

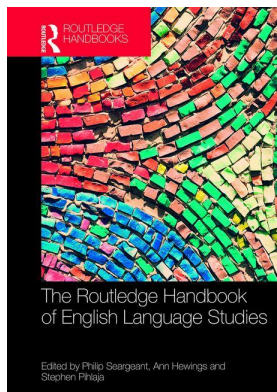
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 02 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## The Routledge Handbook of English Language Studies

Philip Seargeant, Ann Hewings, Stephen Pihlaja

### Multimodal English

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781351001724-30>

Louise J. Ravelli

**Published online on: 20 Jun 2018**

**How to cite :-** Louise J. Ravelli. 20 Jun 2018, *Multimodal English from: The Routledge Handbook of English Language Studies* Routledge

Accessed on: 02 Dec 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781351001724-30>

**PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT**

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Multimodal English

*Louise J. Ravelli*

---

## Introduction

Multimodal texts are a ubiquitous feature of today's communication landscape, and thus multimodal English should be a matter of central concern for English Language Studies. The issues of understanding, analysing and evaluating multimodal English have the potential to require dramatic revisions of most, if not all, areas of English Language Studies. Multimodal English is not just about looking at language in the context of a particular medium, such as 'the language of films' or 'the language of magazines' and so on. Rather, it is about communication through multimodal texts of which language is one part. How such texts work intersemiotically, and how that interaction impacts our fundamental understandings of what 'language' is, are central questions to the understanding of contemporary communication, particularly where digital technologies make such complex forms of texts readily available.

It is hard to imagine any form of communication in which English is *not* multimodal. Indeed, the perception that there is truly any monomodal communication is somewhat of a fiction. If language is written, it has a visual presence – whether it is handwritten, printed by a machine, or appearing on-screen in the form of pixels; whether it is produced in a small, neat font or something large and exuberant; whether it is black ink on a white page or multicoloured inks against a photographic image . . . all these add further layers of meaning to what is 'written'. If the communication is spoken, it may be loud or soft, it may be in a familiar accent or one which is strange, it may be accompanied by wild gestures or perhaps heard without any visual presence, there may be relative silence in the background or a cacophony of noise – all of which also add further layers of meaning to the communication taking place.

But it is important to recognize that there is a continuum from these inherent forms of multimodality – that is, the visual presence of written language, and the physical presence of spoken language – to the related phenomenon of explicit co-configuration of multiple modes. This might occur in a webpage which makes use of images, language, on-screen layout, and sound; or in a school textbook which combines language with pictures, diagrams, and page layout to make meaning; or in social media where language, images, sound, and hyperlinks can combine. Thus for this chapter, 'Multimodal English' includes the inherent sense of multimodality, as such an understanding challenges the primacy and exclusivity often

accorded to language. But the stronger emphasis will be on the more explicit sense of co-configuration of multiple modes. In our contemporary world, the ubiquitous presence of explicitly co-configured multimodal texts dramatically changes the landscape of communication, and the study of such texts must be of central concern to English Language Studies – and of course, to *all* language studies. As (Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 110) write,

a past (and still existent) common sense [belief] to the effect that meaning resides in language alone – or, in other versions of this, that language is the central means of representing and communicating ... – is simply no longer tenable ... it never really was, and certainly is not now.

### *Historical perspectives*

Multimodality as a communicative phenomenon is not new, but it ‘is new as a *term*, a *conceptual terrain*’ (Trimbur and Press 2015: 21; original emphasis). Within this terrain, there are multiple perspectives on the phenomenon. Van Leeuwen (2011: 668) defines it as ‘a field of study investigating the common as well as the distinct properties of the different modes in the multimodal mix and the way they integrate in multimodal texts and communicative events’ (see also Unsworth 2008: 8). It is closely related to terms such as ‘multimedia’ and ‘new media’, that is, digitally-enabled communicative forms which integrate multiple communicative resources (Hartley 2002), though it is not confined to digital texts. Thus a printed book with no pictures is still multimodal, as the font, paper, ink colour, layout, and binding all contribute to socially and culturally understood meanings. The multimodality is more obvious if the printed book contains illustrations: here, the two modes of language and image are being explicitly combined.

Interest in multimodality as a field of study is due in large part to the foundational work of Gunther Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, 2006). They outline common semiotic principles which underlie all multimodal texts, as well as an approach to the analysis of images which culminates in a ‘grammar’ – systems for relating visual resources to their social meanings. Their overall approach is one of social semiotics, that is, an understanding of meaning-making deeply embedded within an understanding of the social, which combines an exploration of semiotic resources with an understanding of the communicative practices in which these are based, including their histories, questions of individual agency, and the environment in which communication takes place. The work is heavily influenced by systemic functional linguistics (SFL, e.g. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; Halliday 1978), including that all communication is socially and culturally situated and needs to be understood and explained in relation to those contexts, that meaning arises from systemically-available options, and that meaning is multi-functional. To use the terms of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), any mode realizes representational (material), interpersonal (social), and compositional (semiotic) reality simultaneously.

