# THE DEPENDENCE OF VERBAL PASSAGES ON VISUAL REPRESENTATION IN MEANING-MAKING

**Yan Mujiyanto**
English Language Education
Postgraduate Program of Semarang State University
Kampus Sekaran Gunungpati Semarang Indonesia 50229
yanmujiyanto@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

A lot of studies have been focused on the comprehensibility of written passages owing to facts that texts are generally presented in written or verbal form. Visual images are merely thought of as additional ornament just to make the verbal texts representation look more eye-catching. The presence of such visual entities as graphic, figures, tables, diagrams, visual illustration, and the like is oftentimes reckoned solely as complement to the verbal form in meaning-making. With an assumption that visual images play a significant role in aiding readers to better understand the respective verbal texts, it is questioned to what extent meaning-making is dependent on the visual representation of the texts. In order to answer such a question, some groups of English Department students who were still in their sixth semester were the subject of this study. They were assigned to work out questionnaires asking for their perception about the dependence of verbal texts on their respective visual representation. Documentary study was also conducted in order to see the ways in which verbal passages were related to their respective visual images. Learning such skill subjects as listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary as well as content subjects like linguistics, stylistics, and discourse studies, the students were expected to be capable of understanding passages be they entirely in verbal form or accompanied with visual images. The results of this study show that (1) the dependence level of verbal passages on visual images depends on the text types and the target readers' degree of education; (2) while presenting visual images to clarify the meaning of verbal passages was considered being important, verbal texts more often stand alone, letting their readers to rely their capability of understanding meaning merely on the verbal representation; (3) given that visual images may only take the role of accessories accompanying verbal passages, relating verbal texts to their respective illustration may even be in vain, if not misleading.

**Key words**: multimodality, visual image, meaning-making

## INTRODUCTION

This research was initiated by an assumption that a lot of studies have been focused on the comprehensibility of written passages owing to facts that texts are generally presented in written or verbal form. Visual images are merely thought of as additional ornament just to make the verbal texts representation look more eye-catching. The presence of such visual entities as graphic, figures, tables, diagrams, visual illustration, and the like is oftentimes reckoned solely as complement to the verbal form in meaning-making. With another assumption that visual images play a significant role in aiding readers to better understand the respective verbal texts a number of studies have been conducted so far.

Exploring the multimodality of EFL textbooks for Chinese college students, Liu, et al. (2014), for example, explore the multimodality of two EFL textbooks, comparing their visual and verbal semiotic modes. Through multimodal discourse analysis, the study aimed to clarify how high-quality multimodal EFL textbooks were developed. Among the main findings were as follows. (1) T*he books* were similar in that their representative multimodal texts are visually-verbally coherent and both demonstrated prominent features for intersemiotic semantic relations; (2) their differences were *one book* displayed a higher degree of interpersonal

intersemiotic complementarity and multimodality facilitates the realization of different modern educational concepts. As an attempt to probe into the possible relationship between multimodality and modern educational concepts in EFL textbooks, the study showed the importance of properly arranging the different modes in a double-page spread.

As stated in BEZERRA (2011) the increased multimodal nature of communication in today's globalized and culturally diverse world had initiated teachers to devote their attention to how semiotic resources had been used to create identities and to position people socially, especially for the fact that the school played, contextualizing the work with images and present metalanguage from the Grammar of Visual Design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) in order to enable teachers to develop activities to foster their students' 'multimodal communicative competence' (Royce, 2007; Heberle, 2010). Based on such a concept, an analysis of a movie poster was carried out so as to put the theory presented into practice.

Souzandehfar, et al. (2014) investigated how Iranian EFL learners used their literacy practices and multimodal resources to mediate interpretation and representation of an advertisement text and construct their understanding of it. The findings suggested that students situate  the meanings of the advertisement texts in specific contexts reflecting their own socio-cultural experiences. Furthermore, the students demonstrated that the use of multimodal resources had the potential to enhance language and literacy learning. In addition, the use of multimodal pedagogy had permitted the students to enter into text composition from different paths. Finally, multimodal/multiliteracies pedagogy could foster critical literacy practices.

