

**Multimodality in Literary Text**  
**Lecture 3**  
**Multimodal Discourse Analysis: 3 Metafunction Approach**  
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**Learning objective**

At the end of this meeting, you are expected to understand:

1. The basic concept of multimodal discourse analysis
2. The clarity of multimodal discourse analysis
3. Interpretation and representation in MDA
4. The 3 metafunction approach

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**A. Basic Concept of Multimodal Discourse Analysis**

Before going further to the multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), it is important to have good understanding about discourse as one of the core points in MDA. The history of discourse analysis is marked by a lack of clarity regarding the term "**discourse**." It essentially covers a broad area somewhere between two main concepts: firstly, describing connected pieces of language in use, and secondly, uncovering important social, political, and psychological aspects within text-like materials. In the field of sociolinguistics, the primary focus has generally been on understanding the connection between the situations in which language is used and the characteristics of the language being used. This involves examining who is speaking, to whom, when, for what purposes, and how they do so.

There are also different viewpoints related to the discourse analysis. Kress has interest in how power and knowledge are expressed through language (Gee & Handford, 2023). There is also Foucault who uses the term "discourse" and finds it valuable in exploring the social factors connection within the language (Gee, 2008). According to Foucault, "**discourse**" **socially produces "knowledge"** which means discourse is more closely to the society than to linguistics. Meaning that the source of meaning is from the social context itself. The terms "text" and "discourse" have often been connected to the spoken and written language, as well as to signify the inherent social meanings within such texts. "Discourse" can be employed in, such as in politics and philosophy. Moreover, it's been broadly utilized to describe social meanings in general.

In relation between ideology and text, ideology is used to describe the specific arrangement of discourses found within a particular text while text serves as the physical context where abstract discourses come to life. The word "**text**" originates from the idea of connecting different elements, typically assumed to be either spoken or written language, into a coherent whole.

In MDA, the textual elements are sourced from numerous materials, including gestures, speech, still and moving images, writing, and even music, as seen on websites or in films. These elements, can be integrated into a single textual or semiotic entity as in MDA, a text can take on multiple dimensions. Regardless of their type, texts are the outcome of semiotic design, composition, and production processes. They result in of different modes is the semiotic efforts of the text maker or creator. Texts reflect the intentions of their creators. A text becomes coherent by using semiotic tools to establish connections within the text itself and with the world around it. When interpreting a semiotic entity, the interpreter not only understands the original text but also creates a new coherent text based on their interpretation. However, there's no guarantee that this new text will have the same coherence as the original (Kress in Gee & Handford, 2023).

Texts play a dual role: they help shape social institutions and serve as records of interactions within these institutions. They offer a way to understand the intentions and purposes of those involved in creating texts within an institution. This distinction between text and discourse is crucial in discourse analysis (Kress in Gee & Handford, 2023).

MDA aims to describe and analyze what is going on in a text, including how power relation works through the social interaction. In MDA, the understanding of a text involves understanding various aspects, including the selection of discourses, their organization, identifying the dominance and its functions. Multimodality and social semiotics both revolve around the questions about meaning and the processes in creating the meaning, who creates meaning, as well as how knowledge is produced or shaped in different modes and by whom. In multimodal approach, all explicit meanings are considered based on any mode within a culture. The signs are shaped by social cultural modes of resources such as layout, color, writing, image, and font. Each of the sign contributes to shape the intended meaning. "Writing tells, image shows, color frames and highlights, layout and font are used as part of compositional arrangements" (Gee and Handford, 2023).

So, in Multimodal Discourse Analysis, the objective is to provide a complete and coherent analysis of text, which includes what is happening within the text and how the power relation work in the social interactions. In order to do this, we need to be aware of selecting certain discourses and their arrangement, the dominance, and the roles they play. In addition to that, other meanings presented in the text are influenced by the discourses within the text which forms an ideological structure.

## **B. The Clarity of Multimodal Discourse Analysis**

Multimodality is the field in which various forms of communication and meaning-making are constructed. It encompasses a wide range of resources and approaches from various field of study such as psychology, media studies, education, and other sociological perspectives such as sociolinguistic and linguistic. Each study brings its unique approach and methods to examine how meaning is created. Therefore, it is also necessary for English Literature major to study multimodality. The perspective presented here is rooted in social semiotics, which focuses on the theory of meaning and communication. The tools developed within multimodality are influenced by this theory.

