EUROPE FOR WOMEN: THE RE-MEDIATION OF INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE IN THE EU CAMPAIGNS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

SOLE ALBA ZOLLO
UNIVERSITÀ DI NAPOLI "FEDERICO SECONDO"

Abstract – By opening the pages of the European Union (EU) website, you can obtain a wide range of information about the EU's work in every field. The Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion section leads the reader to detailed information about the institution's commitment for women and also provides different materials about the gender equality campaigns run by the European Commission from 2009. In the EU, citizen empowerment is becoming fundamental in order to raise awareness on human rights, so the institution has generated, in addition to legal documents, a variety of informative and promotional materials and provided information in a form that can be easily understood by those who are not legal specialists.

The analysis is based on a corpus collected from the EU's website. It includes different text types – posters, leaflets and video clips – which belong to the EU campaigns for gender equality.

Following the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodality, I investigate the discursive practices and strategies identifying the recurrent features employed in order to disseminate information on European citizens' rights in a friendly language and narrow the gap between sexes. In particular, this study focuses on the way legal documents such as directives are 'translated' for the computer screen and on the way the several modes such as words, pictures, sounds and colours are produced and re-produced in order to reach citizens at every possible level. Thus, a pragmatic comparison between source legal texts and target texts allows to identify the linguistic and visual elements used to simplify source genres in order to communicate legal discourse on women rights to the European layman.

Keywords: gender equality, multimodality, institutional discourse, remediation, intertextuality.

> *Equality is not a concept. It's not something we should be striving for. It's a necessity. Equality is like gravity. We need it to stand on this earth as men and women.*
> Joss Whedon

1. Introduction

Equal treatment for women and men is one of the European Union's fundamental values. It goes back to 1957 when the Treaty of Rome laid down the principle of equal pay. Since then, the European Union (EU) has been trying to eliminate discrimination and achieve gender equality. Thanks to legislation for the advancement of women and specific measures the organization has made significant progress over the last decades by improving women's lives. Nonetheless, inequalities still exist. Women still earn 17% less than men, and they are still under-represented in decision-making positions.

By browsing the European Commission's website, the reader can obtain information about the EU's work in fostering equality between women and men. In order to break down stereotypes and achieve economic independence for women it has long been acknowledged that legislation alone is not enough. The EU needs to communicate

more directly with the general public to narrow the gap between institutions and citizens (Wodak and Wright 2006). Citizen empowerment is becoming fundamental in order to raise awareness on women's rights, so the EU has produced, in addition to institutional/legal documents, a variety of informative and promotional materials and provided information in a form that can be easily understood by those who are not legal specialists. The Gender Equality section[1] leads the reader to detailed information about the EU's commitment for women and also provides different materials about the gender equality campaigns run by the European Commission from 2009.

Combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodality the analysis is conducted on a corpus collected from the EU's website. It comprises a selection of different text types – posters, leaflets, and video clips – which belong to the institution's campaigns for gender equality.

This study investigates the discursive practices and strategies across a range of different genres aiming to identify the recurrent features employed in order to disseminate information on women's rights in a friendly language and narrow the gap between institution and citizens. In particular, the research focuses on the way legal documents such as directives are 'translated' for the computer screen and on the way the several modes such as words, pictures, sounds and colours are produced and re-produced in order to reach citizens at every possible level. Thus, a pragmatic comparison between source legal texts and target texts allows to identify the linguistic and visual elements used to simplify source genres in order to communicate legal discourse on women rights to the European layman.

In addition, by bringing to light the intertextual and interdiscursive elements which come out of the comparative linguistic and semiotic investigation, the study explores how institutional/legal discourse is recontextualized across genres through the interaction and combination of different modes in order to demonstrate whether the transfer from institutional/legal language to popularizing texts involves any contamination in discursive practices, thus leading to the birth of new text-types.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Institutions and discourse

Discourse is a fuzzy concept and scholars give different definitions. Given the centrality of discourse in the critical and multimodal study of institutions, it is important to analyze the term itself. According to Brown and Yule (1983) discourse is language in use so it cannot be analyzed in its linguistic forms without taking into account the purposes and functions of language in human life.

