Multimodal Translational Research: Teaching Visual Texts

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the development and implementation of a multimodal discourse analysis approach in the teaching of visual texts. This follows in the direction of "appliable discourse analysis" (Matthiessen 2013) where multimodal discourse analysis frameworks and approaches are translated into classroom strategies. Drawing on the multimodal discourse frameworks developed by O'Toole (2010), Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and later extended by Lim-Fei and O'Halloran (2012), Tan, E and O'Halloran (2012), O'Halloran and Lim-Fei (2014), and Lim-Fei, O'Halloran, Tan and E (2015), we developed an approach to the teaching of visual texts aimed at secondary school students in Singapore. Following Unsworth (2006), the approach advocates the provision of a set of vocabulary (or meta-language) for teachers and students to describe the choices made in the multimodal text. This supports students' reading and interpretations of the text by relating them to textual evidence, as a result of the system choices. In turn, this serves to develop students' critical viewing competencies and discourse analysis skills as they are able to explain the choices made in the text and present an argument for their interpretation. The student's perspective, based on their analysis of the text, is empowered where traditionally the teacher's perspective was privileged. This chapter introduces the approach to teaching visual texts (advertisements and posters in print and electronic form) for secondary school students.

Keywords: Multimodal Literacy, Applicable Discourse Analysis, Meta-language, Critical Thinking, Critical Viewing

1. Introduction

Our world is changing every day with the affordances brought about by digital media and technology. With the ubiquity of multimodal texts and the different ways of meaning making, the reality of multimodal communication has grown increasingly apparent. The traditional focus on literacy and numeracy will no longer be sufficient for students to navigate the complex

multimodal communicational landscape that they inhabit. New skills for reading and finding, authenticating, linking, and representing information are demanded in this increasingly interactive digital media enabled multimodal environment (Kress 2003; Jewitt 2007).

This chapter describes the translational research efforts made to apply the theories and frameworks developed in academia to inform teaching and learning in the secondary education setting. This follows the direction of "appliable discourse analysis" (Matthiessen 2013) where, in this case, multimodal discourse analysis frameworks and approaches are translated into instructional strategies for the classroom. By drawing on the multimodal discourse frameworks developed by O'Toole (2010), Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and later extended by Lim-Fei and O'Halloran (2012), Tan, E and O'Halloran (2012), O'Halloran and Lim-Fei (2014), and Lim-Fei et al. (2015), the authors have developed an approach to the teaching of visual texts aimed at secondary school students in Singapore. Visual texts are defined as discourses that are constructed using only images or that have a combination of image(s) and written/oral language. Examples include advertisements and posters – print and electronic. This chapter describes the translational process from theories in the field of multimodality to a set of instructional strategies for the teaching of visual texts.

2. Multimodal Literacy

Information, particularly in the digital age, is represented not just with language alone. Instead, language is often nestled amongst other semiotic resources in a multimodal text. Halliday (1985: 4) explains that linguistics is at the same time a "kind of semiotics" because language is viewed as "one among a number of systems of meaning that, taken all together, constitute human culture". In particular, technology has accentuated the multimodal nature of text, by facilitating the production and consumption of visual texts. Visual texts such as webpages have images, both static and dynamic, that work together with language to convey meaning multimodally. In addition, webpages may also include various audio and sound effects which, together with the

interactive links, offer an intensely multimodal viewing experience not available from reading a printed book. The epistemological implication of multimodality is that meanings in a text can no longer be assumed to be the result of a single semiotic resource. Meanings are the result of the collective semiotic resources co-deployed within the same text. The multimodal approach takes into account how language and image (as well as other) choices fulfill the purposes of the text, the audience and context, and how those choices work together in the organization and development of information and ideas.

Within the primary and secondary education setting, Unsworth makes the following observation:

> While many of the fundamentals of established, language-based literacy pedagogies will endure in the foreseeable future, they are by no means sufficient for the development of the kinds of literacy practices that already characterise the continuously evolving information age of the new millennium. (Unsworth 2002: 62)

Traditional literacy, that is the ability to use language competently for reading and writing, will retain its importance. However, with the increasingly multimodal nature of communication in this digital age (Kress 2003), it is important for us to develop the literacy to make sense of the new knowledge, to discern truths from falsehoods, and to evaluate the validity of these multimodal texts. In light of this, Kress (2003) proposes a shift from an alphabetic literacy to a multimodal literacy. He argues that this will facilitate changes in how literacy is developed in school. The need for multimodal literacy also grows proportionally more pressing as interactive digital media and information technology become even more ubiquitous (see for example Kalantzis, Cope and Harvey 2003 and Jewitt 2007).

More recently, there is growing recognition (see for example Unsworth 2014; Unsworth and Macken-Horarik 2015; Chan and Chia 2014; O'Halloran and Lim-Fei 2011; and Lim-Fei et al. 2015) that it is important to develop multimodal literacy in our students. Students need to develop the competencies to view multimodal texts critically. The challenge for educators is how to teach

critical viewing and develop multimodal literacy in their students. Developing multimodal literacy involves acquiring the codified knowledge in the field, recognizing how it can be appropriated and transferred to new contexts, and reproducing this understanding through demonstrated competencies in performance tasks.

Multimodal literacy, first proposed by Jewitt and Kress (2003), is about understanding the different ways of knowledge representation and meaning making. Multimodal literacy "focuses on the design of discourse by investigating the contributions of specific semiotic resources (e.g. language, gesture, images) co-deployed across various modalities (e.g. visual, aural, somatic), as well as their interaction and integration in constructing a coherent text" (Lim-Fei et al. 2015: 917). Multimodal literacy aims to develop students into discerning readers and savvy producers of multimodal texts by drawing attention to the various strategies utilized in the production of these texts, and the ways in which specific choices work together to achieve the desired communicative goals. Current research in multimodal analysis establishes the need and provides the meta-language to develop multimodal literacy in education. O'Halloran & Lim-Fei (2011, 14) envision that "a 'multimodal literate' student must be sensitized to the meaning potential and choices afforded in the production of the text, rendering an enhanced ability to make deliberate and effective choices in the construction and presentation of knowledge".

In the last decade, many frameworks and approaches have been developed to examine the meanings made in multimodal texts. For instance, in films (Bateman and Schmidt 2012; Bateman and Wildfeuer 2014; Tseng and Bateman 2010; Wildfeuer 2014), picture books (Painter 2008, 2013; Painter, Martin and Unsworth 2011; Wignell 2011), print advertisements (O'Halloran 2008; O'Halloran and Lim-Fei 2009), and television advertisements (Baldry and Thibault 2006; Feng and Wignell 2011; Lim-Fei and O'Halloran 2012). Advances in theoretical understandings in multimodality have also been compiled in recent publications such as O'Halloran and Smith (2011), Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran (2016), and Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala (2017).