Related social-semiotic approaches to multimodal communication include the work of O’Toole (2011) and O’Halloran (2004, 2008), who use a similar systemic functional base, while placing greater emphasis on other aspects of Halliday’s grammatical model, such as the principle of rank. Complementary approaches include multimodal interaction analysis (Norris 2004), a branch of mediated discourse analysis (e.g. Scollon 1998; Scollon and Scollon 2003) which links a micro-analysis of everyday social interaction to broader social and political contexts. (See Jewitt 2009 and Norris and Maier 2014 for comprehensive overviews of these and related approaches).

*Educational foci*

The range of multimodal studies, despite its relative recency, is vast. Kress and van Leeuwen's and O'Toole's early work on images already included studies of children's drawings, classical art, popular media texts such as magazines and newspapers, school textbooks, and even sculptures. Since then, the range has expanded further to include such diverse texts as children's toys (e.g. Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen 2001; Machin and van Leeuwen 2008), hairstyles (McMurtrie 2010), and the built environment (e.g. Ravelli and McMurtrie 2016). There are a wide range of relevant monographs, edited volumes, journal articles, and handbooks which manifest this diversity (see Further Reading, below). But in this chapter for multimodal English, I focus on those studies which emphasize questions of literacy and education, where language works together with other communicative resources in new ways. A strong educational focus was first advocated by the 'New London Group', a group of ten scholars from across the UK, the US, and Australia (New London Group 1996; Cope and Kalantzis 2000). In the context of emerging technological change and processes of globalization, they drew attention to the need to understand and provide a pedagogy for what they termed 'multiliteracies'. They argued that multiliteracies should be understood as going beyond basic senses of competency as a basis for literacy, to one in which 'language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes' (New London Group 1996: 64). This can be achieved by incorporating the key concept of *design*, 'in which we are both inheritors of patterns and conventions of meaning and at the same time active designers of meaning' (New London Group 1996: 65). Thus, users both make use of available patterns – grammars of relevant semiotic systems – and transform these through use.

These foundational ideas were explored via a number of different pathways. Studies of children's developing literacy, both prior to and at school (Kress 1997, 2003), highlighted just how semiotic was the work done by all modalities; that is, learning to communicate, to participate in society and culture, is not just a matter of learning language. Kress (2000: 338–339) shows that a seemingly 'trivial' child's drawing is as much a process of acculturation as learning to speak, and also that 'There is a semantic trade among speech, image, and writing (and other modes, and via other senses – taste, touch and feel)', that is, that each mode has its own affordances; modes are 'distinct in what they permit'. Succession in time, for example, is more easily afforded by language ('First, ... then ... next') and spatial relations are more easily afforded by images (e.g. how parts fit together into a whole). It is not that one can't be done by the other, but each has its own logic, a 'functional specialization', and in this specialization, 'language is no longer the carrier of all meaning' (Kress 2000: 339). Thus, teachers need to attend to all the modalities, and recognize their students' agency in the process of text creation. The emphasis on pedagogy extends to the analysis of the multimodal resources that students access, such as computer games (Jewitt 2006), identifying how these can both support and challenge students' learning, and to the analysis of classrooms as important sites of multimodal integration, including how the placement of chairs and the positioning of the teacher instantiate a specific pedagogical style (Kress et al. 2005).

A similar interest in education and literacy in the context of multimodality has been pursued particularly vigorously from an SFL perspective, sometimes referred to as systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA, O'Halloran 2008), and strongly influenced by systemic functional approaches to genre-based literacy (Martin and Rose 2008).<sup>1</sup> The strong link to SFL in a pedagogical context affords the effective sharing of an explicit metalanguage which can connect language with other semiotic systems (Unsworth 2001, 2009), thus providing a

coherent basis for understanding and critiquing complex multimodal texts. This work has explored the particularities of specific modes, such as the visual communication of children's picture books (Painter et al. 2013), as well as the multimodal texts and literacy demands distinctive to academic subject areas (Derewianka and Coffin 2008; O'Halloran 2005; Unsworth 2001, 2004). Research is now being extended to consider digital-specific resources (Unsworth and Thomas 2014), as well as the role of gesture in teaching (Hood 2011) and the contribution of other sensory modes to questions of literacy (Mills 2016).

These approaches have not only informed research into multimodal texts, but have also been integrated into school curricula, such as the new national Australian Curriculum for schools. For senior English (the last two years of school), the syllabus specifies that students be adept in creating, transforming, and adapting 'oral, written and multimodal texts in a range of mediums and styles' (Australian Curriculum, Senior Secondary English (n.d.)). While English Language Studies are not confined to (literary) subject English, it is here in particular where language skills are emphasized most strongly, and where the subject content is, at least in part, the textual products themselves, and that now necessarily includes multimodal texts. Importantly, however, such intentions need effective teacher education, appropriate resources, and meaningful assessment practices, in order to succeed. And the knowledge base needs to be underpinned by strong frameworks or grammars which enable the systematic analysis and interpretation of multimodal resources (Unsworth 2014).