Multimodality emphasizes that language is only one of tools for conveying meaning. This perspective treats all the different modes of communication available in a culture as a single, interconnected field of resources for meaning-making. Unlike approaches where each mode is closely tied to a specific theory and discipline (e.g., linguistics for writing or art history for images), multimodality treats all modes as part of one unified cultural resource for conveying meaning. In this approach, all modes are considered equal in their potential to contribute to the meaning of a complex semiotic entity, such as a text. Each mode is also seen as distinct in its material and social characteristics, requiring appropriate descriptive categories that account for these differences.

This means that Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) must go beyond all modes used in any text. Each mode should be described in a specific term, as well as terms that apply across all modes. When combining multimodality and social semiotics, we can explore a wide range of questions about meaning and how it is created. As stated by Kress (Gee & Handford, 2023), the questions go around the following:

1. **Who creates meaning and how?** It is about the investigation of individuals or groups roles in shaping meaning and how they construct their identities through signs and meaning-making.
2. **What limits meaning-making?** It is about examining the constraints—whether social or other factors—that influence how people create meaning.
3. **Social Signs and Knowledge** It is about the exploration of how the knowledge is produced and represented differently across various modes of communication and who is responsible for shaping it.
4. **Resources and Capabilities.** Multimodality allows you to inquire about the potential and capabilities of the resources available within a society for conveying meaning, which in turn affects how knowledge is presented in different modes.

It is important to distinguish between two linguistic modes: spoken and written (Halliday in Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). In MDA, both spoken and written are treated as different modes. They bring their unique meaning potentials to shape discourse and ideology. In MDA, all modes are taken seriously and examined closely, rather than marginalizing or ignoring meanings expressed in other modes. In summary, multimodality and social semiotics provide a broader framework for studying how meaning is created and communicated, and MDA extends these ideas to consider diverse modes and contexts.

In using MDA as the method of analysis, we should be aware that all modes of communication convey a clear meaning in their different ways rather than "implicit" meanings. In MDA, there is an emphasis on transparency and recognizing that all modes contribute to the meaning of a text. Modes, such as speech and writing, are distinct due to their material properties and how they have been socially shaped over time. For instance, speech and writing differ both in their materiality and how they have been culturally shaped in various societies. In some societies, links have been established between speech and writing, allowing for the representation of spoken language using alphabetic scripts.

The key takeaway is that MDA treats all modes as explicit carriers of meaning, considering their unique characteristics and social influences.

As MDA works more on the visual signs, they are different from language in which we can find the definition in the dictionary. There is no dictionary to refer to when we want to see a clear definition of certain visual sign. Even though Google searching feature can work on images or picture that we take from our phones, but the result would come out variously. These signs, like most visual images, are created using common cultural elements such as layout, color, writing, images, and fonts. Each sign uses these elements in a unique way to convey its intended meaning. For example, writing communicates, images illustrate, color adds emphasis, and layout and font contribute to the overall design and arrangement.

### C. Interpretation and Representation in MDA

In this part, I will show you how the interpretation and representation of MDA work in two kinds of contents. First is a book cover and second is the magazine cover.

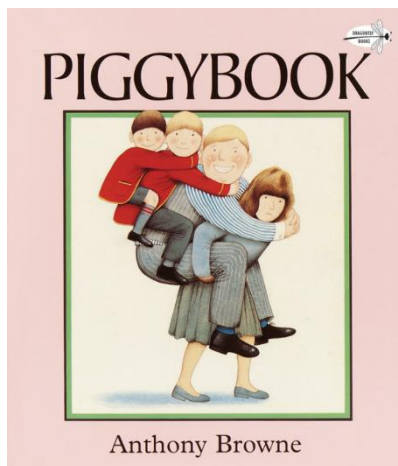


Figure 1 ( Browne, 1990)

"Piggybook" is a literary work which explores issues related to gender roles, fairness, and independence by telling a story of how household chores are unfairly divided based on gender. In the story, Mrs. Piggott is responsible for all the cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks, even while holding a job. On the other hand, Mr. Piggott and their two sons do not contribute and simply rely on Mrs. Piggott. One day, Mrs. Piggott decides to leave, then the husband and their two boys struggle to take care of themselves and maintain the house. It becomes a mess. When Mrs. Piggott returns, they realize the importance of

sharing the responsibilities and agree to help with cleaning and cooking in the future with all the family members.

