



Multimodal Discourse Analysis: The Case of Visual Grammar.

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to focus on and stress various frames, whether linguistic or visual, that contribute to the development of meaning. This research attempts to concentrate on the key elements in the evolution of various meaning-making processes, starting with discourse analysis and moving on to social semiotics, multimodal, and multimodal discourse analysis, as well as a new framework called visual grammar. It appears that the importance of images as a semiotic resource in communication has long been overlooked in the field of discourse analysis. This research argues that, like language, images are governed by grammatical patterns that can be used to decipher their multiple meanings. Discourse analysis that looks at how meaning is created through the use of many communication modalities, including words, images, body language, and sound, is known as multimodal discourse analysis (MDA). A theoretical framework for examining the symbolic role of images is called visual grammar. Therefore, the study ends with the emphasis on the importance of linguistic sources of communication, in addition to visual sources, as images, to create new kind of meaning in society .

Key words: Multimodality, multimodal discourse analysis, visual grammar, semiotics, social semiotics .

تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط: حالة القواعد البصرية

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الخلاصة

كان الغرض من الدراسة التركيز على الأطر المختلفة، سواء كانت لغوية أو بصرية، والتي تساهم في تطوير المعنى والتأكيد عليها. يحاول هذا البحث التركيز على العناصر الأساسية في تطور عمليات صنع المعنى المختلفة، بدءًا من تحليل الخطاب والانتقال إلى السيميائية الاجتماعية، وتحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط، ومتعدد الوسائط، بالإضافة إلى إطار جديد يسمى النحو البصري. يبدو أن أهمية الصور كمورد سيميائي في



التواصل قد تم التغاضي عنها منذ فترة طويلة في مجال تحليل الخطاب. يجادل هذا البحث بأن الصور، مثل اللغة، محكومة بأنماط نحوية يمكن استخدامها لفك معانيها المتعددة. تحليل الخطاب الذي يبحث في كيفية إنشاء المعنى من خلال استخدام العديد من طرق الاتصال، بما في ذلك الكلمات والصور ولغة الجسد والصوت، يُعرف باسم تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط (MDA). يُطلق على الإطار النظري لدراسة الدور الرمزي للصور اسم النحو البصري. ولذلك تنتهي الدراسة بالتأكيد على أهمية مصادر الاتصال اللغوية، بالإضافة إلى المصادر البصرية، كالصور، لخلق نوع جديد من المعنى في المجتمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعدد الوسائط، تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط، النحو البصري، السيميائية، الاجتماعية.

1. Introduction

Many people think that language is necessary for us to be able to "say things," or convey information, according to Gee (2014). But language has many uses in our daily life. Information exchange is not limited to one person. Naturally, language enables interpersonal communication. However, it also endows us with the capacity to act and behave. It makes it possible for us to do actions and tasks. We start committee meetings, propose to our sweethearts, argue politics, make pledges to one another, and "talk to God" (pray). These are but a handful of the numerous tasks humans accomplish using language, beyond just sending and receiving data. It is language that makes us what we are. It allows us to take on multiple identities that have social significance.

This study primarily focuses on various frameworks—whether linguistic or visual—that aid in the creation of meaning. Additionally, discourse analysis has evolved into a field today known as "multimodality study." This paper provides a historical context for this progression, with a special emphasis on the contributions made by multimodality research towards a better understanding of social semiotic processes. Simultaneously, the focus on multimodality is showcased as offering a crucial explanation of multimodal discourse analysis and serving as a vital instrument for analysing images to derive meaning. This research also focuses on how language, visuals, gestures, and music are used in conjunction with other forms of communication to create meaning. A framework for examining the ways in which images are used to convey meaning is called visual grammar.

Discourse analysis examines how both written and verbal words perform identities and social and cultural perspectives. Discourse analysis is the study of language in context, as stated by Gee (2014). After Zellig Harris published a number of papers in 1952 summarising the research he had used to construct transformational grammar in the late 1930s, the phrase became widely used. Sentence transformations are used to place a text in a canonical form while making explicitly obvious the formal equivalent relations among the sentences in a



coherent discourse. Then, in the same column of an array, are words and sentences that have the same amount of information (p. 8).