Studying the role of multimodal in Chinese EFL students' autonomous listening comprehension and multiliteracies, Ruan (2015) examined the role of multimodal in EFL students' autonomous listening comprehension and multiliteracies. Materials consisted of a questionnaire concerning autonomous learning of listening comprehension and listening proficiency tests so as to find participants' attitude towards the new autonomous listening model and the effectiveness of the model. The results indicated that the new model proved to be popular with most of the participants, was able to effectively improve students' autonomous learning ability and significantly improved their listening comprehension and multiliteracies.

Integrating multimodality into classroom practices for English Language Learners Choi andYoung (2015) claimed that despite the proven benefits of multimodal teaching and learning for students, little is known about how teachers of English language learners (ELLs) integrate multimodality into their existing curriculums. In this study, the authors examined how two teachers employed multimodality to teach the learners in their content area classes. Qualitative analysis revealed that employing multiple modes for instructional supports to enhance linguistic text gave teachers opportunities to help them gain understanding of subject-matter content knowledge, express what they learned, and discover a psychological refuge. Multimodal teaching was found to enhance the learners' sense of accomplishment and self-esteem.

Besides the afore mentioned studies, Ajayi (2012) questioned how teachers deployed multimodal textbooks to enhance English language learning, while Huang (2015) conducted action research about the intersection of multimodality and critical perspective. Nørgaard (2010) studied the relations between multimodality and the literary text, while Herman (2010) conducted a case study concerning word-image versus utterance-gesture in multimodal storytelling. In the field of assessment, Hsiu-Ting Hung, et al. (2013) studied a theory-driven designed multimodal assessment of and for learning.

Considering all of the studies presented above and based on an assumption that visual images play a significant role in aiding readers to better understand the respective verbal texts, it is questioned to what extent meaning-making is dependent on the visual representation of the texts. In order to answer such a question, a number of references were taken into account as the referential bases of the study. Among such references is theoretical studies found in Kress, et al. (2001) who theorized about multimodal teaching and learning which they viewed from the perspective of the rhetoric of the science classroom. This study was followed by a work written by Kress, et al. (2005) entitled A multimodal perspective on teaching and learning. Jewitt (ed.) (2009) extracted a number of research articles in their phenomenal handbook entitled *The*

*Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis. Then,* Page (Ed). (2010) published a collection of articles on the implementation of multimodality in EFL classes in New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality, while Kress, (2010) views multimodality as a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication. In the following year, O'Halloran & Smith (eds.) (2011) explored issues and domains *in* multimodal studies. *In 2015,* Camiciottoli & Fortanet-Gómez tried to implement the results of multimodal analysis in academic settings in teaching-learning processes. Such studies were considered as the theoretical basis to make the theoretical framework for this current study.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to answer research question stated above, two groups of English Department students who were still in their sixth semester were randomly chosen as the subject of this study. They were assigned to work out questionnaires asking for their perception about the dependence of verbal texts on their respective visual representation.

The object of this study was the respondents' perception about the dependence of English written texts on their respective visual images. The four texts types chosen for this research were (1) descriptive, (2) recount, (3) procedure, and (4) narrative texts. Meanwhile, the dependence levels were measured in terms of 11 aspects, i.e. discovering main idea, identifying detail, sequencing events, using context, getting facts, drawing conclusions, distinguishing between fact and opinion, understanding cause and effect, identifying inferences, summarizing concepts, and determining author's purpose.

Documentary study and observation were also conducted in order to see the ways in which verbal passages were related to their respective visual images. Learning such skill subjects as listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary as well as content subjects like linguistics, stylistics, and discourse studies, the students were expected to be capable of understanding passages be they entirely in verbal form or accompanied with visual images.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Dependence Level of Verbal Passages on Visual Images

In general, the dependence level of verbal passages on visual images was determined by considering the respondents' answers to the questionnaire, without considering the text types, offering five options, i.e. very low, low, moderate, high, and very high, each scoring 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Using very simple descriptive statistics it was found that the dependence level of verbal passages on visual images scores 142.45 (See Table 1). This average value of the total score falls within the range of 121 – 160 (of the 0 – 200 range). It implies that in general, the respondents perceived that the dependence of verbal passages on visual representations in meaning making is relatively high. It also implies that without considering differences in text type, visual images are needed in support of understanding texts as part of meaning making.