Throughout the work of the New London Group and SFL-based approaches, questions of literacy are paramount. Multimodal English places yet further demands on literacy practices, as multimodal texts are 'sites for the integrative deployment of visual, verbal and acoustic semiotic resources' (Unsworth 2001: 279). That is, they are more than just language. Within these approaches, particular emphasis is placed on issues of critical literacy, and this means moving beyond basic recognition and reproduction literacies, towards literacy which enables reflection, that is, 'an understanding that all social practices, and hence all literacies, are socially constructed' and the ability to read the practices of 'inclusion and exclusion' which are necessarily entailed in such social construction (Unsworth 2001: 15). Critical perspectives are particularly foregrounded in the work of Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies (Machin 2013), developing from earlier Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) work (Fairclough 2010).

The term 'critical' means 'denaturalizing', bringing to light understandings – especially in relation to manifestations of power – which are otherwise hidden. Hence, all these approaches – overlapping and intersecting as they do – target and investigate the social and cultural implications of multimodality, both generally, and particularly for its impact on an understanding of language.

### **Current critical issues and topics**

Rethinking English Language Studies in the context of multimodality requires some fundamental shifts in perspective. In the first instance, the multimodal resources themselves must be understood: if it is now the case (if ever it was not) that English is essentially and fundamentally multimodal, what are these 'other' modalities and what do they contribute to communication? Language has long been studied to understand its component parts, its grammar, the nuances of its meanings, its discourse patterns. Attention now also needs to be given elsewhere. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual images shows that images with people in them can be positioned to create direct eye contact with the viewer (or not); be positioned above or below the viewer's eyeline; or to look close or far away. Such choices create different interpersonal positions with and for the viewer – including meanings

of intimacy or formality, power or equality. At the same time, the arrangement of multiple visual elements as part of a larger composition (a page with words and pictures, for example, or multiple pictures) can prioritize some parts of the composition over others, for example by using the size of the elements or lighting effects to create salience; it can use resources such as framing to show separation or unity among the parts; and a reading/viewing sequence can be constructed by the placement of elements or by the inclusion of vectors (visible and invisible diagonal lines, such as arrows, or the direction of a gaze). This means that not all parts of a visual composition have equal value, and such resources can position readers/viewers to view the elements as having different information values and specific interrelationships. Further, the components of an image may include dynamic vectors, indicating action, or may simply present elements, creating stasis. Representation can thereby show what things ‘do’ and/or what they ‘are’. Understanding these different kinds of meanings requires some appreciation of the grammar of images: that gaze is a resource that can be used for interpersonal effect, for example; or that placement creates organization and reading paths; and that vectors can create a sense of action taking place.

Callow (2013) shows how a seemingly simple children’s picture book uses images to expand on the nature of the characters relayed in the story. He analyses a two-page spread from a book called *Fox* (Wild and Brooks 2000), where a drawing of a large and scary fox is placed higher than and almost surrounding a little bird; the fox’s words are positive and friendly, but his stance and gaze, directed at the bird, suggest something else. For a child, learning ‘to read’ this kind of text means a lot more than understanding the words. The picture is just as much a part of the story, and it is the tension between the two which gives excitement and suspense to the tale. Literacy, here, includes ‘reading’ the image, and reading the relationship between the image and the words.

The power of explicit knowledge of visual resources is being added to that of explicit grammatical knowledge of language in primary and secondary schools, as with Painter et al. (2013), who extend the description of visual resources found in children’s picture books. They reveal how images can be used to encourage the reader to share the point of view of a depicted character, for example, by showing a part of a character’s body *as if* it were extended from the reader’s body, or by looking from behind a character, *as if* the reader is seeing what the character sees. Such extensions to the visual grammar reveal how young readers are apprenticed into ways of appreciating, attending to, and understanding stories, through the clever deployment of visual strategies. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) underscore, images are neither transparent nor simple; their complex meanings require a carefully considered grammar as a basis for developing explicit pedagogical resources and interventions.

Such concerns apply not only to issues of literacy for children, but to critical literacy issues for the adult world also. For example, the complexity of messages created through the intersection of visual and verbal meanings, and their power in construing ideological understandings, has been demonstrated in relation to such domains as news discourse (Bednarek and Caple 2012), and the presentation of war in video games (van Leeuwen and Machin 2005). And while visual resources are perhaps the most pervasive and accessible ‘other’ communicative mode, all communicative resources create challenges for understanding multimodal English. Ongoing research into other communicative resources includes the role of sound (e.g. van Leeuwen 1999), of animated text (da Costa Lima Carneiro Leão 2013), and of specific media such as PowerPoint (Djonov and van Leeuwen 2012) and websites (Zhang and O’Halloran 2012).