Given the theoretical understandings developed in recent research in multimodality, it is worthwhile to explore how they can be extended to inform the teaching and learning of students in the secondary education setting. While many of the extant theories are meant for graduate and post-graduate research work, this chapter investigates how these understandings may be applied in the secondary education setting. It is important for teaching and learning at the secondary education level to be informed and grounded in sound theoretical understanding. Our students must be equipped with the skills and knowledge to comprehend the messages in the multimodal texts. They must learn to view such texts with discernment, recognize perspectives, and clarify their values in relation to these messages. Developing these critical viewing competencies requires a deliberate focus by the teacher to scaffold the students' viewing process, impart the language and tools to 'deconstruct' or analyze the text, as well as cultivate the dispositions and attitudes towards these media texts.

However, it must also be recognized that there are constraints in the secondary education setting. These include a fairly crowded curriculum in most systems where time and space to be devoted to new areas of learning are strongly contested (Tan 2006). While teachers may have access to professional learning opportunities, the range of teachers' capabilities in any system is usually broad. As such, teachers may be unwilling or unable to manage new knowledge that may appear too technical and challenging to appropriate (Albright and Kramer-Dahl 2009; Teo 2014). Explicit alignment to current content areas of learning is also important, as teachers have to make connections and create coherence across the disparate areas of learning for their students (English Language Syllabus 2010 (Primary and Secondary): 16). In this light, it can be challenging for the current theories and frameworks in multimodality to be applied directly to inform teaching and learning in the classroom. There is, therefore, a need for a translational research process, where the insights from research can be meaningfully adapted and approximated to inform the practices in the secondary education setting. The aim is to develop a theoretically robust yet easily accessible framework to scaffold the analysis of multimodal texts for the young and teach critical viewing.

3. The Systemic Approach to Critical Viewing

The English Language Syllabus guides the teaching of English Language literacy in Singapore. In the revised syllabus from 2010, it is mentioned that this English language curriculum will be

> […] enriched through the use of a variety of print and non-print resources that provides authentic contexts for incorporating the development of information, media and visual literacy skills in the teaching of listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and representing [as well as] opportunities for pupils to be exposed to and engage in producing a variety of multimodal texts to represent ideas effectively and with impact. (English Language Syllabus 2010 (Primary & Secondary): 9)

With this, two new areas for language learning, namely Viewing and Representing, are added.

As part of the teaching of viewing skills, teachers are expected to help students "comprehend closely and critically a variety of different types of texts: literary and informational/ functional, print and non-print [and] teach pupils to think critically and reflect on what they read and/ or view to become critical readers and viewers" (English Language Syllabus 2010 (Primary & Secondary): 29).

With the inclusion of the aim of developing students into critical viewers being reflected in the English Language Syllabus in Singapore, it is a signal that the notion of literacy within the primary and secondary education setting in Singapore schools has broadened beyond the traditional areas of language learning, such as reading, writing, and speaking, to a literacy that takes into account the multimodal communicative environment the students inhabit. It recognizes the importance of fostering multimodal literacy amongst students, starting as young as when they are in primary school, that is the age of seven in Singapore.

While the acknowledgement of the importance of multimodal literacy and having it represented in the Singapore English Language Curriculum is good progress, there remains, understandably, a policy intent and implementation gap. This is unsurprising since, given the introduction of the new areas of language learning, teachers would need time to develop the knowledge and skills to be able to teach them. Time is needed for the professional competencies of the English language teachers to be built so that they, in turn, can nurture and develop their pupils into critical viewers.

The syllabus document indicates that "viewing skills will be taught explicitly" (English Language Syllabus 2010 (Primary & Secondary): 20). For instance, teachers will guide students to "evaluate the logic and soundness of arguments by posing a range of questions [and evaluate] the validity of an argument based on the given evidence and the lines of reasoning presented" (English Language Syllabus 2010 (Primary & Secondary): 22). Teachers are, thus, expected to guide students through the process of viewing and scaffold their learning such that they are able to develop their students into critical viewers. The challenge for teachers remains in knowing how to do so effectively.

From the authors' classroom observations, most teachers would typically 'teach' visual texts by asking a series of questions, often framed randomly, to the students (Lim-Fei et al. 2015). The approach of 'teaching' visual texts by questioning or 'interrogating the text' is unproductive, as it assumes that by 'testing' the students' comprehension through a barrage of questions, the understanding of the visual text will somehow develop. It assumes that the understanding of the text will be intuitively transferred to understanding of other texts. It assumes that through the experience, students will somehow develop into critical viewers.

While a better-defined approach to teaching visual texts is not yet common in schools, attempts have been made in this direction. An example is the development of a guided set of questions or

frames by Chan and Chia (2014) known as the Six Semiotic Modes Framework. Building on the earlier work by Anstey and Bull (2010), the framework provides descriptions and examples of the linguistic, audio, spatial, oral, visual, and gestural modes to guide the teachers and students as they make various observations when analyzing a multimodal text.

Using similar social semiotics lens as Chan and Chia (2014), this chapter proposes a genre-based pedagogy to the teaching of visual texts. Following the work of researchers such as Tan, E and O'Halloran (2012), the authors adapted the work in the field of multimodality to develop a Systemic Approach and a FAMILY Framework to develop the knowledge and skills of secondary students to talk about, understand, and question the meanings made in multimodal texts.

The Systemic Approach to teaching visual texts emphasizes explicit teaching of the generic features of visual texts and introduces the common multimodal strategies used to engage viewers. It aims to provide a set of pedagogical scaffolds, informed by Systemic-Functional Theory and insights from multimodal research, to provide students with a structure and appropriate meta-language to interpret visual texts.

The Systemic Approach is named as such given its roots in Systemic-Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SFMDA) (Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016; O'Halloran and Lim-Fei 2014), which is an application of the Systemic-Functional Theory developed by Halliday (1985). As O'Halloran and Lim-Fei observe:

> The term 'systemic' also describes the underlying organization of semiotic resources which enable the resources to be used for different purposes. The systems of meaning are typically modeled as inter-related 'system networks' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Martin, 1992; Kress and van Leeuwen, (2006) to describe the meaning potentials of semiotic resources. (O'Halloran and Lim-Fei 2014: 138)

Systemic-Functional Theory is about meaning as choice. Halliday explains that "[s]ystemic theory is a theory of meaning as choice, by which language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as networks of interlocking options" (Halliday 1994: xiv). Meaning is, therefore, made through realized choices from paradigms and in syntagms. Semiotic resources comprise networks of interlocking options from which the meaning maker selects. As Halliday explains, the choice is "not a conscious decision made in real time but a set of possible alternatives" (Halliday 1994: xiv–xxvi) from which choices are made in actual texts. The paradigmatic and syntagmatic options available in the system network foreground the importance of choice in Systemic-Functional Theory. As such, Lim-Fei notes:

> The perspective offered by Systemic Functional Theory, and by extension SFMDA, is that meaning making is a result of choice. These choices may not always be conscious or intentional but they are always motivated according to the interest of the meaning-maker. (Lim-Fei 2011: 74)

The Systemic Approach also offers a vocabulary to describe multimodal texts. It is important to have a meta-language to denote semiotic resources beyond language so as to "describe meaning in various realms" (New London Group 2004: 24). Unsworth argues that:

> Teachers and students need this kind of metalanguage for talking about language, images, sound, and so forth, and for their meaning-making interactions […]. This kind of metalanguage gives students and teachers a means of comparing texts, of determining what semiotic choices were made in constructing particular meanings, what alternatives might have been chosen, and the effects of particular choices rather than others. Unsworth (2014: 38)

With a meta-language to describe the choices made in visual texts, students are able to identify the common media strategies used to engage them and the typical effects they bring about

(Painter, Martin and Unsworth 2013; Unsworth and Cleirigh 2009). This leads to heightened awareness of the meanings in the visual texts. With the meta-language, students are able to identify the genre of the texts, specifically the features and their typical functions, so that this knowledge will guide their reading of new texts within the genre that they will encounter, as has been well recognized (Martin 2012; Rose and Martin 2012). While a set of meta-language, undergirded by sound theories, is useful, care must be taken not to overwhelm the teachers and students with too much technical jargon and complexities. As such, the translational process is critical. The authors worked iteratively with teachers to judiciously identify the necessary descriptions and choice of descriptors that are aligned to what they are already using to teach similar concepts in English language learning.

The meta-language provided to the students empowers them to describe and discuss the visual texts. The Systemic Approach in teaching critical viewing focuses on the explicit teaching of features and strategies in a visual text supported by a framework to scaffold teaching and learning. As part of scaffolding the understanding of the visual texts, students are explicitly taught the generic features and typical functions of the texts. They are also introduced to the common strategies and typical effects used to engage the viewer. This equips the students with the understanding to know where to look and what to look out for in a visual text.

Through this procedure, students develop critical thinking and discourse analysis skills – which nurtures them into critical viewers, armed with the knowledge of text types and the common multimodal engagement strategies used in these texts. This approach is very much unlike how students make sense of a poem or prose in a literary criticism class in the subject of English Literature. Within the Systemic Approach, the extension of discourse analysis is made beyond language to multimodal discourse analysis. Teachers who understand the multimodal ways in which knowledge is presented may teach students to assess, appraise, and appropriate the multimodal texts which they will inevitably encounter. In addition, through the lessons, students will become more discerning viewers of multimodal texts – thus developing multimodal literacy.

While questioning is still encouraged, the Systemic Approach advocates first the explicit teaching and identification of generic features and engagement strategies in the multimodal texts. Questions are used to elicit interpretations of the visual texts that are supported by textual evidence. Students are able to respond to these questions based on their knowledge of the textual features and typical functions as well as the common multimodal strategies and typical effects that have been introduced earlier. As students apply their knowledge of the text to make meaning from the visual texts, their critical reasoning faculties and discourse analysis skills develop. This is because they are now better equipped with the relevant skills to explain the choices made in the text and subsequently to present an argument for their interpretation.

The Systemic Approach consists of three Levels of Viewing with a visual text (see Table 1). They are:

LEVEL 1	ENCOUNTER
	Engaging with the Text
LEVEL 2	COMPREHENSION
	Understanding the Text
LEVEL 3	CRITICAL VIEWING
	Questioning the Text

Table 1. Three Levels of Viewing a Visual Text

3.1. Level 1: Encounter – Engaging with the Text

The first level of 'Encounter: Engaging with the Text' focuses on the affective domain where students react to the text based on their immediate impressions. The Systemic Approach encourages teachers to devote time and space during the lesson for students to engage, on an emotional level, with the text.

Upon presenting a visual text, teachers can invite students to share personal responses to it. The intent is to address the affective component of students' engagement with the visual text. The responses may be individual or collective, written or oral, and may comprise emotional reactions, associations called forth by the text, and evaluations based on initial observations.

These reactions can include finding the visual text humorous, boring, intriguing or confusing. The reactions of students may also vary from indifference to deep personal involvement, and each reaction to the text will likely be based on a different initial observation of the text. Students are then invited to articulate the reasons (*why*) for their emotional reaction. In doing so, the students may express their focal awareness and associations that the text calls forth (and thus begin their first step toward critical viewing!). Students may point out a particular visual element that captures their attention, and what is visually dominant in a text may vary from student to student. For instance, a student may articulate attention that is riveted upon the face of the protagonist and is acutely aware of the latter's delight. Another student may express attention to the items that are presented in vivid colors against a dull background. Another student may discuss personal associations, feelings, and ideas engendered by the viewing. As students seek to make sense of the text, they may recall objects, people, and events in their lives. Some may be reminded of other texts – they could be visual, aural, or both – of a similar theme but composed of different visual and linguistic elements. Others may be reminded of their past experience(s); for instance, they may feel more intensely toward an anti-smoking advertisement because they had a family member whose terminal illness was caused in part by heavy smoking.

All of these show a powerful resonance of personal observation and experience in the interaction with a visual text.

The teacher consolidates students' responses, invites expansion wherever appropriate, and concludes by drawing attention to different aspects of the multimodal text and the underlying differences in understanding that account for varying responses. This way, the teacher heightens student awareness of the need to examine and integrate all of the elements of the text (linguistic, visual, and others) to arrive at an informed, cohesive interpretation of the multimodal text. This is the first step to active engagement with the visual text and its ideas.

3.2. Level 2: Comprehension – Understanding the Text

The understanding of the visual texts must be explicitly taught and the learning of it well scaffolded. 'Level 2: Comprehension – Understanding the Text' anchors the Systemic Approach as this is the level that adapts the theories and frameworks in multimodality into an accessible framework to guide the students' critical viewing of visual texts (see Figure 1).

As discussed earlier, the Systemic Approach provides students with a language to describe multimodal texts. It also helps students develop awareness of the genre of the visual text, i.e. of the text's features and the typical functions of these features. Finally, the Systemic Approach leads students to acquire a sensitivity to the common multimodal strategies and their typical effects. In a sense, the Systemic Approach scaffolds the understanding of the multimodal texts through explicating the system choices, which realize ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. This follows from the understandings in Systemic-Functional theory where the meanings made in language through the system choices oriented around the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions (Halliday 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004).

