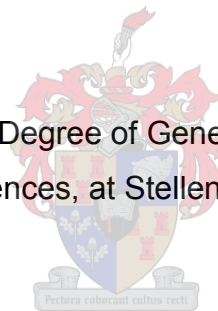


**Multisemiotic resources in student assessment: A case study of one module at  
Stellenbosch University**

by

Tamzin du Toit

Thesis presented for the Masters Degree of General Linguistics in the Faculty of Arts  
and Social Sciences, at Stellenbosch University



Supervisor: Dr Marcelyn Oostendorp

Co-supervisor: Ms Lauren Onraët

April 2014

## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Tamzin du Toit

November 2013

## Abstract

This study investigates multimodal assessment in the South African higher education context. The communication landscape of students is becoming increasingly multimodal, resulting in a shift away from higher education institutions' preferred mode (that is, the written mode). This is partly as a result of the digital era in which we live, as the verbal, visual and audio modes co-exist to make meaning, thereby creating new forms of text (Iedema 2003: 33). Although there is a common acceptance that the communication landscape has changed, higher education institutions still seem to consider the written text and written communication as the most dominant form of meaning-making (Lea 2004: 743). Thus, there is a disparity between the types of literacies with which students arrive at university, and the types of literacies that they are expected to use in university. I argue that this disparity is problematic for education, and maintain that pedagogies be transformed in order to resolve this issue. In this way, students will be able to "benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life" (Cazden et al. 1996: 60).

Data for this research includes assignments that were produced by second-year students of *Applied English Language Studies*, a subject offered by the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University. These assignments include a multimodal component as well as a formal, written component. Analysis of their assignments revealed that students show great dexterity in their creations of multimodal texts. Apart from their design skills, it was revealed that students have knowledge of a wide variety of social discourses, which is currently mostly ignored in the education context. Thus, I propose that this knowledge, along with the digital and visual design skills with which students arrive at university, be valorised and utilised as an entry point for the teaching of linguistic literacy. This proposal is partly supported by schema theory, a cognitive theory of learning, which entails that existing knowledge is used as a platform on which to build new knowledge.

## Opsomming

Hierdie studie ondersoek multimodale assessering in die Suid-Afrikaanse hoër onderwys konteks. Die kommunikasie landskap van studente word al hoe meer multimodaal wat 'n skuif weg van die voorgekeurde modaliteit (die geskrewe) in hoër onderwys teweegbring. Dit is gedeeltelik a.g.v. die digitale era waarin ons leef waarin die verbale, visuele en klank modaliteite saam gebruik word om betekenis te skep; dus word nuwe vorme van teks geskep (Iedema 2003: 33). Alhoewel daar algemeen aanvaar word dat die kommunikasie landskap verander het, beskou hoër onderwys instansies nog steeds die geskrewe teks en geskrewe kommunikasie as die dominante vorm van betekenis skepping (Lea 2004: 743). Daar is dus 'n gaping tussen die tipes geletterheid waarmee studente by die universiteit opdaag en watter daar van hulle verwag word om te gebruik in die universiteit. Ek voer aan dat hierdie gaping problematies is vir opvoedkunde en stel voor dat pedagogie verander moet word om dit aan te spreek. Op hierdie manier kan studente voordeel trek op maniere wat hul toelaat om ten volle deel te neem aan publieke, gemeenskaplike en ekonomiese lewe (Cazden et al. 1996: 60).

Data vir hierdie navorsing sluit opdragte in wat deur tweede jaar *Applied English Language Studies* ('n vak wat deur die Departement Algemene Taalwetenskap by Stellenbosch Universiteit aangebied word) studente uitgevoer is. Die opdragte sluit 'n multimodale element sowel as 'n formele geskrewe element in. Analise van die opdragte wys dat studente vaardighede het in die produksie van multimodale tekste. Behalwe die produksie vaardighede wys die analise ook dat hierdie studente kennis het van 'n wye reeks sosiale diskoerse wat op die oomblik meestal geïgnoreer word in die opvoedkundige konteks. Ek voer dus aan dat hierdie kennis sowel as die digitale- en visuele produksie vaardighede waarmee studente by die universiteit opdaag, gevalideer en gebruik word as ingangspoort vir die aanleer van talige geletterheid. Deels word die voorstel deur skema teorie ondersteun, 'n teorie wat in kognitiewe benaderinge tot leer ontwikkel het en wat voorstel dat bestaande kennis gebruik kan word as 'n platform om nuwe kennis te bou.

## Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks to my wonderful supervisor, Dr Marcelyn Oostendorp, as well as my co-supervisor, Lauren Onraët, for all the assistance and support that they have offered me throughout the year.

Thank you to Thérèse Groenewald for assisting with the handing out of consent forms, to Genaro Anthony Delponte for assisting with the hefty amount of scanning, and to Tyron Evans for the moral support and for putting up with my many late nights of working.

To all the AELS 278 students of 2012 and 2013 who gave me permission to use their assignments in my thesis - thank you so much!

I would also like to thank Stellenbosch University and the National Research Foundation<sup>1</sup> for their financial support, without which the research conducted in this thesis would not have been possible. My thanks also go to the Stellenbosch University Fund for Innovation in Teaching and Learning that funded the teaching intervention on which this study was based.

---

<sup>1</sup> Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

## Table of Contents

Declaration .....	i
Abstract .....	ii
Opsomming .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of figures .....	vi
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 Problem statement .....	1
1.3 Research questions .....	2
1.4 Research aims .....	2
1.5 Theoretical point of departure .....	3
1.6 Research design .....	3
1.6.1 Data collection methods .....	3
1.6.2 Data analysis .....	4
1.7 Chapter outline .....	4
<b>Chapter 2: Multimodality and Multimodal Analysis</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	7
2.2 The development of multimodality .....	7
2.2.1 The genesis of the theoretical study of multimodality .....	7
2.2.2 Key concepts that evolved from multimodality as a theory .....	8
2.3 Approaches to multimodal analysis .....	10

2.3.1 Social semiotic multimodal analysis .....	10
2.3.2 Multimodal discourse analysis.....	11
2.3.3 Multimodal interactional analysis.....	12
2.4 Detailed discussion of multimodal analysis informed by social semiotics.....	13
2.5 Criticisms and shortcomings of multimodal analysis .....	16
2.6 Multimodal analysis in practice.....	18
2.6.1 Multimodality of children’s drawings .....	18
2.6.2 Multimodality in commercial material.....	22
2.6.3 Multimodality in the pedagogical context.....	23
2.7 Conclusion .....	27
<b>Chapter 3: Multiliteracies and Higher Education.....</b>	<b>29</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	29
3.2 The traditional view of literacy .....	29
3.3 Problems with “old literacies” .....	31
3.4 Multiliteracies and new literacies .....	33
3.4.1 Recommendations for multiliteracies.....	35
3.4.2 Multiliteracies in the primary and secondary educational context.....	39
3.4.3 Multiliteracies in higher education contexts .....	42
3.5 Digital literacies .....	47
3.5.1 Critiques of digital literacies.....	51
3.6 The “moral panic” and “old” new literacies .....	52
3.7 Conclusion .....	53

<b>Chapter 4: Research Methodology</b> .....	55
4.1 Introduction .....	55
4.2 Research site and context.....	55
4.3 Data and research instruments .....	57
4.4 Data selection and analysis.....	59
4.5 Limitations .....	60
4.6 Conclusion .....	61
<b>Chapter 5: Multimodal Analysis of Students' Assignments</b> .....	62
5.1 Introduction .....	62
5.2 Point of departure.....	62
5.3 General trends found in students' assignments .....	63
5.4 Description of the assignments selected for analysis.....	66
5.5 Printed advertisements.....	68
5.5.1 The affordance of layout.....	68
5.5.2 The affordance of colour .....	72
5.6 Multimedia advertisements.....	74
5.6.1 The affordance of colour .....	74
5.6.2 The affordance of sound .....	78
5.6.3 The affordance of movement.....	80
5.7 The website .....	82
5.7.1 Hyperlinks .....	82
5.8 The audio clip.....	83
5.8.1 The affordance of sound .....	83



5.9 Limitations of the modes and materials .....	84
5.10 Exploitation of social discourses.....	86
5.11 Conclusion .....	97
<b>Chapter 6: Multiliteracies: Learning and Assessment in Higher Education .....</b>	<b>98</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	99
6.2 General findings .....	99
6.3 Position of multiliteracies within higher education .....	100
6.4 Implications of multimodal pedagogies for higher education .....	101
6.4.1 The use of multimodal skills .....	101
6.4.2 Written academic discourses.....	103
6.4.3 Using non-linguistic modes as an entry point into academic discourses .....	105
6.5 Implications for multiliteracies assessment .....	107
6.5.1 Multimodal designs as schemata for linguistic learning.....	108
6.6 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further studies .....	110
<b>References .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Appendix B .....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Appendix C .....</b>	<b>123</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Plastic badges included in an advertisement .....	64
Figure 2: Babies' socks included in an advertisement.....	65
Figure 3: Using layout to portray conflicting issues .....	69
Figure 4: Using layout for comparison.....	70
Figure 5: Using framing to separate entities in order to portray a message .....	71
Figure 6: Using colour as a semiotic resource .....	73
Figure 7: Absence of colour to portray a particular genre.....	75
Figure 8: Transition from black and white to colour for contrastive effect.....	76
Figure 9: Importance of colour expressed linguistically .....	76
Figure 10: Bright, vivid colours to portray reality .....	77
Figure 11: Decreased saturation levels to portray a dream-like state.....	77
Figure 12: Portraying movement through the use of image stills.....	80
Figure 13: Portraying an action through the use of image stills.....	80
Figure 14: Actions that portray relationships .....	81
Figure 15: Actions that portray emotions.....	81
Figure 16: Gesture to indicate a mood .....	82
Figure 17: Utilising popular culture .....	87
Figure 18: Making reference to popular movies .....	88
Figure 19: Making reference to a popular movie, song and internet meme.....	89
Figure 20: Utilising the written mode and mode of action to make reference to a popular movie.....	90
Figure 21: Using bodily movements as a reference to a well-known brand.....	90

Figure 22: Community discourse realised on the lexical level .....	92
Figure 23: Community discourse realised on the lexical level .....	92
Figure 24: Community discourse realised on the visual level .....	93
Figure 25: Using small print as an advertising technique .....	93
Figure 26: Including the logo of the organisation.....	94
Figure 27: Including the logo of the organisation.....	95
Figure 28: Utilising logos for social networking sites (Twitter & Facebook) .....	95
Figure 29: Utilising a logo for a social networking site (Facebook).....	95
Figure 30: Utilising testimonials.....	96

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

The communication landscape is becoming increasingly multimodal, which is partly as a result of the digital era in which we live. The verbal, visual and audio modes co-exist to make meaning, thereby creating new forms of text (Iedema 2003: 33). Although there is a common acceptance that the communication landscape has changed, higher education institutions still seem to consider written text and written communication as the most dominant form of meaning-making (Lea 2004). This is surprising considering that studies from the early 1990s have suggested a multimodal approach to pedagogy yet two decades later, not much has changed. This study will therefore attempt to investigate the meaning-making potential of multimodal assessment methods in higher education.

Specifically, the study is interested in investigating multimodal assessment in the South African higher education context. This context is characterised by multilingualism as well as diversity. However, most of the higher education institutions use English as the main medium of instruction and expect students to deliver assignments in standard, academic English. Stellenbosch University, where this study was conducted, is an officially bilingual university, integrating Afrikaans and English in various ways in teaching and learning. However, the course which provides the data for this study is an English-language module, so English only is used as the language of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the student body includes students who do not have English as their first language (L1). This study is part of a larger project that uses multimodality as a way of integrating diversity into the teaching and learning curriculum. Ultimately, the study will draw attention to ways in which higher education can be more inclusive and valorise the diverse skills and knowledge with which students enter university.

### **1.2 Problem statement**

The South African higher educational context is characterised by diversity. Higher educational institutions in South Africa also have to deal with issues and tensions

surrounding transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. Increasingly larger numbers of first-generation students enter the higher educational context (Archer 2006). Furthermore, students who do not have English as a first language enter the higher educational sector. Even with this increased diversity, higher educational assessment still largely depends on assessing students on their ability to write academic essays in Standard English and in standard academic registers. Considering the increasing use of multimodal meaning-making resources by students (such as Facebook, Twitter, 9gag and Reddit), and the diverse range of linguistic repertoires that these students possess, there is a mismatch between the resources with which students enter higher education and the kinds of products (in the form of academic essays) that they are required to produce (Lillis and Turner 2001). This study investigates a module at a university that valorises the multimodal resources and diverse range of repertoires that students have by allowing choices in the type of assessment given to them.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The assignments produced by the students will be investigated in order to answer the following research questions:

- i. To what extent do modes, other than written language, feature in student assessment when they are given the choice of integrating other semiotic modes?
- ii. For which meaning-making potential do students use modes other than written academic language in their assessment?

### **1.4 Research aims**

The research aims for this study are twofold, namely:

- i. To investigate the extent to which students use modes, other than written language, in assessment when given the option to do so, and
- ii. To investigate the meaning-making potential offered by the different modes that students use.

## **1.5 Theoretical point of departure**

In this thesis, communication will be viewed as essentially multimodal (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996), and literacy as socially-situated, multiple and diverse (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee, Kalantzis, Kress, Luke, Luke, Michaels and Nakata 1996: 63). Specifically, this thesis will take the view that communication surpasses the mere use of language, to include a number of semiotic resources that collaborate in bringing a message across or in making meaning (Jewitt 2009: 14).

The focus on multimodality has become increasingly prevalent which can be partly attributed to the evolution of the digital era. Computers have provided a platform through which information can be displayed and meaning can be made concurrently in a number of modes, such as written text, moving or still images, and sound (Iedema 2003: 38). The multimodal approach that will be drawn upon in this thesis originates within the theory of social semiotics, which regards meaning to be socially-situated and culturally-dependent. In other words, the type of modes that are selected to make meaning and the ways in which these modes are understood depends upon the context in which communication takes place.

In the same way, literacy is also viewed as socially-situated. Literacy is believed to be experienced differently by diverse groups of people, depending on how they were exposed to literacy processes such as reading and writing (Street 2005: 418). Thus, engagement in literacy practices is always considered a social enactment (Street 2005: 418). Additionally, literacy is not viewed as a single, neutral entity, but as multiple and diverse, where a number of literacies exist and are constantly changing as society changes (Street 2005: 418; Barton 1994: 52). This notion of literacy is referred to as “multiliteracies” and encourages the utilisation of a variety of modes and language codes (Cazden et al. 1996).

## **1.6 Research design**

### **1.6.1 Data collection methods**

My data consists of assignments from second-year students in the Applied English Language Studies (AELS) classes of 2012 and 2013. Consent forms were distributed

to the students in order to obtain permission to use their assignments in my thesis (see Appendix C for an example of a consent form). These assignments include an advertisement that the students were required to create, as well as a written essay in which they explained their advertisement design in light of their target audience. The advertisements could be realised by any medium, provided that students utilise visuals or other paralinguistic features.

### **1.6.2 Data analysis**

These advertisements will be analysed using multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) in order to determine the extent to which modes other than written language feature and to determine the potentials and limitations of these particular modes. The assignments will be analysed so as to understand the students' motivation behind selecting particular semiotic resources over others, as well as to determine whether there is a discrepancy between their academic writing skills and their visual literacy skills. Through these analyses, I endeavour to establish whether there is a need for a change in the higher education pedagogic system and, if there is indeed a need, to propose a potential pedagogic design with the objective of eliminating possible literacy issues that may be found.

### **1.7 Chapter outline**

Following this chapter, chapter two will introduce and explicate the theory of multimodality. I will begin by presenting the development of the theory as well as key concepts that will form the groundwork for most of the multimodal analysis to follow. A brief introduction will be given on the three central approaches to multimodal analysis, namely social semiotic multimodal analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and multimodal interactional analysis. This will be followed by a more elaborate description of the approach that I will be using for my own analysis, along with some of its critiques. Finally, previous studies which have used this theory will be illustrated.

Chapter three will explore the evolution of literacy, starting from the traditional understanding of literacy which focuses on reading and writing alone and where literacy is viewed as a neutral entity that one needs to acquire in order to become

literate, to a more social view of literacy where context plays an important role in literacy acquisition. I will then move on to the relatively recent concept of 'multiliteracies', where it is acknowledged that more than one type of literacy exists and that literacy involves more than just reading and writing. A multiliteracies approach encourages the utilisation of a variety of modes as well as a variety of language codes, which will be further explained in this chapter.