In addition, as all texts are socially and culturally situated, specific cultural literacies also need to be accommodated. Something as obvious as left-right reading practices in western

cultures, which affect the ‘reading’ of an image, as much as the reading of written text alone (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) need to be considered as potentially impinging on a user’s understanding of that text. Kress (2000) underscores the importance of accounting for multimodal texts in TESOL contexts, demonstrating that the substance of a science lesson is as likely to be carried by images as by written language, and in ways that are functionally specialized – that is, the one resource does not simply replicate what can be said/shown in the other, but they each contribute unique meanings.

While understanding the individual modes which contribute to multimodality is a necessary step in achieving a fuller understanding of multimodal English, an additional critical issue is the ‘multi’ side of this communication revolution: what is the impact on language and communication when multiple resources work together to create a unified text? The New London Group identified that multimodality is, after all, about *multiple* modalities, that it hinges on the ‘patterns of interconnection’ among modes (New London Group 1996: 78), and Unsworth adds that ‘we need to understand how these different modalities separately and interactively construct different dimensions of meaning’ (Unsworth 2001: 9).

One example of the fundamental change that this interaction brings relates to the nature of reading patterns. In cultures which have writing that goes left to right, top to bottom, a linear reading pattern predominates, also moving from left to right, top to bottom, verso (left) page before recto (right).<sup>2</sup> But if the ‘page’ is, say, a two-page spread in a school textbook, with various images and paragraphs scattered around it, a linear reading path may well be quite unsuitable, and indeed the resource of layout takes on new significance in terms of understanding how the parts of the text relate to the whole (Kress 2010: 141–145, see also Matthiessen 2007). Exley and Cottrell (2012) note that ‘seemingly simple and short multimodal texts make exceedingly complex reading demands of their [young] readers’ (p. 97). Layout and design may effectively support a reader’s capacity to identify important information – or it may not – and such understandings must be part of teaching and understanding relevant literacy practices (Unsworth 2014). Many would be familiar with a primary school child’s first attempts at creating a PowerPoint presentation: every effect of colour, transition, animation, and sound will be deployed, not necessarily enhancing the communicative outcomes! Or, on the other hand, many would also be familiar with a dull and monotonous presentation, presenting written work on-screen, and not using the affordances of the technology; equally unsuccessful.

The reimagining of ‘English language’ as ‘multimodal English’ requires the reevaluation of other core notions, including genre (Bateman 2008; Bowcher and Yameng Liang 2016). News reports, for example, occur now less and less frequently in printed forms, and the shift to online environments is not just a shift in the mode of production, but is leading to changes in the genres that are used to convey the news. These are moving away from extended hard-news reports, structured around a nucleus (headline and lead) and satellites (subsequent developments of the nucleus) (White 1997; Feez et al. 2010), towards such genres as the newsbite: brief items, usually with a thumbnail picture, a hyperlink to a more extended version, and a brief textual description. These are more than simple alerts to what is to come, but serve important roles in their own right, functioning to accommodate the continuous time scale of digital news and indicate the relative salience of multiple items competing for attention (Knox 2007). Other emerging news genres include the image-nuclear text (Caple 2013), where large images are paired with brief verbal descriptions, inevitably requiring a pun between the image and text, and thus requiring the reader to actively move between the two to understand the whole. Bednarek and Caple (2012: 182) give the example of an arresting photo of a drought-ridden landscape, with the caption ‘Dry hard with a vengeance’, creating a pun

between the 1995 Hollywood movie, 'Die Hard: With a Vengeance' and the severity of the drought as depicted in the image. 'Reading' the news, then, includes recognizing the role of these deceptively simple genres in shaping and guiding attention and reading patterns, and in creating meaning.

And because of the shift to digital communication, even what we understand to be 'language' is changing. Mills and Unsworth (2015) draw attention to the new affordances of digital texts, which challenge traditional reading skills. More than just displaying a page on a screen instead of printing it onto paper, new resources such as hyperlinking necessitate different skills of information searching and aggregation on the part of the reader. They note that

The online environment can be a challenging landscape for readers, who must make use of self-regulation and persistence to avoid the cognitive overload and disorientation experienced by an endless sea of hyperlinked reading pathways. They must engage in active decision-making processes, engaging in predication of partially obscured web content that is hidden behind navigational links. Online reading requires careful planning, monitoring, predicting, and questioning, and involves moving speedily and efficiently by skimming and summarizing valid findings.