The aims of the Systemic Approach are realized through the FAMILY Framework that has been developed through working alongside teachers (see Figure 2). The FAMILY Framework is a result

of distilling the understandings from the SFMDA approach (Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016; O'Halloran and Lim-Fei 2014), and representing the ideas in an easy and accessible manner for teachers and students in the secondary education setting. For instance, the textual metafunction is represented as Form, the interpersonal metafunction as Audience, and the ideational metafunction as Message. While retaining some of the core ideas of SFMDA, the FAMILY Framework is also eclectic in the sense that it draws on insights from the field of media studies and rhetorical studies, for instance, the Aristotelian types of persuasion in Ethos, Logos, or Pathos (see for example Halmari and Virtanen 2005 and Ross 2010).
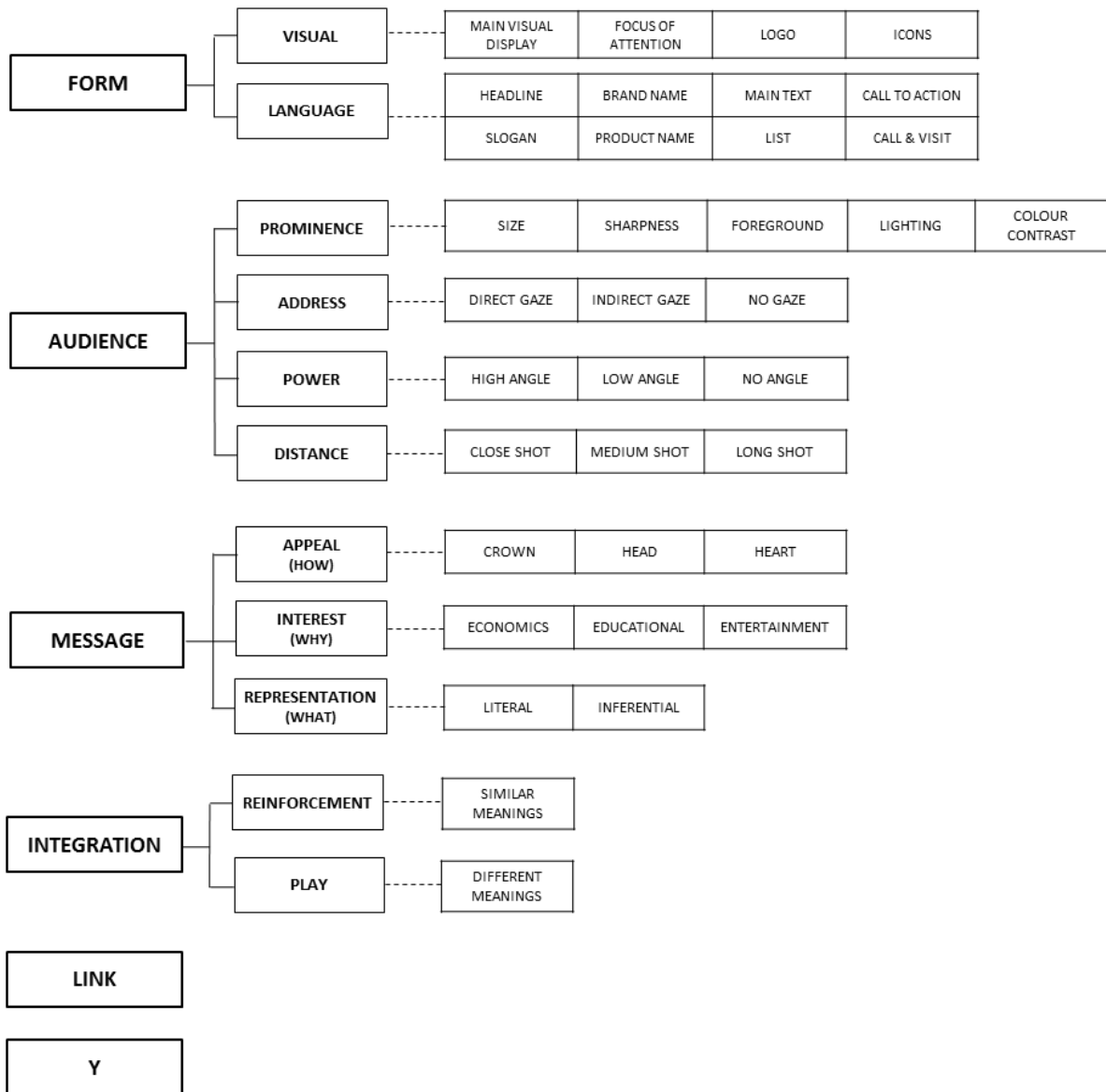
Figure 1. FAMILY Framework

FORM

Acquiring awareness of the **genre** (**features** and **functions**)

AUDIENCE

Developing sensitivity to the common multimodal **strategies** and their typical **effects**

MESSAGE

Understanding literal and inferential **representations** and nature of **persuasion**

INTEGRATION

Recognising **relationship** across **semiotic modes**

LINK

Connecting across **areas of language learning** and other **subjects**

Y

Questioning to prompt **evidence-based interpretation**

Figure 2. Summary of Systemic Approach

Form

Adapting from the systems under the textual metafunction by Tan, E and O'Halloran (2012), students first learn the parts of a visual text and relate the parts in the text to the typical functions they serve (*FORM*). The information that is offered to viewers is typically subsumed into typical features in an advertisement text. These are the headline, slogan, main text, sub-categories/list, main visual display, call to action, icon(s) and logo (see Figure 3).
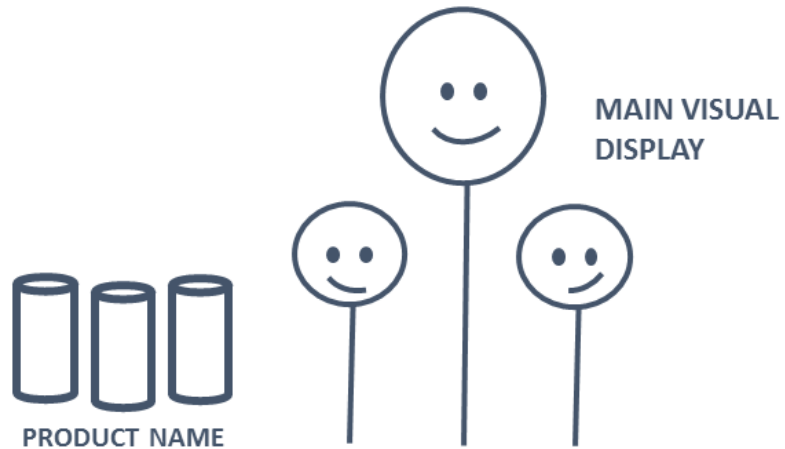
Figure 3. Parts of a Typical Visual Text

Students look at the individual layers of information to develop a preliminary understanding of the text. Table 2 provides a summary of the parts of a visual text and the typical functions they serve.