Certain problems surrounding the verbal mode of pedagogic assessment are considered in order to argue for a shift in assessment methods. Multiliteracies research will be looked at firstly from a primary- and secondary-schooling perspective and then from a higher-education perspective, the latter being my point of interest. An important aspect of multiliteracies research is the acknowledgement of how new technologies have brought about a multifarious range of new text types which many researchers argue should be employed in the pedagogic arena. These new text types are often referred to as "digital literacies" and will be investigated in this chapter, along with some of the critiques of these new literacies that have emerged. Finally, this chapter will explore the common concerns surrounding changes in literacy customs, which have been described as a "moral panic".

Chapter four will provide an overview of the research methods that I have used to collect the data, as well as an explication of how I will analyse the data. My research takes place within the context of an AELS second-year course offered by the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University. The data used for my study comprises advertisements produced by the second-year students of this course as well as their written essays that accompanied and reflected on these advertisements. The data will be qualitatively analysed using multimodal analysis approaches that developed from Halliday's (1978) social semiotics, and within the framework of multiliteracies (Cazden et al. 1996). A full explication of this information will be provided in this chapter. The chapter will conclude with limitations of the study, followed by possible contributions that the outcomes of my research could make to higher education and the field of Linguistics as a whole.

In chapter five, I will analyse the advertisements that the students created for their assignment. Although the main focus is on the advertisement, I will also make



reference to the written essay that accompanied the advertisement because many of the strategies used by students only become apparent when reading the essay. I will begin by introducing the themes and patterns that were evident in the assignments, including the types of modes that the students chose for the presentation of their advertisement as well as the materiality by which these modes were realised. I will then explore the potentials (or affordances) and limitations of these modes and materials. Finally, I will investigate the various social discourses that the students drew upon in their advertisements.

In the final chapter, I will discuss the findings from chapter five with regard to the implications for general and academic literacy. More specifically, I will investigate the implications that these findings have for assessment practices in higher education. I will then present some of the limitations of a multimodal approach to pedagogy and conclude with recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Multimodality and Multimodal Analysis**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will introduce and explicate the theory of multimodality. I will begin by presenting the development of the theory as well as key concepts that will form the groundwork for most of the multimodal analysis to follow. A brief introduction will be given on the three central approaches to multimodal analysis, namely social semiotic multimodal analysis, multimodal discourse analysis and multimodal interactional analysis. This will be followed by a more elaborate description of the approach that I will be using for my own analysis, along with some of its critiques. Finally, previous studies which have used this theory will be illustrated.

### **2.2 The development of multimodality**

#### **2.2.1 The genesis of the theoretical study of multimodality**

Multimodality has its roots in “social semiotics”, a term introduced by Halliday (1978: 39), who maintained that language and society are interrelated and that language is a “meaning potential” which develops according to the needs of a society at a particular time. Halliday termed this theoretical framework “social systemic functional grammar”, where language is viewed as a system of interrelated meaning-making elements that achieve social functions and is realised through certain “metafunctions”<sup>2</sup> or meanings (Jewitt 2009: 24). Halliday identifies three meanings, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual (Jewitt 2009: 24). Ideational meaning refers to people’s “experience of the world” and the way they construct meaning or organise their meaning-making elements accordingly. Interpersonal meaning is that which is achieved through the relationships between the sender and receiver, i.e. the message being conveyed between the two. Textual meaning brings the ideational and interpersonal meanings together in the form of a coherent text.

Social semiotics was later expanded to include not only language but all types of signs that may be used for communicative purposes. This movement, led by Hodge

---

<sup>2</sup> The functions that all languages aim to serve

and Kress (1988, 1998), as well as Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), marks the advent of the theoretical study of multimodality. Multimodality is an approach that perceives communication as surpassing the mere use of language in that a number of semiotic resources play a role in bringing a message across or in making meaning (Jewitt 2009: 14). In other words, the “multimodal communicational landscape” is made up of a number of different semiotic resources, each with its own function (Jewitt 2009: 2). The focus on multimodality has become increasingly prevalent over the years. This is as a result of various social changes, such as globalisation, as well as a shift in the understanding of who is eligible to produce knowledge - from the elite groups alone to the general public (Jewitt 2009: 3). The focus on multimodality can also be partly attributed to the evolution of the digital era. Computers have provided a platform through which information can be displayed and meaning can be made concurrently in a number of modes. Examples of this include written text, moving or still images and sound (Iedema 2003: 38).

### **2.2.2 Key concepts that evolved from multimodality as a theory**

There are a number of concepts that are central to the theory of multimodality, regardless of the specific approach used to analyse multimodal discourses. It is important to know these concepts in order to be able to analyse multimodal texts. Accordingly, I will define and illustrate some of the concepts that will form the foundation for the analysis to follow, namely ‘modal affordances’ or ‘meaning potentials’, ‘materiality’, ‘mode’, and ‘intersemiotic relationships’ or ‘intermodal relationships’.

Although different semiotic resources can perform the same function, certain resources are better suited for particular functions than others. This phenomenon can be explained in terms of “modal affordances” or “meaning potentials”. A modal affordance, as defined by Kress, is the potential of a mode to easily make meaning (Jewitt 2009: 24). For example, while written text may be the best mode in which to present the laws of a country, this same mode would not be the best semiotic resource to utilise for publicising a missing person, as the visual mode (in the form of, for example, a photograph), would communicate more easily and accurately the

message that would achieve the intended result i.e. people's ability to identify the missing person.

The affordance or meaning potential of a mode "is shaped by how a mode has been used, what it has been repeatedly used to mean and do, and the social conventions that inform its use in context" (Jewitt 2009: 24). This is also culture-specific. Accordingly, even though the materiality of a mode may manifest a number of potentials, it does not necessitate that all cultures will view these as modal affordances (Kress 2009: 56). The materiality of a mode is simply the materials used in making meaning with a particular mode. For example, sound is used in the spoken mode and, even though sound has a number of meaning potentials, it may not be considered a modal affordance in all cultures.

It is important to note that the resources that are used in making meaning are socially and historically constructed. Furthermore, these resources only become a "mode" when a community has a shared agreement about the use of particular resources for making meaning (Jewitt 2009: 15). This is apparent in Bezemer and Kress's description of a "mode" which is defined as "a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning" (2008: 6). Kress (2010: 19) highlights that communication and society are interrelated in the sense that societal changes play a vital role in shaping communication, but that communication also initiates changes in society. Thus, power transformations in societies can cause changes in communication, as can be observed from past incidences such as colonisation, where the oppressed eventually take on the communication norms of the oppressor. However, communication can also initiate changes in society because individuals can choose how they would like to make meaning, or communicate, through their choice and arrangement of modes which, in turn, affect society as a whole.

Relating to this last point, it can be said that the way in which modes interact is also an important aspect of meaning-making (Jewitt 2009: 15). Intersemiotic- or intermodal relationships are concepts that are used to explain this phenomenon. Within the framework of multimodality, semiotic resources, or modes, work together to make meaning, where "each mode is [...] partial in relation to the whole of the meaning" (Jewitt 2009: 25). Thus, multimodality is concerned with each individual

mode's function as well as the interaction between these different modes in making meaning (Jewitt 2009: 25). Sometimes modes are in tension with each other, while at other times they are in agreement. This relationship between modes plays a vital role in communicating meaning as it portrays to the reader what the creator of the text is trying to communicate (Jewitt 2009: 26). For example, the image that a text producer chooses to use alongside the written text creates meaning in itself, as it could portray his/her stance towards a particular issue. To illustrate this, a written piece about South African President Jacob Zuma would portray a completely different message depending on whether it appeared alongside a picture of him helping the poor, or if it appeared alongside a picture of him sleeping in a meeting.

### **2.3 Approaches to multimodal analysis**

The prevalence of multimodality as a tool for making meaning necessitated a means for interpreting these multimodal signs, just as critical discourse analysis is used for interpreting language use (see Van Dijk 1977 and Fairclough 1995). Simply put, a form of multimodal analysis was needed. Several approaches to multimodal analysis were designed to study "the role of image, gesture, gaze and posture, and the use of space in representation and communication" (Jewitt 2009: 1). According to Jewitt (2009), there are three key approaches to multimodal analysis, namely social semiotic multimodal analysis, multimodal discourse analysis and multimodal interactional analysis. These approaches will be elaborated on in sections 2.3.1 to 2.3.3.

#### **2.3.1 Social semiotic multimodal analysis**

Social semiotic multimodal analysis stems from Halliday's social semiotics and social systemic functional grammar (1978, 1985). However, Halliday's theory of social semiotics was in relation to language only. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) extended this approach to cover other modes of meaning as well, and provided key terminology for the analysis of visual modes. They demonstrated that these modes have meaning potentials and that the choice of mode can convey beliefs and discourses. The meaning potential of a mode is simply its ability to communicate

meaning; therefore, different modes can have different meaning potentials (Van Leeuwen 2005: 139).

The concern of social semiotic multimodal analysis is how people choose specific meaning potentials to make meaning that is socially- and context-specific. Hence, this approach to multimodal analysis places its focus on the sign-maker and views sign-making as a social process (Jewitt 2009: 30-31). Hodge and Kress used the concept of a 'motivated sign' to depict the sign-maker's agency in the meaning-making process. Furthermore, they used this concept to illustrate that sign-makers choose certain semiotic resources over others when making meaning (Jewitt 2009: 30). Kress developed the concept of 'interest' to portray the reasoning behind the sign-maker's choice of semiotic resource (Jewitt 2009: 30-31). This concept involves a sign-maker's sense of identity in the present moment of meaning-making, as well as an awareness of the social context in which meaning-making occurs (Kress 2010: 35). According to Kress, this interest is governed by the sign-maker's "physiological, psychological, emotional, cultural, and social origins" (Jewitt 2009: 31). Thus, the choice of semiotic resource that an individual uses to make meaning is guided by his/her sense of self or identity (Kress 2010: 50-51).

The context in which meaning is made is also of importance within social semiotic multimodal analysis as it "shapes the resources available for meaning-making and how these are selected and designed" (Jewitt 2009: 30). Within this approach, meaning potentials of a mode are not viewed as constant but are rather believed to be constantly changing as society changes (Jewitt 2009: 30). The social semiotic multimodal approach was influenced by interactional sociolinguists, as well as by work outside of the realm of linguistics, such as the study of music, icons, films, and the history of art (Jewitt 2009: 30).

### **2.3.2 Multimodal discourse analysis**

Multimodal discourse analysis, also known as systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis, is an approach that is associated with Kay O'Halloran, although it also has its roots in Halliday's social systemic functional grammar (Jewitt 2009: 31). Rather than focusing on the sign-maker, as is the case with social semiotic

multimodal analysis, multimodal discourse analysis places the multimodal phenomenon at its centre (Jewitt 2009: 33). It highlights the metafunctional systems of semiotic resources and looks at the system of meaning that is used as well as the social context in which it is entrenched (Jewitt 2009: 32).

The aim of multimodal discourse analysis is to create a framework that can be used for analysing multimodal phenomena within a particular social and cultural context, by means of describing the metafunctions of semiotic resources as well as the relationships between these semiotic resources (Jewitt 2009: 32-33). This approach also uses “syntax-level rank-scale” in its analysis of multimodal phenomena (Jewitt 2009: 32). This refers to the way in which meaning-making elements are hierarchically categorised in order to illustrate “how meaning is built up as a series of functional units” (Jewitt 2009: 32). In other words, each unit makes meaning individually, but works together to give the overall meaning of the text<sup>3</sup>.

### **2.3.3 Multimodal interactional analysis**

Multimodal interactional analysis derives from Scollon and Scollon’s (2000) mediated discourse analysis approach as well as the work of sociologists and sociolinguists such as Goffman (1986), Gumperz (1982) and Tannen (1987). Multimodal interactional analysis focuses on the social interaction of people. Specifically, it is concerned with how various modes work together and arbitrate interaction in a specified context (Jewitt 2009: 34). These modes include “gesture, gaze, posture, movement, space and objects” (Jewitt 2009: 34).

The sign-maker, or actor, is central to multimodal interactional analysis as there can be no interaction without them (Jewitt 2009: 33). The meaning that these actors communicate is always viewed as co-constructed, as their knowledge is influenced by both the environment as well as other individuals with whom they interact (Jewitt 2009: 34). Thus, according to multimodal interactional analysis, the behaviour of actors cannot be divorced from the environment, nor from the other actors involved in the interaction. Additionally, Norris (2004: 101) maintains that interaction creates a cycle or an on-going process of change where semiotic resources, or “systems of

---

<sup>3</sup> “Text” here is used in the extended sense to also refer to non-linguistic texts.

representation”, are concerned. To elaborate, actors utilise various modes made available to them and, through this utilisation, change and develop these systems of representation. This, in turn, is used and further changed by other actors partaking in interaction (Jewitt 2009: 34).

Scollon and Scollon (2003) eventually used the term “nexus analysis” to refer to this type of multimodal analysis approach (that is, multimodal interactional analysis). Although this approach also considers the importance of social actors in interactions, it emphasises the role of action in these interactions and thus views action, rather than the actors themselves, “as the organizing unit of analysis” (Scollon and Scollon 2007: 612).

#### **2.4 Detailed discussion of multimodal analysis informed by social semiotics**

Because of the scope of this thesis and the type of data that was collected, I will discuss in detail only those approaches that have derived from Halliday’s semiotic theory. These approaches will form the main theoretical framework of my study.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) designed a framework for analysing the visual mode. This framework utilises three “principles of composition”, namely the information value, salience and framing of the design (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 177). The composition of the visual mode is the way in which the meaning-making elements are represented and interact with each other (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 177). This is important as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 177) maintain that it is not enough to analyse elements of a multimodal text as distinct units; rather, the text should be analysed as an integrated whole. I will now elaborate on the three aforementioned principles of composition. It should be noted that these principles of composition are “ideological in the sense that it may not correspond to what is the case either for the producer or for the consumer of the image or layout” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 181). Thus, the meaning that is portrayed according to these principles may not always be the producer’s intention. Alternatively, not all viewers may identify with the interpretation portrayed by the producer’s choice of layout.

The information value is given to the various meaning-making elements based on their positioning within the visual mode, for example, the left position versus the right



position, the top position versus the bottom position, and the centre position versus the margins. Kress and Van Leeuwen make certain generalisations according to the position in which elements are placed within the overall layout (2006: 180).

Elements on the left side of the layout are construed as the “given”, while those on the right side are construed as the “new” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 181). Given information is that which is already known to the viewer “as a familiar and agreed-upon point of departure for the message”, while new information is unfamiliar to the viewer and thus requires the most attention (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 181). This layout is culture-specific and closely related to written language because there are certain cultures that write from the right-hand side to the left-hand side. In such a case, the given information would be presented on the right, with the new information positioned on the left (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 181). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 182) illustrated this by comparing Sony’s English website to their Arabic website, showing that the new information is presented on the right-hand side in the English website, and on the left-hand side in the Arabic language website. The layout can also reveal social differences as “what is taken for granted by one social group” (the “given”) may be new information for another social group (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 184). Therefore, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 184) theorise that, depending on the readership of particular material, the layout will be structured differently. They also note that new information can become given information in subsequent texts as it will then no longer be unfamiliar nor the focus of attention (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 185).

With regard to the information value of top and bottom, elements placed in the top region of a layout receive the status of “ideal”, while elements placed in the lower half of the layout are given the status of “the real” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 186). Elements classed as “ideal” are generally those that evoke emotions and display a possible reality, whether far-fetched or not, while elements seen as “the real” provide an informative function and display the actual reality of a situation (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 186). For example, in the layout of advertisements, “the promise of the product” or service is often positioned in the top half of the page, while the lower region serves an informative function, with details such as addresses or websites for

more information (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 186-187). In a sense then, the top and bottom regions can be said to be in opposition which is realised by a dividing line created through the systematic placement of the various elements (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 186).

Elements in the top half are also considered more important than those in the lower half. In other words, information at the bottom of the layout simply functions to elaborate on the information positioned higher up. The information in the bottom section is therefore seen to be subservient to elements positioned in the top section (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 187). This often takes the form of a picture in the top region which evokes emotions and plays a symbolic role, with text in the bottom half of the layout giving context to the picture and adding an element of reality to the idealised/symbolic nature of the picture (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 188).

The final type of information value that Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 194) discuss is that of the centre and margin. They claim that if a visual layout is structured so that it has an element in the middle (the “centre”) with other elements surrounding it (the “margins”), then the centre will be the focal point and the most important element in the layout, with the margins considered to be secondary and dependent on the centre (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 196). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 197) also point out that it is possible to have an unrealised centre, in which case the margins are still seen as subservient, albeit to an indiscernible or unspecified axis.

