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Multimodal Texts and the Linguistic Mode

While the field of multimodality is still being pioneered, many scholars agree that “meaning is not made with but across modalities” (DeVoss Conclusion). However, the linguistic mode can be a powerful asset when it comes to the creation of texts. In this essay, I will examine how the linguistic mode serves as a foundation for different multimodal processes, a way of conveying identity and bias, and an accessible way to create texts.

Drafting a multimodal text can take on many forms, which highlights the importance of the linguistic mode as a source of structure. In her webtext “On Multimodal Composing,” Danielle DeVoss details how her students design multimodal texts and concludes that the composition process is just as varied as the people who create (DeVoss Conclusions). She further states that, “composing isn't limited to a particular time when a writer is sitting at a notebook or a computer,” adding that “writing is sedimented and intersected by life experiences occurring during our composing” (DeVoss Analysis). Similarly, Melanie Gagich outlines points of consideration when it comes to composing a multimodal text in her article “An Introduction to and Strategies for Multimodal Composing.” Like DeVoss, she does not recommend a “one-size-fits-all” composition process but mentions that, “[drafting] could take the form of writing all of the text you want to include in an outline if you have a word-heavy multimodal text like a website, drawing your design if you are creating a poster or commercial, or writing a script

if you are creating a podcast or video” (Gagich 81). Despite these varieties of processes, the linguistic mode can anchor the act of composition; regardless of a text’s intended medium or predominant modality, the linguistic mode can be broadly applied, whether it is used in a script, draft, essay, or pre-writing exercise that can provide a foundation for an entire project - a major affordance for anyone intending to create a multimodal text.

Additionally, the linguistic mode’s use of language can help or hinder the creation of a multimodal text as it can serve as a conductor of both identity and bias. DeVoss sees how identity is reflected in texts crucial to the act of composition. She states that:

“What isn’t perhaps as visible [during composition] are the ways in which our composing practices rub up against, fit into, or even explode metanarratives of queerness, race, disability, mothering/hood, and more. Both individually and as members of a larger academic community, we are wrestling with these metanarratives and how they shape our practices.” (DeVoss Analysis)

Alternatively, Gagich sees the potential for bias in the composition process. She says that:

“As an author, you bring explicit (obvious) and/or implicit (not obvious) biases to your message, so it is important to recognize how these might affect it and your audience. Also, you may be targeting an audience you are familiar with (perhaps you are also a college freshman) or not (perhaps you are a graduate student). It is important to think about how your familiarity might affect your message.” (Gagich 76)

While neither author specifically mentions the linguistic mode, language itself is one of the most explicit ways of conveying ideas - identity and bias included. Who we are shapes what our texts become, and careful choice of language can afford us with texts that are representative of our

identities and inclusive of our many potential audiences just as careless choices can limit our texts and alienate our audiences.

The accessibility of the linguistic mode serves an affordance in the creation of multimodal texts. In her analysis of her students' composition processes, DeVoss describes how many of her students make use of several different word processors and take digital or paper notes (DeVoss Analysis). Despite these students' reliance on writing and note-taking, they produce vastly different texts ranging from slam poetry to conference presentations to the composition videos presented on the webtext (DeVoss Analysis). Additionally, Gagich addresses the apprehension some students face at the thought of creating a multimodal text, especially in an academic setting. She states that, "This process [of creating a multimodal text] parallels the traditional writing process" (Gagich 72). No matter what the intended product will be, the linguistic mode is accessible to experienced and inexperienced authors. It is an affordance in the sense that it provides common ground, available whether someone uses a laptop or simply a pen and paper to convey their ideas.

To conclude, the linguistic mode serves many different purposes depending on a text's medium. It can serve as a point of reference for the creation of a text, whether or not its final draft will be text-heavy; it can help share the author's identity and values and, by extension, the audiences'; and it can be easily accessed by those familiar and unfamiliar with the creation of multimodal texts. However, it can also be a limitation as it may convey bias.

Works Cited

DeVoss, Dànielle Nicole et. al. “On Multimodal Composing.” *Kairos*, Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy, 15 Jan. 2017, <https://kairos.technorhetoric.net/21.2/praxis/devoss-et-al/introduction.html>.

Gagich, Melanie. “An Introduction to and Strategies for Multimodal Composing.” *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, vol. 3, Parlor Press, Mountain View, CA, 2020, pp. 65–85.