(Mills and Unsworth 2015: 10)

Similarly, Zappavigna (2012) shows that the medium itself can change the message. In investigating the language used in Twitter and other social media, she demonstrates that social media resources such as the hashtag (#) and the character address (@) create 'searchable talk' and allow for affiliation around shared interests and values. That is, community can be created through these online resources; hashtags such as #jesuischarlie being a notable recent example. Part of the literacy of using these media is understanding such potential.

### Diversity of approaches

Areas of diversity within multimodal studies include variations in theoretical approach and methods, issues of stabilizing terminology in an emerging and evolving field, and concretizing evidence for claims around multimodality. These are all framed here as sites of productivity and potential, rather than as problems; knowledge is, after all, like an ecosystem, and diversity is necessary to its health and longevity.

In terms of theoretical antecedents, the various frameworks described above such as the New London Group, SF-MDA, and CDA all share a socially-oriented basis of some sort, as well as long-standing interests in issues of education and literacy. Differences arise both between these groups (in so far as any can be said to have distinct boundaries) and within, in focus and in method. For example, SF-MDA will foreground system networks as a way of explaining meaning potential; multimodal interaction analysis (Norris 2012) foregrounds social action and the role of psychological tools and material objects in mediating this. Distinctly different approaches include cognitive perspectives on multimodality (Mayer 2005), although as Pelletier observes (Pelletier 2008: 81), social and cognitive approaches do not often meet in the middle, and it will be evident that this chapter concentrates on the social.

The diversity of available approaches has led to innovations in methods for capturing, transcribing and analysing multimodal texts. Close, qualitative work, often based on just a few or sometimes even just one text, is very evident in multimodal research, and has an important role to play in terms of explaining nuances and complexities of meaning,



particularly where it can be used to explicate an underlying system (Hasan 1989). But other methods are being developed for larger-scale studies, including developments of corpus-based work which accommodates multimodal texts (e.g. Baldry and Thibault 2005; Lim Fei et al. 2015), and specific software to facilitate transcription and analysis (e.g. O'Halloran et al. 2012).

A particular challenge for studies of Multimodal English can be the boundaries between and overlaps among new terms. One such instance includes the overlaps and confusions between terms such as 'mode', 'modality', and 'medium'. While sometimes used interchangeably, Kress and van Leeuwen make an important distinction between 'mode' and 'modality'. 'Mode' has an explicit theoretical value: 'it is an organizing and shaping meaning-resource, it is at the same level as *discourse* and *genre*' (Kress 2010: 114), and this theoretical positioning means that 'mode' is in fact *separate from* 'a particular material means of expression' (van Leeuwen 2011: 674). A mode occurs where society seeks to 'control and maintain' media for purposes of developing 'more abstract, more explicit, and more systematic forms of knowledge' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001:79). So the sound of a mechanical door closing on a train might simply be a by-product of the mechanical action – it exists as a material construct. Or the mechanics may be adjusted to produce a sound which is more soothing – it is now a mode, enmeshed in complex processes of judgements about what is soothing, what is stressful, who should control this, and why (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). So the two terms are not, in fact, interchangeable. One additional source of confusion is that 'mode' is related to, but also distinct from, the systemic functional sense of 'mode' as a key component of register (Halliday 1978). Additionally, 'modality' has further meanings elsewhere, for example, related to issues of truth-value in Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of images.

Similarly, there is little clarity on how to account for the 'multi' side of multimodality. The New London Group proposed 'multiliteracies' as a way of capturing the centrality of multiple modes in an understanding of literacy (that is, that literacy could no longer be thought of in terms of language alone). But they also emphasized not just the co-presence of multiple modes, but the 'integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioral' (New London Group 1996: 64). This has sometimes been accounted for as 'intersemiosis', or 'the *interaction* of the different semiotic modes constitutive of [a text] . . . a coordination of semiosis across different sign systems' (Ravelli 2000: 508; original emphasis). 'Intersemiotic complementarity' has also been proposed (Royce 2007) to explain how, in the case of visual-verbal relations, 'the intersemiotic semantic relationship *between* the visual and verbal modes' can be used 'to explain just what features make multimodal text visually-verbally coherent' (p. 63; original emphasis). That is, how do the parts make up the whole? Painter et al. (2013) argue that the phenomenon to be accounted for is not so much that of 'multimodality', but of 'intermodal' complementarity, that is, where the individual modes, such as the visual and verbal working together in children's picture books, each retain their own distinctive affordances (see also Bateman 2014 for an extended discussion of how visual-verbal relations can be theorized). Here, the slight differences in terms point to important distinctions in theory, which is to be expected in a domain which has only recently begun to receive theoretical attention. Such contestations are, indeed, a site of productivity, a way to make scholars reflect on the issues at stake. While Kress cautions that 'Careful theoretical work needs precise instruments' (Kress 2010: 105), it also needs to be remembered that sometimes, the terminology used just needs to be 'good enough' for the task at hand (Macken-Horarik et al. 2011; Exley and Cottrell 2012).