*Table 1. Dependence Level of Verbal Passages on Visual Images.*

|  | Very Low | Low | Moderate | High | Very High | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total scores | 30 | 330 | 1551 | 2612 | 1175 | 5698 |
| Average (Score/40) | 0.75 | 8.25 | 38.775 | 65.3 | 29.375 | **142.45** |

Taking a look at the dependence levels of the four different text types on their respective visual images, it was found that the average scores for the four text types (descriptive, recount, procedure, and narrative) fall within the range of 121 – 160 (of the 0 – 200), i.e. 136.636; 143.545; 145.455; 144.909. It means that in order to better understand the contents of various text types, the dependence of verbal passages on visual representation is high.

*Table 2. Dependence level of Text Types on Visual Images*

| | Descriptive | Recount | Procedure | Narrative | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Discovering Main Idea | 123 | 140 | 161 | 140 | 564 |
| Identifying Detail | 130 | 155 | 158 | 135 | 578 |
| Sequencing Events | 128 | 138 | 151 | 136 | 553 |
| Using Context | 126 | 143 | 146 | 158 | 573 |
| Getting Facts | 136 | 146 | 153 | 144 | 579 |
| Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion | 137 | 148 | 159 | 151 | 595 |
| Understanding Cause and Effect | 142 | 156 | 135 | 158 | 591 |
| Drawing Conclusions/Predicting Outcomes | 146 | 137 | 142 | 141 | 566 |
| Summarizing Concepts | 141 | 143 | 132 | 146 | 562 |
| Understanding Vocabulary | 143 | 127 | 126 | 141 | 537 |
| Determining Author's Purpose | 151 | 146 | 137 | 144 | 578 |
| Mean | 136.636 | 143.545 | 145.455 | 144.909 | |

In order to ascertain whether there is any significant difference in average among the four average scores, the single factor Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied. Table 2 shows the results of the statistical analysis.

*Table 2. Results of Single-Factor ANOVA*

Anova: Single Factor

| Source of Variation | SS | df | MS | F | P-value | F crit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 549.2727 | 3 | 183.0909 | 2.082407 | 0.117811 | 2.838745 |
| Within Groups | 3516.909 | 40 | 87.92273 | | | |
| Total | 4066.182 | 43 | | | | |

Based on the ANOVA output for between groups (i.e. the four different texts), the F-value was only 2.082, while the F-critical based on df (0.05, 3, 40) was 2.839 with p-value of as much as 0.117. Because the F value was a bit lower than the F-critical or the p-value (.0117) was well higher than the alpha (0.05), it can be inferred that there is no significant difference in the respondents' perception about the dependence of verbal texts on visual images among the average scores of the four different text types. It implies that the dependence of text meaning on visual images is not determined by the text types, but rather by the comprehension elements, as it is seen in Figure 1.
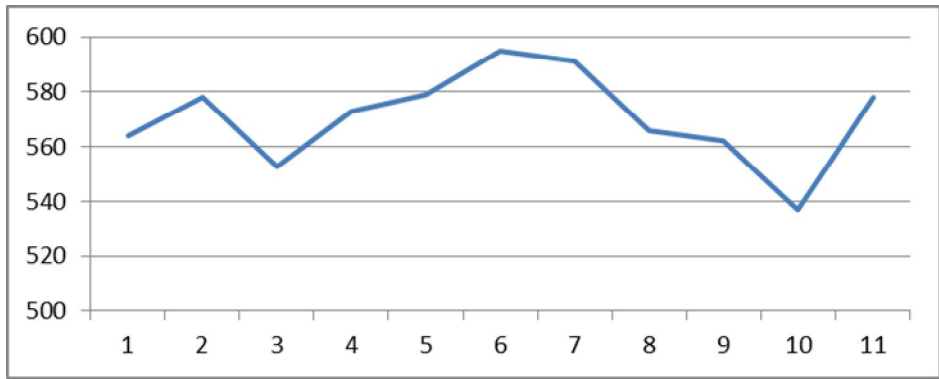
*Figure 1. The Dependence of Comprehension Elements on Visual Images*