> The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs. (Brown and Yule 1983, p. 1)

Since we have to pay attention to the aims and functions of language in human life discourse is inevitably linked to context. In order to analyze a text effectively researchers

---

[1] It is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/index_en.htm.

should investigate what people do through discourse and how this action is related to interpersonal, institutional and social contexts.

Institutions are shaped by discourse and they in turn have the ability to create and impose discourses. Institutions are linked to power and their power is often expressed through the discourse of their members. We usually think that organizations must show impartiality on important political and social issues but large organizations such as the European Union need to maintain themselves and their position. They try to legitimize their existence through discourses. This vision of language is stressed by critical discourse analysts (Fairclough 1992, 1995) who see discourse as a form of social practice. So this definition is the starting point of my study since the analysis of institutional discourse implies a relation between a discursive event and the institution where it occurs. Given the multimodal nature of the corpus collected this study is based upon a combination of two analytical frameworks: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodality.

2.2. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is "a theory and method analysing the way that individuals and institutions *use* language" (Richardson 2007. Cited in Mayr 2008, p. 8). A critical discourse analysis approach involves linguistic and also intertextual analysis. Discourses are always linked to other discourses. CDA places particular emphasis on this concept because of its focus on the changes of institutional social practices and the colonization of one discourse practice by another. For example the UE tries to legitimize its power in order to be accepted by European citizens by bridging the gap between experts and lay people. It involves asymmetrical roles between experts and non-experts and language is constitutive of institutions. Through discourse the organization tries to transform and recontextualize social practices. At the same time today the EU needs to shorten the distance existing between experts and citizens so it is very common to see forms of popularization in institutional discourse. Nowadays the distinction between ordinary conversation and formality does not exist since both spheres colonize each other. This is observed in that process called by Fairclough (1992) *conversationalization* of public discourse.

Producing an easy-to-read/accessible text implies recontextualizing and reformulating the original source in such a way that it is comprehensible for a different kind of addressee in a discursive context that is different from that of the original source. Hall et al affirm:

> Recontextualization here refers, among other things, to various ways of appropriating, using, and reusing talk or text drawn from one context to make formulations available in another. However, recontextualization entails more than just the representation of speech and written text, as it presupposes another context, viz. 'contextualization'. (Hall et al 1999, p. 541)

Recontextualization amounts to putting something in a different context and, by doing so, creating a new context for it. Consequently, genres can change, hybridize with and colonize one another. Colonization is a process which involves the invasion of the territorial integrity of one genre by another which often leads to the birth of a new hybrid – both mixed and embedded – genre. (Bhatia 2004)

> […] any text is necessarily shaped by socially available repertoires of genres (for example, the genre of scientific articles, or the genre of advertisements), but may creatively mix genres. There are pressures for texts to follow conventional genres, but also pressures to innovate by mixing genres. (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, p. 262)

Therefore, genres play a key role as they provide an approach of theorizing the range of possibilities open to documents. Bateman (2008) considers genres not as a set of separated text types, but as "regions" in a space of genre potentialities. Since genres can hybridize, it is necessary to have a "region" within which they can move and encounter one another.

Although CDA has focused on an analysis of linguistic structures, other scholars (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Bateman 2008) have emphasized the importance of visuals in discourses moving towards a multimodal analysis. Also visual structures express meanings and contribute to the whole meaning of texts.

Multimodality is the study of different semiotic modes in a text or communicative event. It is "the combination of different semiotics modes – for example, language and music – in a communicative artifact or event" (van Leeuwen 2005, p. 281). A mode is not a rigid concept. New modes constantly emerge and existing modes are constantly transformed by their users in response to specific communicative needs. Since modes are *inseparable integrated* (Lemke 2002), multimodality aims at investigating in which way meaning is made in all the modes independently and how they work together to create a unified text or communicative event. It is usually believed that words are more important than visuals, but according to multimodal discourse analysts there is not hierarchy but difference.