Perhaps a more serious issue of dispute is the status of claims made around multimodality. There can be a tendency to circularity in claims based on hand-picked examples (Thomas 2014), where examples are chosen to illustrate a particular point, such as the Given-New information value (realized by left-right placement of elements within the image) proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and then those examples are taken as proving the existence of the phenomenon. There is no doubt that the close, qualitative analysis of individual examples is an essential tool in both exploring and explicating multimodal texts, but at the same time it raises questions about the nature of the evidence, counterposed in part by attempts to validate claims through larger corpus-based studies (Bateman 2008). Studies of multimodality grapple with the complex interplay of phenomena and require a thorough rethinking of long-held assumptions based on a study of language alone, as well as rethinking of the theories of communication used to address multimodality, which have themselves of course also been based on language. It is therefore not surprising that new theoretical formulations need to explicitly account for even such basic concepts as the sign, as well as for the impact on terms and concepts derived from specific theoretical frameworks, such as rank or metaredundancy, from the perspective of SFL (Martin 2011).

### Future directions

More than two decades ago, the New London Group were sufficiently prescient to identify the centrality of multimodality to an understanding of communication. The tasks they identified then have been vigorously pursued, but remain incomplete. There is an ongoing challenge to continue to explore and explain individual modes: what are these ‘other’ resources, and how do they work? For those modes which have already been examined in some detail, such as the visual, much still remains to be done, not least of which is substantiating claims, accounting for social histories and impact, and extending the work to new genres. For those modes which have received less attention, the task is even greater. Beyond individual modes, it is of course the ‘multi’ side of multimodality which demands further exploration, not only finding satisfactory theoretical models, but also using this knowledge to understand the complex forms of communication which impinge on everyday life. How does a reader make sense of a whole text with many different component parts? How can language, image, layout, and sound be integrated to create a coherent text? How do such resources work together – in harmony or in counterpoint – to persuade and influence?

Most importantly, the significance of all this research for social understandings needs to continue to be pursued. In particular, the role of multimodality in critical literacy must not be underestimated: the communicative world has changed, is changing, and will keep on changing, and research needs to change with it. Pedagogy and curricula need to change, too: being literate includes understanding how to read a film, recognizing that children’s picture books influence as much by image as by word, and that being able to communicate requires more than the spoken or written word alone.

Importantly, however, such intentions need effective teacher education, appropriate resources, and meaningful assessment practices, all underpinned by strong grammars of multimodal resources, in order to succeed.

Language remains an intrinsic feature of communication, which needs to be understood in and of itself. But at the same time, language has lost its position as the centre of the communication process, and it certainly does not achieve communication in isolation from other communicative resources. The interaction of language with, as well as the specificities of, other modes of communication, must be accounted for. For anyone with an interest in English Language Studies, this is a future which must be embraced.

## Notes

- 1 These approaches are especially strong in Australia, and the genre-based approach is sometimes referred to as ‘the Sydney School’, but neither are confined to either Australia or Sydney.
- 2 Ignoring the capacity to scan ahead, back-track, etc.

## Further reading

- de Silva Joyce, H. and J. Gaudin (2007) *Interpreting the Visual: A Resource Book for Teachers*. Putney: Phoenix Education. Along with Callow (2013), this provides excellent exemplification of how to apply visual analysis in the classroom.
- de Silva Joyce, H. and J. Gaudin (2011) *Words and Pictures: A Multimodal Approach to Picture Books*. Australia: Phoenix Education. This provides an accessible introduction to visual-verbal interaction in children’s picturebooks.
- Goodman, S. (2007) ‘Visual English’, in S. Goodman, D. Graddol and T. Lillis (eds), *Redesigning English*. New York: Routledge & The Open University, 113–160. This provides an accessible and comprehensive overview of reconsidering English language as a visual phenomenon.
- Kress, G. (2003) *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge. This is a foundational text examining the impact of technological change on society and culture.
- Jewitt, C. (ed.) (2009) *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. London: Routledge. This provides a comprehensive overview of approaches to, domains of, and techniques for, multimodal analysis.
- O’Halloran, K. (Series Ed.) (n.d.) *Routledge Studies in Multimodality*. This series of monographs explores a variety of multimodal resources.

## Related topics

- The relevance of English language studies in higher education
- Literacy in English: literacies in Englishes
- Media, power and representation
- The language of social media
- Discourse analysis: studying and critiquing language in use.