In cases where the margins are analogous, the given/new and ideal/real information value distinctions do not play a role. However, there are some cases where the margins are divergent, allowing for these aforementioned information values to be used alongside the centre/margin distinction (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 196). This generally takes the form of a triptych structure, where the centre acts as an arbitrator for the margins. Consequently, the margins are categorised into given/new and ideal/real, depending on whether they appear on the left or right and top or bottom of the layout respectively (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 197). Alternatively, the triptych can also take the form of “a simple and symmetrical Margin-Centre-Margin structure” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 199).

Apart from the information value given to elements based on their positioning, salience is another principle of composition that needs to be considered when analysing visual layouts (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 201). Salience is concerned with the importance of certain elements over others in a layout, which is dependent on a number of factors such as “size, its place in the foreground or its overlapping of other elements, its colour, its tonal values, its sharpness or definition” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 210) as well as “specific cultural factors” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 202). Thus, regardless of an element’s information value (or positioning within the layout), its importance can be revealed through its degree of salience and a hierarchy can be created in this way (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 201).

The final principle of composition that Kress and Van Leeuwen consider for visual mode analysis is that of framing (2006: 203). Framing concerns the connection, or lack thereof, between elements within a layout (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 203). While framing indicates separation from other elements in the layout, the absence of frames signifies a unity between elements (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 203). The stronger the presence of the frame, the more it evokes a sense of separation between elements (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 203). Framing can be realised in various ways, ranging from subtle techniques such as a discontinuation of a particular colour, or white spaces between elements, to a stronger realisation of framing, such as actual lines separating elements from each other (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 204). Alternatively, connectedness is achieved through techniques such as the recurrence of a colour or shape, or using vectors to lead viewers’ attention from one element to another (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 204).

## **2.5 Criticisms and shortcomings of multimodal analysis**

In order to provide a balanced account of the theory of multimodality, I will present some of the criticisms that researchers have made of this theory.

Jewitt points out that one of the criticisms often made about multimodal analysis is that it is very subjective (2009: 26). Furthermore, researchers have questioned the reliability of multimodal analysis, as it stems from the field of Linguistics, yet claims to be able to analyse modes of all kinds, whether related to language or not. Some

researchers also view multimodality as a theory that the field of Linguistics imposes upon through its implementation of numerous linguistic terms to be used in the analysis (Jewitt 2009: 26). The final point of critique that Jewitt makes is that multimodal analysis focuses on specific cases and does not allow for generalisation (Jewitt 2009: 27).

O'Halloran (2011: 25) highlights the difficulty in finding patterns within and across a vast variety of modes, all the while having to consider the context in which they occur. She also points out that different multimodal realisations have to inevitably employ "different theoretical approaches" (O'Halloran 2011: 25). For example, if a video is the point of multimodal analysis, then the analyst may be required to consult film studies (O'Halloran 2011: 25). Moreover, sites of display such as websites further complicate the analytical process as hyperlinks take readers to new pages, thus requiring additional analysis (O'Halloran 2011: 25).

Forceville (1999) directs his critique at Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) approach to social semiotic multimodal analysis in particular, rather than multimodal analysis as a general approach. He reviews and provides some shortcomings of Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) book entitled *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Firstly, Forceville recognises problems with the categorisation provided by Kress and Van Leeuwen (Forceville 1999: 168). According to Forceville, these categorisations do not leave space for the in-between (1999: 169). They are too "clear-cut", and provide "an either/or structure" rather than "a continuum between extremes" (Forceville 1999: 169). Thus, one can run into trouble when trying to analyse particular images that do not fit any of the categories. Another issue, according to Forceville, is that Kress and Van Leeuwen do not specify when particular rules apply (1999: 171). For example, while their left/right, top/bottom and centre/margin distinctions are convenient for analysing a number of images in their book, Kress and Van Leeuwen do not use these distinctions for analysing all of the images. Forceville (1999: 171) maintains that "a full-blown visual grammar should predict, or at least suggest, under what conditions certain 'rules' operate".

Furthermore, Kress and Van Leeuwen use the same tools to analyse a wide variety of image types in an attempt to show that images, as with language, have a

'grammar'. However, Forceville asserts that this is an unreliable approach, given that images are more "genre-dependent" than language (1999: 172). To illustrate this, he points out how Kress and Van Leeuwen occasionally analyse film frames which, Forceville maintains, cannot be done without acknowledging its context, namely, the film as a whole (1999: 172).

Despite these criticisms, the usefulness of multimodal analysis cannot be denied and researchers from various fields choose to use it for their respective analyses. Multimodal analysis is used to analyse multimodal meaning-making in a number of contexts such as advertising, technology, art, and pedagogy, amongst others. Literature in some of these contexts will now be explored.

## **2.6 Multimodal analysis in practice**

### **2.6.1 Multimodality of children's drawings**

Mavers (2009) uses multimodal analysis to analyse children's drawings. She points out that, regardless of the text producer's age, producing a text requires an element of design in that the producer must choose resources from those that are available and combine them in a way that will construe their intended meaning (Mavers 2009: 264). Additionally, Mavericks (2009: 265) draws attention to the fact that it is not viable to present all of one's knowledge or memories in a text; hence, a process of selection must take place within the producer's mind, making the end-result a product of this person's "immediate 'interest'". As previously mentioned, 'interest' is a concept coined by Kress and involves a sign-maker's sense of identity in the present moment of meaning making as well as an awareness of the social context in which meaning-making occurs (Kress 2010: 35). Texts which we analyse are thus not a random collection of ideas; rather, everything that we see in the design has been systematically selected and organised by the individual to be displayed in his/her text (Mavers 2009: 265). Through the use of resources such as Kress and Van Leeuwen's principles of composition, it becomes possible to discern what the focus of the text is as well as understand the relationships between elements in a text (Mavers 2009: 266).

Mavers' study is centred on a multimodal analysis of the drawings of children who belong to a club called the "Gridclub" (2009: 266). They were asked to draw a mind-map responding to questions that were put forward to them, namely their "perceptions of who club members are, how they interact, and the activities in which they engage" (2009: 266). Although the children's designs were limited to a particular affordance, namely a drawing-focused design, the children's experiences of Gridclub were determined based on their choice of drawings and written text, their choice of layout, the links they made between different nodes in their mind-maps, and what they chose to include and exclude (Mavers 2009: 266). Therefore, by analysing these children's mind-maps and how they chose to make meaning, Mavericks is able to determine their individual experiences of the club (2009: 266).

Researchers were present when the children designed and created their mind-maps, allowing for additional insight into the children's design process. For example, it allowed researchers to see that the children frequently switched between drawing and writing, which they considered to be an indication that decisions were constantly being made in the design process (Mavers 2009: 266). Additional information also took the form of recorded interviews with the children in which they explained their process of design as well as their understanding of the club (Mavers 2009: 266).

Some interesting findings were made regarding the children's experience of Gridclub. In two different mind-maps where club members were depicted as stick figures (which Mavericks speculates could have been due to time constraints), one child drew the stick figures in their simplest form so that they all looked the same, and not specifying any gender differences; another child differentiated between her stick figures by giving them different clothing and hairstyles, thereby distinguishing between male and female (Mavers 2009: 266-267). Mavericks attributes this to these children's respective experiences of the club members: The first-mentioned child does not seem to consider members as individuals, but rather views them as a uniform group which is reiterated with his chosen label "pupils". The second-mentioned child, however, views members as a diverse group that she seems to think about on a personal level (given the finer details in her drawing) and labels this

image “meeting other people that use Gridclub”, revealing her social perception of the club (2009: 267-268).

Children chose to depict their club activities by “combining person and object” and using the “bodily posture and the focus of attention” of their illustrations of club members (Mavers 2009: 268). For example, one child drew a person in front of a computer reaching for the mouse, where the screen is his focus of attention, signifying a digital activity (Mavers 2009: 268). To distinguish between the different types of digital activities available in Gridclub, this child displayed different details on the computer screens of each of her pictures. For example, a drawing of a policeman and a robber on the screen depicts a computer game, a map on the screen depicts an educational activity and written text on the screen together with a speech bubble alongside the computer-user reading “we are friends” depicts a communicational activity (Mavers 2009: 270). Mavericks (2009: 270) notes that club members were drawn facing the computer, and away from the viewers, which portrays their preoccupation with the club activities.

While the findings of individual nodes of the mind-map are important, the relationships between these nodes also need to be considered. In the mind-maps, each node was separated from each other using white or blank spaces (a form of framing), but these nodes were also thematically linked. Mavericks found that themes were linked using vectors such as lines and word repetitions to guide viewers’ gaze (2009: 270). For example, one child linked a node depicting a digital educational activity to a node depicting members’ benefits of being in the club (obtaining understanding and inspiration) by means of a diagonal line with the label “giving you ideas”, as well as a double repetition of the word “ideas” in the node to which it was linked. This, in turn, was linked to the following node by means of another line, with the label “I like learning” as well as a repetition of the word “learning” in the node to which it was linked (Mavers 2009: 269). Thus, these children communicated their experience of Gridclub through a process of visual design, which relied upon their switching between modes (drawing and writing), their choice of layout as well as their approach to linking elements.



Bezemer, Diamantopoulou, Jewitt, Kress and Mavers (2012) also consider the importance of children's drawings in making meaning. They maintain that children's drawings reveal their worldview or how they make sense of the world (Mavers et al. 2012: 6). Accordingly, what children choose to include in their drawings is attributed to their interest, a concept that was explained in section 2.3.1 (Mavers et al. 2012: 6). Thus, their drawings depict their "physical, affective, cultural, social position in the world at that moment" (Mavers et al. 2012: 6). Children only include in their drawings that which they deem important or characteristic of the object to be represented, while any other details are omitted or placed in the background (Mavers et al. 2012: 6). For example, Mavers et al. (2012: 7) show a picture drawn by a 12-year-old boy, depicting his experience of a visit to a museum. This drawing includes a picture of "an aeroplane, a tree, a spear, a tool and a skull" (Mavers et al. 2012: 7). Accordingly, out of all that was on display at the museum, those particular objects stood out for him or, in his opinion, were deemed as the most important (Mavers et al. 2012: 7). His drawing therefore conveys his personal experience of the museum visit, thereby making meaning.

In another illustration of meaning-making processes, Mavers et al. (2012: 6) show a 3-year-old boy's drawing of a car which, to an onlooker, simply looks like a series of circles. However, while in the process of drawing, this boy explained that he was drawing the wheels and then stated that "This is a car" (Mavers et al. 2012: 6). Mavers et al. (2012: 6) thus propose that this child perceives the wheels to be the defining feature of a car. They view this as a process of analogy in that circles are representative of wheels and wheels are representative of a car (Mavers et al. 2012: 6) or, as Kress puts it, the circles are the signifiers of the wheels, which in turn is the signified, and the series of circles as wheels is the signifier for the car, which in turn is the signified (2010: 55).

To further explain these concepts, Kress (2010: 55) applies them to another drawing, this one created by a 6-year-old boy. This particular drawing depicts two soccer players from opposing teams facing each other. Kress (2010: 55) suggests that the positioning of these players is the signifier to denote the signified of "confrontation" or



‘opposition’”. By applying the concepts of ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ to these drawings, Kress shows how children make meaning using the visual mode.

### **2.6.2 Multimodality in commercial material**

Iedema (2003: 29) maintains that although multimodality is the utilisation of a number of modes when making meaning, the fact that certain modes are more valued than others should not be overlooked. However, this preference is not a constant. It changes over time as well as within different cultures and societies. This phenomenon can be explained in terms of ‘resemiotisation’. Resemiotisation is the transfer of meaning-making elements from one mode to another or from one context to another (Iedema 2003: 41). An example is the movement of meaning-making elements expressed using spoken language from written text to visuals. This often results in dissociation from the meaning-making element’s original social purpose, allowing “new realities” to be formed or an added function to be employed (Iedema 2003: 41-42). Some authors also maintain that resemiotisation can be used either to identify with or distance oneself or others from a particular community group. For example, Leppänen, Kytölä, Jousmäki, Peuronen and Westinen (2013) explore how resemiotisation processes in social media (in the form of drawing on specific discourses) can be used as a means to claim membership with certain groups. Additionally, Kerfoot (2011: 90) explores how resemiotisation, (in the form of moving meaning-making elements from one semiotic mode to another) can either “enable [or] constrain interaction in multilingual participatory spaces”.

Iedema (2003: 29) believes that resemiotisation is an important factor to consider alongside multimodal analysis, as it provides insight into the processes involved in the transfer of meaning from one mode to the next as well as the reasoning behind favouring a specific mode over another for fulfilling a particular function. In other words, resemiotisation can be utilised to realise the meaning-maker’s interest (in the Kressian sense).

Resemiotisation focuses on “how materiality (‘expression’) serves to realize the social, cultural and historical structures, investments and circumstances of our time” (Iedema 2003: 50). To illustrate this, Iedema comparatively analyses two different

Apple™ computer instruction manuals, one from 1992 and the other from 1999. In his analysis, he shows how the semiotic resources employed to realise the same functions have changed over time. He found a number of differences between the presentations of these two manuals, the most prominent difference being that the 1992 manual favours written text, while the 1999 manual favours images (Iedema 2003: 45). Other differences include comprehensive, complex explanations versus straightforward, easy-to-use instructions, as well as black and white presentation versus colour presentation in the 1992 manual and the 1999 manual respectively (Iedema 2003: 45-46). Iedema seeks to explore the rationale behind this change. More specifically, he seeks to understand why the visual mode was chosen to present the computer manual at the expense of the written mode, or to discover Apple's™ rationale for foregrounding the visual mode, while backgrounding, or marginalising, the written mode (Iedema 2003: 47).

Iedema (2003: 47) is of the opinion that the visually-dominant, colourful display of the 1999 manual is analogous to a sales brochure, which is user-friendly and something that everyone can relate to, unlike the writing-dominant, monochromatic display of the 1992 manual, with technical instructions that could look daunting to a new computer owner. Thus, the shift from linguistic foregrounding in the 1992 manual to visual foregrounding in the 1999 manual is attributable to Apple's™ re-examination of the discourse of new computer owners and improving the transparency of their manuals to suit the needs of their target market (Iedema 2003: 48). As Saint-Martin notes, all modes have particular affordances as well as constraints (Iedema 2003: 47). Subsequently, although the linguistic mode allows for more comprehensive detail where instructions are concerned, it does not allow for the “transparency, accessibility, ease and perhaps even desirability [and] pleasure” that images are able to achieve, which is Apple's™ primary concern (Iedema 2003: 48). It can therefore be said that “resemiotization opens up different modalities of human experience” (Iedema 2003: 48).

### **2.6.3 Multimodality in the pedagogical context**

Bezemer and Kress (2008: 166) note how learning materials such as textbooks have shifted from being writing-dominant to increasingly including more pictures or other

graphic representations. Additionally, the mode of representation for learning materials is becoming progressively more digital, so that books are becoming overshadowed by internet and digitally-created resources (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 166). Bezemer and Kress (2008: 166) set out to explore these changes by collecting and analysing secondary-school learning resources using social semiotic multimodal analysis for the subjects Science, Mathematics and English from “the 1930s, the 1980s, and from the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as digitally represented and online learning resources from the year 2000 onward”. They chose topics from each subject that are enduring enough to be a part of the syllabus throughout their chosen period, namely ‘the human digestive system’ for Science, ‘angles’ for Mathematics, and ‘similes’ for English (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 169).

In their analysis of these school textbooks, Bezemer and Kress (2008: 168-169) propose the utilisation of the concepts ‘sign’, ‘mode’, ‘medium’, ‘frame’ and ‘site of display’ as tools for analysing the multimodal learning resources. They view a ‘sign’ as the combination of meaning and form, prompted by a sign-maker’s interest, in the Kressian sense (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 170). However, this is also dependent on the resources available. For example, although using spoken language may be the best way of communicating a message, you may find yourself in a situation where you do not share a common language with the people with whom you wish to communicate, resulting in the need to use, for example, signs of gesture or pointing (Kress 2010: 65).

As previously mentioned, Bezemer and Kress (2008: 171) define a ‘mode’ as “a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning”. Thus, a resource can only be deemed a mode if there is a shared agreement amongst community members that it can be used to make meaning (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 172). For example, images and writing are modes often used in learning resources. The central idea of multimodality is that meaning is always made with more than one mode (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 171).

‘Medium’ is a concept that needs to be understood alongside that of ‘mode’. It refers to how meaning is realised in the process of communication (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 172). Medium has a material- as well as a social aspect (Bezemer and Kress

2008: 172). The material component refers to a mode's physical realisation or how a mode comes to be (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 172). This is not limited to one medium. Rather, various mediums each play a role in the "chain of materializing and rematerializing" (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 172). For example, a DVD, a DVD player, as well as a television and speakers are all material mediums in the chain of materialising. A medium is also socially dependent, due to "semiotic, sociocultural and technological practices" (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 172). Thus, a textbook is a medium within the pedagogical arena but this medium is becoming increasingly substituted with digital media such as educational websites (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 172).