Form	Description	Typical Function(s)
Visual		
Main Visual Display	Largest and most prominent visual	To attract viewer attention and arouse interest
Focus of Attention	Most salient visual feature(s)	To focus viewer attention on what is important
Logo	Graphic representation of organization	For identification of organization
Icon	Graphic representation of ideas	For faster information processing
Language		
Headline	Largest and most prominent text	To attract viewer attention and arouse interest; to express or imply topic
Slogan	Catchy promotional phrase	To convey brand's key selling proposition
Main Text	Smaller text comprising main information	To provide more details and description
Brand Name	Name of brand, company	For brand identification/awareness
Product Name	Name of product	For product identification/awareness
Call to Action	Command to do something	To solicit viewer to take action

Table 2. Description of Parts and Typical Function(s) Served (adapted from Tan, E and O'Halloran 2012)

Students learn that most visual texts have a *headline* which is typically short and punchy and can be placed anywhere in the visual text. Usually large, set in boldface, or a contrasting type or color, it can be identified by its appearance. This attracts viewer attention and arouses interest toward

the rest of the visual text with the topic expressed/implicit in the headline. A *slogan* is a catchy phrase that captures viewer attention and conveys the brand's key selling proposition in a compelling and memorable way. To make a slogan memorable, some writers use devices such as alliteration (e.g. Jaguar's 'Don't dream it. Drive it.'), pun (Citibank's 'Because the Citi never sleeps'), and rhyme (Pringles' 'Once you pop, you can't stop'). The *main text* portion, produced in smaller font, contains details and descriptions; it explains ideas presented in the headline and other elements of the visual text. Sometimes, subheadings and a bulleted list are used to ease reading. Other elements include the *brand name* and *product name* that aid the viewer in brand and product identification and awareness. A *call to action* is placed typically at the bottom of the visual text. Reinforcing the messages of the headline and supporting text, it strongly solicits the viewer to take some action. Varying with the nature of the visual text, it includes imperative verbs such as 'call', 'write', 'try', 'visit', 'email', 'order', or 'buy'. Some visual texts also invite viewers to scan quick response (QR) codes provided for easy access to the company's website, buy eCoupons, or use coupon codes.

Having looked at the linguistic elements of a visual text, students will then examine the illustrations. The dominant image, which can be referred to as the *main visual display*, captures viewer attention. The *focus of attention* then shifts to the most salient features of the illustration, which can be intentionally elicited with the use of techniques such as color contrasts and lighting. Other visuals include organization *logos* that are often displayed in the lower-right corner that allow the organizations to be readily identified and create an obvious link between the organizations and the products, services, or ideas presented; and *icons* that are universally understood and, thus, allow for faster information processing as compared to that for the corresponding words.

Audience

Audience, adapted from the systems under the interpersonal metafunction by Tan, E and O'Halloran (2012), introduces students to the common strategies used in visual texts to attract

attention. These help students develop an understanding of codes and conventions and their influence on the viewer.

Students learn how an element can be given *prominence*, or made to 'stand out'. This salience, as depicted in Figure 4a, can be realized by choices made in size, sharpness of focus, color contrast, lighting, and foreground techniques.
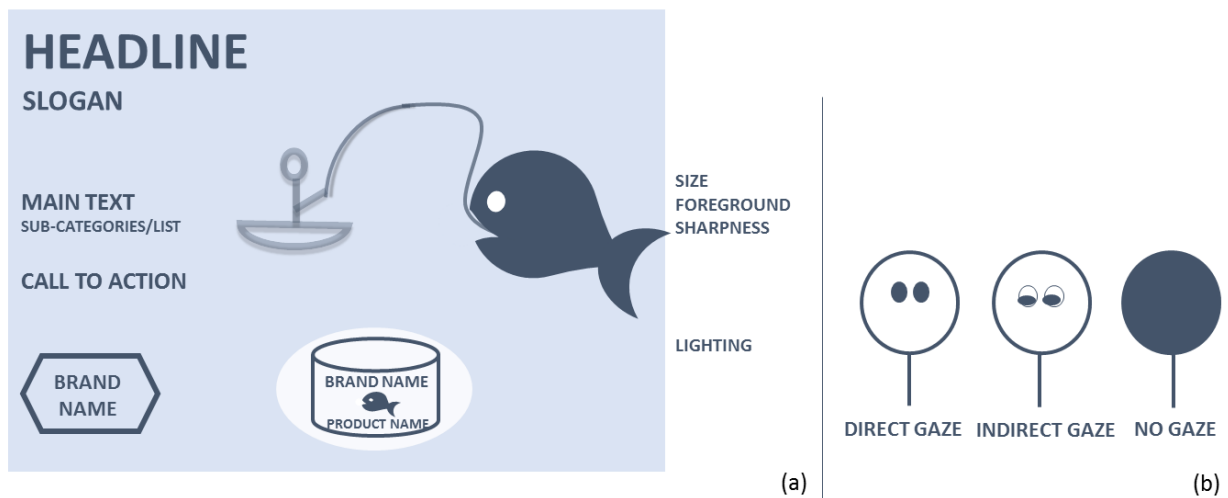

Figure 4. (a) Prominence; (b) Address.

Students learn that the subjects' type of gaze – looking directly at or away from the viewer – changes the way the viewer interacts with them. In Figure 4b, the first subject is looking 'out of the frame'; through this, the subject addresses the viewer and, typically, demands the latter to do something. The demand for connection is reinforced with the placing of viewers at eye level with the subject. This is contrasted with the gaze of the second subject who does not look directly at the viewer – and this establishes the subject as an 'object' offered as an item of information for contemplation.
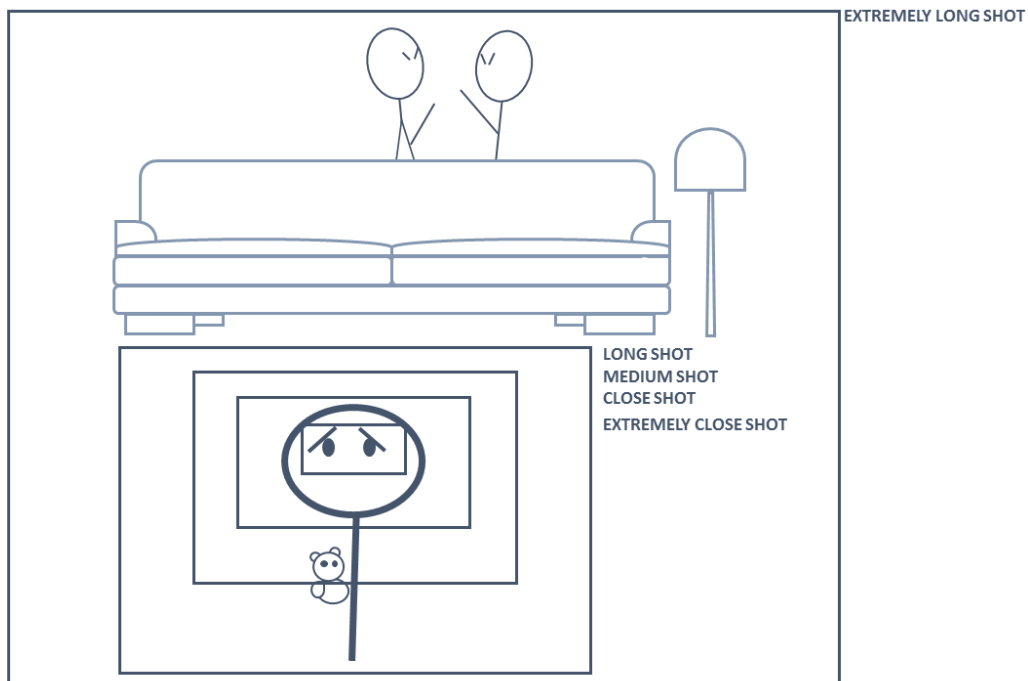
EXTREMELY LONG SHOT