Thus far, the recent work seems to follow two major analytic themes. Critical theoretical work has been influenced by Fairclough's "reworking" of Foucault and Bakhtin (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). On the other hand, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1990, 1996; Van Leeuwen, 1999) are becoming more often acknowledged as the definitive source for text analysis and interpretation techniques. This branch of inquiry is where the term "multimodality" originates (p. 32).

To emphasize how important it is to consider semiotics other than language usage—such as gesture, music, image, and so on—the term "multimodality" was established. This renewed interest in and focus on the multi-semiotic complexity of the representations we generate and see around us is surely a result of the growing ubiquity of sound, picture, and video through TV, computers, and the internet. Its complexity is further enhanced by the pairing of this development with another. We must acknowledge that, in duties pertaining to language's function, sound and vision have essentially supplanted language since the printing press's development. Not only that, but we are increasingly depending on methods of meaning-making outside "language-in-isolation" (such as those found in mass-produced books) (Iedema, 2003, p. 33).

Furthermore, these extra instruments or "modes" of communication are further highlighted through multimodal discourse analysis. Discourse, according to multimodal discourse analysts, is composed of multiple modalities that frequently cooperate. In a face-to-face conversation, for example, people communicate in ways other than spoken words. Along with numerous other cues, people also communicate through posture, clothes, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and the distance that they sit or stand apart from one another. In a comparable manner, "written texts" are rarely made entirely of words, particularly in the modern day. Charts, graphs, and photographs are commonly included in them. Even the typeface selected and the placement of paragraphs on a page or screen can convey meaning. Rather than analysing these additional modes in place of speech and writing, the aim of multimodal discourse analysis is to understand how various forms, including writing and speech, interact with one another in conversation. Furthermore, studying "multimodal discourse" as a distinct sort of discourse is not the aim; rather, it is to understand how various modes interact in all speech. Jones (2012), pages 23–27.



2. Discourse Analysis

Since its initial introduction by Zellig Harris in 1952 as a method for examining related speech and writing, discourse analysis has garnered attention. Harris concentrated on examining language at a level higher than sentences and the connection between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviours (Paltridge, 2012, p. 2). Within the vast field of discourse analysis, however, the term "discourse," which once stood for a well-built field, has a distinct definition (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). The two primary concepts used to characterise it are structural and functional. In terms of structure, it deals with the language's form.

According to **structuralists**, "language is an intrinsic skill and personal characteristic, whereas functionalists are more concerned with language use" (e.g. Anderson, 1988). Shiffrin (1994, p. 360) on the other hand views both paradigms as complimentary, offering an alternative definition of discourse (i.e., discourse as utterance) where language use and structure function together. According to this viewpoint, the functional method completes the language theory gap left by the structural approach (Shiffrin, 1994, p. 340). The definitions in this section are organised according to different interpretations of the word "discourse," not in chronological order, which is an important point to remember.

Discourse is further described as "a group of ideas or patterned ways of thinking that can be identified in textual and verbal communications as well as located in wider social structures" by Lupton (1992: 145). Discourse analysis asserts the power effects of a discourse on groups of individuals in order to demonstrate how bodies of knowledge function in their particular contexts. (Cheek 1997, p. 14). However, these claims cannot be generalised to other contexts.

Furthermore, a number of scholars, such as van Dijk (1988, p. 108; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 258–284), underline the importance of language use context and see discourse as a social practise. Bernstein's (1990) concept of "recontextualization," which holds that the term "discourse" is based on the recontextualizing principle—which selectively recalls, appropriates, refocuses, and connects disparate discourses in a particular order—is cited by Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 5) to highlight the importance of language use context. Scholars and linguists employ the terms "text" and "discourse" differently, which is a crucial distinction to make. A "text" is a communicative action that meets the following criteria, according to Beaugrande and Dressler (1981): cohesiveness, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality.

Words are typically the first thing we discuss when discussing speech. Words are recognised as a discourse's representation. There are numerous facets to



discourse analysis. Politics, speeches, news items, movies, clothes, games, music, and everything else that involves human interaction can all be used to debate it (Hery, 2017). Discourse also conveys information about semiotic modes and resources. semiotic resources (which aid in the process of giving experiences meaning and making learning logical). Thus, multimodal analysis can be used to analyse all of these. (p.33).