Not to be confused with Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) concept of 'framing', a Bezemer and Kress's notion of a 'frame' can be likened to the 'genre' of a semiotic resource in that it "defines text in terms of activity, of social relations of participants in an event, and in terms of the use of modes and media" (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 173). The authors (2008: 173) use the example of an announcement to illustrate a type of frame. (For ease of explanation, they define 'frame' in this example alongside the notion of 'site of display'.) An announcement (the frame) can be displayed as a poster, a brochure, or a flyer, all of which are sites of display (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 173). Thus, according to Bezemer and Kress, a site of display is the way in which a particular medium is realised (2008: 173). Furthermore, they point out that new sites of display are developed as frames change (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 174).

With the help of these aforementioned concepts, Bezemer and Kress seek to explore what may be achieved or, alternatively, lost through modal changes - a process which they call "transduction" (2008: 169). Accordingly, they investigate the affordances of various modes used to make meaning in the pedagogical context (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 171). They also look at recontextualisation, which is a change in the medium used to make meaning (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 183). Thus, Bezemer and Kress show "how meaning material is moved from social site to social site, from medium to medium, from context to context, in each case requiring social, semiotic remaking and often entailing epistemological change" (2008: 169). This

bears resemblance to Iedema's notion of resemiotisation, as discussed in the previous chapter, and these terms are thus often used interchangeably. Some of Bezemer and Kress's (2008) findings will now be detailed.

Bezemer and Kress found that the site of display used to communicate a unit of knowledge has changed from the 1930s textbook to the contemporary textbook (2008: 174). To illustrate this, they show how the human digestive system was afforded a full chapter in the 1930s Science textbook, while in the contemporary textbook, this same unit of knowledge was only afforded a double-page spread, where images predominated (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 174). Thus, although the medium is the textbook in both instances, and the topic (the human digestive system) remains the same, the site of display has been altered over the different time periods. These sites of display differ in their content composition: while the length of the chapter is determined by the author's judgment of what constitutes the subject matter of the human digestive system, the two-page spread limits and controls the comprehensiveness of the subject matter (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 174). Bezemer and Kress (2008: 167) acknowledge that this transformation from one site of display to another leads to "social and epistemological change". In the design process, the designer organises the meaning material with "the assumed characteristics of a specific audience" in mind (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 174). Thus, it is not only the designer's interest that guides the design process but the interest of the target audience as well (as presumed by the designer).

Bezemer and Kress (2008: 177-182) made interesting findings with regard to Mathematical instructions as portrayed in a textbook, versus Mathematical instructions portrayed on a web-based learning resource. While the textbook instructions were afforded the modes of image and writing, the web-based resource was afforded the modes of moving images, writing, as well as speech. Bezemer and Kress (2008: 182) found that the use of particular modes, firstly, leads to different degrees of specificity and generality. To illustrate this, written textbook instructions on drawing an angle (such as "Put the cross over the point of the angle") are seen as actions, which provide more specificity than an image depicting that same action (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 180). An image can only represent one moment of the

action, making it more general than the written description thereof which can portray the action in its entirety (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 180). The image also increases generality through its absence of actor, while the written mode specifies that the reader is the actor who will be drawing the angle, thus rendering it more specific (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 180). The use of moving images, however, allows viewers to see the full action (in this case, drawing an angle) being played out, thus gaining specificity (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 182).

Furthermore, Bezemer and Kress (2008: 181) found that, although the same instructions may be portrayed by both the written mode and speech, the syntactic structure of written text (as opposed to the intonation used in speech) results in the emphasis being placed on different elements. For instance, in the sentence “Put pointer of compass on point ‘a’”, readers are likely to view the action as the most important piece of information due to the verb “Put” appearing first; in the spoken version, the intonation falls on the words “compass” and “a”, making the object and the location the issues of importance (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 180-181). Thus, in the written text “reading paths are set by the learner”, while in the mode of speech, they are set by the designer (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 182).

Through this study, Bezemer and Kress have communicated a number of gains and losses of various modes and mediums, and have shown the potentials of incorporating multimodality in the pedagogical arena. Multimodality as a pedagogic approach has been proposed by a number of researchers, such as Lillis and Turner (2001), Cazden et al. (1996), Unsworth (2001) and Lea (2004), among others. These authors’ contributions will be explicated in the following chapter. This research is useful in that it can facilitate curriculum designers, designers of learning material and educators in making more informed decisions when designing courses, curricula, learning material and lesson plans.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced and explicated the theory of multimodality. The development of the theory was presented along with key concepts that will form the groundwork for most of the multimodal analysis to follow. A brief introduction was

given of three central approaches to multimodal analysis, namely social semiotic multimodal analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and multimodal interactional analysis. This was followed by a more elaborate description of the approach that I will be using for my own analysis. In order to provide a balanced account of multimodal analysis, some of its shortcomings were revealed. Finally, this chapter has illustrated multimodality in practice by presenting some of the literature that have utilised this theory in its analyses.

In response to the widespread acknowledgement of multimodality, researchers began using the approach as a tool in their respective research topics and applying the approach to a range of contexts, such as film, advertising and technology. Researchers also began looking at literacy and pedagogy through the lens of multimodality. It is to this educational context that I will now turn.

## **Chapter 3: Multiliteracies and Higher Education**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will explore the evolution of literacy, starting from the traditional understanding of literacy which focuses on reading and writing alone and where literacy is viewed as a neutral entity that one needs to acquire in order to become literate. This will be followed by a more social view of literacy where context plays an important role in literacy acquisition. Finally, I will move on to the relatively recent concept of ‘multiliteracies’, where it is acknowledged that more than one type of literacy exists and that literacy involves more than just reading and writing. A multiliteracies approach encourages the utilisation of a variety of modes and language codes which will be further explained in this chapter. Certain problems surrounding the verbal mode of pedagogic assessment are considered in order to argue for a shift in assessment methods.

Multiliteracies research will be looked at, firstly from a primary- and secondary-schooling perspective and then from a higher-education perspective, the latter being my point of interest. An important aspect of multiliteracies research is the acknowledgement of how new technologies have brought about a multifarious range of new text types which many researchers argue should be employed in the pedagogic arena. These new text types are often referred to as “digital literacies” and will be investigated in this chapter, along with some of the critiques of these new literacies that have emerged. Finally, this chapter will explore the common concerns surrounding changes in literacy customs, which have been described as a “moral panic”.

### **3.2 The traditional view of literacy**

Before an explanation is provided of multiliteracies, it is important to give a brief overview of the earlier models and views of literacy that existed in an attempt to show the progression towards the notion of “multiliteracies”.

In order to categorise different views of literacy, Street (1984) distinguishes between an autonomous model and an ideological model of literacy. The autonomous model



is generally an older view of literacy, where literacy is considered an entity independent of any social context (Street 1984: 1). On the other hand, the ideological model adopts a more culturally-sensitive and context-dependent view of literacy (Street 1984: 2). The ideological model takes literacy *practices* as its point of analysis, rather than literacy itself, as literacy is not viewed as an independent entity. A literacy practice can be defined as a culturally-determined way of using literacy (Barton 1994: 37). The following section will elaborate on these two models of literacy.

The autonomous approach to literacy usually favours the researcher's own ideas of what literacy is, disregarding the fact that this may not be true for everyone (Street 1984: 2). This was especially prominent during colonisation, where colonisers would often refer to the indigenous peoples' "primitive thought" and would consider these people to be illiterate (Street 1984: 6). They would then impose western ideas of literacy onto these cultures (Street 2005: 417). The autonomous approach views literacy as something tangible and considers literacy to be a universal phenomenon, regardless of space and time (Barton 1994: 117). In other words, literacy remains the same throughout history and in all cultures and contexts.

Researchers who adopt the autonomous approach to literacy believe that being literate carries general consequences such as "logical thought and abstraction" and that non-literate people will not possess these skills (Baynham 1995: 47). The autonomous approach also deems literacy to be measurable and, consequently, many tests have been conducted on people under this model in order to determine their degree of literacy (Barton 1994: 117; Street 2005: 419). This poses certain problems as these tests disregard any social or cultural influences that may affect the results (Street 2005: 419). Subsequently, numerous people were deemed illiterate under the autonomous model even though they engaged in various literacy practices (Street 2005: 419). Many researchers became aware of the shortcomings that are associated with the autonomous model and strived to develop a model that takes the social and cultural contexts of literacy into account. Thus, the ideological model was established.

The ideological model of literacy, as previously stated, focuses on literacy practices, where reading and writing are not analysed in isolation, as with the autonomous model, but rather in accordance with the cultural, social and ideological aspects in which they are rooted (Street 1984: 2). Baynham (1995: 1) highlights that literacy practices are “not just [about] what people do with literacy, but also what they make of what they do, the values they place on it and the ideologies that surround it”. Thus, unlike the autonomous model, the ideological model does not view literacy as a neutral entity (Street 2005: 418). Additionally, literacy is believed to be experienced differently by different groups of people depending on *how* they were exposed to literacy processes such as reading and writing (Street 2005: 418). Street calls this phenomenon “social literacies” or “social practices”, where the social experience and perception of literacy processes is emphasised and engagement in literacy is always considered a social enactment, even from the first time that a person is exposed to literacy practices (Street 2005: 418). For example, the relations between teachers and students are considered a social practice that will affect the type of literacy being acquired as well as the students’ and teachers’ perceptions of literacy (Street 2005: 418). Thus, the ideological model views power relations as an important factor in the acquisition of literacy.

Barton’s (1994) ecological view of literacy is synonymous to Street’s (1984) ideological model of literacy. They both highlight the social entrenchment of literacy and argue for the notion of ‘literacies’ rather than a single literacy, as is the case with the autonomous model. Additionally, Barton anticipates that literacy will keep changing as technology develops (1994: 52). The New London Group<sup>4</sup> (Cazden et al. 1996) build on these views by suggesting “multiliteracies”, which will be explored in section 3.4.

### **3.3 Problems with “old literacies”**

Earlier semioticians, such as Barthes, believed that writing was the most important form of visual literacy and that images, or any other forms of visual literacy, were

---

<sup>4</sup> According to their website (<http://www.newliteracies.com.au/what-are-new-literacies?/138/>), the New London Group is a team of ten academics who specialise in the field of Multiliteracies. They are primarily concerned with “how literacy pedagogy might address the rapid change in literacy due to globalisation, technology and increasing cultural and social diversity.”

dependent on writing in order to make meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 18). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) oppose this view and argue that various visual literacies are able to collectively form meaning without any of the modes necessarily being dependent on any of the other modes (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 17). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) then, images are able to create meaning without the help of written text. To explain the distinction between these earlier and more recent views, Kress and Van Leeuwen present the notions of 'old visual literacies' versus 'new visual literacies' (2006: 17). Old visual literacies represent the mode of the written text, where images are thought to be dependent on written text and are simply viewed as imitations of reality. New visual literacies, on the other hand, encompass all forms of visual modes with each being able to independently make meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 23).

Lillis and Turner (2001) explore certain problems surrounding written assignments, or old visual literacies, in higher education. Data for their study include students' assessed written assignments as well as interviews held with these students in order to record their views on tutors' criticism. They found that students do not always understand what their tutors expect from them in written assignments (Lillis and Turner 2001: 58). Lillis and Turner attribute this dilemma to a "discourse of transparency" where language is viewed as self-evident (Lillis and Turner 2001: 58). Instructions are often viewed as self-explanatory by tutors and lecturers while in fact it is not as transparent to students as tutors would like to believe (Lillis and Turner 2001: 58). When students do not produce the standard of work that tutors expect from them, it often results in a predicament where tutors view students as bad writers and students do not understand the rationale of the criticism or commentary provided on their assessed work (Lillis and Turner 2001: 60).

Lillis and Turner (2001: 62) consider this discourse of transparency to have derived from a "historical-cultural context". Knowledge and language were originally seen as concepts independent of each other, until Newton's experimental reports proved otherwise (Lillis and Turner 2001: 64). His need for the Royal Society to accept his theories drove him to be consciously aware of his language use in the experimental reports which suggested that knowledge and language are co-dependent (Lillis and

Turner 2001: 64-65). Additionally, his style of writing became the norm for academic discourses and this style is still the accepted norm for academic writing in higher education institutions (Lillis and Turner 2001: 65). Lillis and Turner (2001: 65) argue that this style should not be viewed as transparent and that just as language is constantly changing, so should the style of academic writing. Lillis and Turner (2001: 66) are of the opinion that it would benefit students if pedagogies are adapted to the current era, instead of focusing on deep-rooted academic conventions that are inconsistent with the diversity of the time.

This study illustrates some problems that are associated with written assessment in higher education. Thus, Lillis and Turner (2001) focus on only one meaning-making mode. Nevertheless, they have raised thought-provoking and valid points that educators should take into account when assigning or grading written forms of assessment. Although Lillis and Turner (2001) suggest that educational curricula be modified to correspond to the current era in which we live, they do not specify a multimodal approach as the solution. Considering that multimodality is ever-present in our lives, this seems like a necessary approach to consider.

### **3.4 Multiliteracies and new literacies**

The New London Group point out that literacy has traditionally been associated with language but that this understanding needs to be modified to include forms of communication and meaning-making in addition to language (Cazden et al. 1996: 63). This will be further explored in section 3.4.1. Similarly, Lankshear and Knobel (2007: 2-4) maintain that literacy is not one single phenomenon but is rather a “family of practices”. Gee (1996) cited in Lankshear and Knobel (2007: 3) proposes the notion of ‘discourse’ in order to define literacy, emphasising the point that literacy is socially-situated and that it needs to be understood within context. He sees discourse as a socially accepted way of using language, as well as a way of thinking and behaving, that categorises people into particular social groups (Lankshear and Knobel 2007: 3). For this reason, Gee’s concept of ‘discourse’ is also often referred to as “social discourse”. For example, a doctor is socialised into the discourse of doctors where he/she learns, mostly subconsciously, to talk, think and act like a doctor. Gee elaborates on this concept by distinguishing between a “primary

discourse”, which is the initial identity one receives from socialisation within the family, and a “secondary discourse”, which can be described as the identities one receives as a result of being a part of other social groups outside of the family (Lankshear and Knobel 2007: 3). With this as a backdrop, Gee defines literacy as “mastery [...] of a secondary Discourse” (Lankshear and Knobel 2007: 3). Thus, just as there are many types of secondary discourses, so there are many different types of literacies, and just as a discourse is socially-situated, so must literacy be socially-situated.

When examining literacy acquisition, it is also important to consider the role that ‘power’ plays in this process. Those who are higher up on the socio-economic ladder (i.e. mainstream students) will generally be exposed to a wider variety of dominant discourses than those in lower socio-economic brackets (i.e. non-mainstream students) as the latter do not always have the same opportunities available to them, particularly where schooling is concerned (Gee 1989: 25). It is therefore easier for mainstream students to master a secondary discourse than it is for non-mainstream students, as the former’s primary discourse is more closely related to the dominant discourse, whereas non-mainstream students’ primary discourse is often incompatible with dominant discourses of society (Gee 1989: 25). This illustrates how power relations in society can affect literacy acquisition.

Another difficulty that some students face is that they do not speak the “standard” variety of their language. This is a particularly pressing issue, considering that schools focus on teaching students the “correct”, standard or official form of a language. This poses a problem for these types of students in terms of literacy acquisition because their primary Discourse (Gee 1989) is at odds with the secondary Discourse that they are supposed to master.

The New London Group noted this problem and proposed that the perception of literacy pedagogy be revised in order to manage this issue (Cazden et al. 1996). Their solution took the form of “a pedagogy of multiliteracies” (Cazden et al. 1996). The definition of “multiliteracies” here involves a more inclusive view of literacies, where different varieties and dialects of languages are considered (not just the standard or official form), and where a wider variety of text types (including, but not

limited to, those made possible by new technologies) are also considered (Cazden et al. 1996: 63). Thus, the New London Group pioneered the notion of ‘multiliteracies’. This will be further elaborated on in section 3.4.1.

Although the idea of multiliteracies is very valuable, much has changed since the New London Group proposed this concept in the early 1990s. While technologies such as computers and mobile phones were around then, these technologies were only accessible to a relatively small portion of the population, and did not have all the advanced capabilities that are common to the technologies of today. Accordingly, new technologies have brought about new ways of communicating and, thus, new ways of making meaning (Cope and Kalantzis 2009: 167). These new ways of making meaning are referred to as “new literacies” and it is beneficial to utilise these new literacies in a pedagogical context in order to move with the changing times (Lewis 2007: 230, 236). Although I have depicted the transformation from “multiliteracies” to “new literacies”, it is important to note that these two terms are often used interchangeably and the concept of ‘multiliteracies’ can also encompass ‘new literacies’.

