BOOK REVIEW

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Review of *Visual and Multimodal Communication: Applying the Relevance Principle* by Charles Forceville, Oxford: Oxford University 2020, pp. 320. ISBN: 978 0 190 84523 0

Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) is a theoretical cognitive model which expands upon effective human communication. RT examines how people produce and interpret language (Yus 2011: 3). RT theorists claim that successful communication rests on mutual comprehension and optimal communicative relevance to an envisaged addressee. So far, RT has been restricted to include instances of verbal face-to-face communication between 2 familiarised people (Forceville 2014: 59–60). Forceville's seminal and pioneering book *Visual and Multimodal Communication: Applying the Relevance Principle* challenges this traditional theory. Forceville intends to show how RT can be accommodated to visual communication and multimodal discourses. The book emerges as a ground-breaking contribution to the study of RT.

The volume consists of 11 chapters, preceded by an *Introduction* and followed by *Concluding Remarks.* In the Introduction, the author stresses that modern communication involves multimodal elements. It is emphasised that conveying and

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exchanging information is of a multimodal nature. Forceville remarks that nowadays there is no overall theory which bridges all forms of communication, accounts for a variety of media, modes and genres, and takes into account circumstances and contextual information. The author believes that RT can fill this research gap and can develop into an inclusive communication theory accounting for various acts of communication, including visual, multimodal and mass-communication discourses.

Chapter 1, entitled *Preliminaries*, offers a detailed overview of general cognitive-oriented approaches/theories. Against these background assumptions, Relevance Theory is to be discussed. The author uses Darwin's Evolution theory to explain the peculiarities of human communication. It is stated that all humans are goal-oriented creatures who share the desire to survive and procreate. Besides, language users cooperate and read other people's intentions to realise their goals. Attention is drawn to the fact that intention and cooperation are the most important features of human communication.

The second chapter, *Relevance Theory. Basics*, provides a summary of the basic principles of RT. The chapter opens with a discussion on communicative and cognitive principles of relevance, according to which each and every act of ostensive communication is relevant (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260). As Yus (2021: 1) notes, Forceville links this principle with the urge of cooperation, which is biologically conditioned. That being said, there is the cognitive principle of relevance, which assumes that people are biologically predisposed to look for relevant input, making up information pertinent for human survival and well-being. Again, it is recapitulated that both communicative and informative intentions are mutually recognisable in a typical act of communication. The chapter also addresses the derivation of messages, paying special attention to cognitive effects (benefits) and mental effort. It is concluded that the relevance of a message increases when the retrieval of information requires the least mental cost.

The following chapter, *Adapting Relevance Theory to Accommodate Visual Communi-cation,* is devoted to the applicability of RT to visual discourses. The author lists reasons why RT can be extended beyond the verbal form of communication. Forceville explains the reasons for which RT can be accommodated to a wider range of discourses combining different modes and media. The author revisits the central tenets of RT to prove his point. Verbal messages come with the presumption of relevance and, in a similar fashion, other modes (including visuals) carry potentially relevant content. A successful derivation of verbal messages depends on a balance between cognitive effects and mental effort. It also applies to the derivation of information visually conveyed. All verbal sentences are decoded and can be enriched into contextualised explicit interpretations (explicatures). The chapter contends that visuals have parts which are decoded as visuals require reference assignment. Enrichment is also applied to visuals.

Nevertheless, they tend to need additional information mediated by texts. Forceville, similarly to Yus, assumes that some visuals can trigger visual explicatures.

Chapter 4, *Relevance Theory and Mediated Mass-Communication*, discusses RT against a host of dimensions of mass-communication. It is shown that mass communication, in comparison to one-on-one communication, poses a challenge as it is difficult to establish relevance for a myriad of addressees of different cognitive environments sharing a set of various assumptions, beliefs, etc. Consequently, a message mediated in mass-communication may trigger a whole range of different explicatures and implications. Additionally, the chapter offers some insight into the notion of medium and its meaning potential, affordances and constraints.

Chapter 5 revolves around the topic of genre, which is considered to be one of the most important pragmatic factors steering people's interpretations of multimodal discourses. Genre attribution entails genre convention, which encourages certain interpretations, behaviour or responses that the communicator hopes for. Thus, genre attribution and genre convention account for similar interpretations of a message among dozens of addressees. For example, a billboard of a political party is to recruit the interpretation of democratic elections, which involves a voting scenario.

Chapters 6–10 present case studies analyses featuring a great number of specific exemplifications of visuals and multimodal discourses organised per genre. The chapters provide an application of RT to specific examples of visuals in mass-communication. Chapter 6 elaborates on pictograms, traffic signs and logos, which are types of signs of highly stable and fixed meaning. In this respect, they resemble words whose meaning can be searched for in dictionaries. In turn, Chapter 7 looks at advertisements, showing how visual explicatures are processed in the context of genre conventions, intertextual references and situational context and encyclopaedic knowledge. Chapter 8 studies cartoons of a political and non-political nature, also addressing the issue of visual argumentation. And Chapter 9 goes beyond stand alone visuals, focusing on sequences of visuals, namely comics. Chapter 10 investigates instances of controversial communication, paying special attention to misleading and manipulated multimodal discourses, which also come with the presumption of optimal relevance. Chapter 11, *Concluding Remarks*, summarises the most important information on RT and its application to other forms of discourses. Suggestions for further applications of RT to research on other genres and media add true value to this volume.

All in all, *Visual and Multimodal Communication: Applying the Relevance Principle* is a ground-breaking proposal which will be of interest to a wide readership. It offers a plethora of inspiration for mass communication, multimodality RT researchers and scholars in cognitive pragmatics. Additionally, it is a highly recommended book for non-experts in RT and postgraduate students of philology or communication studies. Indeed, the book presents theories in a clear way, and no prior knowledge of RT is needed. The

main value of the book is the fact that it goes beyond a traditional approach to RT, accommodating it to modern multimodal communication. It is innovative, so it can be said that the reviewed monograph is an important contribution to studies on RT. The strength of the book is that it combines the theoretical framework with case studies featuring some multimodal excerpts of mass-communication. It shows the ways in which RT can be applied to multimodal discourses.

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