## References

- Australian Curriculum, Senior Secondary English (n.d.) Available at [www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/seniorsecondary/english/english/curriculum/seniorsecondary#page=3](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/seniorsecondary/english/english/curriculum/seniorsecondary#page=3), accessed May 2016.
- Baldry, A. and P. Thibault (2005) *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis*. Oakville: Equinox.
- Bateman, J. (2008) *Multimodality and Genre: A Foundation for the Systematic Analysis of Multimodal Documents*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Bateman, J. (2014) *Text and Image: A Critical Introduction to the Visual/Verbal Divide*. London: Routledge.
- Bednarek, M. and H. Caple (2012) *News Discourse*. London: Continuum.
- Bowcher, W. and J. Yameng Liang (2016) ‘GSP and multimodal Texts’, in W. Bowcher and J. Liang (eds), *Society in Language, Language in Society: Essays in Honour of Ruqaiya Hasan*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 251–274.
- Caldas-Coulthard, C. R. and T. van Leeuwen (2001) ‘Baby’s first toys and the discursive construction of babyhood’, *Folio Linguistica* 35 (1–2): 157–183
- Callow, J. (2013) *The Shape of Text to Come: How Image and Text Work*. Newtown: PETAA (Primary English Teaching Association Australia).
- Caple, H. (2013) *Photojournalism: A Social-Semiotic Approach*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cope, B. and M. Kalantzis (eds) (2000) *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. London: Routledge.
- da Costa Lima Carneiro Leão, G. (2013) *A Systemic Functional Approach to the Analysis of Animation in Film Opening Titles* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Technology, Sydney).

- Derewianka, B. and C. Coffin (2008) 'Time visuals in history textbooks: Some pedagogic issues', in L. Unsworth (ed.), *Multimodal Semiotics: Functional Analysis in Contexts of Education*. London: Continuum, 187–200.
- Djonov, E. and T. van Leeuwen (2012) 'Normativity and software: A multimodal social semiotic approach', in S. Norris (ed.), *Multimodality in Practice—Investigating Theory-in-Practice-Through-Methodology*. London: Routledge, 119–138.
- Exley, B. and A. Cottrell (2012) 'Reading in the Australian Curriculum English: Describing the effects of structure and organisation on multimodal texts', *English in Australia* 47 (2): 91–98.
- Fairclough, N. (2010) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Harlow: Longman.
- Feez, S., R. Iedema and P. White (2010) *Media Literacy*. Sydney: NSW Adult Migrant Education Services.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978) *Language as Social Semiotic*. London: Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. and C. Matthiessen (2004) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 3rd edn. London: Arnold.
- Hartley, J. (2002) *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Hasan, R. (1989) *Linguistics, Language and Verbal Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hood, S. (2011) 'Body language in face-to-face teaching: A focus on textual and interpersonal meaning', in S. Dreyfus, S. Hood and M. Stenglin (eds), *Semiotic Margins: Meanings in Multimodalities*. London: Routledge, 31–52.
- Jewitt, C. (2006) *Technology, Literacy and Learning: A Multimodal Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Jewitt, C. (ed.), (2009) *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Knox, J. (2007) 'Visual-verbal communication on online newspaper home pages', *Visual Communication* 6 (1): 19–53.
- Kress, G. (1997) *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2000) 'Multimodality: Challenges to thinking about language', *TESOL Quarterly* 34 (2): 337–340.
- Kress, G. (2003) *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2010) *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G., C. Jewitt, J. Bourne, A. Franks, J. Hardcastle, K. Jones and E. Reid (2005) *English in Urban Classrooms: A Multimodal Perspective on Teaching and Learning*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. and T. van Leeuwen (2001) *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold.
- Kress, G. and T. van Leeuwen (2006) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
- Lim Fei, V., K. O'Halloran, S. Tan and K. Marissa (2015) 'Teaching visual texts with the multimodal analysis software', *Educational Technology Research and Development* 63 (6): 915–935.
- Machin, D. (2013) 'What is multimodal critical discourse studies?' *Critical Discourse Studies* 10 (4): 347–355.
- Machin, D. and T. van Leeuwen (2008) 'Toys as discourse: Children's war toys and the war on terror', *Critical Discourse Studies* 6 (1): 51–65.
- Macken-Horarik, M., K. Love and L. Unsworth (2011) 'A grammatics 'good enough' for school English in the 21st century: Four challenges in realizing the potential', *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 34 (1): 9–23.
- Martin, J. R. (2011) 'Multimodal semiotics: Theoretical challenges', in S. Dreyfus, S. Hood and M. Stenglin (eds), *Semiotic Margins: Meanings in Multimodalities*. London: Continuum, 243–270.
- Martin, J. R. and D. Rose (2008) *Genre Relations: Mapping Culture*. London: Equinox.
- Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2007) 'The multimodal page: A systemic functional exploration', in T. Royce and W. Bowcher (eds), *New Directions in the Analysis of Multimodal Discourse*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1–62.
- Mayer, R. (ed.) (2005) *The Cambridge Handbook of Multimedia Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McMurtrie, R. (2010) 'Bobbing for power: An exploration into the modality of hair', *Visual Communication* 9 (4): 399–424.
- Mills, K. (2016) *Literacy Theories for the Digital Age: Social, Critical, Multimodal, Spatial, Material and Sensory Lenses*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

