

Multimodality in Literary Text
Lecture 4
Representational, Interactional, and Compositional Analysis
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Learning objective

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

1. Review of three metafunction approach
2. Previous and current related researches
3. Analysis of representational metafunction
4. Analysis of interactional metafunction
5. Analysis of compositional metafunction

A. Review of 3 Metafunction Approach

In Lecture 3, we have previously discussed in detail about what multimodal discourse analysis is and how it works in the literary works. We have also discussed in brief about the basic concept of three metafunction approach which is sourced from Kress and van Leeuwen book entitled “Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design” (2021). This book offers visual grammar model called representational metafunction, interactional metafunction, and compositional metafunction as the key approach to do multimodal discourse analysis. As its name multimodal, this book comprehensively explains the analysis framework not only to the language but also to the images either it is still image or moving image. In this current lecture we will examine each of the metafunction in more detail including the further steps to use this metafunctions concept in analyzing various contents in literary works and media. I will also present my research works which is still related with the topic.

B. Previous and Current Related Researches

MDA can be a theory and a methodology at the same time. Therefore, utilizing three metafunction framework is one of the best methods to conduct multimodal discourse analysis in various types of literary works. Writing a research paper can be also one of the best practices in utilizing the MDA. Multimodal Discourse Analysis and 3 metafunction concept of Kress and van Leeuwen have been utilized and implemented in many researches including my own research papers.

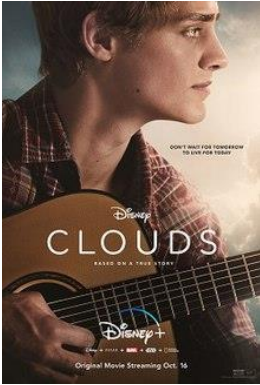
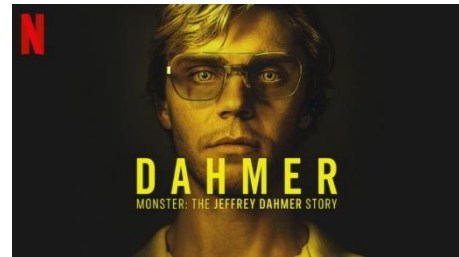


Figure 1 (*Clouds* film 2020). Wikipedia)

Early this year, in 2023, I and my student published a paper entitled “Representation of Educational Values in *Clouds* Movie: A Metafunction Analysis in Main Characters.” This study analyzed the representation of educational values from by the four main characters. There are two main theories of the research: The three metafunctions and the theory of educational value by Linda and Richard. The analysis was conducted by examining the dialogues, gestures, eye contact, and action of the main characters. The findings of the research claim that there are ten from the 12 values.

Figure 2 (Pariano, 2022)

Currently I and a lecturer from another university are also working on a research paper in the same field which is targeted to publish by end of this year. The object of research is a 10-episode Netflix series entitled “*DAHMER* Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story”. What I examine from the series is not the serial killer story of Dahmer but the representation of black people in this series. Setting of this series is in Milwaukee, United States, in 1991. The discrimination, injustice, drug abuse, gang violence and many other social problems among the black community were significantly depicted in the series. This becomes interesting for me to see it from the perspective of MDA. So far, I have found positive and negative portrayals of black people in the series, however the negative one is more dominant. Racial issue has been a significant discussion in this research. The black citizens in Milwaukee are discriminated and their actions are taken for granted by the law enforcement who are mostly whites. Among all the negative portrayal, there are also positive ones where some black characters are employed important positions and occupations.



In 2021, a paper about MDA by Linh N.T.T. entitled “A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Romantic Comedy Movie Posters” was also using the same three metafunction framework from the 2006 book of Visual Grammar. The result of study found the similarities and differences in the meaning making and promoting the movies using the semiotic elements. The findings of the research are not only in the identification of patterns in designing movie posters but also in examining on how effective the framework in analyzing multimodal texts.