> The sequential/temporal characteristic of language-as-speech may lend itself with greater facility to the representation of action and sequences of action; while the spatial display of visual images may lend itself with greater facility to the representation of elements and their relation to each other. (Kress 2000, p. 147)

We live in a multimodal era where meaning is seldom made with verbal language alone so Kress and van Leeuwen have showed that communication is multimodal rather than monomodal. All modes are used to make meaning so language is not dominant and it is not the only means able to express significance. It is one among others for making meaning. "A mode is what a community takes to be a mode and demonstrates that in its practices" (Kress 2009, p. 54). Boundaries between modes are fluid. "Only purists and purist genres insist on separation or monomodality. In normal meaning-making practice, they are inseparably integrated on most occasions" (Lemke 2002, p. 303). Today most texts communicate at a visual level too. It is almost impossible to have a text which is pure language and additionally with digital technology it has become easier to blend modes. In fact, in the data analyzed gender equality discourse is communicated both linguistically and visually. The EU legitimizes its actions not only through language but also through images and multimodal discourse analysis allows us to analyze both words and images to establish what types of discourses are realized.

There are different approaches to multimodality. My analysis is mainly based on Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic approach to multimodality. Social semiotics focuses on discourse and its context, in fact the focus is on "[…] the way people use semiotic 'resources' both to produce communicative artifacts and events and to interpret them – which is also a form of semiotic – in the context of specific social situations and practices" (van Leeuwen 2005, p. XI). All signs are motivated by the interest of the sign producers. When we produce signs our choice reflects our interests based on our social position and the context of the sign production. What we want to communicate depends on who we are and on the context. Texts are embedded in the contexts in which they function. Context is not something extrinsic to text. Texts themselves may recontextualize meanings and practices in one modality to some other modality. Since in the corpus taken into account the words are always accompanied by images, a multimodal analysis allows to verify if these modes contribute to popularizing institutional discourse.

3. Analysis: the remediation of institutional discourse across genres and media

3.1. *The Gender Pay Gap campaign*

Women in the EU earn 17% less than men and in some countries the gender pay gap is widening. It persists because of different factors which go beyond the issue of equal pay for equal work such as segregation in the labour market, stereotypes and difficulties to reconcile work and private life. Since 1957 the EU has provided a legal basis for policy and action on gender equality. In order to tackle the gender pay gap in 2009 the European Commission launched the *Gender Pay Gap* campaign introducing new tools and taking the campaign to the national, regional and local level.

This section reflects on the recontextualization of institutional and legal discourse across genres and media. The posters (figs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4) issued by the EU campaigners exploit some typical characteristics of promotional discourse such as the use of direct questions and statistics. The use of direct questions is clearly a linguistic strategy to make the text easy to read, as the reader immediately understands what the content of the page is about. Instead, through percentages ("This results in an average gender pay gap of 17 % in the European Union"; "By the time they grow up, the boy will be earning on average 17 % more than the girl"; "As a result, women earn on average 17 % less than men"; "Women's earnings over a lifetime are on average 17 % lower than men's"), the EU tries to convey a message of reliable scientific precision producing a rhetorical effect.

From a social semiotics perspective each poster (figs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4) represents some people in a short shot and eye contact; they command, they are asking readers to contribute to fighting gender inequalities. The frontal angle is used to increase audience identification and involvement with the actors. The represented participants look directly at the viewer's eyes creating an imaginary relation with him/her.

Figure 3.1
Poster – Is our work valued the same?

Figure 3.2
Poster – Boy or girl, equal opportunities?

Figure 3.3
Poster – Will having a child harm my career?

Figure 3.4
Poster – Same job, same pension?

