

Multimodality and EFL Teaching

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Abstract

This article proposes an integration of multimodality in language teaching. It starts with a brief discussion on multimodality and the social semiotic approach to analysis of multimodal texts. The article subsequently explores the connection of multimodality, and language teaching, and reviews recent studies on integration of multimodality in language teaching. Accordingly, it foregrounds benefits of addressing multimodality in educational contexts and practical suggestions for teaching multimodality. Based on the reviewed theoretical frameworks, a detailed proposal is outlined for adapting a unit from a language-dominated textbook to integrate multimodality in an EFL writing class.

Keywords: EFL teaching, Image-language, Multimodality, Social semiotic approach relation

Introduction

The advent of digital technology has enabled humans to use different semiotic resources or modes for communication more easily than ever before. Smartphones with built-in digital cameras have revolutionized our communication, allowing us to make meaning not only in language but also in other modes such as image, movie, music. Multimodal texts in our daily life have become so popular that Kress (2000) commented that today it is

impossible for us to understand a multimodal text, or even a part of it, if we do not take into account the contribution of other modes in the text. This revolution in communication has required rethinking in language education, and there has been an increase of interest in multimodality in language teaching. In this article the author argues for the inclusion of multimodality in language teaching. She will start with a brief review on multimodality and the social semiotic approach to multimodality. I will subsequently discuss the importance of multimodality in language teaching. Finally, with a focus on the mode of image, she will describe how to address multimodality in an EFL writing class.

Multimodality and the Social Semiotic Approach

Multimodality refers to the combination of different modes or semiotic resources for communication. and multimodal texts are ubiquitous at both levels of mass media and personal-to-person communication (Pantaleo, 2017; Liruso et al., 2019). The ubiquity of multimodal texts leads to increasing interest in investigation of semiotic resources other than language and the interplay of multiple semiotic resources in meaning making. It is widely assumed among researchers and scholars in the field (Bezmer & Jewitt, 2010; Kress, 2000; Smith, 2014) that communication is always multimodal and all modes contribute to making meaning of a multimodal text. Any mode has the function of making meaning, establishing relationship and making structural texts, and each mode has its own affordances to realize these functions. It is also believed that the interaction between modes is important to produce the whole meanings of a multimodal text.

Modality analysis needs a new approach, and social semiotics lends itself to this need. As Leuween (2005, p.1) stated: “Social semiotics is a form of enquiry”. It studies and explains how meaning is made with a particular mode of communication in a social context. It also focuses on how both language and other modes of communication interact to create meaning (Aiello, 2020). Accordingly, social semiotics helps to develop theoretical frameworks for analysis of communication modes. Halliday (1994) states

that ‘Functional Grammar’ is widely considered to be the first investigation of language from the social semiotic approach. Drawing on his ideas, several studies were conducted on other modes of communication such as sound and music (Leuween, 1999), image (Kress & Leuween, 2005).

For the purpose of providing a theoretical framework for analysis of multimodal texts in the context of an EFL writing class, she briefly reviews the social semiotic approach to language and image. Halliday’s Functional Grammar (1994) which conceptualizes three metafunctions of language, namely ideational/representational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions, could be seen a foundation for this approach. Drawing on Halliday’s work, Kress and Leeuwen (2005) proposed a very influential theoretical framework to investigate how visual resources can create meanings, enable social interaction, and form coherent texts. Also based on Halliday’s Functional Grammar, a number of studies examined image-language relations in multimodal texts. These studies shed light on how the two modes interact to produce synergic meanings of the whole multimodal text. Perhaps, the most comprehensive and systematic system of image-language relations was introduced by Martinec and Salway (2005). Halliday’s Functional Grammar, Kress and Leeuwen’s visual grammar, and Martinec and Salway’s system of image-language relations can serve between them as theoretical frameworks for multimodal text analysis. Since my focus in this article is on meaning making of the two modes, she will highlight only the ideational/representational metafunction of language and of image in the following sections.

1. Functional Grammar: The Ideational Metafunction of Language

According to Halliday (1994), language can perform the metafunction of ideation via clause. A clause, which represents a process, is composed of participant(s), a process, and circumstance(s). For example, “*The girl is cut the cake with a knife*” represents a process in which participants are “*the girl*” and “*the cake*”, “*cutting*” is a process, and “*with a knife*” is a circumstance. Clauses are classified into six types: material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational, and existential. Material clauses represent

processes of doing and happening. Behavioral clauses express physiological and psychological behaviors. Mental clauses are about processes of thinking, sensing, and perceiving. Verbal clauses recount processes of saying or dialogic exchange. Relational clauses describe processes of being and having. Existential clauses show existence or occurrence. All these processes represent our experience of the material world, the world of abstract relations and the world of cognition and senses.