'Discourse' is assumed by Foucault (1969, p. 141) to mean that all declarations and utterances are subject to the laws of a community or society. To put it another way, understanding society's norms and bounds helps to develop the notion of discourse, according to Foucault. This understanding will be mirrored in the manner in which particular social practices are represented. However, discourse can only represent a subset of social practices; it cannot represent all of them.

The other term, "discourse," is defined by van Leeuwen (2008) as "a socially constructed knowledge" that is formed in specific contexts and associated with them. These contexts might be tiny, like family conversations, or huge, like global businesses. Due to the fact that discourse is social cognition, certain social interpretations of social practices are seen as crucial resources for accurately portraying social practices in a text. Discourse can also contain texts that incorporate additional elements—such as voices, videos, photos, and others—that aid in the meaning-transmission process (p. 6).

3. Multimodality

According to Jewitt (2013), multimodality is "an interdisciplinary approach borrowed from social semiotics that understands communication and representation as more than just language and attends systematically to the social interpretation of a range of forms of making meaning" (p. 1). Multimodal text analysis examines texts in which two or more types of representation interact and integrate to develop and provide meaning (O'Halloran, 2011a, P. 2). This type of text analysis examines representation and communication in all of their various forms.

In general, **critical linguistics**—which was primarily interested in examining ideology in language and initially drew influence from Halliday (1978, 1985)—is where the study of multimodality originated. While multimodality emerged in the late 1980s to expand the scope of the critical analysis of texts to include, in addition to language, various types of visuals analyzed from a social semiotic perspective, critical linguistics concentrated on language as the only system through which meanings are made and ideologies are detected (Djonov & Zhao, 2014, P. 3). The first application of Halliday's theory—that language is a social



semiotic system—to other semiotic systems was made by Hodge & Kress (1988). Their new strategy is based on two main concepts. The first is that "no single code can be successfully studied or fully understood in isolation" and that "the social factor in comprehending language structures and processes" is important (Djonov & Zhao, 2014, pp. 3–4).

With regard to multimodal text analysis in general and social semiotic theory specifically, the theory put forth by Hodge and Kress in 1988 is therefore regarded as the foundational work (Djonov & Zhao, 2014, P. 3). This is because they provide a general overview of the main issue that all multimodality investigations raise. This suggests that a variety of semiotic systems—of which language is only one—are used to create meaning; examples of these systems include pictures, children's drawings, and sculptures.

Additionally, O'Toole (1994) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1990; 1996; 2006) expanded Halliday's (1978) concept of language as a social semiotic system to include other semiotic systems, which laid the groundwork for the social semiotic approach to multimodal text analysis (O'Halloran, 2011, p. 3). "Modelling the meaning potential of words, sounds, and images as a set of interrelated systems and structures" is the main goal of this approach. The "revival or rediscovery of an important and intriguing field of research" is how their findings are referred to—multimodality (Kaltenbacher, 2004, p. 192). Furthermore, they originally created the word "multimodality" in order to create methods and tools for image analysis. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2014, p. 107; as quoted by Okado-Gough, 2017, p. 60; Iedema, 2003, p. 32).

Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, p. 1) have stated that their intention is to offer lists of the principal compositional structures that have developed into standards throughout the history of visual semiotics, as well as an analysis of the ways in which modern image-makers employ these structures to generate meaning. Even if multimodality is not limited to images and how they convey meaning in texts, Kress and van Leeuwen (1990; 1996; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) were particularly interested in applying the semiotic and systematic notions that Halliday (1978, 1985) articulated for language to still images.

The development of a grammar for diverse visual representations, including images, sketches, and diagrams, is Kress and van Leeuwen's primary goal. Moreover, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) have upheld Halliday's metafunctional principle in their pursuit of a broader application of "the meta-linguistic formulations" (Victor, 2011, p. 27). Their aim is to "provide inventories of the major compositional structures... and to analyse how they are used to



produce meanings by the contemporary image-makers" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 1).