The above summary of this novel is clearly represented in the book cover as well. The cover is designed in such a way that it could convey an explicit meaning to the readers. A woman is portrayed as carrying a man and two boys on her back. As has been explained in the book summary, this representation is interpreted how certain roles and attributed are traditionally associated with men and women. It also reflects the gender inequality issue within a family, about who does the household chores. Then the question revolves around the gender roles, fairness, and independence in our society. This is the society we live in, where certain roles and attributes traditionally associated with men and traditionally associated with women are normalized. Gender essentialism posits that men are naturally better at certain things, and women are naturally better at other things. In Piggybook, Mrs. Piggott makes it clear that she does not like to do all the housework for her family. However, hypothetically, what if she

claimed that she did? Why would she be okay with doing all the housework? Is this a genuine preference? If Mrs. Piggott claims to be fine with her situation, is it still morally wrong or unfair? Is she making a bad choice? This would be another interesting topic to be discussed further.



Figure 2 (Asidiky Z. et al., 2022)

This figure is taken from a research paper written by Asidiky et al. (2022). They used the MCDA approach to uncover the ideological meanings behind the modes shown in this TEMPO magazine cover. The researchers used the visual grammar theory, as also known by 3 metafunction, by Kress and van Leeuwen. The research came up with three conclusions: (1) The cover's visual elements (pictorial mode) serve their purposes. Firstly, they aim to present President Jokowi in a negative light from the reader's perspective. Secondly, they intend to show President Jokowi's actions as a lie to the public. Lastly, they aim to inform the readers about President's activities. (2) The cover's use of language (linguistic mode) also serves three functions. Firstly, it confronts the main issue by putting the key headline in bold and big fonts. Secondly, it represents the social actions of President Jokowi and other parties. Lastly, it informs the readers about the suspicions of anti-corruption activists toward President's action. (3) Overall, the cover story portrayed President Jokowi in a negative manner which comes from the pictorial modes of long nose silhouette and from the titles which express his action. The portrayal was further influenced by the political context of that time.

#### D. The 3 Metafunction approach

Different cultures use various ways to represent things. Each way of representing things has unique potential for creating meaning. These ways of representation are valued differently in different social situations. Using different ways to create meaning can shape our sense of self. People use a mix of these ways to represent things, which affects how they form their sense of self. These different ways of representation are not completely separate in our minds or in how we communicate. Our emotions and feelings are always part of our thinking and how we communicate. Each way of representing things changes over time based on how it is used in society, and it can become more or less important in different social contexts (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021).

Multimodality is multidisciplinary which means that multimodality covers meanings across various fields and it is applicable in various related areas. So in multimodal text which includes images and writings, the writings may carry a set of meanings while the images carry another. In the case of speech and writing, they can express a certain representation to be taken which images cannot. Therefore, the truth is the truth of perception. The visual mode calls truth as 'realism'. The more we think about the image that we see, the more it will resemble what we see in reality, the greater the visual truth.

In the book “Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design” (2021), Kress and van Leeuwen elaborated the concept of three metafunction inspired from the Systemic Functional Language (SFL) of Michael Halliday. According to Halliday, spoken and written simultaneously fulfill three main communicative functions, doing so by means of specific sets of resources which are: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021). On the other hand, the three metafunction concept of Kress and Leeuwen consist of: **representational metafunction, interactional metafunction,** and lastly **compositional metafunction**. Their work on three metafunction framework will be elaborated in more details one by one. Moreover, examples form research paper, magazine articles, advertisements, textbooks, websites and other digital resources will be given to give better understanding to the concept of three metafunction.

### **Summary and Conclusion:**

MDA requires analysis of multimodal resources, not monomodal. The three metafunction concept of MDA is more suitable to be implemented in the literary works which consist on only writings or still images but more to the moving images, sounds, gestures, settings, and more resources. The more modes to be analyzed to deeper framing, interpretation or meanings can be concluded. Movies, series, song video clips, speech videos, podcast, and vlogs. The focus of MDA is into the whole context of the multimodal resources being presented. Therefore, in the analysis process, the researcher need to have a very critical mindset by keep questioning what, why, how, when, who, or to whom the multimodal resources appear in such a way. Just like the primary approach which are semiotics and social semiotics, MDA is also very much suitable for people with high curiosity about something. MDA cannot accept something just the way it is. Therefore, Kress and van Leeuwen have elaborated the very detail framework of three metafunction in their “Reading Images” book (2021) which consists of: representational metafunction, interactional metafunction, and lastly compositional metafunction.

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**Sources of Figures:**

Figure 1

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Figure 2

Asidiky Z. et al. (2022). *Multimodal Portrayal of Joko Widodo on Tempo's Cover Story: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis*. JJMLL