The message of the posters is elaborated and reformulated in the leaflet (figs 3.5 and 3.6), especially through expansion such as the section devoted to the key figures on the pay gap between men and women (fig. 3.5). What is interesting here is how the text has been organized in the page. In this leaflet simplification is reached mainly through the composition of the layout; lines, bullet points and colours contribute to making accessible the content of legal documents (source texts) which have been reformulated and re-arranged according to a simpler and schematic structure. Moreover, by comparing the source texts to the leaflet we realize that in the leaflet the content of the EU legal documents is re-elaborated and rebuilt, mostly through expansion as you can see in examples 1 and 2. In order to give a definition of gender pay gap (example 1) in the leaflet the campaigners use the definition given by a legal document, i.e. the communication on tackling the gender pay gap (2007), but a percentage is added conveying a rhetorical effect to the message. Again, by defining direct discrimination (example 2) in the leaflet we find that through a process of substitution the tone becomes less neutral and impersonal, for example "one person" is replaced by "women".

Example 1
What is meant by pay gap?
The pay gap measures the relative difference in the average gross hourly earnings of women and men within the economy as a whole. (*Communication on tackling the gender pay gap – 2007*)

What is the gender pay gap?
On average, women in the EU earn 17 % less than men.
The gender pay gap measures the difference in average hourly earnings between men and women in paid employment across the economy as a whole. (*Leaflet*)

Example 2
 (a) direct discrimination: where one person is treated less favourably, on grounds of sex, than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation; […] (*Article 2 – DIR 2004/113/EC*)

direct discrimination: Sometimes women still earn less than men for doing the same job. But because so much progress has been made in recent years, and we now have effective European and national legislation, this factor only explains a limited part of the gender pay gap. (*Leaflet*)

The relationship between words and visuals is very significant. Images and words are organized in a way to give immediate and understandable information but also to legitimize the EU's actions. The visuals' main objective is to attract the reader to the text and convince him/her about the content of the text. The EU is willing to inform lay people on women's rights but also to persuade them that the EU is the only European organization which is working actively to protect and guarantee women's rights. Thus, verbal and visual techniques become also instruments of legitimation.

Figure 3.5
Leaflet – Close the gender pay gap (page 1)

Figure 3.6
Leaflet – Close the gender pay gap (page 2)

3.2. Super Eva: a video clip to raise awareness on gender equality

Super Eva is a female animated character who, in five amusing short clips,[2] shows how the European Commission legislation is helping to fight inequalities at work and in the labour market. These video clips are themselves an entextualized artifact that the campaigners have extracted and appropriated from the original context of videogaming. The video text has been then transferred to and transformed in order to inform citizens about the European legislation on gender equality at work.

Words, colours, movements and music are highly synchronized. For instance, colours are not in isolation but have their significance in relation to the other modes present in the videos with which are integrated (fig. 3.7). In addition, some modes are perceived to be more salient than others. The fact that colours are saturated, for example, may have a particular salience or implication in the text. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) saturated colours generally characterize the sensory/sensual coding orientation and suggest a hyperreal world to the viewer. In this case, saturated colours appeal to the imagination of viewers, in particular young ones, projecting them to a fairer world where inequalities between men and women are fought thanks to the EU's effective and immediate intervention.

Movement is another foregrounded feature in these clips. The locomotory and gestural movements of Super Eva and her antagonist are embedded in the rhythmic composition of the video. Their movements are rhythmically synchronized with the soundtrack. Movement has here a dominant indexical function. "It both realizes critically important aspects of the depicted world of the participants at the same time that it indexically enacts or models an emergent interactional text" (Thibault 2000, p. 380).

Furthermore, in these sequences the music accompanies the main character's actions thus providing an important principle of textual cohesion. Different modes dialogically interact and together they can produce a dialogic relationship with the viewer. In collaboration with the visual elements, the music here has the purpose to invoke principles of gender equality for the listener.

Also these video clips are an example of remediation of institutional discourse and recontextualization of social practices. Typical social activities from the working world, which are well known to television viewers or website users, are transformed and recontextualized. Cases of gender discrimination at work are here used to raise awareness and also underline the active role of the EU in tackling the gender pay gap. This text-type blends diverse visual domains such as the realistic image containing the article from the legal document and the fantasy world of the cartoon. By comparing the legal documents to the video clips (examples 3 and 4) it is evident that the clips do not explain in detail the legislative documents but they only mention the key point in order to reach the audience immediately and raise awareness on gender equality. By appealing to the sense of fun and enjoyment of young readers, the text is not so much concerned with what a player must do to win the level but with the manufacturing of consent about an important issue: informing European citizens, particularly young generations, on the EU's actions on gender equality.