2. Grammar of Visual Design: The Representational Metafunction of Image

In a similar vein, Kress and Leeuwen (2005) stated that images are capable of representing meanings via clause. A visual clause is also comprised of participant (s), a process, and circumstance(s). While language uses the category of “action verbs” as the verb “*cut*” in the above example to realize an action process, images have the concept of “vector” to represent an action process. A vector can be displayed with body, parts of body or instruments to form the direction of an action. For example, a hand holding and directing a knife to the cake represents the action of “*cutting*”. Kress & Leeuwen classified visually-represented processes into two main types: narrative process and conceptual process. Narrative processes represent actions and events taking place and changing through time and space, whereas conceptual processes describe participants in their temporarily stable status. Narrative processes include action processes, reactional processes, speech processes and mental processes, and circumstances. Conceptual processes can be classified into classificational processes, analytical processes, and symbolic processes.

In short, both semiotic modes, language and image, are capable of realizing the ideational or representational metafunction. Both of them can create clauses that represent the material world of actions and events, the world of abstract relations, or the world of cognitions and senses. It is the similarity and compatibility of the two semiotic modes that enable a combination of them into a logico-semantically coherent multimodal text. The

ideational/representational metafunction of the two modes can be summarized in Figure 1.

Processes represented in language		Processes represented in image		
Material	} Process of doing, happening	} Process type	} Narrative process	Action
Behavioral				Reactional
Mental				Speech and mental
Verbal				Circumstance
Existential	} Process of being and having		} Conceptual process	Classificatory
Relational (attribute, identify, symbolize)				Analytical
				Symbolical

Figure 1. The representational metafunction of language and image.

3. Logico-semantic Relations in Multimodal Texts

According to Halliday (2004, p.380), verbal clauses can be connected in two ways: projection and expansion. With projection, one clause is projected through another as in the following example: “John said that he was running away”. The projecting clause is “John said”, and the projected clause is “He was running away”. The two clauses are connected with the structure “...that...” In expansion, one clause expands another by elaborating on it or its component, or by extending it with relevant new ideas, or by describing its circumstantial features such as time, place, reason and so on. For instance, the whole idea in the clause “John ran away” can be commented as something “which surprised everyone” as in “John ran away, which surprised everyone”. It can be extended with a new idea as in “John ran away, and Fred stayed behind”. It can be qualified with the circumstance of reason as in “John ran away because he was scared”.

Drawing on Halliday’s Functional Grammar, and Kress and van Leeuwen’s Grammar of Visual Design, Martinec and Salway (2005) specified a system of logico-semantic relations between language and image in multimodal texts. According to this system, language and image can also be combined in terms of projection and expansion. With projection, a visually-represented clause can project a verbal text as in the case of cartoon where a character depicted in image reports a verbiage put in a bubble. Similar to expansion in language, there are three types of expansion in multimodal texts: elaboration, extension, and enhancement. A clause expressed in language can elaborate on another clause represented in image and vice versa. Or clause can be also extended by another clause described in a different mode. A verbal clause can be specified with circumstantial features shown in image. Leuween (2005) further distinguished three types of extension which are complementation, similarity, and contrast. The system of logico-semantic relations can be visually presented in Figure 2.