Multimodal discourse has been defined by many scholars. Van Leeuwen (2005, p. 7) defines multimodality as "the combination of different semiotic modes—for example, language and music—in a communicative artefact or event." The definition of multimodal discourse provided by O'Halloran et al. (2011) is more accurate: it "involves the interaction of different semiotic resources such as language, gesture, attire, architecture, proximity lighting, movement, gaze, camera angle, and so on."

The discipline of multimodal discourse analysis is constantly expanding into new areas of study. The early 1990s witnessed the creation of this. Multimodal discourse analysis, according to O'Halloran in Ayodeji & Susan, is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies that expands the study of language to include gestures, movement, visuals, colors, scientific symbolism, music, and sound (Rambe, 2019). "Multimodality" refers to the simultaneous use of multiple modalities of communication by individuals. As per Kress & Van Leeuwen (as mentioned in Rambe, 2019), a multimodal text is one that utilises both verbal and visual semiotic modes to accomplish its communication objectives.

Additionally, it's essential to understand how to determine if a discourse is multimodal or not. Zhu Yongsheng (2007) has proposed two sets of criteria to identify whether or not a discourse is multimodal. It can be ascertained by counting the variety of modalities that are employed during the talk. Writings that use only one modality are referred to as monomodal discourse, whereas writings that use two or more different forms of modality are referred to as multimodal discourse. The second need can be met by increasing the number of semiotic systems that are active. Comic strips, which only employ the visual modality but also include text and images, are an example of a discourse that uses many semiotic systems in contrast to those discourses that only use one (Yongsheng, 2007, as cited in Haijing, 2015, p. 3).

Observations indicate that there are a few established methods that can be used to explain how people understand images and composite texts (Anstey & Bull, 2000; Unsworth, 2008). Van Leeuwen and Kress (1996 and 2006) and O'Toole (1994) have established a foundation for multimodal discourse analysis research in the past few decades. Particular attention has been paid by Kress and Leeuwen (2001) to multimodal analysis techniques that combine verbal and visual elements. As a result, they are regarded as the pioneers of the field, often known as visual and multimodal studies (Jewitt, 2009).



Thus, multimodal discourse analysis is a method that emphasises the several communication modalities—text, images, colour, and speech—that Kress (2009, p. 54) emphasised. This type of discursive analysis concentrates on specific modes and how they interact and communicate to produce meaning.

In the field of multimodal discourse analysis, two approaches are most commonly employed. both contextual and linguistic methods. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996, [2006]) used visual design and image analysis to illustrate the contextual technique. In response, Michael O'Toole (2010) semiotically analyzed displayed art, including paintings, sculptures, and architectural designs, using Michael Halliday's (1978) systemic functional model (SFL). This provided as an illustration of the grammar rule. O'Halloran (2011), pp. 3–4) Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) underlined the identification of general principles of visual design using a top-down approach, which are then demonstrated through text analysis. Their method produced the first comprehensive framework for assessing visual modes of communication, which in turn provided the groundwork for further developments in the area. O'Toole (2010) employs a bottom-up grammatical method, studying sculptures and paintings to create frameworks that can be used with other pieces (O'Halloran, 2011, p. 4).

Later on, these strategies have been expanded and widened. For voice, sound, and music, contextual techniques have been developed in addition to the visual design of Kress and van Leeuwen. New breakthroughs in the grammatical method include its use in hypermedia and mathematics. (O'Halloran, 2011, p. 4)

4. Social Semiotics

Semiotics is "the study of sign systems," not the study of signs, according to Halliday. All the same, it is "the study of meaning in its most general sense" (p. 4) according to Halliday and Hasan (1989). He has stated that "we all the time exchange meanings, and the exchange of meanings is a creative process in which language is one symbolic resource—perhaps the principle one we have, but still one among others" and sees language as one semiotic system that interacts with other semiotic systems (Halliday, 1978, p. 4).

According to Halliday, "language is a system of signs with social functions in which meaning is constructed." Within the setting of "text in use," language is understood by social semiotics as contingent upon its surroundings (Kress and Hodge, 1988, p. 95).