In my class I also refer to this one paper as one of the examples. The paper is written by three authors: Jamshidzadeh Z., Roohani A., and Jam B. (2016) with the title “Hidden Meanings of Visual and Verbal Layers of American English File Textbook Series: A Semiotic Approach”. Even though the publication is quite old but the content is still very much relevant to be discussed in the MDA class. This paper provides a very detail elaboration about the visual grammar concept where Kress and van Leeuwen introduces the three metafunctions (2006). The object of the research is ELT textbook series entitled American English File. This study aims to uncover the meanings behind choosing different resources that book shows in verbal and visual. What I like about this research is because my students can learn

from these researchers on how to write a paper using the MDA theory and how to write the MDA theory in their own paper.

C. Representational Metafunction

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), representational metafunction in any kinds of literary works can be identified through the relations of three aspects, which are: **participants, processes, and circumstances**. Simply explained, this first metafunction focuses on participants who are presented in the images, what these participants do to themselves or to the other participants, and in what circumstances they do it.

In detail, the **participants** in representational metafunction are sourced from the **people, places, and things** that are mentioned or illustrated in speech, writing, or image (Beili and Daniela, 2023). There are two types of participants, which have a significant role in this first metafunction. They are stated as **interactive participants** and **represented participants**. Interactive participants are those who become the actor of communication. It is including the ones who speak, listen, write, read, create or see the images. Meanwhile, represented participants refer to those who become the subject of the communication as they are represented in and by speech or writing or image (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

Visual structures of representation can be in form of narrative or conceptual. Narrative representation presents to unfold the actions and events, processes of change, and transitory spatial arrangement. Meanwhile, conceptual representation means depicting individuals based on their broader, relatively unchanging, and timeless characteristics. It leads to the second aspect of representational metafunction which is processes. There are five **processes** in defining the 'action' of the participants: **action processes, reactional processes, speech and mental processes, conversion structures and vectors** (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021).

The last aspect of the representational metafunction is called circumstances. The setting in **circumstances** matters a lot. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) highlighted in their book

“It requires contrast between foreground and background which can be realized in one or more of the following ways: (a) Participants in the foreground overlap the setting. (b) The setting is drawn in less detail. (c) The setting is more muted and desaturated in color with the various colors all tending towards the same hue. (d) The setting is darker or lighter than the foreground, or lighter, so that it acquires an overexpose. The features can occur in various combinations.”

It can be concluded that circumstances are about the situation of when and where the participants conduct the processes or their actions of certain events.

D. Interactional Metafunction

In Reading Images book (2021), the chapter about interactional metafunction is titled representation and interaction explained as designing the position of the viewer. This indicates that interactional metafunction is closely related with the previous discussion about representational relations between people, places, and things. Meanwhile, this second metafunction refers to the relations between the **represented participants (RP) and interactive participants (IP)**. The relations among these RPs are built between the RPs or between the RPs and the IPs. Relationship among the RPs refers to all participants who or which appear in the frame, so the interaction is between one RP to another. Meanwhile, the relation between RP and IP includes us as the viewers. So, the interaction is not only between the participants in the frame but also involve the viewers who watch the frame or listen to their interaction. With our role as IP, we are the ones who not only enjoy the presented frames or images, but we have the freedom to interpret, communicate, absorb, or even re-produce the representation based on our background knowledge. The attachment or detachment between RP and RP or RP and IP are influence by these aspects: **contact, social distance, size of frame, and perspective and subjective image** which occur within the represented and interactive participants.



Figure 3 (@louisvuitton Instagram, 2023)



Figure 4 (Snyder B. in Heller, 2020)

Contact is shown by the image act and gaze to determine the 'demand' and 'offer' of the RP and IP. '**demand**' contact happens if the RPs in the frame look directly to the camera as if they look at the viewers in person. This kind of image act and gaze means that the RP demands something from the viewers or demands the viewers to do something. The demand toward the viewers can be emphasized not only by the direct gaze but also the other supporting vectors and gestures of the participants. The example of demand contact can be found in an advertisement or political area. In a product advertisement, the model is usually holding a product and showing it while his or her gaze is directed to the camera. Figure 1 is taken from Instagram post of @louisvuitton. Ana de Armas, the House

Ambassador, is wearing LV jewelries. Her vectorial pose and gaze implicitly persuade the viewers to consume or buy the jewelries. In political campaign, the gaze of the politician is usually directed to the camera lens as if he looks at and speak to the audience. Picture in Figure 2 is captured by Brin Snyder as cited by Heller (2020). It shows Joe Biden doing his speech during the first presidential debate against Donald Trump. Biden was captured looking at the camera as he spoke in person to the audiences at home who watched him on the screens (television).