---

[2] They are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=671&langId=en&videosId=2361&vl=en.

Figure 3.7
Video clip – Super Eva

Example 3
Clip 1
Access to employment should be equal for everyone irrespective of gender. Article 153 (TFUE)

Article 153
1. With a view to achieving the objectives of Article 151, the Union shall support and complement the activities of the Member States in the following fields:
(a) improvement in particular of the working environment to protect workers' health and safety;
(b) working conditions;
(c) social security and social protection of workers;
(d) protection of workers where their employment contract is terminated;
(e) the information and consultation of workers;
(f) representation and collective defence of the interests of workers and employers, including codetermination, subject to paragraph 5;
(g) conditions of employment for third-country nationals legally residing in Union territory;
(h) the integration of persons excluded from the labour market, without prejudice to Article 166;
(i) equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work;
(j) the combating of social exclusion;
(k) the modernisation of social protection systems without prejudice to point (c).

Example 4
Clip 2
Women who are pregnant, have given birth or who are breastfeeding must be protected
Directive 92/85/CEE

Directive 92/85/CEE
SECTION I
PURPOSE AND DEFINITIONS
Article 1
Purpose
1. The purpose of this Directive, which is the tenth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16 (1) of Directive 89/391/EEC, is to implement measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or who are breastfeeding.

Over the last few years video games have become to be considered as powerful instruments of communication. For instance, the idea of embedding advertising temporarily inside a video game is relatively new and Obama is the first presidential candidate to buy advert space inside a game during his campaign. The ads (figs 3.8 and 3.9) which appeared on billboards and other signage reminded players that early voting had begun and plugged a campaign website that encouraged people to register for early voting.

Figure 3.8
Early voting has begun

Figure 3.9
Early voting has begun

Super Eva video clips, thus, can be seen as an example of a new hybrid genre since they are a blending of some structural features typical of videogames and TV spots. They are a combination of subtitles, repetition and authentic language, graphics, colours and sound like videogames but there is no interactivity (deHaan 2010) and their main purpose is not to entertain like in video games but to inform and raise awareness. Then, similarly to TV spots, each video clip ends with a slogan ("Equality of the sexes is an everyday battle for women"). In addition, the different relationship between actors and world in both media is another aspect which emerges from the analysis. While in videogames we might define a circular relation (fig. 3.10) between the actor, i.e. the player, and the virtual world since there is no direct link to the real world, in Super Eva there is a linear relationship (fig. 3.11) since the virtual word helps the actor, i.e. the viewer, to connect to the real world.
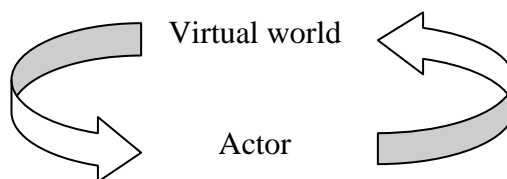
Virtual world

Actor

Figure 3.10
Relation between actors and world in videogames

Virtual world ⟹ Actor ⟹ Real world

Figure 3.11
Relation between actors and world in Super Eva

4. Conclusions

The EU uses verbal and visual techniques to attract readers' attention and make them share their points of view and opinions. We can consider the poster and the leaflet two stabilized genres which exploit those linguistic and visual features typical of promotional discourse where legal concepts have been simplified to reach laypeople. On the contrary, Super Eva can be considered a new hybrid genre aiming to popularize legal documents on gender equality in which we find not only a mixture of discourses – legal and institutional and informative/promotional – but also a mixture of genres – TV spots and video games – whose main purpose is to reach especially younger audience.