### **3.4.1 Recommendations for multiliteracies**

The New London Group maintain that the objective of education is “to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (Cazden et al. 1996: 60). Literacy pedagogy has conventionally been limited to teaching and learning the standard and official form of a language. This approach is inconsistent with the objective of education as it does not allow students to benefit fully in public, community, and economic life. It does not take into account the vast variety of languages and cultures that co-exist and interact in society due to globalisation, nor does it consider the ever-increasing variety of texts made possible by new technologies. The New London Group aspire to broaden the notion and understanding of ‘literacy pedagogy’ to include these aforementioned aspects, which they termed “multiliteracies”, thereby ensuring that students benefit from their education (Cazden et al. 1996: 63).

The New London Group maintain that diversity should be viewed as an asset rather than a drawback as it allows students to “gain substantively in meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic abilities and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems and their interactions” (Cazden et al. 1996: 69). They view ‘design’ as an important concept for making meaning and for the establishment of a new literacy pedagogy. Available designs, or resources, are used in the process of designing, resulting in the redesigned (Cazden et al. 1996: 74). In this way, through a process of designing, students are able to create new meanings by building on resources that are made available to them. Designing can take the form of seeing, listening and reading (Cazden et al. 1996: 75).

Working, private and public lives have changed over time. Thus, literacy pedagogy needs to address these changes in order for students to be able to prosper in all aspects of life (Cazden et al. 1996: 65). The New London Group propose the designing of social futures to tackle these changing realities (Cazden et al. 1996: 71). By this, they mean that the language needed to communicate and express meaning in the aforementioned areas of our lives is vastly changing to conform to these changing realities and that school should be a preparatory space for handling these changes. Thus, the New London Group propose a few ideas to help prepare students for their futures, such as a functional grammar to enable students to express themselves amid such transformations, as well as four components of pedagogy that they believe will enable students to “participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (Cazden et al. 1996: 60). These propositions are elaborated upon below.

The New London Group put forward an idea of a “metalanguage” or “functional grammar” that can be utilised by students and educators when analysing texts, in the broadest sense of the word (Cazden et al. 1996: 77). A functional grammar is a special language designed to provide students and educators with appropriate terminology for analysing “language, images, texts, and meaning-making interactions” (Cazden et al. 1996: 77). They identified six areas where a metalanguage would be necessary, namely linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial,



and multimodal design<sup>5</sup> (Cazden et al. 1996: 78). A metalanguage would thus be beneficial for students and educators alike who engage in multiliteracies.

In addition to the six modes of meaning put forward by the New London Group, they also propose four components of pedagogy, namely situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice (Cazden et al. 1996: 83). Situated practice involves engagement in various discourses and simulating real life experiences to prepare for the real world; overt instruction has to do with active and conscious learning, where students make use of a metalanguage to create meaning; critical framing entails constructively analysing information within the context that it appears, and transformed practice involves taking information out of its original context and analysing it within new contexts, thus redesigning its meaning (Cazden et al. 1996: 85-88). According to the New London Group then, students should be viewed as “creative [...] makers of meaning [and] designers of [...] social futures” (Cazden et al. 1996: 89).

Unsworth also notes the ever-changing nature of texts that accompanies technological and societal evolution and maintains that literacy pedagogy needs to comply with these changes in order for education to be more beneficial to students (Unsworth 2001: 7). Just like the New London Group, Unsworth suggests introducing multiliteracies to the pedagogic system in order to stay abreast of the multifarious range of texts available in this new age, ultimately optimising education (Unsworth 2001: 8). In addition, Unsworth identifies important elements of pedagogic frameworks for developing multiliteracies, namely visual literacies, curriculum literacies, cyber literacies and critical literacies (Unsworth 2001: 9-14). Where visual literacies are concerned, he recognises how every text needs to be read multimodally and that images and verbal representations work together to make meaning (Unsworth 2001: 10).

Pertaining to curriculum literacies, Unsworth indicates how research has shown that a multitude of literacies is necessary across the curriculum because a singular literacy is not appropriate for all subjects or even all lessons of the same subject

---

<sup>5</sup> Multimodal design is simply the utilisation of more than one mode when making meaning (Cazden et al. 1996: 78).



(Unsworth 2001: 10-11). Separate subjects have different specifications which require different texts and language use and, thus, different literacies (Unsworth 2001: 11). Unsworth (2001: 11) illustrates this by comparing the subjects Science and English, and finding, for example, that Science texts frequently utilise explanations but English texts do not. Thus, it is not plausible to assume that there is a singular literacy for all subjects. Rather, the idea of curriculum literacies should be considered.

Regarding cyber literacies, Unsworth notes how the amount and variety of texts have increased since the emergence of new computer technologies. Furthermore he highlights how hypertext links and windows have made it possible to create non-linear texts, thus making it possible to move away from the traditional linear texts (Unsworth 2001: 12-13). The way in which authors of multimedia texts choose to hyperlink particular pieces of information to other pieces of information, or alternatively, choose *not* to hyperlink certain pieces of information, gives readers insight into the author's views or ideologies and allows them to follow the author's thought patterns (Unsworth 2001: 13). Additionally, authoring software enables students to be a part of the knowledge construction process, rather than just passively consuming information (Unsworth 2001: 12). Unsworth (2001: 12) maintains that the multimodality of these texts (in the form of images, sounds, texts, hyperlinks, windows and frames all used simultaneously to make meaning) necessitates that these new forms of text cannot be grouped together with traditional literacies, but rather need to be placed in a separate category, that of cyber literacies.

Increasingly, critical literacies are seen as an important type of literacy, especially in higher education. The principal feature of critical literacies is realising that all literacies are socially-dependent and that the context should always be considered when analysing literacies, much like the ideological model of literacy (Unsworth 2001: 16). Unsworth identifies three components to critical literacies, namely recognition literacy, reproduction literacy and reflection literacy (Unsworth 2001: 14). Recognition literacy is the ability to recognise and make use of the various meaning-making modes; reproduction literacy is the ability to comprehend and produce text types specific to one's culture, and reflection literacy is one's understanding of the fact that

all literacies are socially- and culturally dependent and using this understanding to critically analyse texts (Unsworth 2001: 14-15). Although the acquisition of these literacies is not dependent on age, researchers have argued that “reflection literacy presupposes reproduction literacy, which presupposes recognition literacy” (Unsworth 2001: 15).

Unsworth also builds on the New London Group’s idea of creating a metalanguage in order to develop these aforementioned multiliteracies. He defines a “metalanguage” as a language used to describe aspects of language itself and considers it to be imperative for describing meaning in a variety of domains (Unsworth 2001: 16). It will thus be helpful in dealing with a multiliteracies approach to pedagogy.

### **3.4.2 Multiliteracies in the primary and secondary educational context**

Because most research on multiliteracies is conducted on pre-primary, primary and secondary school contexts, I will begin by introducing multiliteracies in this domain before delving into the use of multiliteracies in the higher education context.

Mills (2006: 64) conducted a multiliteracies study on a group of grade six learners, where they were required to create a claymation film as a group project. This project involved a number of tasks, namely inventing a story, designing a miniature movie set and clay characters, using a digital camera to take photographs, combining these single shots using special software to create the illusion of moving clay characters and adding an audio aspect to the final product (Mills 2006: 64). This project thus necessitated that students move away from the traditional creation of verbal, monomodal texts, to producing creative multimodal texts with the help of digital technologies (Mills 2006: 70). Additionally, situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice were all utilised in the undertaking of this project as students were required to “situat[e] meaning making in real world contexts [...], use an explicit metalanguage of design [...], interpret the social context and purpose of designs of meaning [...] [and] transform existing meanings to design new meanings (Mills 2006: 62-64). Accordingly, this project seems to be an effective form of multiliteracies that places the student in the position of designer and thus in a

position to be a part of the designing process rather than just a passive consumer of facts or knowledge.

Another form of multiliteracies is the use of comics in the classroom (Jacobs 2007). Jacobs (2007: 20) notes how most researchers in favour of comics simply view them as a means to an end, the end being acquisition of so-called “higher” literacies. For example, librarians appealed for comic books to be introduced into libraries in order to lure adolescents in the hopes that they would eventually move on to “proper” books (Jacobs 2007: 20). Although Jacobs acknowledges the benefits of this tactic, he believes that comics can and should be used as a form of multiliteracies rather than just a bridge to more complex texts. Using social semiotic multimodal analysis, Jacobs analyses a comic from the *Polly and the Pirates* series. He shows how certain visual elements are used to create meaning such as the use of framing, focus, facial expressions of the characters, font of the written pieces and the relation of the comic panels to each other (Jacobs 2007: 22-24). For example, a character who is framed by certain elements in a panel, thus drawing our attention to said character, indicates that he/she is the central character in that panel; bordered panels can indicate a disconnection from the previous or subsequent panel; and, regarding the written text, words in bold suggest importance or vocal emphasis. Through this analysis, Jacobs (2007: 24) illustrates how an educator could go about teaching students to be consciously aware of how meaning is made in comics, thereby teaching them to become creative meaning-makers in their dealings with multimodal texts.

Other multiliteracies research focuses on multilingual classrooms, as is the case in the research conducted by Schwarzer, Haywood and Lorenzen (2003). Participants of this study were learners of an international pre-school class consisting of native speakers of Korean, Mandarin, Spanish, Turkish and English (Schwarzer et al. 2003: 457). The aim of the study was to foster these children’s native languages through various classroom activities, as their native language is considered a cultural resource that can be used as an educational asset in a multiliteracies classroom (Schwarzer et al. 2003: 455). Classroom activities involved learning lesson-related songs and words in each child’s native language, with the help of community

members and parents (Schwarzer et al. 2003: 457-458). The study also highlights the effectiveness of having materials available in the classroom that are written in the learners' native languages. This enables the learners to have daily exposure to their native language, hence becoming aware of its importance and consequently fostering in them a sense of linguistic pride and ownership (Schwarzer et al. 2003: 459). Thus, Schwarzer et al. (2003: 455) maintain that even though teachers may not be competent in their students' native languages, this does not prevent them from being able to promote these languages in a multiliterate classroom environment.

In South Africa, the most prominent proponents of multiliteracies have been researchers working on the Wits multiliteracies project. This project was initiated in 1996 and worked with "multiple semiotic modes (such as visual, verbal and performative modes) drawing on learners' histories and identities" (Stein and Newfield 2004: 28). In this project, multiliteracies have been introduced and investigated in various ways. Stein and Newfield (2004: 28) report on the different ways and outcomes used in different school settings. In one school in Soweto with limited resources, the English teacher started using multimodal pedagogies in his literature classes. Instead of asking students to discuss key scenes, he required them to draw particular scenes. This led to other forms of multimodal meaning-making such as students performing scenes out of the book or creating conceptual art. In their final matriculation exams, these students showed a marked improvement and only one student out of 140 failed the exam (Stein and Newfield 2006: 31).

Other projects included the exchange between a Johannesburg primary school and a school in Manhattan, New York. The schools differed in socioeconomic status, with the Johannesburg school being from a lower working-class area, while the school in Manhattan mostly had learners from middle-income families. The schools exchanged murals which represented their cultures and identities and which ultimately led to discussions on identity, inequality and differences in culture (Stein and Newfield 2006: 35).

Janks (2006) reports on a study where grade four learners, who were not L1 speakers of English, produced English books on and recordings of the local games they played. Since these learners did not necessarily have the English language

proficiency to write the written texts for the books, the visual and performance modalities acted as platforms for writing. Non-linguistic modalities were used as an entry point to perform the task. The study attempted to position children as knowledge makers and not only as consumers. The study showed how local knowledge can be relevant and used in a broader context. Janks (2006: 136) concludes her study by arguing that a multimodal pedagogy that uses local knowledge in literacy education gave these learners a glimpse into a “wider world to which they can belong, and in which they can claim a space for themselves”.

### **3.4.3 Multiliteracies in higher education contexts**

Lea (2004: 742) points out that previous research on academic literacies in higher education is limited as the focus has been mainly on non-traditional students and on written assessment. To design a course based on research that has only focused on non-traditional students will not be beneficial to the greater student population. Thus, Lea (2004: 742) suggests using a more inclusive group of students in order to generate impartial results. She also suggests analysing a greater variety of texts when researching academic literacies instead of focusing on written assignments alone (Lea 2004: 743). This is particularly important, now more than ever, given that computer technology has introduced a vast variety of new text forms that are becoming increasingly prevalent in higher education (Lea 2004: 743). Lea (2004: 744) suggests a multimodal approach to teaching and learning while not assuming a big shift away from written text.

Lea mentions a case study of an online postgraduate course from the Open University in the United Kingdom in order to illustrate how educational developers can design a course using certain principles obtained from academic literacies research (Lea 2004: 744). Academic literacies is a body of work associated with the New Literacy Studies view of literacies as social practices that are context-dependent and endeavour to conduct research concerning the disparities between tutors and students' understanding of academic writing in the higher education context (Lea 2004: 740). Lea (2004: 745) also includes possible limitations to this approach of course design.

The online course attempts to introduce multimodality by requesting that students submit both a written assignment as well as a visual presentation for their final assessment (Lea 2004: 751). Students' "linguistic, cultural and professional" backgrounds are acknowledged and respected and they are thus given the opportunity to decide whether they would prefer their visual presentation to count 35% or 20% of their total final assessment mark (Lea 2004: 751). Lea considers the students important participants in the process of knowledge construction, as their engagement with the texts warrants their participation in the process, which is reminiscent of the New London Group's description of students as "creative [...] makers of meaning" (Lea 2004: 89).

Archer (2006) also adopts a multimodal approach to higher education assessment, but in a South African context. Consistent with the New London Group's study on pedagogy (1996), she views diversity as an asset rather than a drawback as students from different linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds will bring a variety of resources to academic genres, which would inevitably result in a genre transformation (Archer 2006: 452). Diversity in literacy studies is also often referred to as "heteroglossia", a term introduced by Bakhtin (1941). It entails "the multi-faceted and multi-layered plurality [of] language" (Busch 2011: 3). Archer highlights the importance of establishing a multimodal approach to teaching in South Africa where variety in the classroom (whether linguistic, cultural, or social) is the norm (Archer 2006: 452).

Archer examines a communication course of an engineering faculty in a South African university (Archer 2006: 452). This course aims to address the issues that are associated with a diverse student population and attempts to prepare students academically (Archer 2006: 452). For their assignment, students were asked to explore "the infrastructural and developmental needs of a rural settlement of which they have personal knowledge" (Archer 2006: 453). The assignment consisted of an individual written report as well as a poster produced in groups (Archer 2006: 453). Archer analyses one of the group's assignments using social semiotic multimodal analysis in order to illustrate multimodality (Archer 2006: 455). This method of

analysis focuses on the correlation between texts, social practices and social contexts of language and other modes (Archer 2006: 455).

Archer (2006: 456) found that in the written reports there was evidence of movement between different “domains of practice”, specifically academic language and informal language, which she sees as a normal part of acquiring academic register. With regard to the poster, she found a mixture of informal and formal domains across the different modes. Specifically, the images and colours used in the poster represent one’s everyday observation of the world, while the written parts of the poster were very formal and represent scientific discourse rather than everyday speech (Archer 2006: 455). Archer (2006: 455) believes that the multimodal nature of the poster enables a tolerable co-existence of different domains, whereas the report is presented in only one mode (the written mode), therefore the switch between different domains “often manifests in lexico-grammatical awkwardness”.

Archer observed that the poster’s design is guided by the written mode as the written text forms an organised linear sequence, called “linear design”, while the images are simply placed in the spaces between sections of written text, referred to as “spatial design” (2006: 456). Although the design of the poster is guided by the written mode, meaning is not drawn from the written text alone, but through the combination of all the elements in the poster which is what multimodal meaning-making necessitates. Archer (2006: 456) noted a switch between linear design and spatial design, in that the images were numbered unsystematically and did not appear in numerical order on the poster. When using the written mode, the students also made use of point form on their poster. This is a visually-friendly way of presenting information but Archer (2006: 457) points out that it hinders the ability of communicating hierarchical information.

In the written mode, the students made use of agentless passives and did not use first- or second-person pronouns, apart from in the subtitles of the pictures (Archer 2006: 457). This was done in order to distance themselves from their work which Archer views as a means of realising scientific discourse (2006: 457). Their use of first- and second-person pronouns in the pictures’ subtitles reveals more of a personal discourse rather than a scientific one. Scientific discourse is more often



realised through the written mode, as it is through the verbal mode that students usually come across academic discourse (Archer 2006: 457). Archer (2006: 457) points out that, because the subtitles belong to the pictures, they are linked to the visual mode, making it understandable why the language used in these subtitles is inconsistent with scientific discourse in that it is more personal in tone, therefore giving students more creative freedom.