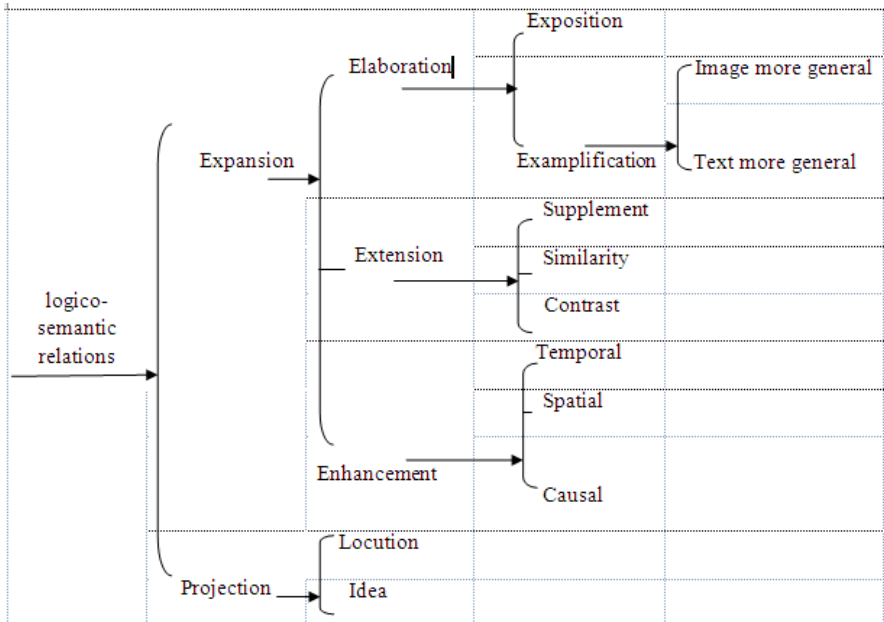


Figure 2. Image-language relations adapted from Martinec and Salways, (2005).

Multimodality and Language Teaching

With regard to language education, the ubiquity of multimodal texts in our life has required educators to rethink the curriculum and educational approach. Over the last two decades educational institutions around the world have started integrating multimodality in education. More and more attention has been paid to other semiotic resources such as image, video, sound and music as inherent modes of communication that are worth teaching. A great deal of research has been conducted on how multimodality is treated in textbooks (Danielsson & Selander, 2016; Smith, 2014; Unsworth, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). These studies show that the content of lessons is presented not only in verbal language but also in other modes like image. The interplay between language and image helps convey more sophisticated knowledge. Many other investigations were carried out on how multimodality was addressed in the classroom in both terms of comprehension and composition (Jewitt, 2008; Liruso et al., 2019; Magnusson & Godhe, 2019; Royce, 2002). The research findings suggest that the integration of multimodality in language education proves beneficial to students with regard to their language and communication competence. The studies also confirm that for students to gain these benefits, teaching multimodality requires overt instruction.

Overt instruction in teaching multimodality means pre-planning and scaffolding. Pre-planning should be made right from the establishment of an assignment for students. For example, Godhe and Magnusson (2017) believed that the teacher's choice of a word like "design" or "create" instead of "write" in his/her question to ask his/her students to compose a poem would give them freedom of choice for their preferred mode of expression and recognize other meaning-making modes other than verbal language. Therefore, "design a poem" would be more appropriate than "write a poem". Yet, for students to be able to design a multimodal text, it is highly necessary to prepare them with elements of the design. This preparation can involve activities like brainstorming and deconstruction a design or a multimodal

text. In these activities, there is a need for a tool to support learning multimodality. This scaffolding tool is a metalanguage to discuss the elements of a design or to deconstruct and describe a multimodal text (Magnusson & Godhe, 2019; Smith, 2014; Unsworth, 2009). In other words, this metalanguage enables the teacher and students to talk about how meanings are represented and communicated in multimodal texts.

Metalanguage for Teaching Multimodality

There is a strong agreement that the social semiotic approach can offer a foundation for the development of a metalanguage to teach multimodal texts. The New London Group (2010) and Cope and Kalantzis (2009) suggested adapting the metafunctions of semiotic resources as a metalanguage to discuss how meanings of a multimodal text are represented, organized and communicated. Other scholars such as Royce (2002), Unsworth (2006a, 2006b, 2009) further focused on image-language relations to develop a metalanguage to describe how the synergy of language and image makes new meanings. On the ground that a metalanguage adapted directly from social semiotic theories could be too vague and abstract to be used in the classroom, Cloonan (2011) further advanced the language framework proposed by Cope and Kalantzis (2009, p.36) into a “scaffolding proforma” which they believed to be more readily and flexibly employed in class. However, from my application of Cloonan’s metalanguage in my EFL class the author found that it needed further specifically directing to the components of clauses (i.e., participants, processes, circumstances), and image-language interaction in meaning-making. Accordingly, based on Cloonan, she developed a list of more specific questions that can be asked to help students understand how meaning is made and how they can use the two modes to create meaning for communication in an EFL writing class. The list consists of the following questions, but they are not exhaustive: What do you read? What were the main participants? What were they doing? What was happening to them? Where and when did it happen? What do you see? How language and images work together? What verbal clause repeats the meaning in an image? What image clarify a verbal clause? and so on.

