

BAAL Health and Science Communication SIG workshop 2018
Mixing it up: multi-media, methods and modalities

Hosted by the School of Education, Communication & Society, King's College London
21st November 2018

The Health and Science Communication SIG held its fourth annual event “Mixing it up: multi-methods, media and modalities” on 21 November 2018 at King’s College London. As research into health and science communication continues to expand, we felt it was timely to examine the variety of methods and modalities that researchers in the field are working with. The goal of this workshop was thus to showcase research that analyses multimodal data, that adopts mixed methods approaches or that is in some way innovative with the methods it employs. The event aimed to bring together researchers from multiple disciplines to discuss the challenges and opportunities that variety in methods can pose.

The workshop attracted 40 participants from the UK and abroad (including Spain, Poland, Italy and Austria) with backgrounds in linguistics, discourse analysis, psychology, public health, medical education and sociology. The day was organised around two plenary talks, six parallel sessions, a poster presentation session over lunch and the HSC AGM.

In the first plenary talk, Jeff Bezemer (Professor of Communication at UCL Institute of Education) presented on how the successful accomplishment of healthcare is contingent on semiotic work. Using examples from ethnographic research and video-recordings of the work of surgeons, Jeff showed us how meaning making in clinical work emerges from semiotic relationships in a truly multimodal domain. In the second plenary talk, Gabriella Rundblad (Reader in Applied Linguistics at King’s College London) focussed on a 10-year programme of research investigating the communication of risk in relation to potential contaminants in the water supply. Using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, Gabriella demonstrated how lexical items in risk communication (e.g. *low*, *insignificant*, *standard*) hold different meanings for the public and for health professionals, thus affecting public reactions and compliance to health advice.

The six parallel sessions were grouped around the themes of: 1) social media, 2) media & corpus analysis, 3) mental health & online forums, 4) health literacy, 5) health professional communication, and 6) multimodal resources. The variety of sessions reflected the theme of the workshop, with each session focussing on a different approach, method or type of data.

Many of the presentations used online data. For example, in the social media session, we heard how expertise and credibility is constructed through interdiscursive, multimodal means on YouTube, and we saw how corpus analysis of social media data can be combined with considerations from Artificial Intelligence. In the mental health & online forums session, presenters discussed the challenges and ethics of doing online ethnography, as well as the use of metaphors, metonymy and advice giving in forums for parents and carers of those with mental health problems. Sticking with written data, in the media and corpus session, a common thread was how women are represented in the UK press. We heard about gendered discourses of obesity, framings of ‘normal birth’ and representations of populations affected by the recent Zika outbreak.

Several of the presentations examined communication involving health professionals. For example, in the health literacy session, we heard about tailoring linguistic and semiotic choices in risk information to culturally diverse audiences, about developing protocols for multilingual patient education videos, and about the interactional practices of clinicians when using 'Easy Read' texts with patients with intellectual disabilities. In the health professional communication session, presenters discussed issues such as training for open disclosure conversations, multilingual practices in therapy sessions and how multimodal channels in teamwork can help to improve patient safety. Finally, the session on multimodal resources explored how people use different technologies and artefacts to negotiate their identities and express their experiences.

Much of the discussion on the day revolved around the great diversity of approaches represented at the workshop, and many fruitful conversations were had about effective research design and the pros and cons of different (combinations of) methods.

Using the hashtag #healthsci18, the workshop also had a healthy representation on Twitter. To keep up-to-date about future events and to share relevant information with the ever-growing HSC SIG community, join our mailing list: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=BAAL-HEALTHSCI>