

## Unboxing: Relevant to Media Linguistics?

(3-Min-Talk)

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My 3-Min-Talk will sketch possible research interests in analysing a web phenomenon called unboxing. Unboxing is a term that is used to describe a video format that films the opening of packaging. These clips reach click rates up to 400,000 clicks on youtube.com. Originally, unboxing videos were very emotional self-expressions of surprise. When unpacking a product, they were filmed simultaneously by an unprofessional hand camera or steady cam which is why we were able to face a unique situation: A moment of planned surprise that is loaded with emotion. What is the planned surprise effect and is it worth examining unboxing videos in linguistic studies?

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The video presented is about unboxing – a former Youtube trend that has emerged to a culturally manifested way of self-expression. Unboxing means to unpack a product in front of a camera. The box presented in the videos is bought by some average Joe himself. The video is taken by an un- or semi-professional hand camera in one shot, i.e. there are no cuts. And it is a simultaneous recording with comments on every single action taken.

In fact, the spontaneity presented in unboxing videos is what makes me think of some kind of media linguistic relevance. The reason therefore is the planned surprise effect. Imagine you buy a birthday gift for yourself – like a much-anticipated DVD. Of course, you were surprised as you reach the moment of opening the case for the first time, exploring the cover, reading the booklet and so forth. But the situation will never be the same as of receiving a gift



**Figure 1:**  
Stills from “Unboxing Skypro Pony”

from someone else. In unboxing videos we encounter a special moment of semantic opposition: planning/expecting vs. surprise.

As Stöckl (2006) mentions in his multi-modal text analysis, media linguistics once focused on rhetorics and language, but nowadays puts its main interest in mediality and materiality. Advanced media linguistics as of Perrin (2011) therefore tackles media by adding perceptual surveys and analysing the pragmatic actions of all acting communicators.

In order to provide you with some take-aways on the question of whether media linguistics should start conducting surveys on unboxing let me give you four notes:

**First:** The planned surprise effect is unique. We can expect emotional language and spontaneous speech. This unique situation makes unboxing videos relevant to linguistic studies.

**Second:** When it comes to materiality, we should concentrate on the role of packaging as a multimodal medium. The sounds that emerge when touching a package adds a second auditive mode, besides the speaker's voice. Plus, the packaging adds a tactile

mode that finds expression in an emotional way of speaking.

**Third:** There is no need for an additional perceptual analysis, because the speakers express their perception both phonologically and lexically.

**Fourth:** Unboxing videos provide a huge variety of speech acts like presumptions, implications and references.

## References

- Perrin, D. (2011). *Medienlinguistik*. Konstanz: UVK.
- Stöckl, H. (2006). Zeichen, Text und Sinn – Theorie und Praxis der multimodalen Textanalyse. In: E. M. Eckkrammer & G. Held (Eds.), *Textsemiotik: Studien zu multimodalen Medientexten* (pp. 11-36). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.