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Multimodality in Practice

Investigating Theory-in-practice-
through-methodology

Edited by
Sigrid Norris



Multimodality in Practice

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First published 2012
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business*

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Typeset in Sabon by IBT Global.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Multimodality in practice : investigating theory-in-practice-through-methodology / edited by Sigrid Norris.

p. cm. — (Routledge studies in multimodality; 4)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Modality (Linguistics) 2. Communication—Methodology.
3. Social interaction. 4. Oral communication. I. Norris, Sigrid, 1961–
P99.4.M6M87 2011
401'.4—dc22
2011015292

ISBN13: 978-0-415-88037-4 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-80124-6 (ebk)

**For
Jim and Lorrie**

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Preface

In recent years, the study of multimodal phenomena has increased quite dramatically. To a great extent, this increase is due to technological advances: the great increase in computer and other new-media technology has demanded scholars' attention; and, at the same time, new technologies have made it possible to investigate everyday life as multimodal events even when not linked to new media.

First, we found that scholars were grappling and extending linguistic theories (O'Toole, 2011 [1994]; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; Kress et al., 2001; Van Leeuwen, 1999; O'Halloran, 2004; Baldry and Thibault, 2005; Bateman, 2008) or that they were developing theories and methodologies (Scollon, 1998, 2001; Norris, 2004; Norris and Jones, 2005).

Although both theory and methodology need to be attended to by scholars to broach new areas of inquiry, I think it is important to remember that theory and methodology building are performed only so that these new or adjusted theories and methodologies can then be used to gain new understanding about the world we live in. Studies that utilize conceived theoretical and methodological tools to investigate practices in the real world are thus a natural next step that allows us to gain knowledge about new, but also about old practices.

In this book, I have tried to bring scholars together who come from different areas of inquiry; but all scholars have the goal here to shed light upon practice by *utilizing* theory and methodology. Thus, the focus in each of the chapters is on *what is new about a particular practice when investigating it through a multimodal lens*.

With this book, I hope to illustrate what multimodality can do to broaden our knowledge in the social sciences on the one hand, and hope to invite scholars to take part in this quickly growing field of inquiry on the other hand.

Whereas most books on multimodality either take one theoretical/methodological approach or are written in the form of a handbook, this book is conceived differently: This book is divided into two parts, which are not delineated by theoretical/methodological approaches but rather are

delineated by their focus of study. Chapters in Part I focus primarily on social actors, whereas chapters in Part II focus primarily on cultural tools. Dividing chapters in this way illustrates the editor's theoretical lens.

Whereas many aspects in each chapter could be, and certainly are, highlighted in the introductions to each part, an initial arranging of the chapters and the introductions for Parts I and II actively direct the reader to one major difference: whereas chapters in Part I primarily investigate social actors, chapters in Part II primarily investigate cultural tools. Interestingly, as we will see, many chapters examine some aspect of new technology, and all utilize new technologies.

My point of view stems from mediated discourse analysis, in which the mediated action is the rudimentary unit of analysis, but where a mediated action is always and only viewed as taken by a social actor mediated by cultural tools. Thus, inherent in the unit of analysis, the mediated action is the social actor(s) and the cultural tool(s). In other words, no action can be taken in the world without social actor(s) or without mediating cultural tool(s) or mediational means (where cultural tools and mediational means are used interchangeably).

Although not all authors in this book view the world through this analytical framework, it is nevertheless possible to view their work through this analytical lens. By viewing all chapters through a mediated discourse lens, we accomplish the following:

1. We can find similarities and differences in the chapters that are not based upon their theoretical underpinnings or the methodological frameworks used to analyze a particular practice.
2. We can more easily see that quite different theoretical and/or methodological approaches yield very important findings that are relevant for all of the various theories and methods as well as to the investigation.

For many readers, the introductions to Parts I and II may be an exercise in looking at the world from a slightly or even broadly different perspective than they are used to. However, I hope to widen the readers' views, possibly taking some out of their comfort zone; but with the help of the many chapters coming from different perspectives, I hope to build a different and new angle that in the end will make sense even to those readers who are not at all familiar with my way of thinking and looking at the world.