Archer (2006: 458) saw that the students depict the same infrastructural or developmental problems of the township in a different manner depending on the mode in which it is presented. For example, the bad road conditions were portrayed in the written report as “conditions of roads [...] retarding the pace of business effectiveness”, while on the poster this same issue was represented in a picture’s subtitle as “Dust leave me alone” (Archer 2006: 458). The former description is clearly academic register while the latter takes on a personal tone.

Thus, the “modal affordances” of the visual and the verbal are somewhat different. Recall that a modal affordance, as defined by Kress, is the potential of a mode to easily make meaning (Jewitt 2009: 24). While the visual mode is effective for conveying emotions and personal issues, the written mode seems to be best suited for communicating rational information (Archer 2006: 458). Archer (2006: 459) deliberates that this could be accounted for by the fact that the poster genre is less normalised than the written report genre (in academic environments), allowing more freedom for creativity and personal reflection in the visual mode, whereas the written report genre is constrained by prescriptive specifications which makes it difficult to express any personal feelings.

From these findings, Archer (2006: 460) proposed that, in order to develop academic literacies practices, modal affordances should be investigated with students. She also points out that it is customary to employ a variety of modes when presenting information in the field of Engineering, and it should therefore become customary to take a multimodal approach to the assessment methods of the field as well (Archer 2006: 460). This is of particular importance in the higher educational context as the student population is diverse in many aspects, including the types of skills and resources with which they enter university (Archer 2006: 460). Students can benefit



from a multimodal approach to the assessment methods used in engineering courses as they will be able to utilise their skills and resources which are ordinarily prohibited due to the academic conventions of written text.

Gough and Bock (2001), also working within the framework of multiliteracies in South Africa, argue for the expansion of the notion of 'academic literacy' to include oral literacy traditions. Furthermore, they argue that structure and organisation occur in oral literacy practices and that this can be drawn on in the development of written academic literacy. Expanding the idea of multiliteracies to include multimodal teaching and learning methods, Thesen (2001) reports on one course in the Humanities at a South African university. She takes a critical approach of multimodality in higher education, arguing that even multimodal forms of teaching can reproduce dominant academic literacy cultures. It should be noted that, although multimodal pedagogy was used in lectures and workshops, the formal assessment for this module was a written, academic essay. The results of the essay were polarised in that white middle-class students from good schooling backgrounds fared much better than black working-class students from under-resourced schooling backgrounds (Thesen 2001: 138). Therefore, despite using a multimodal pedagogy, students who did not have the dominant linguistic cultural capital were still disadvantaged. Thesen (2001: 143) states that "we need to be cautious that we do not elevate multimodality to the next pedagogical holy cow" and proposes that both lecturers and students should rather focus on developing metalanguages in order to critically reflect on the processes used in academic discourse.

Contrary to Thesen's (2001) findings, Stein and Newfield (2001: 33) report how multimodal pedagogies can be used to counteract dominant academic cultures. In their case study of a university course aiming to increase academic literacy in visual arts students, they report that using local knowledge can enable students to recover their own agency that "ha[s] been made invisible in the school system" (Stein and Newfield 2001: 33). Their study was different from Thesen's (2001) because the assessment method included a multimodal component and because a western

concept (quilt making) was reconceptualised within the African tradition of *minceka*<sup>6</sup> making. This also shows that multimodal pedagogies need not only be conceptualised in terms of technologically-based multimodalities.

### 3.5 Digital literacies

Up to this point, the literature which has been reviewed in this chapter has mainly pertained to non-digital multiliteracies. However, as we are living in an era where we rely upon digital technologies on a daily basis, it is essential to provide an overview of the literature that deals with digitally-created multiliteracies as well, also referred to as “new literacies”.

Prensky (2001a) remarks that most students entering university today have grown up in the digital age and have therefore not had to familiarise themselves with new technologies because they have been surrounded by these technologies their whole lives. As a result, Prensky (2001a: 1-2) argues, members of the younger generation are much more technologically-inclined than the older generation. He compares this notion to language acquisition in that those who are exposed to a particular language from birth are able to acquire this language unconsciously and with ease, while those who are only exposed to this language later on in life have to consciously learn it, making it a much more difficult task (Prensky 2001a: 2). Keeping with this comparison, Prensky (2001a: 1-2) terms those who are born in the digital era as “digital natives”, and those who were not born in the digital era as “digital immigrants”. Other terms which incorporate the same idea as “digital natives” include “the Net generation” (Tapscott 1998) and “millennials” (Howe and Strauss 2000).

Prensky (2001a: 3) states that educators are still teaching students outdated content and in the old-fashioned manner in which they themselves were taught, which is neither effective nor useful for digital natives. There is thus a miscommunication between students and educators. Prensky proposes that educators alter their style of teaching as well as the curricula in order to stay abreast of students’ preferences

---

<sup>6</sup> Stein and Newfield (2001: 38) describe *minceka* as “a decorative, embroidered cloth of hybrid form, from the northern Limpopo Province in South Africa, worn by women as a form of cultural dress”.

(2001a: 4). One such solution he suggests for this miscommunication is turning learning material into digital games (Prensky 2001a: 4).

Prensky (2001a: 1) even goes so far as to suggest that the brains of digital natives function differently and are structured differently to that of digital immigrants. He elaborates on this point in his second instalment of *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* (Prensky 2001b). He uses evidence from other studies to show that, contrary to popular belief, the brain does not lose its plasticity after a certain age and can actually change its structure at any age when extensive time is spent on a certain type of task (Prensky 2001b: 1-3). One such experiment to which Prensky (2001b: 2) refers to illustrate this point is Tramano's magnetic resonance imaging study on the brains of musicians versus those of non-musicians. The results of this experiment reveal that the cerebella of musicians' brains are of a greater volume than those of the non-musicians, demonstrating that one's brain can indeed reorganise itself depending on the type and amount of exposure one receives. Furthermore, Prensky (2001b: 3) adds that thought patterns and strategies are not universal as western researchers once assumed; rather, our thought patterns are determined by our life experiences.

He uses this information to demonstrate that digital natives think differently and that their brains are most likely physically different to that of digital immigrants because the stimuli that they are exposed to growing up are much different to the stimuli that digital immigrants were exposed to, therefore resulting in completely different thought patterns (Prensky 2001b: 3-4). Some researchers claim that the linear thought processes that are central in schools and universities can actually impede students' education rather than benefit it because, being digital natives, they no longer think linearly (Prensky 2001b: 3). Spending a great deal of time on the internet, these students are constantly exposed to multimodal presentations of information, with hypertext links taking them to completely new pages with new information, all in a matter of seconds. Thus, Prensky (2001b: 3-4) argues that digital natives' brains have to adapt to the kind of exposure that they receive, which is non-linear, fast-paced information, and that their way of thinking is therefore likely to be different to

that of digital immigrants. Accordingly, teaching methods need to be adjusted to suit these new ways of thinking.

Similarly, Stone (2007) suggests utilising websites as a form of multiliteracies, considering that it is a familiar platform for young students today. She claims that websites inadvertently teach students to construct and deconstruct meaning in a multimodal context. Stone reveals that literacy-centred research pertaining to websites has either focused on websites that are officially used in pedagogical contexts or on websites that are used outside of the classroom (such as fan fictions, chat rooms and blogs). Little research has been conducted on the interaction between these two functions that websites assume (Stone 2007: 52). In an attempt to bridge this gap, Stone (2007: 50) examines a number of websites that are popular amongst adolescent students and shows how, in spite of common perceptions that such websites are detrimental to literacy acquisition, these websites actually require students to utilise “complex literacy practices”.

Many of the websites that Stone analysed display genres that are familiar to educational contexts such as biographies, interviews and summaries (Stone 2007: 56). Stone also found that the syntax and vocabulary used in these websites are often higher grade, thus exposing students to literacies that challenge and extend their current knowledge (Stone 2007: 56). Furthermore, the websites make use of a vast variety of modes such as written text, images, sound, as well as combinations of these modes (Stone 2007: 59). Additionally, many elements of the websites require intertextual knowledge for full comprehension (Stone 2007: 59). This subconsciously teaches students to deconstruct multimodal texts as well as to tap into their knowledge of previous texts in order to make meaning. When looking in retrospect then, popular websites necessitate a lot more knowledge than people give them credit for. Therefore, Stone (2007: 51) argues that knowledge of these websites can provide educators with an understanding of the types of literacies students acquire online and use this information as a tool in curriculum design. In a sense then, instead of criticising popular websites and elevating traditional curricula, educators and students can find a middle ground.

Akin to Prensky's (2001) idea of using digital games as a solution to the miscommunication between students and educators, Gee (2003) considers the constructiveness of computer and video games as a form of literacy practice. He analyses a number of aspects of digital games that are beneficial for learning but are not employed in education institutions. Firstly, the information received in digital games does not appear out of context, and the player uses this information immediately, unlike in school where students are usually provided with information outside of its context, and they are not required to utilise this information until later on in life (Gee 2003: 2). Consequently, when students are eventually placed in a situation where they are required to use the information that was provided to them, they can often no longer recall it (Gee 2003: 2). Additionally, digital games introduce problems in a logical pattern across the stages of a game, so that the simple problems that game players are faced with in the beginning stages of the game provide them with knowledge of how to face the more complex problems in later stages (Gee 2003: 2).

Another point that Gee (2003: 2) makes is that game players are regularly a part of the creation process rather than just receivers of information as they are in schools. This point resembles the New London Group's belief that students should be viewed as "creative [...] makers of meaning" (Cazden et al. 1996: 89). Digital games are created to be challenging yet feasible and players are also able to set and reset the game's level of difficulty as they become accustomed to it. Hence, players are constantly challenged which keeps them motivated to complete the level and eventually the entire game (Gee 2003: 2). In contrast, schools usually set their standards in line with the weakest students, leaving a great amount of stronger students unchallenged and therefore unmotivated (Gee 2003: 2). Another factor that, according to Gee, keeps players motivated in digital games is the way in which they can get into character and feel as though they have entered a new world (2003: 3). Gee (2003: 3) maintains that this would be beneficial as a learning strategy in schools and workplaces as recreating one's identity to match the task at hand is a significant factor in staying motivated, and thus a great advantage for learning.

### 3.5.1 Critiques of digital literacies

Although the idea of using new, digital literacies as a learning strategy seems beneficial for students of the digital era, a number of researchers have critiqued this approach (Bennett 2012; Helsper and Eynon 2010, and Jones, Ramanau, Cross and Healing 2010).

Firstly, the definitions of “digital natives”, “the Net generation” and the “millennials” is problematic as it presupposes that everyone born in the digital era is technologically inclined. However, as studies have shown, this is not always the case. Rather, research has revealed that age is not the primary deciding factor in one’s ability to successfully use digital technology, but that external factors play an even greater role in determining one’s digital aptitude (Bennett 2012: 4; Helsper and Enyon 2010: 1). In fact, there is more diversity *within* age groups, in terms of digital aptitude, than there is *between* age groups (Bennett 2012: 6; Jones et al. 2010: 725). People choose to use technology and communication practices which suit their needs, irrespective of age (Bennett 2012: 7; Jones et al. 2010: 726). Helsper and Enyon (2010:5) attempt to improve the understanding of “digital native” by investigating whether being a digital native is determined by “age”, “experience” or “breadth of use”. Their research revealed that, although not the only factor, extensive use of new technologies (“breadth of use”) seems to be the greatest determiner of digital native status, thus conflicting with the information given by Prensky (2001) (Helsper and Enyon 2010: 17).

Another factor that the “digital native” hypothesis disregards is socioeconomic status. Many students who were born in the digital era do not have the same resources as students in higher socioeconomic brackets, and it would follow that these students would be less proficient in operating new digital technologies (Bennett 2012: 8). This poses a problem for the approach that many researchers are adopting, that is, modifying pedagogies to be more digitally-friendly. Contrary to what Prensky (2001) and others believe, this approach could create more problems than it can solve considering that many students born in the digital era are not familiar with these new technologies (Helsper and Enyon 2010: 15).

It is apparent that many studies provided evidence against and opposed the Prensky's (2001) digital native hypothesis. However, although this hypothesis was largely discredited, it did present food for thought as well as a space for further research. Bennett (2012:9) likened the digital native hypothesis to a mere "moral panic", of which the latter will be elaborated upon in the following section.

### **3.6 The "moral panic" and "old" new literacies**

A moral panic arises "when a particular group is seen as a threat to societal norms [and] the concern inspired exceeds the supporting evidence" (Bennett 2012: 9). Additionally, the language used to construct such an argument is usually excessive and is constructed in such a way that it is taken as truth, leaving no space for discussion (Jones et al. 2010: 724).

This is not the first, and probably not the last, moral panic that has occurred in the context of education. Wertham's (1954) view of comics seems to resemble the same type of moral panic that ensued when digital technologies became dominant. To put this into perspective, it must be noted that Wertham's argument took place in the 1950s. He argued that learners struggle with reading as a result of their engagement with comics, where pictures dominate written text (Jacobs 2007: 19). Wertham believed that these learners were not actually reading but were focusing all their attention on the pictures instead as a means of escaping the difficult task of learning to read (Jacobs 2007: 19). It follows from this that Wertham favours the written mode over the visual mode, or "old visual literacy" over "new visual literacy" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 17). However, as was explicated earlier, this approach to literacy has largely been replaced with the new visual literacy approach, thus confirming that Wertham's theory (that comics have a negative effect on students' reading skills) was just another moral panic. Where comics were seen as a "new literacy" more than half a century ago (hence my calling it an "old" new literacy), digital literacies are seen as the new literacies of today.

Aziz, Shamim, Aziz and Avais (2013) and Drouin and Davis (2009) show that similar hypotheses were made in research about SMS language. Because there are only a limited amount of characters that one can use in an SMS message, people began to

shorten their language through abbreviations, acronyms and vowel omissions in order to fit as much as possible into one message (Drouin and Davis 2009: 49-50). This shortened or simplified use of language, commonly referred to as “text-speak” or “SMS speak”, was carried over to contexts outside of SMS messages, such as various social networks, and thus received names such as “webspeak”, “netlingo” and “teen-talk” (Aziz et al. 2013: 12885). This caused a widespread panic that this type of language use would erode one’s ability to spell and use language “correctly” (Aziz et al. 2013: 12885; Drouin and Davis 2009: 51). However, research on text-speak reveals that this concern has no tangible evidence (Drouin and Davis 2009: 51).

Just as language change is inevitable, it is inevitable that the way we approach literacies, as well as the types of literacies that emerge, will change over time. This is largely as a result of the fact that literacy is socially-dependent. Hence, as society changes, literacy practices change as well. This does not mean that newer forms of literacies will result in a degradation of education. In the words of David Bruce, “there is a fallacy that kids aren’t reading and writing anymore. They are, but they are just reading and writing differently than what we’ve traditionally done in schools” (Borsheim, Merritt and Reed 2008: 88). It seems then, that such anxieties are simply a result of a fear of change as well as a fear of the unknown outcomes that may stem from these changes.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the evolution of literacy, starting from the traditional understanding of literacy which focuses on reading and writing alone and where literacy is viewed as a neutral entity that one needs to acquire in order to become literate. A more social view of literacy was then introduced, where context plays an important role in literacy acquisition. The relatively recent concept of ‘multiliteracies’ was explored in-depth. Multiliteracies acknowledges that more than one type of literacy exists, and that literacy involves more than just reading and writing. Additionally, a multiliteracies approach encourages the utilisation of a variety of modes, as well as a variety of language codes. This chapter also investigated certain



problems surrounding the verbal mode of pedagogic assessment in order to argue for a shift in assessment methods. An important aspect of multiliteracies research is the acknowledgement of how new technologies have brought about a multifarious range of new text types which many researchers argue should be employed in the pedagogic arena. These new text types are often referred to as “digital literacies” and were investigated in this chapter, along with some of the critiques that have emerged in response to these new literacies. Finally, this chapter has explored some of the common concerns surrounding changes in literacy customs, which have been described as a “moral panic”.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide an overview of the research methods that I have used to collect the data for this study, as well as an explication of how I analysed the data. My research takes place within the context of an AELS second-year course offered by the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University. The data used for this study comprises advertisements produced by the second-year AELS students as well as their written essays that accompanied and reflected on these advertisements. My data was qualitatively analysed using multimodal analysis approaches that expanded from Halliday's (1978) social semiotics, and appear within the framework of multiliteracies (Cazden et al. 1996). A full explication of this information will be provided in this chapter. The chapter will conclude with limitations of the study, followed by possible contributions that the outcomes of my research could make to higher education and the field of Linguistics as a whole.