LONG SHOT
MEDIUM SHOT
CLOSE SHOT

EXTREMELY CLOSE SHOT

Figure 5. Shot Types

Shot Types	Description	Effect
Extreme long shot (XLS)	The human subject is very small in relation to the surrounding environment	Location
Long shot (LS)	The entire body of the subject is visible, along with some of the surrounding space.	Context
Medium shot (MS)	The subject is framed from the waist up	Personal
Close-up (CU)	A section of the body is framed e.g. face, torso, hands	Intimacy
Extreme close-up (XCU)	Only a body part is framed e.g. eye, ear, finger	Scrutiny

Table 3. Summary of Shot Types and their Effects

Following the work of scholars such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), students learn that camera distance (see Figure 5 and Table 3), that is, the space between the camera and its subject(s), can change the degree of emotional involvement the audience has with the subjects. In essence,

medium shots and close-ups tend to create a greater sense of intimacy by allowing viewers to focus on the subjects' faces and emotions, while long shots tend to accentuate the environment and the space surrounding the subjects.
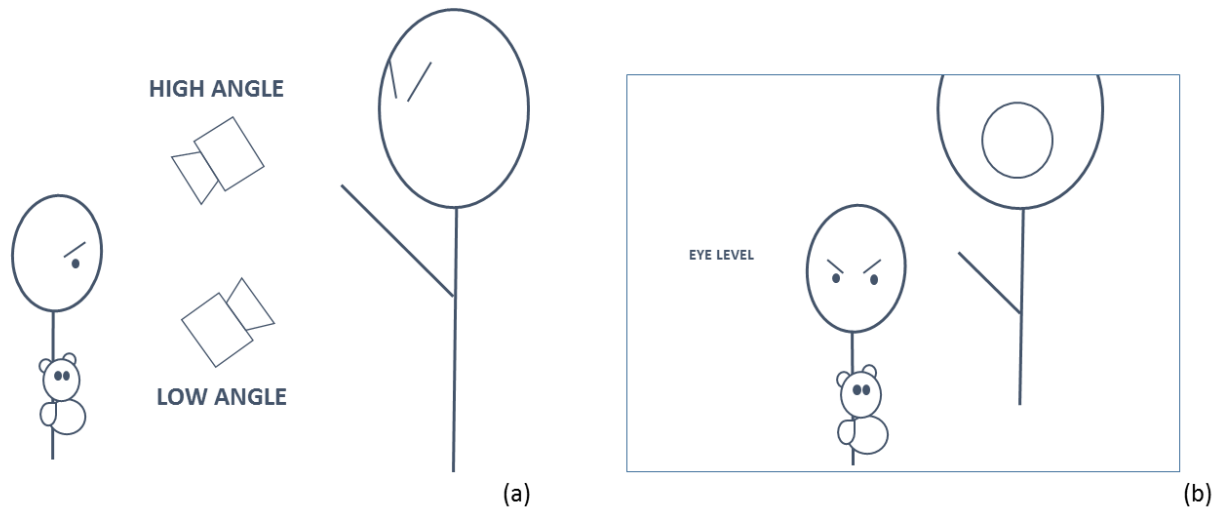

Figure 6. (a) Camera Angle Determine Power Relations; (b) An Eye Level Shot that Encourages Viewers to Look Beyond Conventional Interpretation

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) also posit that generally relationships of *power* are constructed through the use of vertical angles. High-angle shots, where the camera is positioned above the subject or action and aimed downward, tend to minimize the subject (see Figure 6a). The subject is rendered powerless and vulnerable. When the camera is positioned below the subject in low-angle shots and aimed upward, it amplifies the size and volume of the subject, rendering him or her more important, powerful and imposing in relation to the viewer than if the camera angle is at eye level.

It should be noted, however, that more recent studies in multimodal film analysis, such as Bateman and Schmidt (2012) and Bateman and Wildfeuer (2014), have questioned the generalization of the use of vertical angles and power relations. While it must be recognized that there are examples where the opposite is true, it is nonetheless useful for students to know of

the effects that are typical but not always realized by specific choices in camera angles. Through this, students build awareness of conventional interpretations of camera angles. It is, nevertheless, important to note that such conventional interpretations may be overridden by other factors in particular contexts. Take Figure 6b as an example where the camera is placed level with the child's head, and behind him, captures in extreme close up his towering parent's reprimands. A possible interpretation is the child's assertion of power (and non-compliance) and significance in the text – with him turning his back to the figure of authority, seizing the viewer's gaze, and occupying the center of the frame. In this case, this camera angle, predicated on a convention where eye-level framing either implies an equal power relationship between the subject and the viewer or is merely an alignment of the viewer's line of sight to the screen, creates a shot that is meaning-laden. It augments the effect of the power and importance of the subject. This is an example of shots that encourage viewers to look beyond default interpretations of camera positioning.

