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Normy w komunikowaniu retorycznym
Norms in rhetorical communication

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SPRAWOZDANIE / REPORT

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Sprawozdanie/Report: 12th International Conference on Multimodality, October 29-31, 2025, Groningen

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Sprawozdanie/Report: 12th International Conference on Multimodality, October 29-31, 2025, Groningen

Following a successful 11th ICOM at the University College London in 2023, the 2025 edition of the biannual International Conference on Multimodality took place at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, from 29-31 October 2025.

The conference theme – 'Multimodal Multiverse' – signalled the diversity of approaches to multimodal communication. This diversity was particularly visible in the presentations by the participants. While the sessions have not been officially themed, the presentations can be divided into several main categories based on their focus:

- Social media (most notably TikTok, X, RedNote, Instagram),
- Political communication (presidential campaigns),
- News and media (news videos, fact-checking),
- Hate speech (depiction of immigrants and minorities),
- Education (educational resources, classroom interactions),
- Comics and illustrations (books for children, irony in political comics),
- AI-generated content,
- Gestures,
- Multimodal argumentation and rhetoric,
- Multimodality theory.

Apart from looking into diverse analytical objects, the participants represented various schools of thought and approaches to multimodality, including, but not limited to, Bateman et al. (2017) approach, Systemic-Functional Linguistics, or Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. Finally, the eleven workshops that initiated the conference familiarized the participants with novel approaches to multimodal corpus design and annotation, short video creation, and experimental contributions on AI and professional communication, among others.

Keynote lectures constituted the highlight of the event. On the first day of the conference, Tuomo Hiippala from the University of Helsinki, Finland, discussed the possibilities of conducting large-scale corpus analyses of multimodal artifacts. While annotating big corpora is a daunting task, it is particularly useful in finding meaningful results. Hippala explored two major ways of helping the researchers look into large corpora: using artificial intelligence and crowdsourcing, of which the latter appears to give better outcomes, given the current technological possibilities.

The second keynote was given by Louise Ravelli from the University of New South Wales, Australia. Ravelli talked about museums as objects of research in multimodality, providing the audience with an overview of the basic methods and focusing on several examples, including those from the Netherlands.

Later that day, Bart Verheij from the University of Groningen introduced the participants to his work on AI, including hybrid argumentation, highlighting the benefits of the argumentative-theoretical approach to artificial intelligence. Verheij argued that the interactions between humans and AI can be analyzed with and enhanced by the framework of argumentation theory, yet remained skeptical about the capabilities of the current versions of Large Language Models, such as ChatGPT, as competent arguers.

Finally, Aslı Özyürek from the Radboud University in Nijmegen and the Max Planck Institute discussed the role of gestures in communication. Özyürek, among others, pointed to the differences in gesture usage in face-to-face communication depending on the age of the receiver, as well as to the qualitative differences in gestures in spoken languages and sign languages.

The conference was concluded by a roundtable discussion with John Bateman (University of Bremen), Judith Holler (Radboud University/Max Planck Institute), Kay O'Halloran (University of Liverpool), Dušan Stamenković (Södertörn University/University of Niš), and Renske van Enschoot (Tilburg University). The discussion, moderated by Nataliia Laba (University of Groningen), centered around the salient topic of AI. While the panelists said that there is no need for a change in the paradigm of multimodality research given the recent technological advances, they debated the role of researchers and academics in the societal adjustment to the rising role of artificial intelligence, and whether scholars actually have any power to stand against, e.g., the environmental costs of using AI.

The three-day event gathered more than 250 participants from around the world. It featured over 100 presentations, eleven workshops, four keynote talks, two poster sessions, and a roundtable discussion. The conference was organized by a team based in Groningen, led by Janina Wildfeuer. It was supported by the Jantina

Tammes School of Digital Society, Technology and AI (University of Groningen), and hosted mostly in the House of Connections of the University.

During the conference closing, the venue of the next ICOM was announced. In an anonymous vote, the participants have chosen Helsinki to host ICOM in 2027. As a representative of the University of Helsinki, Tuomo Hiippala announced that the participants of the conference in Helsinki will enjoy 18 hours of sunlight, since the 13th ICOM is set to take place in June. Given that the weather in Groningen this year was slightly capricious, we hold him to his word.