Thus, in the introductions, I use a mediated discourse lens (Scollon, 1998, 2001; Norris and Jones, 2005), where mediated discourse analysis builds on Wertsch (1991), building on Vygotsky. As I explained elsewhere:

When using the mediated action as our unit of analysis, the action can neither be analysed without analysing the social actor(s) who is(are) performing the action, nor can it be analysed without the mediational means that the social actor(s) draws on when performing the action.

Thus the point of view is: actions are performed by social actors who are acting with or through cultural tools (Wertsch, 1991). (Norris, 2009:81)

Whereas the social actor, the cultural tool and the action are always inter-linked, as researchers we can focus more on the *cultural tools* that are being used by *social actors* in order to act or while acting; or we can focus more on the social actors acting with or through the cultural tools. Essentially, no matter where our focus, we will always find the inherent tension that Wertsch (1998) insists on; and it is because of this connection and the inherent tension that a researcher focusing on cultural tools will always have findings, that allow us to gain insight into social actors and their actions; and a researcher who focuses on social actors will always allow us to gain insight into social actions and the cultural tools that were used to perform the actions. Simultaneously, both the researcher who focuses on investigating cultural tools and the researcher who focuses on examining social actors will necessarily either directly or indirectly investigate the actions that social actors take.

However, before moving on to Part I, I would like to thank the many wonderful social actors without whom I could not have written the book. Family is always very important, and I would first of all like to Alan, Luke and Kevin for their humor when I spent long stretches at home writing/editing and for the many times they make sure that I take breaks to simply be. I am sure I am most productive because their happiness, love and laughing is surrounding me.

Besides family, many scholars have had an impact on this book in one way or another. I particularly would like to thank all of the authors contributing to this volume. Throughout the process, I have had wonderful conversations with each one of them, and the book would not be what it is without these contributions. I would also like to thank the members of the Multimodal Research Centre for the fun that we have discussing ideas (such as this book) and developing research and creative thoughts; and I wish to particularly thank my research assistant, Jarret Geenen, for his attention to wording and grammar in the final stages of editing this book. Of course, many colleagues have had an impact on my editing this book, and although I would like to thank them all, there is not enough space to add all of their names. Even though many people have had an impact on this book, all of the shortcomings in the following pages are certainly my own.

NOTES

1. Where “new” theories means a building of an interdisciplinary theory by mixing and extrapolating upon various older theories from linguistics, anthropology, sociology and psychology to music, and art, to the earth sciences.

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Part I

1 Introduction to Part I

Primary Focus—Social Actors and Their Actions

Sigrid Norris

Everyone acts in the world. We eat, have conversations and go to school and work. Everywhere, we produce some kind of action: sometimes we act together with other social actors; sometimes we act with objects and sometimes with animals. As social actors, we live our life acting and interacting. In this part of the book, scholars investigate how social actors act and interact multimodally.

Generally speaking, visual modes have received much more attention than many other modes in current research into multimodality. For this reason, I begin this book by looking at a mode that has received very little attention, but a mode that we all utilize: the mode of touch. In Chapter 2, I investigate horseback-riding/horse-training lessons. The social actors are the student and the riding teacher, and the particular actions that I am interested in are the teacher's actions of teaching the student how to touch the horse and then feel the horse's response. Thus, my primary social actor is the *teacher* and the primary actions are the *teaching* of what I call touch/response-feel.

In order to investigate the teaching of touch/response-feel, I first outline and expand the underlying theoretical notions; then I give a brief overview of the methodology used to study the practice of horseback riding and teaching; and after that, I illustrate one example in detail.

In Chapter 2, I investigate the theory that underlies the practice of horseback riding/teaching; and I investigate this theory by using the method of multimodal interaction analysis. Thus, I actually arrive at the theory that is outlined in the beginning of the chapter as a result of the systematic investigation of horseback riding/teaching using multimodal interaction analysis. Here, looking at a practice, using a method, I was able to expand theory. Thereby, I discovered that the teacher uses a modal aggregate to teach the touch/response-feel to his student. The chapter shows the circularity of investigations moving from theory to method, from method to practice and from practice to newly developed theory.

Next, in Chapter 3 Loenhoff investigates video conferencing as the action that social actors perform, discussing that senses are in fact interlinked and interdependent. This is a claim that emphasizes, even though Loenhoff

does not explicitly make this connection in this chapter, that modes are simply and always only heuristic units (Norris, 2004). Although we can take a look at separate modes to analyze instances of interaction and learn much by doing this, modes as such do not actually exist.