Figure 5 (Wang, 2023)

'Offer' contact is the opposite of 'demand' contact. The gaze of 'offer' contact happens between the RPs in the frame only without including the viewers. However, the offer contact also directs the viewers to pay attention to the RPs gaze. Figure 3 is a picture of a Vivian Tung (left side) with and a medical personal (I assume it is an obstetricians). They both look like paying a close

attention to the medical syringe. Their gazes are considered as an offer contact which automatically directs the viewers gaze to the syringe as well.

Social Distance is to show the personal, social, or impersonal relations among the participants in an image or frame. Social distance is related to the size of frame, choice of shots, choice to depict the participants close to or far from the viewers. The **close personal** distance is when someone can have a very close physical contact with someone else because they have intimate relationship with each other. The examples can be found in romantic couple or family relations. **Personal distance** extends from a point just beyond arm's reach for one person to a point where two people can touch. So the physical touch can happen between them because of their personal relationship but not as close as the close personal, there is still distance between them. **Close social** distance occurrences can be found in business setting when the colleagues are close one to another for professional purposes as if they are working on the same project. **Far social** distance can also be found in social interaction to the business clients. It is conducted at this distance with a more formal and impersonal character than in the close phase. **Public** distance is the distance between people for they are strangers one to another.

As has been said earlier that social distance is influenced by the size of frame, choice of shots and choice to participants depiction distance to the viewers. **Size of frame** can display the social relations between the participants in the frame and the us as the viewers. The participants include all the objects, buildings, and landscapes that appears or are captured. Close distance in a frame suggests social relations around these participants. Middle distance is when the object shown in a full shot, but with not much space around them. Long distance is when the object is shown in full but without much space around it. At long distance there is an invisible barrier between the viewer and the object. The close, medium, and long distance have close connection with the choice of shots. Shot refers to the arrangement of visual elements to convey an intended message (Maio, 2022). Choice of shots consists

of extreme closeup, closeup, medium closeup, medium shot, cowboy shot, medium full shot, full shot (studiobinder, 2020).

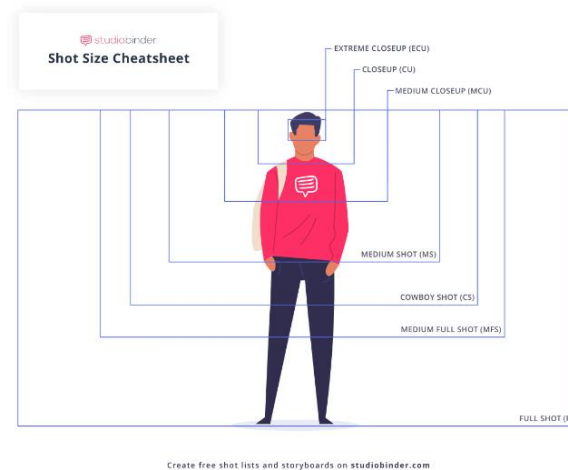


Figure 6 (studiobinder, 2020)

The last aspect of interactional metafunction is **perspective and subjective image**. The perspective is directed the subjectivity or objectivity which can be seen from the **angle**. Angle is about what is being seen and what we are seeing. Therefore, the subjectivity is to see the perspective of involvement or detachment of the participants from their vertical or horizontal angle in the frame. The **vertical angle** indicates the power relation among the participants in the frame which can also show the detachment between one participant from another. The ones with less power could be detached from the one with more power to emphasize the role of the power itself.



Figure 7 (McCurry, 1979)

Figure 5 shows a picture of an Afghani boy in a medium shot and vertical angle. I assume that this picture is taken during the war period. This picture looks very interesting in showing how powerful the boy is. His power is emphasized by a riffle he is carrying on his right shoulder which also placed closer to the camera, his strong eye contact, and firm facial expression. He looks strong and tough. The picture visualizes his strength and toughness in taking control of himself and the war situation. However, on the other side, I cannot hold my tears by looking at this picture because as a very young boy, he is not supposed to be in this kind of hard situation. He did that at that time because he had no choice.