Since institutional and legal discourses are remediated and made accessible to laypeople, we might take into account the pedagogical implications of the material collected and analyzed for further research. Due to the latest developments in technology, the use of online materials, particularly videos, in education is growing. The use of web-based videos in ESL classrooms is becoming more and more popular as the integration of several modes (audio, video, animation, colour, text and music) seems to provide rich learner-content interaction by allowing learners to use their visual and auditory senses to learn complex concepts.

The main advantages of using authentic materials are well known. They increase students' motivation for learning, make the learner be exposed to the "real language" as discussed by Guariento and Morley (2001, p. 347). Authentic material is usually used to teach general English: grammar (modals, tenses), vocabulary (specialized terms), or to strengthen reading skills and in the last few years it has also been used to teach specialized discourses (Argondizzo and Ruffolo 2012).

Many linguistics and language teachers have started to focus on the link between language and gender equality issues. The aim is to provide students with strategies which allow them to understand possible mismatches between saying and meaning. Discourse analysis in a language classroom could offer the opportunity to describe how language is used. Students could benefit from the use of a specialized corpus since they could be encouraged to analyze lexical and grammatical features in detail to facilitate interpretation, analyze social-textual relations in texts, consider what points of view are expressed and have a more critical approach to the text. In addition, we could use this material to enhance students' awareness on gender equality issues and maybe invite them to be more active European citizens. The increase in gender equality awareness in the last few years has led institutions, governments, academia and individuals to take an active part in promoting gender equality. Remediation can be not only a persuasive tool to raise awareness on the EU's achievements in fostering equality between women and men but also a didactic instrument in an ESL classroom.

References

Argondizzo C. and Ruffolo I. 2012, *A Discourse Analysis of the Perception of "Nature" in English Travel Promotion Texts*, in "Textus" XXV [1], pp. 85-103.

Bateman J. A. 2008, *Multimodality and Genre: A Foundation for the Systematic Analysis of Multimodal Documents*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke; New York.

Bhatia V. K. 2004, *Worlds of Written Discourse*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London.

Brown G. and Yule G. 1983, *Discourse Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

deHaan J. et al 2010, *The Effect of Interactivity with a Music Video Game on Second Language Vocabulary Recall*, in "Special Issue on Technology and Learning Vocabulary" 14 [2], pp. 74–94.

Fairclough N. 1992, *Discourse and Social Change*, Polity, London.

Fairclough N. 1995, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Longman, London.

Fairclough N. and Wodak R. 1997, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, in Van Dijk T.A. (ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction. Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* vol. 2, Sage, London, pp. 258-284.

Guariento W. and Morley J. 2001, *Text and Task Authenticity in the EFL Classroom*, in "ELT Journal" 55 [4], pp. 347-353.

Hall C., Sarangi S. et al. 1999, *Speech Representation in Social Work Discourse*, in "Text" 19 [4], pp. 539-570.

Kress G. 2000, *Text as the Punctuation of Semiosis: Pulling at some of the Threads*, in Meinhof U. H. and Smith J. (eds) *Intertextuality and the Media: From Genre to Everyday Life*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 132-154.

Kress G. 2009, *What is a mode?*, in Jewitt C. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 54-67.

Kress G. and van Leeuwen T. 1996, *Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design*, Routledge, London and New York.

Lemke J. L. 2002, *Travels in Hypermodality*, in "Visual Communication" 1 [3], pp. 299-325.

Mayr A. 2008, *Language and Power: An Introduction to Institutional Discourse*, Continuum International Publishing Group.

Thibault P. J. 2000, *The Multimodal Transcription of a Television Advertisement: Theory and Practice*, in Baldry A. (ed) *Multimodality and Multimediality in the Distance Learning Age*, Palladino Editore, Campobasso, pp. 311-385.

van Leeuwen T. 2005, *Introducing Social Semiotics*, Routledge, London.

Wodak R. and Wright S. 2006, *The European Union in Cyberspace. Multilingual Democratic Participation in a Virtual Public Sphere?*, in "Journal of Language and Politics" 5 [2], pp. 251-275.