Although I further discuss modes in the concluding chapter of this book, we can say that in interaction and for the social actors themselves, communicative modes are not separate units. All communication is based on perception and the embodied senso-motory processes, making it impossible in practical terms to dismantle them into isolated parts. Loenhoff gives much theoretical background for his argument and then discusses video conferencing as his example in general terms.

In Chapter 4, Sissons investigates the practice of public relations, looking particularly at the social actors (client and public relations officer; and two public relations officers) and their actions. Utilizing multimodal interaction analysis as her method, Sissons examines in detail an official meeting with a client, here the mayor, and a meeting among two public relations officers following the official meeting. Systematically using method, Sissons conducts a critical discourse analysis and uncovers underlying power structures between the client and the public relations officers, which diverges from the common belief that public relations officers control the messages that go out to journalists and the public.

In Chapter 5, Rowe investigates the practices found in a science museum, looking at how social actors (the visitors) receive and make meaning. He uses nexus and multimodal discourse analysis as his method, examining particular scientific visualizations in a science museum, where multiple discourses in multiple modes meet as part of the interaction. Here, social actors interact with the visualizations and with each other about the visualizations. However, as Rowe discovers through his systematic multimodal analysis, the kinds of visualizations that he investigates do not in fact afford social actors (adults and children visiting the science museum) the ability to make meaning.

In Chapter 6, Frommherz examines temporal rhythms and ritual actions in the practice of Aipan art making. The focus of this chapter is the experience of time in the actions that social actors perform, building on the theoretical notions developed by Scollon (2005) and Lemke (2000), which are discussed in detail.

Investigating the action cycles that social actors undertake during the practice of Aipan art making, and utilizing modal density as her methodological tool, Frommherz compares everyday actions to ritual actions, explaining how social actors experience ritual actions differently by giving detailed theoretical analyses of times and rhythm in an attempt to theorize spirituality. Thus, this chapter investigates the theoretical underpinnings of time and rhythm in the practice of Aipan art making by using methodological tools from mediated discourse and multimodal interaction analysis, arriving at new theorization.

Chapter 7 focuses on the social actor *and* on bodies as cultural tools as this chapter discusses forms of display on Internet sites. Jones refers to body displays on these sites as “bodies without organs,” leaning on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), defining them as any representation of the self which is deployed as a tool to take social actions. He develops his argument by first giving an overview of the theoretical underpinnings, but most importantly, Jones connects social actors to the actions that go into the displays, arguing that bodies are reflections of values and expectations—or putting it differently and looking forward to Djonov and Van Leeuwen’s chapter, norms—about the kinds of bodies that ought to be displayed and how they should be displayed. Investigating Internet practices and the actions that real social actors perform at the Internet sites discussed, Jones illuminates the body as cultural tool.

Chapter 8 challenges the sender-receiver model much in the sense as Scollon (1998) did earlier, even though the chapter does not come from or move into Scollon’s theoretical direction.

Here, Jewitt takes a close look at how social actors utilize the cultural tool *the digital text* in a secondary school classroom to illustrate that the mediational means shapes the reception of the viewer/reader.

The chapter first gives the theoretical background that it draws upon. Jewitt then explains how the cultural tools of sound, visual layering, movement, hyperlinks or the use of color can all be used by the designer (social actor) of a text (the cultural tool under scrutiny) or its reader (social actor) to create layers of information in a text. Whereas this chapter begins in some ways similarly to Chapter 10 by Djonov and Van Leeuwen, who illustrated how certain (cognitive/psychological) mediational means are embedded (and frozen) in the cultural tool (here the text) by the designers, Jewitt illustrates how these embedded aspects are used quite differently by different social actors (the readers).

Jewitt draws a clear connection with her argument against the sender-receiver model based on new-media technologies: in her view, it is particularly new-media technologies that allow and foster nonlinear communication. But, as stated in her theoretical part of the chapter, other scholars have argued that nonlinear communication is just as prevalent in other situations.