Students can fill in the table with their answers to the questions as it is shown in Figure 3.

Meanings	Modes	
	Language	Image
<u>Representation</u>	I read...	I see...
Participants		
Circumstance		
Process		
<u>Image-language relation</u>		
Repetition	(A verbal clause repeats the meaning in an image.)	(An image repeats the meaning in a verbal clause.)
Clarification	(A clause clarifies an image.)	(An image clarifies a clause.)
Exemplification	(A clause exemplifies an image.)	(An image exemplifies a clause.)
Qualifying	(A clause qualifies an image with circumstantial features.)	(An image qualifies a clause with circumstantial features.)
Extension	(A clause extend an image.)	(An image extend a clause.)

Figure 3. Metalinguage for discussing meaning-making in multimodal texts.

Integrating Multimodality in an EFL Writing Class

1. Complementing the Textbook with Multimodal Texts

Since contemporary textbooks tend to focus on verbal language, materials for pre- writing activities in these textbooks might involve pictures or images only as a means of motivation rather than as an inherent meaning-making component of a text. Therefore, teachers who want to address multimodality in their teaching need to adapt their textbook. One way of adaptation is to supplement the textbook with multimodal texts such as multimodal newspaper articles or picture books. In a narrative writing class, I used some of free online picture books for children. They were multimodal texts very useful for deconstruction and analysis activities in class. These

resources included Oxford Owl, International Children's Digital Library and many others. The author used some of them to help students understand how the two modes, language and image, work together to produce a coherent multimodal text.

For instance, "Hero" is a picture book for children, written by Jane Langford and painted by Dawn Vince. It can be read for free at https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/api/digital_books/1272.html. The story is about two children, named Ben and Amy, their Dad, and a new puppy. They took the puppy from a farm and named him Hero because he looked brave. For the first two days, they were so upset and could not sleep as the little dog did not sleep and howled all night. Upon the farmer's advice, they put things into the dog's basket to help him feel like he was with his mum. As a result, he could sleep well.

The book is composed of 24 pages. Each page is a combination of verbal texts and images. Most of the story is told in verbal language, and images elaborate on what is already recounted in language by means of exposition or illustration. There are also pages where pictures expand the verbally told story by qualifying it with circumstantial features such as location. For example, in page 15 the story has it in verbal language that they put Hero in a basket and covered him with a blanket. However, he was not happy and just howled. The story did not specify in language where in the house Hero slept. It is the picture with a washing machine that clarifies this point and foregrounds the loneliness and coldness the little puppy experienced the first two days he was away from his mum. Or in page 24, the picture almost on its own continues the story which can be verbally paraphrased as follows: Next morning, Dad, Ben, and Amy were excited to rush into the utility room where Hero slept. To their relief, the little puppy was sleeping soundly, with his head against the clicking clock, his body against the teddy bear and the warm water bottle. All those things gave him a feeling like his mum were beside him. The words " 'What a hero!' laughed Ben," just elaborate on Ben's happiness which is also depicted in the picture.

2. Teaching EFL Students to Design a Multimodal Narrative

In this section, the author presents a four-hour lesson plan which is about an adaptation of a unit from a language-dominated textbook with a view to addressing multimodality in an EFL class. The textbook entitled “Successful Writing Proficiency” was developed by Evans (2000). It is intended for intermediate-to-advanced-level EFL students to learn writing a variety of composition such as descriptions, narratives, articles, discursive essays. The lesson she adapted to integrate multimodality is unit 5. In what follows below, she will describe the lesson in the textbook and then the four steps of integration multimodality in my writing class.

2.1 The Lesson in the Textbook

Unit 5 entitled “Narratives” aims to teach EFL students how to write a narrative in English. Listening and reading activities are used to elicit and generate the organization and other detailed theories related to this type of writing. Accordingly, after a definition of a narrative a basic plan for a narrative is given as follows:

A good narrative should consist of:

1. An introduction which sets the scene (place, time, characters, etc.), creates an interesting mood/atmosphere to make the reader want to continue reading and/or begins dramatically to capture the reader’s attention;
2. A main body which develops series of events clearly, give vivid description of the people/places involved, etc.; and
3. A conclusion which completes the story, perhaps in an unexpected way, and may describe people’s feelings/reactions, the consequences of what happened, etc.