As the opposite, the **horizontal angle** indicates the perspective of the involvement and power equality of the participants. The participants shown in horizontal angle, which could be in eye level or shoulder level shot, are not intended to show who is more dominant or less dominant. Instead, the power among them tends to be equal which usually portrayed by the 'thick' attachment between them.

Figure 8 (McCurry, 2013)

This right-side picture of a boy and a cow sleeping and leaning back each other is shown in horizontal angle. There are also birds spreading around behind them. This picture is the suitable visualization of the horizontal angle which shows the involvement and power equality between the boy and the animals. Even though they are different creatures, but the picture does not show dominance in any of them.



Furthermore, according to Studio Binder, there are also four different angles that usually appears in moving images such as movies.

- a. **High angle** is to show less power of the participants or object.
- b. **Low angle** in a movie looking up at the subject is to emphasize the power or authority of the participants or object.
- c. **Overhead angle** which looks down on the subjects at 90 degrees to the ground is frequently used to create an all-knowing yet neutral viewpoint.
- d. **Dutch angle** is to create sense of unease which is used to magnify the tension of the object or participants

E. Compositional Metafunction

Composition is the arrangement of elements in an image. It is not only what is being included in a frame but more to the relationship between those elements that creates the overall meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021). Compositional metafunction in multimodal text consists of **information value, framing, salience**. The information value is about the placement of the elements in the frame. According to the Visual Grammar book (2021) there placement of the elements indicates two contrary values. The elements put on **the left and right indicates the given and new information values**. So, the elements placed on the left side of the frame indicates that it is something that has been known before or something that we get used to. In contrast, the elements placed on the right side of the frame indicates that there is new information given compared to the left placement.

Framing is about the presence of framing devices. It is like a frame in a frame. Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) argue that framing could create **disconnection and connection** between the participants. Frame lines can potentially create segregation in which the elements are separated by the frame lines however there is also possibility that these elements are one unity which connected by something. Furthermore, if there are spaces between two or more elements, it indicates they have potential similarities in some circumstances and differences in others which creates separation. Framing can also be created by visual contrast through the color contrast di divide one color tone to another.



Figure 9 (Mascarenhas, 2023)

Picture above is taken by Mascarenhas in Mumbai, India. It could be clearly seen that the housing or flat where they live is no longer worth to live. They put themselves in danger and take a risk to live there for the sake of affordable price. The picture shows the pillars which separate one house to another, left and right, above and below. It creates the framing devices which at the same bring the strong connection among the residents in this frame. They are struggling to the same situation to live in a vulnerable place.

Lastly is the **saliency** which defines the most eye-catching element in the composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021). It is utilized to differentiate the degree of the elements. The saliency can be determined by several things, such as the foreground and background elements, the relative size, the tonal contrast or the color tone, and the sharpness. The tone refers to the brightness and contrast within an image. Blending dark and light in the same image creates a more complicated message. We can focus on the dark side or the light side depends which portrayal is significantly presented to the audience. This significant presentation of dark and light is called high tonal contracts.

We can find the example of Saliency in the following figures. By looking at these three pictures, I believe you can easily point out the most eye-catching element as your eyes would directly pay attention to that element. The saliency element in figure 10 is the green male. This saliency is affected by the color contrast as he is the only green color among the reds. Figure 11 portrays the child as the saliency element. The same with figure 10, this child is placed in the center of the frame. Even though she is not as close to the camera as the other two participants but the camera focus is on her. She is the focal point of the frame and she is the foregrounded participant. Meanwhile, the two medical persons were blurred as the camera does not focus on them. Lastly figure 12 directs the viewers focus on the turtle because of tonal contrast of dark side and the light.



Figure 10 (McCurry, 1996)



Figure 11 (Bashizi, 2022)



Figure 12 (Lopez, 2023)

Therefore, the stronger or maximum the salience is the more it becomes to focal point of the frame. On the other side, the less or minimum the salience is the less we see significant difference between one participant to another. We will see all participants with the same hierarchy in the frame.

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Figure 3

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Figure 4

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Figure 5

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Figure 7

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Figure 10

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Figure 12

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