Discussing her case studies, Jewitt is particularly interested in the social actors and how they interact with the cultural tool, the text. In other words, she investigates what students do with the cultural tool, focusing on their actions. In her first example, Jewitt does not investigate the text as such; however, she is drawn back to the text to explain why the students do not understand the text in the second example. What is reflected in this chapter is the constant tension that exists between a focus on social actors, actions and cultural tools; and because Jewitt is moving on to analyze the cultural tool (the images on a screen) in the later parts of her chapter, this chapter brings us to the second part of the book, where our primary focus is the cultural tool.

SUMMARY

In Part I of the book, scholars investigate a wide range of practices: Chapter 2 examines the practice of horseback-riding lessons; Chapter 3 the practice of video conferencing; Chapter 4 the practice of public relations; Chapter 5 the practice of visiting a science museum; Chapter 6 the practice of Aipan art making; Chapter 7 the practice of display in online environments; and Chapter 8 the practice of teaching with new technologies.

In these seven chapters, scholars have also used a range of methodologies and theories that allowed them to gain new knowledge about the practices and further our understanding of theoretical underpinnings.

What all of these diverse chapters have in common, however, is not only their interest in real-world practices but also their focus on social actors and the actions that social actors take.

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2 Teaching Touch/Response-Feel

A First Step to an Analysis of Touch from an (Inter)active Perspective

Sigrid Norris

INTRODUCTION

In interaction, we utilize numerous modes of communication. Sometimes, language is the primary mode, whereas at other times non-verbal behavior such as gaze or gesture can take on primacy, or again at other times, we use modes in aggregates (Norris, 2011a).

The modes of language and, more recently, the visual modes are given the most attention, whereas modes such as touch receive much less attention.¹ In this chapter, I would like to take a closer look at the mode of touch and feel as they are being taught. Here, I analyze a horse-riding/training session and am taking a particularly close look at the teacher to investigate the way he conveys how the rider is to produce a touch and how the rider then is to feel the horse react.

Touch and feel are what Loenhoff, extrapolating upon Palágyi (1925), refers to as “Doppelempfindung” or dual experience, where

Eine solche “Zusammenordnung” (Palágyi 1925:103) von Empfindungen und kinästhetischen Wahrnehmungen in Form von Rückempfindung konstituiert einen Funktionskreis, den Palágyi als “Prinzip der Geschlossenheit aller Wahrnehmungsprozesse” (1924:166) bestimmt.

Such an “integration” (Palágyi 1925:103) of perception and kinaesthetic experience through counter-perception builds a functional circle, which Palágyi defines as “principle of integration of all perception” (1924:166). (Loenhoff, 2001:121; my own translation)

However, in this chapter I would like to take the integration of perception and kinesthetic experience through counter-perception as given, calling it *touch*, and adding the notion of *feel*.

Whereas Palágyi views touch and feel as two sides of a coin, as in the example of a social actor who touches a doorknob and in turn feels the knob in the hand, or a social actor who sits in a chair and feels the ergonomics of the chair, I, in contrast, view *touch* as something the social

actor does (and this includes the notion of counter-perception), and view *feel* as something that happens as a reaction to the touch. For example, in horseback riding the rider performs *the action of touching* the horse with a heel (and thereby experiences the counter-perception in the heel); in turn the horse responds to this touch and the rider *feels* the horse move in a particular way. This notion of a social actor using the mode of *touch* and *feeling* the response of a meditational means or another social actor is what I will call a *touch/response-feel*.

A *touch/response-feel* is thus differentiated from other haptic experience such as sitting in a chair or walking across a hard surface. This *touch/response-feel* comes about when a social actor (inter)acts with another social actor or a meditational means where a touch of the (touching) social actor results in a response by the other social actor or the meditational means. A handshake is one kind of *touch/response-feel*; holding the handles of a heavily filled wheelbarrow on a downslope is another. In both cases, the (touching) social actor feels the response of either the other social actor whose hand he or she is shaking or the pull of the wheelbarrow. This *response-feel* allows the social actor to act again in response to that feel.

Touch/response-feel is also found in cooking. For example, if a social actor makes mashed potatoes, jam or a sauce from scratch, the social actor touches the meditational means (the substance) with a cultural tool (such as a spoon) in order to feel the substance's response. It is this *response-feel* that allows the social actor to infer whether the substance has reached the wanted consistency.

Touch/response-feel in many situations is learned. A handshake is learned early in life by adults commenting upon the shake and by the young person testing the pressure of the touch and the response-feel as well as other reactions by the one who has been touched. The response-feel of the pull of a heavy wheelbarrow may be learned quite by surprise and simply by experiencing it, but it may also be explained by others.