Message

Building on this understanding, students identify the type of persuasion (Ethos, Logos, and Pathos are the three modes of persuasion) used to appeal to the viewer and discuss the literal and inferential meanings in the visual text (*MESSAGE*).
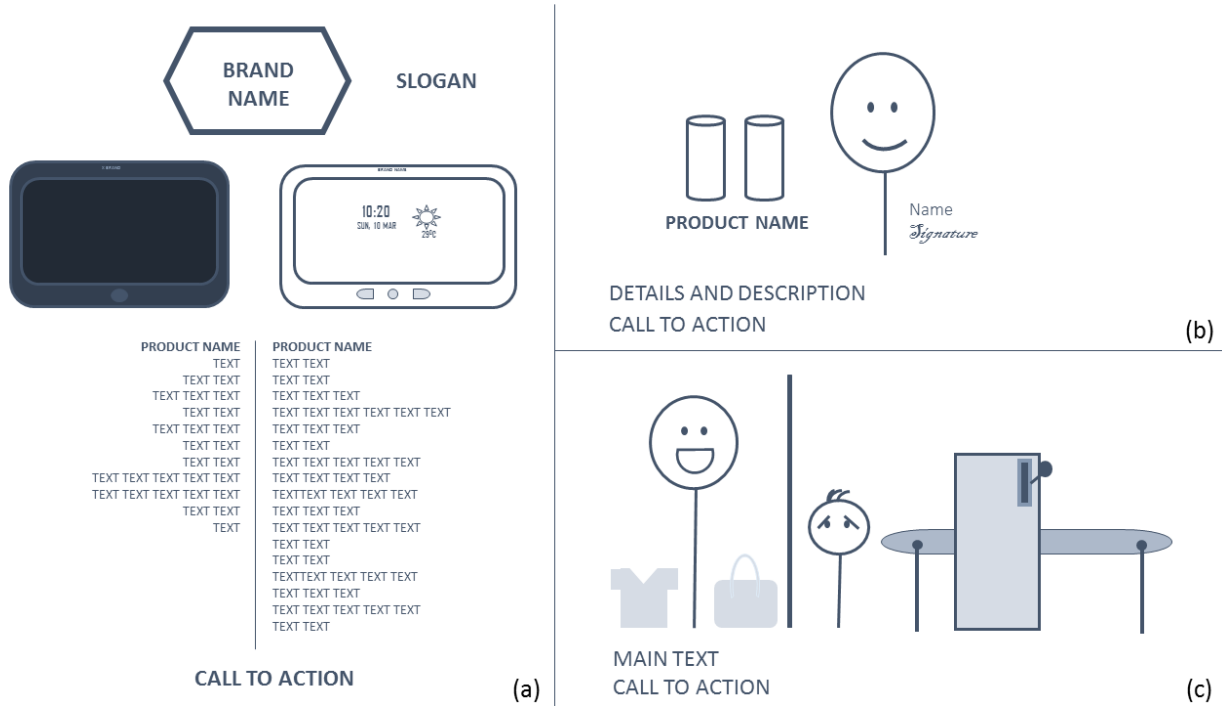
Figure 7. The Nature of the Persuasion Used to Appeal to the Viewer: (a) Appeal to Head (Logos); (b) Appeal to Crown (Ethos); (c) Appeal to Heart (Pathos).

Students learn the three types of persuasive *appeals*: (Head) logos, (Crown) ethos, and (Heart) pathos. For logos, the mode of persuasion takes place on the rational level. 'Ethos' is the appeal to the authority of the subject, and 'Pathos' is the appeal to the emotions of the audience. While there have been scholars, such as Fleming (1996) and Patterson (2010), who oppose the idea of images being a form of argument as these types of persuasions are originally verbal, others, such as Kjeldsen (2015) maintain that visual argumentation based on these types of appeals is relevant. It has also been noted by scholars, such as Bhatia (2005) and Bruthiaux (2005), however, that these types of appeals are seldom discrete and operating in isolation. For instance, Halmari and Virtanen (2005: 5–6) observe that "emotional appeals are also found, as expected, in the language of advertising, combined with ethos (linguistically mediated implications of the "good character" of the persuader) and logos (the appeal to the rationality of the audience)". While recognizing that these types of persuasion can be combined in visual texts, it is, nonetheless,

useful and important for students to know and be able to recognize them in a text. The three types of Aristotelian appeals are translated for teachers' and students' understanding below.

Head (logos, or appeal to reason) demonstrates an effective use of reason and judicious use of evidence such as facts, statistics, comparisons, professional opinions, anecdotes, or observations. Figure 7a is an example of how logos is employed: The juxtaposition of two devices, with one being more salient with its features and specifications to effect persuasion. *Crown* (ethos, or appeal to credibility) demonstrates goodwill toward the audience and the professional knowledge and experience of the subject at hand. Hence, professionals are selected to back up a cause or product; sometimes, companies select celebrities to endorse the product to ride on their authority of fame, glamour, or acclaimed expertise (see Figure 7b for a typical example). *Heart* (pathos, or appeal to emotion) entails the use of visuals and language that will connect with the feelings of the audience. Figure 7c is an example of how pathos is employed. The child, with a heart-rending expression on his face, engenders sympathy in the viewer as the latter realizes that he is a child laborer; the juxtaposition of the child with a delighted consumer raises awareness of the link between consumerism and child labor, and how consumer actions are and can become effective mechanisms of global change. As mentioned earlier, more than one mode of appeal may be employed in some visual texts.

Figure 8. Literal and Inferential Meanings

Students learn that visual texts serve the *interest*(s) of the producer/organization: economics, education, and entertainment. The visual text in Figure 8 clearly serves an economic interest – to sell a service. There are also multimodal texts produced for educational or entertainment purposes. Students also learn that some texts may serve more than one interest; for instance, the use of entertainment/humor in a visual text intended for education increases positive affect, making it more compelling and memorable.

When engaging in meaning making, students also learn that visual texts can contain *literal and inferential meanings.* This is illustrated by Figure 8, where at the literal level, the company organizes children's birthday parties; and at the inferential level, the company appears to intimate that it organizes successful birthday parties filled with organized fun for both children

and adults. With the provision of instructional scaffolding, students learn to draw on their prior knowledge and experience in their inferential interpretation of the text.

Integration

Finally, students examine the relationship between the language and the image in terms of similar (see Figures 9a and 9b) or different meanings made between the two modalities (see Figure 9c) (*INTEGRATION*). By the end, students understand the interaction between form and content in visual texts, and more specifically, how the integration of the linguistic and visual elements can lead to a coherent unified representation and thereby achievement of the intended purpose(s).
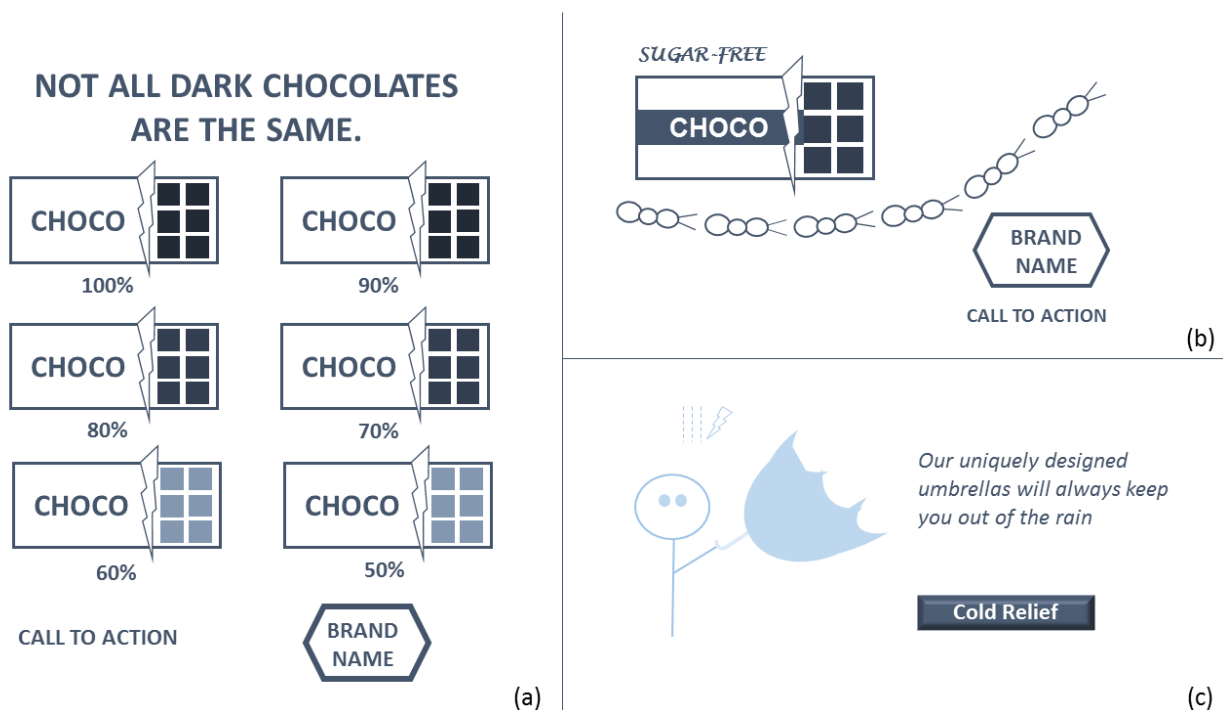