- Mills, K. A. and L. Unsworth (2015) 'The literacy curriculum: A critical review', in D. Wyse, L. Hayward and J. Pandya (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- New London Group (1996) 'A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures', *Harvard Educational Review* 66 (1): 60–92.
- Norris, S. (2004) 'Multimodal discourse analysis: A conceptual framework', in P. Levine and R. Scollon (eds), *Discourse and Technology: Multimodal Discourse Analysis*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 101–115.
- Norris, S. (ed.) (2012) *Multimodality in Practice: Investigating Theory-in-Practice-Through-Methodology*. Routledge, New York.
- Norris, S. and C. D. Maier (eds) (2014) *Interactions, Images and Texts: A Reader in Multimodality*. Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- O'Halloran, K. (ed.) (2004) *Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Systemic Functional Perspectives*. London: Continuum.
- O'Halloran, K. (2005) *Mathematical Discourse: Language, Symbolism and Visual Images*. London and New York: Continuum.
- O'Halloran, K. (2008) 'Systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA): Constructing ideational meaning using language and visual imagery', *Visual Communication* 7 (4): 443–475.
- O'Halloran, K., A. Podlasov, A. Chua and E. Marissa (2012) 'Interactive software for multimodal analysis, in J. Holsanova (ed.), Special issue: Methodologies for multimodal research', *Visual Communication* 11 (3): 352–370.
- O'Toole, M. (2011) *The Language of Displayed Art*. 2nd edn. London: Leicester University Press.
- Painter, C., R. Martin and L. Unsworth (2013) *Reading Visual Narratives: Image Analysis of Children's Picture Books*. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Pelletier, C. (2008) 'The Cambridge handbook of multimedia learning: Review', *Information Design Journal* 16 (1): 81–83.
- Ravelli, L. (2000) 'Beyond shopping: Constructing the Sydney Olympics in three-dimensional text', *Text* 20 (4): 489–515.
- Ravelli, L. and R. J. McMurtrie (2016) *Multimodality in the Built Environment: Spatial Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Royce, T. (2007) 'Intersemiotic complementarity: A framework for multimodal discourse analysis', in T. Royce and W. Bowcher (eds), *New Directions in the Analysis of Multimodal Discourse*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum & Assoc., 63–110.
- Scollon, R. (1998) *Mediated Discourse as Social Interaction*. London: Longman.
- Scollon, R. and S. Scollon (2003) *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World*. London: Routledge.
- Thomas, M. (2014) 'Evidence and circularity in multimodal discourse analysis', *Visual Communication* 13 (2): 163–189.
- Trimbur, J. and K. Press (2015) 'When was multimodality? Modality and the rhetoric of transparency', in A. Archer and E. Breuer (eds), *Multimodality in Writing: The State of the Art in Theory, Methodology and Pedagogy*. Leiden: Brill, 19–42.
- Unsworth, L. (2001) *Teaching Multiliteracies Across the Curriculum: Changing Contexts of Text and Image in Classroom Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Unsworth, L. (2004) 'Comparing school science explanations in books and computer-based formats: The role of images, image/text relations and hyperlinks', *International Journal of Instructional Media* 31 (3): 283–301.
- Unsworth, L. (ed.) (2008) *Multimodal Semiotics: Functional Analysis in Contexts of Education*. London: Continuum.
- Unsworth, L. (ed.) (2009) *New Literacies and the English Curriculum: Multimodal Perspectives*. London: Continuum.
- Unsworth, L. (2014) 'Multimodal reading comprehension: Curriculum expectations and large-scale literacy testing', *Pedagogies: An International Journal* 9 (1): 26–44.
- Unsworth, L. and A. Thomas (eds) (2014) *English Teaching and New Literacies Pedagogy: Interpreting and Authoring Digital Multimedia Narratives*. New York: Peter Lang.
- van Leeuwen, T. (1999) *Speech, Music, Sound*. London: Macmillan.
- van Leeuwen, T. (2011) 'Multimodality', in J. Simpson (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics*. London: Routledge, 668–682.

- van Leeuwen, T. and D. Machin (2005) 'Computer games as political discourse: The case of Black Hawk Down', *Journal of Language and Politics* 4 (1): 119–141.
- White, P. R. (1997) 'Death, disruption and the moral order: The narrative impulse in mass-media hard news reporting', in F. Christie and J. R. Martin (eds), *Genres and Institutions: Social Processes in the Workplace and School*. London: Cassell, 101–133.
- Wild, M. and R. Brooks (2000) *Fox*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin.
- Zappavigna, M. (2012) *Discourse of Twitter and Social Media: How We Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web*. London: Continuum.
- Zhang, Y. and K. O'Halloran (2012) 'The gate of the gateway: A hypermodal approach to university homepages', *Semiotica* 190: 87–109.