In cooking, the response-feel again is taught through experience and through verbal and non-verbal responses to the substance while it is being prepared or once the substance is consumed by others. In all cases of learning a touch/response-feel, verbal teaching, explaining and relating take on a big role, but we do not really know how big a role.

Whereas, as Loenhoff discusses in his chapter (this volume), all senses and sense perceptions function together, my interest here is how can *touch/response-feel* be taught? In order to gain a glimpse of an answer, I investigated riding lessons. The excerpt discussed here comes from a six-month-long ethnographic study of riding and horse-training sessions. During the six months of study, I spent about two hours each week at the riding stable and collected an abundance of field notes, about five hours of video data and two hours of sociolinguistic interviews with the riding teacher and several of his students. The riding teacher (John) points out the difficulty in

one audiotaped interview. Here, the interviewer, Sara, and the riding student, Rita, as well as a few bystanders are present. The particular excerpt is presented in the transcript below.

Transcript: John's interview after a riding lesson

- (557) John: 9:43 right,
(558) how do you get
(559) what's in your brain
(560) into their brain.
(561) Rita: 9:38 right,
(562) you know,
(563) exactly (###)
(564) but maybe it's not translating to what I'm doing.
(565) John: 9:49 this is a feel too,
(566) it's really,
(567) only a little bit of science,
(568) but it's a lot more feel,
(569) Sara: 9:53 uh hm
(570) John: 9:54 because y-
(571) you push the same button
(572) the same way
(573) on three different horses
(574) and you get three different responses.
(575) Sara: 9:57 uh hmm
(576) John: 9:57 just like ahh. . .
(577) you know,
(578) you may communicate
(579) with three different people in the same way
(580) and they take it
(581) and receive it three different ways.
(582) so
(583) how do you communicate a feel
(584) from one person to the next?
(585) it's like trying t
(586) trying to describe a smell
(587) you've never smelled before.
(588) Sara: 10:10 yeah, exactly
(589) John: 10:10 smells like an orange,
(590) well,
(591) I've never smelled an orange.
(592) well,
(593) what do they smell like?

- (594) well they smell like a grapefruit,
 (595) well I've never smelled a grapefruit,
 (596) but sweeter (laughter),
 (597) but (laughter) (###)
 (598) Sara: 10:19 so true. . .

John tries to teach what I call touch/response-feel. The student rider not only has to learn how to touch the horse, but has to learn to feel the horse's response to a particular touch. As John says in lines (583) and (584), the problem is "how do you communicate a feel from one person to the next?";² and what is more, and this comes out in lines (585) to (597) where John uses the example of describing a smell another has not smelled before, how do you communicate a feel that the other social actor has not felt before?

METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the video data, I use multimodal (inter)action analysis (Norris, 2004, 2011b), which is based on mediated discourse analysis (Scollon, 1998, 2001; Norris and Jones, 2005). In multimodal (inter)action analysis, the unit of analysis is the action, which is demarcated into lower and higher levels of action.³

A higher-level action can be the riding/horse-training session, or a part thereof (as in the following example). In this example, a fairly inexperienced rider, Karen, has come to the stable with her own horse to take lessons. Thus, in this lesson, John teaches the student to ride and also teaches the student to train her horse. The first and the second higher-level actions come about through John's and Karen's use of a multitude of lower-level actions at the same time as the lower-level actions construct the higher-level actions.

Lower-level actions are a communicative mode's smallest meaning-units such as a step for the mode of walking, a gesture unit for the mode of gesture or an utterance for the mode of language.

Modes of communication, the systems of representation with rules and regularities (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001), as they are being used (Norris, 2009) are of particular interest here. A mode of communication such as language can take on primacy in communication at one point, and then a different mode such as walking can take on primacy at a different point within a higher-level action. In this way, communicative modes fluctuate in their importance (Norris, 2009). Communicative modes are also only heuristic units, which means that they are defined in ways that are sensible for the study at hand. In the examples below, I speak of the mode of spoken language (with the corresponding

unit of analysis, the lower-level action, the utterance); the mode of foot/leg movement (with the corresponding unit of analysis, the lower-level action, the foot/leg motion); posture; gaze; head movement; and hand movement.