Figure 9. Relationship Between the Language and the Image: (a) Visual and linguistic partnership; (b) Reinforcement of message through the use of irony; (c) Different messages conveyed by visual and the linguistic.

Such a structured approach for the analysis of form and content in multimodal texts helps students get beyond a purely subjective reaction to the text and be critical viewers that examine and synthesize print and visual information to formulate informed interpretations.

Link

Beyond *Form, Audience, Message*, and *Integration*, the following *Link* and *Y* are essentially reminders for the teachers as they teach visual texts. The authors, on several occasions, have ironically confessed that they are also, in part, our attempt to form a sensible acronym that can serve as a mnemonic device for teachers. *Link* refers to the importance for teachers to align what students are learning within the FAMILY Framework with other areas of language learning as well as, possibly, other subjects. For instance, in terms of other areas of language learning, in *Message*, the strategies of identifying literal and inferential meanings are similar for visual texts and for verbal reading skills. Likewise, in terms of extension to other subjects, in *Message*, the types of persuasions are also found in texts students may encounter in science and the humanities as well.

Y

The *Y* in the FAMILY Framework stands for questioning. As discussed earlier, a common approach to teach critical viewing amongst teachers is through questioning. The role of questions is also represented in the FAMILY Framework. However, instead of being the only strategy for teaching visual texts, it is represented as one of the strategies used within the FAMILY Framework. The role of questioning here is to prompt evidence-based interpretations from the students. Through the use of questioning, teachers can guide students in making explicit the students' tacit understanding of the visual texts. Having developed a certain understanding of the genre of visual texts and the common engagement strategies used in these texts, students are now prepared to cite textual evidence to support their responses to the text. While questioning is still used as a strategy, the scaffolds provided in the FAMILY framework contrasts with the previous approach where students can only make intuitive responses based on their personal experiences to the

questions asked. As the teacher asks questions to elicit students' responses to the text, students are now equipped with the vocabulary and the knowledge, through the scaffolds provided, to interpret the text and defend their views with textual evidence.

3.3. Level 3: Critical Viewing – Questioning the Text

It is evident that Level 2 'Comprehending the Text' requires a slightly higher level of multimodal text processing than Level 1. It promotes critical thinking through equipping students with a meta-language to describe the text as well as the strategies and skills essential to unpacking the layers of meaning in the text. Level 3 'Questioning the Text' is designed to support, challenge, and encourage students to further develop their critical thinking and reasoning skills. It requires the highest level of processing. At this level, viewers evaluate the effectiveness of the different semiotic resources deployed to fulfill certain purposes. In other words, students critique the multimodal text in terms of content, design, and cohesion. The teacher can pose questions such as:

- Do the text and image(s) converge to engender powerful, persuasive messages? Why?
- What can be done to make the piece work (even) more effectively for the intended audience? Why?

These questions can be broken down further to scaffold students' reasoning processes: Is the message clear? How persuasive or informative is the text? Do the language and image(s) work together to effectively convey the message(s)? Are there images or words that should be removed, added, or modified? These are some example questions, but teachers are not limited to them. For instance, for a text that uses pathos, an appeal to emotion, the teacher may ask: Does the text create that emotional connection with the viewer effectively? Each of these questions should be followed by the question 'why' to prompt thoughtful, well-reasoned arguments. Such questions can stimulate students to action, to do something with the

information acquired or perspectives developed; and teachers can provide guidance pertaining to the types of products that can demonstrate deep understanding. Student responses can be written or take some other creative forms. Students may, individually or collectively, modify a multimodal text or compose one situated within the original or an entirely new context and articulate how their texts deploy and inter-relate the resources of language and image (and other semiotic modes) to affect persuasion. Teachers can engage students in discussions on expected proficiency and indicators of quality and provide ongoing formative feedback – peer feedback may also be employed – to help students improve their work.

4. Conclusion

There remains a perennial need for teaching and learning in the classroom to be informed by the best of research understandings. Applications of research into the classroom allow for a certain utility for the theories and frameworks developed as well as a certain rigor in teaching and learning. As such, translational research plays a vital role in bridging empirical and theoretical developments with the needs of the classroom.

As the new digital world demands new literacies from our students, our curriculum needs to be continuously updated to ensure that the knowledge and competencies our students develop remain relevant. Teachers also need to expand their professional repertoire, to develop strategies in teaching new areas of knowledge, as well as to foster new areas of competencies in their students. As discussed in this chapter, our students need to develop multimodal literacy – to understand and evaluate visual texts critically. This is a new area of knowledge that requires teachers to draw on the latest developments in multimodality research and adapt them for the learning needs of their students.

The Systemic Approach for the teaching of visual texts has been iteratively refined as it was used in secondary schools in Singapore over the last few years. Most teachers have used the Systemic

Approach in the teaching of students at the lower secondary school level. The Systemic Approach can help teachers facilitate the development of these learning outcomes, including critical thinking. In addition, through authentic learning experiences situated in real-life contexts, students become more discerning viewers of multimodal texts – thus acquiring multimodal literacy.

Future development of the Systemic Approach involves adapting the FAMILY Framework to teach students at the primary school level. This involves further simplifying the language used and making the framework accessible for younger students. More importantly, lesson resources and exemplars will be developed to illustrate how the Systemic Approach can be meaningfully applied in the classroom. Work has also begun recently in extending the Systemic Approach for the teaching of film texts. A FAMILY Framework for the teaching film texts, incorporating both the visual and aural modes, is being developed and trialed in a secondary school in Singapore. This builds on and extends from the work of the present Systemic Approach and FAMILY framework. When completed, it is envisioned that both frameworks will be complementary and productive as scaffolds in developing multimodal literacy for primary and secondary school students.

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