### **4.2 Research site and context**

The study took place at Stellenbosch University. More particularly, my research was conducted using the assignments produced by second-year AELS students. AELS is a year-long course offered by the Department of General Linguistics and may be taken by those students who passed their first year of English Studies. Students' results for AELS 278 are calculated using the system of continuous assessment. This evaluation approach requires that students complete all of the tests, assignments and tasks given to them in order to receive a final mark. Therefore, students do not write a formal examination, however, their marks for each assessment piece (test, assignment or task) constitute their final mark at the end of the year.

AELS 278 comprises several modules on subjects such as textual analysis, varieties of English, English in the media, English grammar, stylistics and the use and abuse of language. The module on which my research is based is entitled "Intertextual English" and is constructed around a number of assumptions, which will now be discussed in further detail.

The first assumption is that students arrive at university with a diverse set of skills or literacies. Thus, it acknowledges the existence of “multiliteracies”, a term introduced in the previous chapter. This is akin to the findings of Archer (2006), who notes how students from different linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds bring a variety of resources to academic genres (2006: 452). Diversity in literacy studies is also referred to as “heteroglossia”, a term introduced by Bakhtin (1941). It entails “the multi-faceted and multi-layered plurality” of language but later pertained to literacies in general (Busch 2011: 3).

Another assumption is that the communication landscape of students is becoming increasingly multimodal, resulting in a shift away from the preferred mode of higher education institutions, namely the written mode. This is partly as a result of the digital era in which we live, as the verbal, visual, and audio modes co-exist to make meaning, thereby creating new forms of text (Iedema 2003: 33). Although there is a common acceptance that the communication landscape has changed, higher education institutions still seem to consider the written text and written communication as the most dominant form of meaning-making (Lea 2004: 743).

Thus, there is a disparity between the types of literacies with which students arrive at university and the types of literacies that they are expected to use at university; this is another assumption around which the Intertextual English module was designed. This can be related to Prensky’s claim that there is a miscommunication between students and educators due to the latter still teaching the former in the old-fashioned manner in which they themselves were taught (2001a: 3).

The Intertextual English module aspires instead to use the knowledge and skills that students have when entering university to develop the types of literacy practices required by higher education. Considering young adults’ constant exposure to multimedia, a multimodal approach to literacy practices seems like a reasonable approach to take. In fact, it is surprising that such an approach has not yet been implemented, considering that studies from the early 1990s have suggested a multimodal approach to pedagogy yet two decades later, not much has changed. This is apart from a few recent exceptions where researchers have successfully applied new literacy studies to pedagogical contexts (see Larson and Marsh (in

press); Rowsell and Pahl (in press); Pahl and Rowsell (2005); Mahiri (2004); Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, Shuart-Faris (2004), and Street (2004)).

The present study attempts to investigate the meaning-making potential of multimodal assessment methods in higher education. This is in line with Archer's opinion of establishing a multimodal approach to teaching in South Africa where variety in the classroom (whether linguistic, cultural, or social) is the norm (Archer 2006: 452).

#### **4.3 Data and research instruments**

Data was collected in 2012 and 2013 from second-year students of AELS from Stellenbosch University. Questionnaires were distributed in the first few weeks of classes in order to obtain some background information about the students, such as age, first language(s), preferred languages and general text consumption and text production patterns. The information obtained from the questionnaires was used to design the course further. Classroom observations were also made to provide contextual information. This information only served as background for my thesis, and was not analysed in detail.

The data which formed the core of this study takes the form of assignments that formed part of a larger project on academic literacy and multimodality. The assignments included an advertisement as well as an essay that critically reflected on the choices that students made in creating and presenting their advertisements, including the rationale behind their choices. These written essays were also consulted, simply to obtain additional information surrounding the advertisements, such as students' "interest" (Jewitt 2009: 31).

The instructions for the 2012 and 2013 assignments differ slightly. For the 2012 assignment, students were required to design an advertisement for the AELS subject with the aim of promoting the subject to prospective students. For the 2013 assignment, students were required to design an advertisement for a non-profit organisation, whether existing or made-up, dealing with an issue of interest to them, or an issue close to their heart. Apart from that, the assignment instructions from both

2012 and 2013 remain the same (See Appendices A and B for more details on the assignment requirements).

Students were required to include an example of explicit intertextuality, interdiscursivity and parallelism in their advertisement. These were the only factors by which they were constrained, aside from which they had creative freedom. However, it can be argued that these assignments are examples of co-constructed text because the course designers play a role in constructing students' assignments by setting boundaries for them in the form of instructions or guidelines. This can be likened to Fairclough's (1992) claim that all texts and discourses rely on and are influenced by prior discourses. If given completely free rein, the students' end products would probably turn out much differently. Therefore, the concept of co-constructed text was kept in mind when analysing the data.

In the Intertextual English module, students could select in which format (multimodal, printed, moving texts etc.) they wanted to present their assignment. Thus, following modal affordance, students could decide which mode best communicated their message and use this mode to present their assignment. This assignment can be said to deviate from the norm as the traditional assessment method in AELS (and the Humanities in general) is written assessment in the form of formal academic essays. This module therefore gives students more freedom to explore alternative forms of meaning-making other than the traditional written essay which, in turn, allows them to (re-)discover their creative side.

Because I am working within the field of social semiotics, where communication is viewed as socially embedded, it is important to give a brief overview of these students' language demographics. The 2012 students had an average age of 20.6 years; 47.56% have English as a first language, 47.56% have Afrikaans as a first language, 2.44% have isiXhosa as a first language, 1.22% have Siswati as a first language, and 1.22% have German as a first language. Results show that English is the preferred language for written assessment (84.15%), while 15.85% of the students selected Afrikaans.

The 2013 students have an average age of 20.8 years; 47% have English as a first language, 50% have Afrikaans as a first language, 1% have isiXhosa as a first language, 1% have German as a first language, and 1% have Southern Sotho as a first language. Results show that 75% prefer to write in English, 24% prefer to write in Afrikaans, and 1% prefers to write in German. Because it is an *Applied English Language Studies* course, the module is presented in English only. The overall profiles of the 2012 and 2013 intake are remarkably similar which allows for the handling of the data in a similar fashion.

#### **4.4 Data selection and analysis**

Permission was obtained from the students in order to use their assignments for research purposes (see Appendix C for an example of a consent form). Of those assignments for which permission was obtained, I selected 40 assignments to use as my sample. A selection was made on the basis of representativeness, in that I looked at the portions of the class that used the various mediums of presentations (for example, videos, posters, brochures etc.) and made my selection according to this ratio so as to be representative of the class. Additionally, I looked at the assignments which received an A, B, C and D grade, and lower, and selected assignments that are in keeping with this mark distribution so as to prevent skewed results. The selected assignments were saved electronically: printed assignments were scanned while multimedia assignments were saved on a disk. These assignments were investigated in order to address the research questions.

Initially, multimodal analysis was used to analyse each selected assignment in order to obtain a broad overview of the assignments and identify trends and patterns. However, these analyses served only as background information and were not incorporated in my thesis.

My data was qualitatively analysed. Increasingly, studies on multimodality have been researched from an ethnographic perspective using qualitative analysis (Dicks, Soyinka and Coffey 2006). An ethnographic perspective of multimodality considers the social and cultural aspects involved in multimodal meaning-making. Similarly, I used social semiotic multimodal analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) as well as

other forms of multimodal analysis that have extended from Halliday's (1978) social semiotics. This approach was chosen due to its close connection with society and societal changes. The South African higher educational context is characterised by diversity and our higher educational institutions have to deal with issues and tensions surrounding transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, it is important to recognise the social entrenchment of these students' assignments. In keeping with the central principal of social semiotics, the context cannot be divorced from the products generated by these students. Furthermore, the analysis was carried out within the framework of multiliteracies where it is acknowledged that more than one type of literacy exists and that all language varieties should be considered, rather than the standard or official form alone (Cazden et al. 1996: 63). This is also useful for the South African context considering the vast variety of languages and dialects that are used in South Africa.

Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) principles of composition were used to analyse the students' assignments in order to get an idea of the design process in which they were engaged. Through the use of these resources, it became possible to discern the focus of their text as well as to understand the relationships that were formed between elements of their text. This provided information about students' "immediate interest" as the chosen elements and layout do not constitute a random selection, but are rather a systematic decision made by the students to convey a particular message (Mavers 2009: 265). The various semiotic resources that students were able to exploit were also investigated and the modal affordances and limitations of these resources were evaluated. In other words, I explored what students were (un)able to communicate through utilising specific modes. Furthermore, the social discourses that students drew upon in their advertisements were also investigated. This was indicative of the types of literacy practices that students engage with, which could ultimately assist in the creation and design of a new pedagogic approach to learning and assessment.

#### **4.5 Limitations**

Due to time constraints, as well as the fact that some of the students dropped out of the AELS course, interviews could not be held with the students. This could have

provided additional insight into the motivations behind their advertisement designs which could have made for interesting material to complement my data considering that social semiotic multimodal analysis places its emphasis on the sign-maker (Jewitt 2009: 30-31).

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has given an exposition of the research context in which my study takes place and has provided an overview of the research methods which were used to collect the data. Additionally, explications were given of the approaches employed in the data analysis as well as the framework in which I worked.

The outcomes of the research will have an impact on the way in which higher education and assessment is conceptualised within a diverse, transformative context such as South Africa. Moreover, the research will contribute to the wider field of Linguistics by investigating how modes, other than language, interact with language and contribute towards meaning-making.



## Chapter 5: Multimodal Analysis of Students' Assignments

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyse the advertisements that the students created for their assignment. Although the main focus is on the advertisement, reference will also be made to the essay because many of the strategies used by students only become apparent when reading the accompanying essay. However, the goal is not to necessarily compare the written and multimodal assessment.

I will begin by introducing the themes and patterns that were evident in the assignments, including the types of modes that the students chose for the presentation of their advertisement as well as the materiality through which these modes were realised. I will then explore the potentials (or affordances) and limitations of these modes and materials. Finally, I will investigate the various social discourses that students drew upon in their advertisements.

### 5.2 Point of departure

As stated in chapter one, the analysis of this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- i. To what extent do modes, other than written language, feature in student assessment when they are given the choice of integrating other semiotic modes?
- ii. For which meaning-making potential do students use modes other than written academic language in their assessment?

In order to address the first research question, I looked at the trends and tendencies of particular modes which featured in the students' assignments. I chose to look at trends rather than actual figures or amounts of specific modes used because many assignments fit into more than one modal category which makes it difficult to accurately count the occurrence of each mode. It would also be counterproductive to count the occurrence of each mode as the aim of the study is to investigate how different modes work *together* to make meaning. Furthermore, I aimed for my study

to be qualitatively, rather than quantitatively, focused. It should be noted that, as is the common convention in multimodal discourse analysis, the terms “mode” and “semiotic resource” will be used interchangeably, as a mode is an agreed-upon semiotic resource for making meaning according to a particular community or social group (Kress 2010: 79). What is (not) considered a mode is sometimes contested, however, this contested notion of ‘mode’ will not affect this study in any substantial way.

In order to address the second research question, I looked at the affordances of the various modes that the students chose to utilise for their advertisement, as well as the materiality of these advertisements. In other words, I explored the limitations and potentials of the modes employed, as well as the limitations and potentials of the materiality through which these modes are realised.

### **5.3 General trends found in students’ assignments**

As stipulated in chapter four, the 2012 class was required to create an advertisement for AELS to market to first-year students, while the 2013 class was required to create an advertisement for a non-profit organisation of their choice (See Appendices A and B respectively). These advertisements had to incorporate three intertextual devices, namely parallelism, explicit intertextuality and interdiscursivity. They then also had to write a formal, academic essay in which they explained these intertextual devices and described how they were used in their advertisement to construct the ideal audience. In terms of the criteria for the assignment, the advertisements were generally better executed than the written essays<sup>7</sup>. I believe that this is indicative of students’ literacy practices and will be explicated in the rest of the chapter.

For both the 2012 and 2013 classes, most students chose to produce printed assignments (in the form of posters and brochures), followed by a large portion of students who chose the multimedia mode (in the form of PowerPoint displays and short films) as their medium of presentation. A small number of students chose to present their advertisements as websites, while only two students used audio clips as their mode of choice.

---

<sup>7</sup> According to the marks students received.

That most students chose the printed mode is most likely attributable to the fact that they were required to include visuals or other paralinguistic features in their assignments. Therefore, the modal affordance of the printed form allowed for the adherence to that particular assignment requirement. This can be likened to Kress's notion of 'aptness', as "the form [which] has the requisite features to be the carrier of the meaning" (Kress 2010: 55). However, the design of most of these printed assignments still included the utilisation of more than one mode and medium, and were realised by a variety of materials. The modes employed were mainly linguistic (typed or written text) and visual (images), and were used alongside each other. It is important to note that another requirement of the assignment necessitated that the students use modes other than language, which means that all of the assignments will necessarily include modes other than language. The mediums used in the design process of the printed assignments include computers, printers and scanners, while those produced by hand used mediums such as colour crayons or pens. The materiality of these assignments ranged from the conventional paper-made posters or brochures to assignments that included forms of materiality that are unconventional to a university assignment. For example, plastic badges were included in one assignment (as can be seen in figure 1) and pegs and babies' socks in another (figure 2).



Figure 1: Plastic badges included in an advertisement



**Figure 2: Babies' socks included in an advertisement**

Multimedia (in the form of PowerPoint displays and short films) was the second most salient medium in which students opted to present their assignments, utilising modes such as the visual (images), the linguistic (typed text), as well as sound in many cases (in the form of either music, sound effects, or speech). Movement is another mode that is exploited in multimedia. With regard to the PowerPoint displays, movement can be seen in the transition between slides as well as in the animations that are added to the presentation. Depending on its manner of production, movement in the short films was incorporated in one of two ways: in the case of stop-motion films, movement is evident in the transition between images (although the slight changes between each image create the effect of natural movement, as would be observed in a series of photographs taken with the multi-shot setting); in the case of standard video recordings, movement takes the form of the natural flow of everyday movement, therefore including body movements and gestures. Some of these multimedia assignments were more advanced or technical than others, perhaps revealing the varying aptitudes that students possess as creators of digital texts.

In addition to movement, the websites also utilised the visual and linguistic modes as semiotic resources, although sound was absent. What distinguished this medium from the printed and the multimedia presentations, however, was the presence of

tabs that, when selected, either take the reader to new pages of the website or present the reader with new pieces of information. This allows the reader to freely navigate his/her way through the website, rather than having his/her reading path set by the designer (in this case, the student) (Kress 2005: 7). Here again, students displayed varying levels of proficiency in their ability to create websites.

The audio presentations made use of sound in the forms of speech, music and sound effects. This mode was the least featured form of advertisement, which could be attributed to the fact that students were required to include visuals or other paralinguistic features in their advertisements. Considering that visuals are not an option in an audio presentation, they would have to use elements such as intonation and rhythm as their paralinguistic features. This is more complicated than simply using images or other visuals which, I would imagine, is the reason why most of the students opted for the latter.

#### **5.4 Description of the assignments selected for analysis**

In order to get an overall perception of the assignments which were selected for analysis, each assignment was analysed individually. These analyses will, however, not be included in this chapter, as it will become too lengthy and repetitive. Rather, the trends and patterns that were found will be presented and individual assignments will be used to illustrate these findings.

I tried to make the selection of assignments for analysis as representative of the class as possible (in terms of medium of presentation as well as marks). Because I did not receive consent from all of the students to use their assignments in my study, it became more of a task to retain representativeness. For example, I only received consent from one student who created a website. Nevertheless, this did not pose too much of a problem considering that the number of students who created websites was minimal. Therefore, I was still able to collect a selection of assignments that accurately reflects the classes' make-up.

It was interesting to see that the trends for the 2012 and 2013 classes were very similar in terms of the modes of presentations that students chose for their assignment, as well as their marks. To illustrate this, the preferred mode of

presentation for both the 2012 and 2013 students was the printed mode; multimedia was the second most salient mode, while websites and audio clips were the least featured modes of presentation. Concerning the marks for their assignments, about one-third of the class received an A grade, approximately one-sixth of the students received a B grade, a C grade was obtained by about one-fifth of the class, while only a small percentage of students obtained a D grade. Students who received a mark lower than a D formed about one-sixth of the class<sup>8</sup>. Once again, this pattern holds true for both 2012 and 2013 classes.

