MODE SWITCHING: HOW ORAL AND WRITTEN MODES ALTERNATE IN VIDEOCHATS

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This poster sets out to illustrate forms of communication in which oral and written modes are integrated in ways that allow participants to “mode switch”, i.e. alternate between the two modes for specific communicative purposes. Videochats are the main focus of investigation as they exhibit a set of different traits, which, as well as mode switching, include new arrangements of interpersonal resources (e.g. non reciprocal gaze) and, more generally, a different systematization of verbal strategies and proxemic patterns that, to some extent, attempt to simulate real-life conversations.

Three main steps are envisaged in this research:

1) Data is gathered through screencasting: i.e. digital recordings of computer screen output (also known as video screen capture) are made, which include audio narration and which capture the complexity of online interaction; screencasting of videochats is thus holistic making it possible to carry out fine-grained multimodal analysis of all the events and resources codeployed by participants;

2) The data is annotated and analysed systematically: the study of the integration of oral and written modes requires an equally fine-grained and integrated framework of analysis; the research draws on the theoretical support provided by current multimodal research, in particular such categories of multimodal film genre analysis as the investigation of visual frames, visual images, kinesic action and metafunctional interpretation (Baldry, Thibault, 2006); more generally it relies on systemic-functional grammar (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004);

3) Reflections and conclusions are drawn vis-à-vis the potential contribution to the multimodal analysis of web genres: Web 2.0, with its vast range of emerging textual genres, is constantly expanding and challenging our notions of multimodal analysis. New textual configurations need to be explored using flexible tools, that take into account unprecedented systems of communication among web-users. In this sense, mode switching underlies a wealth of new systems of human interaction that raise philosophical and ethical questions, such as the extent of the extra (if any) communicative potential made available by Web 2.0 textual genres.

References