A RIDING/HORSE-TRAINING SESSION: TEACHING TOUCH/RESPONSE-FEEL

In the following example, which is only about 40 seconds long, John is trying to teach Karen to touch the horse in a particular way and to feel the response of the horse. Transcript 2 presents the utterance sequence of the excerpt:

Transcript 2: *it doesn't matter where you are*

- | | | | |
|------|--------|------|------------------------------------|
| (1) | John: | 00.8 | one more |
| (2) | | 01.2 | it doesn't matter |
| (3) | | | where you are, |
| (3) | | 02.8 | it doesn't matter |
| (4) | | | where you're headed, |
| (5) | | 03.8 | it doesn't matter |
| (6) | | | where you end up, |
| (7) | | 05.2 | all that matters is, |
| (8) | | 06.8 | I DID this, |
| (9) | | 08.2 | and you dID thAt. |
| (10) | | 11.3 | okay? |
| (11) | | 11.7 | bASically just |
| (12) | | 12.5 | really he's got to drift, |
| (13) | | 14.2 | the guys in Germany all look like- |
| (14) | | 15.8 | he's just wandering aimlessly? |
| (15) | Karen: | 25.2 | hhh |
| (16) | Todd: | 28.8 | please take it seriously |
| (17) | | 31.5 | so if, |
| (18) | | 33.1 | if we can be rEal persistent, |
| (19) | | 36.8 | real specIfic, |
| (20) | | 37.8 | we can teach him thrEE thIngs. |

In lines (2) to (6), John explains to Karen what is *not* important by making a list of three—*it doesn't matter where you are; it doesn't matter where you're headed; it doesn't matter where you end up*—and all three items on the list receive a slightly raised intonation, marking that there is more to come. Line (7) continues with the intonation pattern, but this time John

tells Karen what *is* important: *all that matters is*, emphasizing what is to come by pausing briefly. John then says in lines (8) and (9): *I DID this and you DID thAt*. Here, John's intonation pattern has changed as has the loudness in the three words he is stressing.

Besides the change in intonation and loudness, which all mark the utterances and the particular words as important, John has now changed his pronominal use. Before, in lines (2) to (6), John speaks directly to Karen, using second-person singular (you). Now, in lines (8) *I did this* and (9) *you did that*, John still is addressing Karen, but has stepped into her shoes, addressing her in first-person singular (I) and speaking about the horse in second-person singular (you). He then checks for understanding in line (10) *okay?* Right after that, from line (11) to (14) John speaks to Karen without addressing her directly, using third-person singular for the horse, with a reference to other riders in line (13), which John however cuts off and does not continue. After line (14) John pauses substantially.

When Karen laughs in line (15), John reprimands her, asking her in line (16) *please take it seriously*, pausing briefly. He then reframes the teaching situation saying in line (17) *so if*, pausing, and then continues this with line (18) *if we can be rEal persistent*, speaking very slowly and emphasizing "real," and then continues in line (19) *real specIfic*, emphasizing "specific," still speaking slowly, and then finishes the thought in line (20) *we can teach him thrEE things*. In this section, John uses intonation/loudness for emphasis more than he has before. Further, John has switched pronouns once again, and now, he speaks to Karen in first-person plural, including her as one of the teachers in the situation, thereby reframing the teaching from Karen being taught by John to the horse being taught by both Karen and John.

For the most part of this segment, spoken language takes on primacy; i.e., the spoken language used can be understood without the necessity of other modes being present. This is true for almost all of the utterances except for lines (8) *I did this* and (9) *you did that*, where John uses deictic demonstratives *this* and *that* without providing a verbal referent. When we take a look at a multimodal transcript, we see how John shifts from a primacy in spoken language for his teaching.

The actual shift occurs in line (7) *all that matters is* of the audio transcript as represented in the second row in Figure 2.1. We further see how John performs the deictic referent for *this* and *that* non-verbally and how he continues to use non-verbal modes to communicate with Karen when he says *okay* in line (10). It is in lines (7) to (10) of the audio transcript above, represented in the second and third row of the multimodal transcript below, when John tries to teach Karen what I call the touch/response-feel. The multimodal transcript below illustrates lines (1) to (10).

Multimodal transcript: *I did this and you did that. okay?*