

## Book Review

**Archer, A. and Breuer, E. O.** *Multimodality in Higher Education*. Studies in Writing Series, Vol. 33. Leiden, Boston: BRILL, 258pp. ISBN: 978-9-00-43120-50

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This volume reflects on writing practices and writing pedagogies in higher educational contexts from a multimodal perspective. In the introductory chapter the editors depart from the definition of multimodality as “a field of application rather than a theory” (Bezemer and Jewitt 2010, p. 180). In this sense, writing has always been a multimodal practice since it includes visual, multimedia, and other computer technologies. The book approaches the forms of academic writing that have been catalogued as academic genres and known to an academic discourse community that has previous knowledge about the genre and its conventions. Texts in the book are analysed far beyond their linguistic traits as models of different and discursive pragmatic patterns. Issues regarding challenges for teaching writing are an asset along the book chapters. By teaching writing, lecturers have to provide students with access to academic and disciplinary discourses without forgetting the students’ social background. In other words, they have to help students create their own academic identities. Multimodal composition can aid this purpose by changing communication landscapes in terms of spaces and texts. New academic identities are revisited in the book departing from multimodal texts (visual texts, written texts that use images, written texts that discuss visuals, etc.). The goal is to delve into the dominant role of each mode, or the combination of them, to make meaning.

Most authors in the book depart from Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (1975, 2003) and its three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual, and accommodate the approach to multimodal analysis through Social Semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001). In general terms, the editors claim that the contents of the book are an attempt to answer the question: “What are the characteristics of multimodal academic argument?” (p. 6). In this sense, the notion of academic multimodal argument becomes a central pedagogical issue in the volume, which claims being included in university writing curriculum design. The identification and creation of a multimodal academic argument will enable university students to understand the notion of semiotic choice according to criteria, context, and design.

The editors have divided the eleven-chapter collection into three main sections with a specific theme explored in each of them:

Part 1: Multimodality in Academia (Chapters 1–4)

Part 2: Multimodality in Text Composition (Chapters 5–8)

Part 3: Multimodality across domains (Chapters 9–11)

The first chapter in Part 1 is in fact an interview with Gunther Kress, an international leading researcher in fields such as social semiotics, discourse analysis, and multimodality among others. His work is, in fact, referenced in many chapters of this volume. Kress talks about four challenges that have to be currently faced in multimodal higher education, the four of them enclosed in a single idea and he uses a German word to express the notion of change or transition – “Umbruch” (p. 21). He goes on to state that Higher Education needs to reconsider the notion of knowledge; the “social” is changing and the academic institutions are forced into a wider world where the cultural differences from current international researchers are altering the world view on research. Chapter 2 analyses the genre of lecture from a historical perspective. It shows the lecture as a multimodal evolving genre. The author claims that “lectures are far from dead: They are a highly malleable and flexible genre.” (p. 33). Lectures are presented as a form of multimodal teaching that interplay between different modes (written, spoken, gaze, and image). The next chapter (Chapter 3) approaches the research monograph from a multimodal perspective. The research monograph, although dominated by written language, is usually interrupted by figures, tables, and other graphic elements. Text-flow being the dominant semiotic mode in the research monograph, the author analyses two other additional concepts in the chapter:

medium and genre. These set of concepts work as multimodal artefacts within the Genre and Multimodality model (GeM, Bateman 2008). The author analyses the research monograph as departing from the GeM model and takes into consideration, aspects such as, cohesion and contextualisation of knowledge. Part 1 closes with a discussion about the realisation of academic argument through the non-verbal (Chapter 4). The author claims that regardless of some research stating that academic argument can be realised with the use of the visual, the truth is that the visual elements have proven to have some limitations compared to linguistic text. The chapter concludes that visual propositions always depend on text, whether spoken or written, to avoid ambiguity.

Part 2 of the book focuses on the conjunction of modes in text composition. Chapter 5 revisits the concept of multimodal academic argument already discussed in the previous chapter. The author analyses the realisation of multimodal academic argument in first-year college students' texts from a History and Theory of Architecture module. As a final point, the chapter urges the need for pedagogy in the teaching of multimodal writing. The next chapter (Chapter 6) presents an interesting discussion about how the previous knowledge on antecedent genres and intrinsic popular culture can aid students in their production of multimodal assignments in college. The author reflects on the interpersonal relations generated by the new upcoming digital media. The following Chapter 7 departs from the idea that every text is multimodal and discusses six art and design students' writing projects, which combine text and imagery. For these multimodal texts to be successful and accepted, balance between freedom and restriction as well as between formality and innovation seems to be paramount. The second part of the volume closes with Chapter 8 by approaching the aspect of one's voice in academic writing. It emphasises the need to enhance the use of the *authorial self*, that is "the writer's sense of authority or authorial presence in the text" (Clark and Ivanič's 1997, p. 137) as opposed to the *discoursal self*, the latter is usually more prominent in tertiary students' essays. The author claims that the inclusion of the Image Theatre technique in writing courses can lead to a balance between students' authorial and discoursal selves in academic writing.

Part 3 of the volume opens with an analysis of the symbiotic relationships between text and image and how they work in undergraduate scientific textbooks in the US. Along with previous chapters in this volume, Chapter 9 advances the effectiveness of including explicit instruction about the language of intersemiosis in writing and reading academic courses. Along with other chapters in the volume, Chapter 10 uses Halliday's (1975) Systemic Functional Linguistics to deeply analyse the experiential and logical meanings in postgraduate international students' management accounting texts. Issues regarding English as an additional language and cultural diversity in higher education are singular traits of the study. Following the Integrative Multisemiotic Model (Lim 2004), the last chapter in the book (Chapter 11) examines the particular functions of the written components in a first-year Civil Engineering drawing class at university. The author concludes that the written elements in Civil Engineering drawings highly represent contextual meaning. The written and pictorial modes are complementary to be potentially meaning-making.

All in all, the book includes valuable contributions to multimodality in tertiary education and attempts to ease the differences between conventional academic practices and the rapid, constant changes of the modern society. The volume serves as an updated reference for multimodality in different spaces, varied modes, and diverse texts within disciplinary variations in higher education.

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