

Metaphor as an engagement tool: A Multimodal analysis of 3MT presentations

Digital genres have become increasingly common in academic settings due to their affordances in multimodality, interactivity, and wide-scale distribution (Hafner, 2019; Luzón & Pérez-Llantada, 2022). One such digital genre is Three-Minute Thesis presentations (3MTs), where graduate students deliver their thesis to general audiences in three minutes. Previous studies of 3MTs have analyzed stance and engagement (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2020), moves (Hu & Liu, 2018), and cross-disciplinary differences (Zou & Hyland, 2021) by focusing mainly on the verbal and textual features. Yet, in a 3MT presentation, non-verbal elements like gestures, visuals, tone, and facial expressions are also essential resources for communicating meaning and engaging the audience. In this presentation, we focus specifically on how presenters use metaphoric language and metaphoric gestures to augment meaning and enhance audience engagement in their talks. Examining metaphor multimodally (Cienki & Müller, 2009) allows insight into how presenters exploit multiple resources to communicate complex and abstract ideas (Larsson & Stolpe, 2022) to broad audiences.

The present study analyzed video recordings and transcripts of 20 3MTs in science disciplines and humanities disciplines; presentations were selected based on the format, award-winning status, and date. Our analysis draws on theoretical frameworks of engagement (Hyland, 2005; Luzón, 2023), conceptual and gestural metaphor (Kendon, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; McNeill, 1992), and multimodal genre analysis (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2003). All 3MTs were coded by two researchers through an iterative process. In this presentation, we share our approach to multimodal analysis, including our coding categories and processes for exploring how, when, and why speakers use metaphor across modes. We also share findings, which show that metaphoric gestures were used more frequently in science 3MTs than in humanities and that metaphoric gestures can be used as a kind of metadiscourse and as an engagement strategy. Finally, we discuss implications for future multimodal genre analysis of digital academic genres.