In Figure 1, number 1 -11 represent the eleven components of comprehension in meaning making, i.e. Discovering Main Idea, Identifying Detail, Sequencing Events, Using Context, Getting Facts, Drawing Conclusions, Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion, Understanding Cause and Effect, Identifying Inferences, Summarizing Concepts, and Determining Author's Purpose. It can be seen in the figure that 6 (Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion) and 7 (Understanding Cause and Effect) are among the comprehension components highly requiring visual representation, while 10 (Understanding Vocabulary) is the lowest.

**Relations between Verbal Passages and Visual Images**

While presenting visual images to clarify the meaning of verbal passages was considered being important, verbal texts more often stand alone, letting their readers to rely their capability of understanding meaning merely on the verbal representation. If there is a visual image accompanying a verbal text, the visual image may be closely related to the text, but there are cases in which the visual images only has very partial or even no relations with the verbal passage.

| *Verbal Passage* | *Visual Image* |
|---|---|
| **Statistical Process Control (SPC)** is a method for monitoring, controlling and, ideally, improving a process through statistical analysis. The key to any process improvement program is the *Plan-Do-Study-Act* cycle. *Plan* involves using SPC tools to help you identify problems and possible causes. *Do* involves making changes to correct or improve the situation. *Study* involves examining the effect of the changes (with the help of control charts). *Act* involves, if the result is successful, standardizing the changes and then working on further improvements or, if the outcome is not successful, implementing other corrective actions. |  |

*Figure 2a. Relations between verbal and visual representations*

Figure 2a clearly shows the relation between the verbal passage and its visual image, representing the cyclical process of doing something. On the other hand, Figure 2b shows that albeit representing various object mentioned in the verbal text, the visual images do not directly connect to the substance of the verbal text. Such images may be stimulating but it does not help its readers in making meaning.
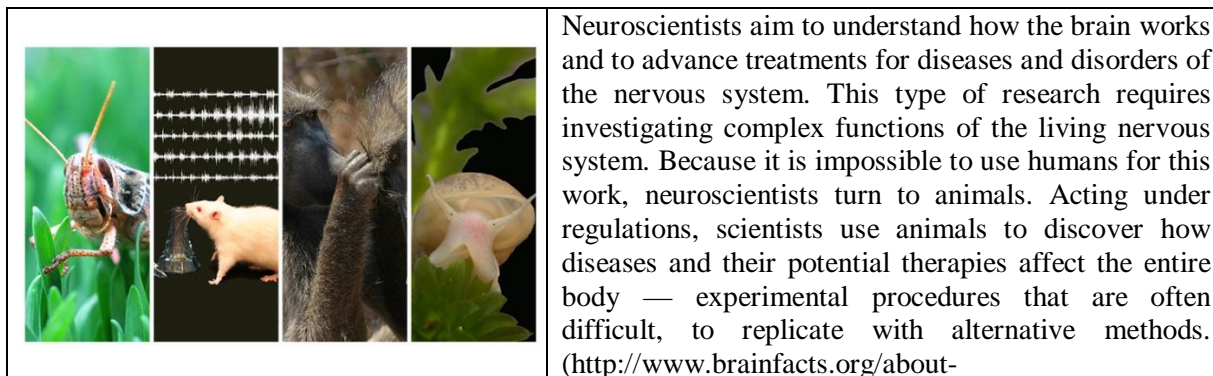
Neuroscientists aim to understand how the brain works and to advance treatments for diseases and disorders of the nervous system. This type of research requires investigating complex functions of the living nervous system. Because it is impossible to use humans for this work, neuroscientists turn to animals. Acting under regulations, scientists use animals to discover how diseases and their potential therapies affect the entire body — experimental procedures that are often difficult, to replicate with alternative methods. (http://www.brainfacts.org/about-

*Figure 2b. Relations between verbal and visual representations*

In other words, such images merely function as accessories. Given that visual images may only take the role of accessories accompanying verbal passages, relating verbal texts to their respective illustration may even be in vain, if not misleading.

