

Layers Of Meaning Or How To ‘Connect The Dots’: Unveiling Multimodal Meaning-Making In Greenpeace’s Environmental Videos

Tetiana Krysanova

Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, Ukraine

krysanova@vnu.edu.ua

Meaning-making is viewed as an ongoing and dynamic process shaped by cognitive processes (Konderak 2021: 134) and influenced by social interactions (Kress 2010: 54). It results from the intersubjective interaction between meaning-makers and their audience, shaped by contextual and bodily factors (Krysanova 2022: 37). My talk aims to delve into the intricate layers of meaning embedded in Greenpeace’s environmental videos aiming to heighten public awareness of ecological issues and inspire individuals to reconsider their perspectives on the environment. This necessitates the integration of two distinct approaches to the analysis of meaning-making in videos: cognitive-semiotic and multimodal.

From a cognitive-semiotic standpoint, the construction of meaning in Greenpeace’s videos can be illuminated through the notions of mental spaces and blending initially introduced by Turner and Fauconnier (2023) and further developed by Brandt (2020), integrating both mental and communicative activities. The multimodal viewpoint facilitates an exploration of the persuasive impact of videos by examining the seamless integration of diverse semiotic resources to establish a coherent communicative flow. This integration is linked to the shared knowledge of communicants and is constituted by social and cultural factors.

This holistic framework proposes that videos can be examined through three interconnecting realms, revealing layers of meaning: material-perceptive, social-semiotic, and affective-attitudinal. Each of these realms encompasses distinct facets of the video content, facilitating a thorough analysis that takes into account material and sensory elements, values and beliefs, as well as emotional dimensions.

While the material-perceptive realm emphasizes such elements as imagery, sound, and color schemes linked to embodiment and interaction with physical objects, the social-semiotic realm shifts its focus to the symbolic and communicative elements employed within the cultural and social context. The affective-attitudinal realm includes the emotional impact on the audience, the intended or unintended affective responses, and the attitudes conveyed by the video content.

Ultimately, the emergence of meaning occurs on different layers, which overlap and integrate within the semiotic environment. This integration strategically combines logical reasoning and emotional impact, amplifying the persuasive efficacy and potential influence on viewers’ attitudes. The exploration of multimodal meaning-making in videos within this

framework facilitates the identification of the semantic potential ingrained in varied semiotic elements and their integration into a cohesive entity.

Keywords: environmental video, cognitive semiotics, meaning, meaning-making, multimodality.

References

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