Social semiotics is an important subfield of semiotics that developed in opposition to classical semiotics. Van Leeuwen (2005) defined social semiotics as "a new distinctive approach to the practise and theory of semiotics." British linguist Michael Halliday, who originated the word "interacts" with other systems



of communication, states that language functions within a socio-cultural environment and that culture has a major influence on this interaction. Halliday wrote *Language as a Social Semiotic* in 1978. Since the verbal code unifies all other codes, Halliday has found that comprehension of it is essential (p. 1).

5. Visual grammar

Using Halliday's theory of language's social and systemic components as a theoretical foundation, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) present their concept of "visual grammar" and analyze images as texts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that their goals were to create a "grammar of visual design" and a theory of visual representation that would make clear how "visual grammar" is created using an analogy to how language creates meaning in texts.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that their images analysis approach is distinct from previous studies in the semiotics field overall, even if it falls under the social semiotics category. The reason for this distinction is that earlier methods concentrated more on the meaning that particular elements—such as people, locations, or objects—produced in an image than on the "grammar" of images, or what may be called visual "lexis" (p. 1). However, much as they do with the elements depicted in photographs, like as people, objects, and locations, they use the term "grammar" to examine how language parts, such as words, sentences, and clauses, are integrated to make meaningful wholes or texts (p. 1).

Because it demonstrates how the visual components of an image are connected in a way that makes it feasible to read them as a text in a way that is comparable to the linguistic text, Kress and van Leeuwen's method for describing the grammar and elements of an image is noteworthy. Because the visual text and the verbal text are similar, it can "display regularities that can be made the subject of relatively formal description" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This makes the analysis of the visual text more methodical. Between the linguistic text and the visual representation, this is a crucial theoretical integrative point. It also contributes to the examination of the language and visual systems that are present in the same text. While simultaneously offering a framework for treating the two semiotic systems as distinct and collaborative units of study, this theoretical approach recognizes that both semiotic systems are capable of producing meanings that are essentially equivalent to one another (p. 20).

Furthermore, they seek to propose a "grammar" of the visual that is explained in terms of the fundamental ideas of the "grammar" of the verbal system because language and visual communication can both be used to realize the "same" fundamental systems of meaning that make up our cultures (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 19). But each person approaches it individually, autonomously, and in a unique way. It is crucial to keep in mind that while the visual and verbal systems



appear to generate meanings of the same kind, they actually do so through unique techniques that are unique to their respective semiotic systems. However, they do emphasize that each modality "has its own possibilities and limitations" (p. 19). Not everything that can be realized through language can also be realized through pictures, or vice versa.

The foundation of visual grammar is the notion that images are active semiotic systems that create meaning rather than just passive depictions of the outside world. Focus, gaze, size, positioning, colour, space, vectors, salience, validity, and other visual characteristics are among the ones identified by the framework as being useful for analysing the interpretation of images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 35).

6.Conclusions

This study has many conclusions:

- The purpose of the study was to focus on and stress various frames, whether linguistic or visual, that contribute to the development of meaning.
- The study found that while discourse is a vital field of study, it ignores the function of images as social resources in the meaning-making process.
- Discourse analysis has many different facets. Various academics, including structuralists, functionalists, and semioticians, have addressed the concept of discourse. Information regarding semiotic modes and resources is also communicated through discourse.
- This study is also intended to provide a summary of multimodality and its new essential aspects of meaning-making flexibility.
- The study addressed multimodal discourse analysis, talked about how important it is to use it in texts, and suggested how to apply the method of analysis. As a message, written or spoken expressions combine with images, music, etc. to generate a message. Multimodal discourse analysis is a great technique for reconstructing various communications.
- These additional tools or "modes" of communication become more noticeable when multimodal discourse analysis is used. Discourse, according to multimodal discourse analysts, is composed of multiple modalities that frequently cooperate. For instance, during a face-to-face discussion, people communicate in methods other than only spoken words.
- Reconstructing images and their compositions to produce new forms of communication, especially visual ones, is made easier with the help of Visual Grammar.



- According to visual grammar, both language and visual communication can be used to realise the "same" fundamental meaning systems that constitute our cultures.
- 9. Rather of being only passive representations of the outside world, images in visual grammar are active semiotic systems that generate meaning. Visual images may also be analyzed using certain methods.

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