**CONCLUSION**

The results of this study show that the dependence level of verbal passages on visual images depends on the text types and the target readers' degree of education. While presenting visual images to clarify the meaning of verbal passages was considered being important, verbal texts more often stand alone, letting their readers to rely their capability of understanding meaning merely on the verbal representation. Given that visual images may only take the role of accessories accompanying verbal passages, relating verbal texts to their respective illustration may even be in vain, if not misleading.

**REFERENCES**

Ajayi, Lasisi. (2012). How Teachers Deploy Multimodal Textbooks to Enhance English Language Learning. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265358277_How_Teachers_Deploy_Multimodal_Textbooks_to_Enhance_English_Language_Learning

BEZERRA, Fábio. (2011). Multimodality in the EFL classroom. *BELT Journal Porto Alegre*, 2(2): 167-177.

Camiciottoli, B.C. & Fortanet-Gómez,I. (Eds). (2015). *Multimodal Analysis in Academic Settings from Research to Teaching*. New York & London: Routledge.

Choi, Jayoung & Jooi, Young. (2015). Teachers' Integration of Multimodality Into Classroom Practices for English Language Learners. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280971386_Teachers'_Integration_of_Multimodality_Into_Classroom_Practices_for_English_Language_Learners

Herman, D. (2010). Word-Image/Utterance-Gesture: Case Studies in Multimodal Storytelling in Page (Ed). 78

Hsiu-Ting Hung, Yi-Ching Jean Chiu & Hui-Chin Yeh. (2013). Multimodal assessment of and for learning: A theory-driven design rubric. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 44 (3): 400–409, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8535.2012.01337.x

Huang, Shin-ying. (2015). Action Research the Intersection of Multimodality and Critical Perspective: Multimodality as Subversion. *Language Learning & Technology*, 19(2): 21–37, http://llt.msu.edu/issues/october2015/action1.pdf

Jewitt, C. (ed.) (2009). *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis.* London: Routledge.

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality a Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London & New York: Routledge.

Kress, G., Jewitt, C., Bourne, J., Franks, A., Hardcastle, J., Jones, K., Reid, E. (2005). *A multimodal perspective on teaching and learning*. London and New York: Routledge.

Kress, G., Jewitt, C., Ogborn, J., and Tsatsarelis, Ch. (2001). *Multimodal teaching and learning: the rhetoric of the science classroom* London & New York: Continuum.

Liu, Xiqin , Dianning Qu, Xiqin Liu. (2014). Exploring the Multimodality of EFL Textbooks for Chinese College Students: A Comparative Study. *RELC Journal,* 45(2): 135-150. doi: 10.1177/0033688214533865

Nørgaard, Nina. (2010). Multimodality and the Literary Text: Making Sense of Safran Foer's Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close. In Page (Ed). p. 116.

O'Halloran, K. L. & Smith, B. A. (eds.) (2011). *Multimodal Studies: Exploring Issues and Domains*. New York & London: Routledge.

Page, R. (Ed). (2010). *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ruan, Xiaoyan. (2015). The Role of Multimodal in Chinese EFL Students'Autonomous Listening Comprehension & Multiliteracies. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(3): 549-554, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0503.14 ISSN 1799-259.

Souzandehfar, Marzieh, Mahboobeh Saadat, Rahman Sahragard. (2014). The Significance of Multimodality/Multiliteracies in Iranian EFL Learners' Meaning- Making Process. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics* (IJAL), 17(2):115-143.