(Evan, 2000, p.38)

In addition, the units suggest techniques for beginning and ending stories, how to set the scene, use past tenses and time words and structures to sequence the events. It also provides more sophisticated descriptive adjectives and adverbs, as well as more lively verbs that students can use to

tell a story. The unit subsequently teaches how to use flashback narration to relate an event that has happened much earlier than what are currently being narrated.

With regard to visual modes, pictures are used as a prompt or a motivation for students to elicit vocabulary or brainstorm ideas for a topic. For example, a picture which shows the scene introducing a story can be used to ask questions like “When and where is the story set?”, “What is the weather like?”, “Who are the people involved and how do they feel?” and so on. What is more, a writing exercise uses four cartoon drawings and supported vocabulary to ask students to write a description of actions and mannerisms of each character in those drawings. In another exercise, with no more vocabulary support students are asked to describe four other pictures into a story.

2.2 Integrating Multimodality in the Lesson: Designing a Multimodal Story

The author plans to teach students to intentionally use both images and verbal texts to narrate a story. The lesson is organized in four steps. Step 1 prepares students with knowledge of how each of the two modes and the combination of them make meanings. Step 2 scaffolds students in producing/designing multimodal texts with given images and words. Step 3 requires students to design their own story. Step 4 is a publicization of their work in class for feedback.

Step 1. Pre-writing: The teacher (T) guides students (Sts) to deconstruct a multimodal story to teach them how the story is organized, how each mode represents ideas in the story, and how the two modes interact to make new meanings.

- a) T uses the picture book “Hero”, which is described in the section of ***Complementing the textbook with multimodal texts*** above, to teach students about the plan of a story.

Suggested questions used to elicit the setting of the story:

- Where did the story take place?

- When did it happen?
- Who were involved in the story? Who was the main character?

Suggested questions about the series of events:

- What happened to the main character?
- What was the problem?
- How was the problem solved?
- What was the ending of the story?

b) T uses the metalanguage developed in the section of *Metalinguage for teaching multimodality* above to teach how the two modes, language and image, represent meanings. T asks students to fill in the table with their answers to the suggested questions. Here is the table 1 showing metalanguage for teaching multimodality.

Table 1
Metalinguage for Teaching Multimodality

	Language	Image
Introduction (Setting)	What did you read?	What did you see?
Place	..... the farm.....	..... the store room
Time	.....	.....
Characters	.....	.....
Main body	What did you read?	What did you see?
Event 1	.....	.....
Event 2	.....	.....
Problem	.....	.....
Solution1	.....	.....
Solution 2	.....	.....
Conclusion	.....	.....

- c) T uses the metalanguage developed in the section of ***Metalanguage for teaching multimodality*** above to teach students how language and images work together: Ask students to fill in the two tables with examples for language-image relations from the story. Here is the table 2 showing the language-image relations from the story.

Table 2
The Language-image Relations from the Story

Language-image relations	Examples
A verbal clause repeats an image.
A clause clarifies an image.
A clause exemplifies an image
A clause qualifies an image with circumstantial features.
A clause extends an image.
Image-language relations	Examples
An image repeats the meaning in a verbal clause.
An image clarifies a clause.
An image exemplifies a clause.
An image qualifies a clause with circumstantial features.
An image extend a clause.

In class, depending on the class size, students in groups of three or four can be assigned to work on one or two pages to understand the content of the story told in the page(s), and analyze image-language relations. They subsequently report their work to the whole class. Finally, T can summarize

the image-language relations on the board which students can refer to while they are designing their story later.

Step 2. Supported writing: using pictures in the textbook, T asks students to connect language and images to design some events of the story.

For example, T asks students to write sentences with given words such as *Rush downstairs/slam/door* to 1) describe events in the story, 2) combine the sentences with the relevant images, and 3) identify language-image relations.

Step 3. Free writing/homework: This task should be a group-work project so that students can help each other with writing and drawing/taking photographs outside of class. T asks students to design their own story using both verbal language and painted pictures or photographs.

Step 4. Publicization: T can have students display their stories in the next class for them to comment and enjoy each other's work.

Conclusion

The multimodal nature of contemporary communication requires language teachers to address multimodality in their class. Social semiotics can offer a useful approach to multimodal analysis as well as to the teaching of multimodal texts. Particularly, with regard to teaching narrative compositions in an EFL writing class, Functional Grammar and Grammar of Visual Design can help develop a metalanguage that can be used for discussing how to combine both language and image to narrate a multimodal story.

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