I aimed to make a selection of assignments that is in keeping with these statistics in order to prevent skewed results. Thus, the assignments that I selected for analysis utilise all of the modes, namely linguistic, visual, audio, digital and multimedia. Indeed, many of these modes feature alongside each other to create multimodal texts. Most of the selected assignments use the visual mode alongside the written mode, and is realised in the printed or hard-copy format. The website that I selected for analysis also made use of the written and visual modes, but can be distinguished from the printed assignments due to its tabs, or hyperlinks, that take the reader to new pages or pieces of information within the document.

The visual and written modes were also used alongside each other in the PowerPoint presentations, with many of these presentations also including the audio mode. Additionally, this was combined with movement which took the form of animations and transitions between slides. These same modes were also combined in the form of short films. It can thus be said that the films combined all of the modes and therefore make use of the most amount of semiotic resources, as opposed to the other mediums of presentation that some of the students chose to use.

Regarding the content of the selected assignments, most students chose to incorporate popular culture discourse as their examples of explicit intertextuality and interdiscursivity, including popular movies, songs, well-known actors or characters, and comics. Many students also made reference to digital and cyber literacies by using, for example, internet memes and gaming discourse, as well as making use of

---

<sup>8</sup> The assignments were marked according to a marking grid and marks were continually discussed by the different markers to achieve and ensure consistency.

text-speak. These trends hold true for both the 2012 and the 2013 assignments. I speculate that the rationale behind this trend is that these discourses are familiar to the students as they spend a lot of time engaging with these types of discourses. In fact, results from the questionnaires that were distributed among the students reveal that their literacy practices are comprised primarily of social networking sites, SMSing, and watching series on their laptops<sup>9</sup>. The fact that the 2012 advertisements were targeted at first-year students, who are predominantly between the ages of 18 and 21, could also justify their use of popular discourse in their advertisements.

## **5.5 Printed advertisements**

### **5.5.1 The affordance of layout**

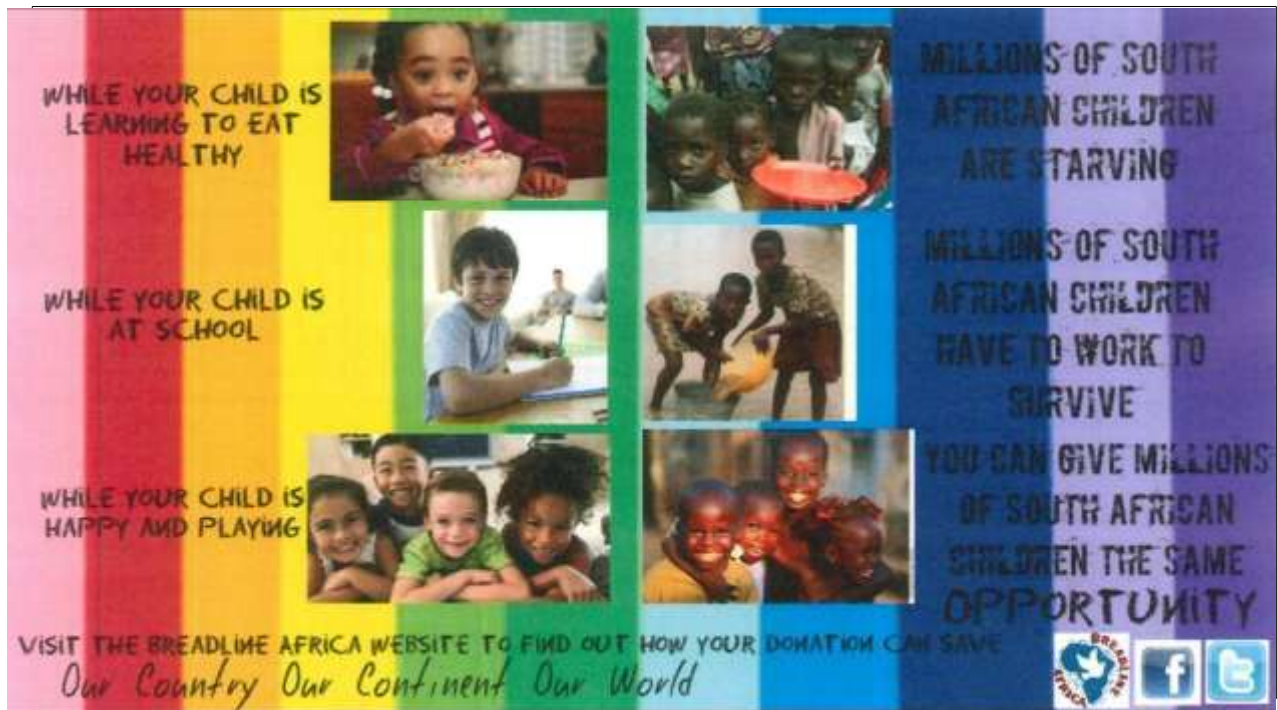
In the case of the printed advertisements, students were able to utilise space in order to make meaning. Thus, the layouts of their advertisements are optimised in the printed format. This was achieved through compositional principles of design such as the information value of left and right, top and bottom, centre and margins; salience; as well as framing, all of which were explicated in chapter two (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 2006).

Students seemed to have a good grasp of how to use layout to communicate particular messages, for example, using framing to separate entities that are in conflict or are being compared with each other. This can be seen in figures 3, 4, and 5.

---

<sup>9</sup> The results were as follows: 12% of the students engage with academic literacies on a daily basis, 7% with newspapers or magazines, 13% with fiction, 80% with social networking sites, 80% with SMSing, and 38% watch series on their laptops or computers daily.

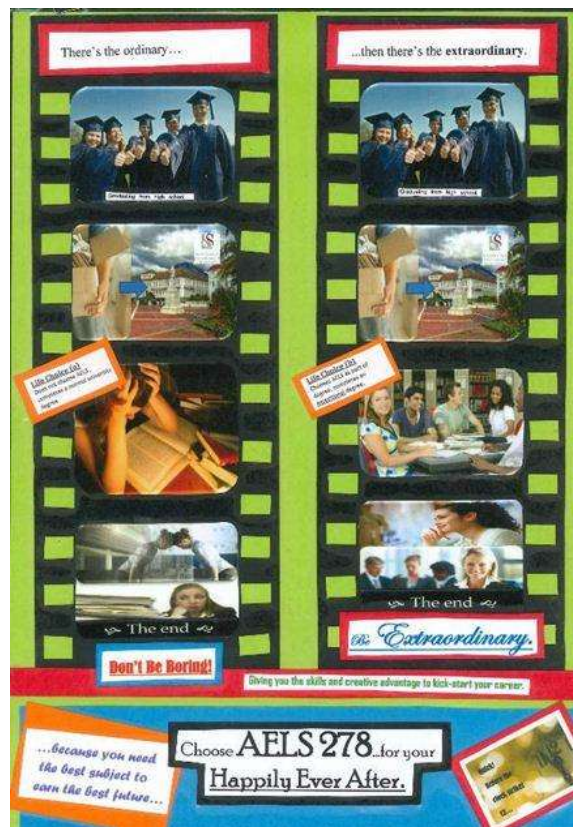




**Figure 3: Using layout to portray conflicting issues**

Figure 3 is an assignment from 2013 and portrays an advertisement for Breadline Africa. Here, the student has placed the ideal life of children (situated on the left of the page) in opposition with the reality of many African children's lives (situated on the right of the page). The student understands that by placing the two extremes alongside each other, she is able to create a comparative relationship and achieve the goal of communicating a message without necessarily having to use the written mode. She did, however, include the written mode to accompany the images, making this an example of an advertisement that uses the linguistic mode to mirror the visual mode. The layout that she decided upon enables readers to see how well-off they are compared to many people living Africa, thus instilling a sense of guilt in the readers for having a comfortable lifestyle while many children in Africa do not have their most basic human needs met.



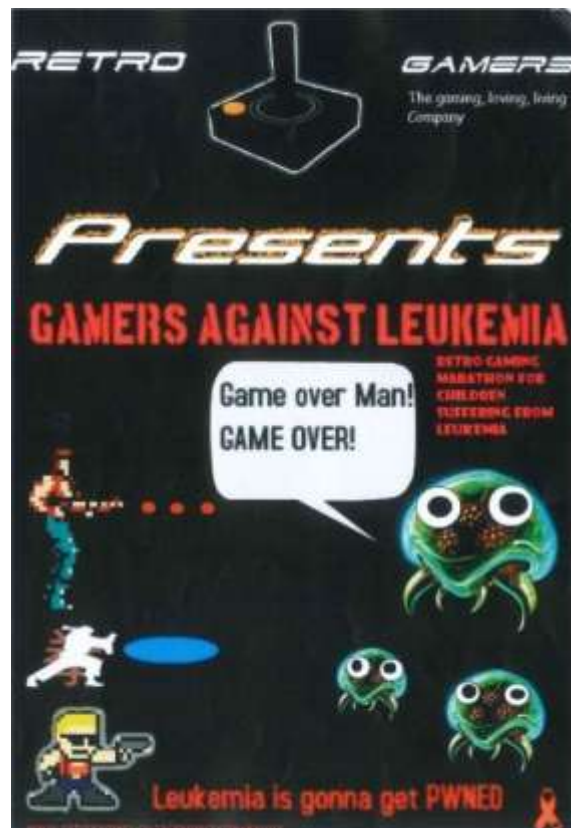


**Figure 4: Using layout for comparison**

Figure 4 is an assignment from 2012 and portrays an advertisement for AELS. The student compares a university life without AELS to a university life with this subject. She distinguishes the two by means of framing, placing them on either side of the page. The use of framing distinguishes these two choices as separate entities therefore creating the effect that either choice will yield completely different results. Because these two choices are placed alongside each other, the reader is able to see that choosing AELS is a better choice for his/her future. This is revealed in the facial expressions and body language of the people in the pictures on the left; one of the people who, it is implied, did not choose to take the subject has her head against a wall, signalling frustration, and another actor is resting her head on her fist, glancing unwillingly at a pile of work in front of her, communicating to the audience that she is not happy in her career. The people who appear in the images on the right who, it is implied, *did* choose to take AELS are smiling and look happy and content in their job. The student has thus exploited the “before and after” scheme, a form of

parallelism common to advertising discourse (Simpson and Mayr 2010: 90; Phillips and McQuarrie 2004: 116). It is clear that this student is versed in the conventions of advertising layout and is able to make meaning without using the written mode.

Framing is not the only compositional principle that is displayed in these assignments. Following Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), the elements displayed in the advertisements in figures 3 and 4 can also be categorised according to what is “given” and what is “new”. The elements on the left side of the page are the given as it is “a familiar and agreed-upon point of departure for the message”, while the elements on the right side of the page are seen as the new because this information is unfamiliar to the reader and requires more attention, therefore making it the focal point (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 181).



**Figure 5: Using framing to separate entities in order to convey a message**

Figure 5 is an assignment from 2013 which depicts an advertisement for a charity fundraiser event (hosted by a gaming company) for children with leukaemia. This student also makes use of layout to construct meaning. He places gaming heroes on the left side of the page, and “metroids” (the villains of a particular video game) on the right side of the page, the latter representing the cancer. The heroes and antagonists are separated by means of subtle framing. This framing is realised through the use of space between the elements on the left and the right. Additionally, all of the heroes are facing the enemies with their respective weapons creating a vector that guides one’s eye in the direction of the enemies. This allows the focus to be placed on these enemies, perhaps so that the seriousness of the cause is not overlooked. The positioning of the heroes versus the enemies symbolises the fight against cancer. Through utilising this layout, the student gets the message across without having to use language.

### **5.5.2 The affordance of colour**

Apart from layout and use of space, colour was also utilised as a meaning potential in the printed medium. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002), colour can be viewed as a mode as it is able to communicate meanings that are culturally-dependent and situated in time. For example, black is the colour of mourning for many cultures, whilst in other cultures, brides wear black dresses on their wedding day (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002: 343). These conventions are also able to change over time.

My analyses of the students’ assignments revealed that, while many students simply used colour as a means of attracting attention (as can be seen in the usage of bright colours in the advertisements in figures 3 and 4), many of them in fact have a sound knowledge of how to use colour as a semiotic resource or as a modal affordance in their advertisements. This will now be illustrated.

Students either used colour to portray a particular message or to link similar ideas. For example, it could be argued that figure 5 makes use of a black background to portray the sombreness of the matter, namely children suffering from leukaemia. Figure 6 portrays an advertisement from 2012 where the student makes use of colour to evoke a specific emotion as well as to show the relationship between specific elements. She uses different hues of red which can be associated with the emotion of love. This mirrors her written text (written in red) which reads: “For the **love** of language. For the **love** of AELS” (own emphasis). In her essay, she claimed that the fortune cookies resemble hearts, therefore, the use of the colour red is apt in this regard as hearts are often symbolic of love. Thus, the student utilises various hues of the same colour in order to link these ideas. This can also be seen as a form of parallelism because a structure (in this case, a colour) is being repeated.

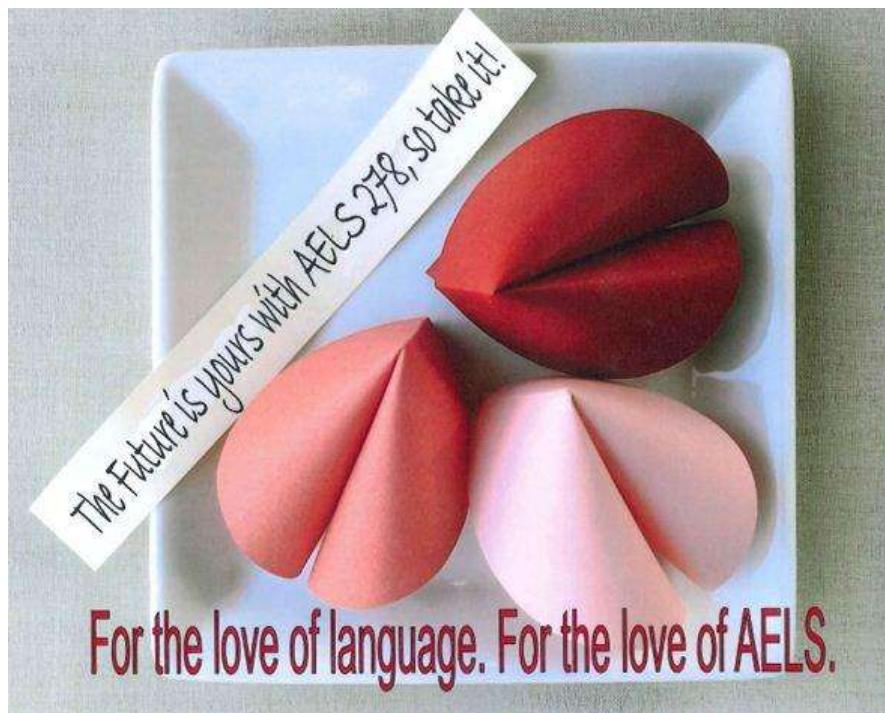


Figure 6: Using colour as a semiotic resource

## 5.6 Multimedia advertisements

For the purpose of this study, multimedia advertisements include the PowerPoint presentations as well as the short films that the students designed<sup>10</sup>. Taking the criticisms of multimodal analysis into consideration (as was explicated in section 2.5), rather than using compositional principles to analyse individual screenshots, as was the method that Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) predominantly used, I will analyse the advertisement as a whole. Where I refer to specific elements in the advertisement, I will consider them within the context that they appear as well as their relationships with the other semiotic resources. This is important as social semiotic multimodal analysis emphasises meaning in context (Jewitt 2009: 30).

Like the printed mode, the multimedia mode can utilise colour and layout in order to make meaning. However, while the printed mode is predominantly limited by these affordances, the multimedia mode is able to additionally integrate sound and movement as meaning potentials. These semiotic resources will be explored below.

### 5.6.1 The affordance of colour

While I did not find any significant semiotic uses of colour per se in the multimedia advertisements, the lack thereof in a few presentations made for an interesting modal affordance in itself. Additionally, adjustments to the saturation levels of colour were also exploited as a semiotic resource. Saturation is “the scale from the most [...] ‘pure’ manifestations of a colour to its softest, most ‘pale’ or ‘pastel’” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002: 356).

One particular student did not use any colour in his advertisement. This advertisement is from 2013 and was presented as a PowerPoint display. The student drew upon the genre of old movies, thus, his motive in using black and white alone was to imitate this discourse. In this case, the student has used “complete desaturation”, or the absence of colour, as a semiotic resource (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2002: 356). This allows the audience to recognise the genre or discourse

---

<sup>10</sup> Please note that where students have used people to act in their presentations, or where they themselves are the actors in their presentations, I have concealed their faces (or other personal information) for ethical reasons.

with which they are engaging, thus making it easier for them to understand the advertisement in its entirety. One of the slides from this presentation can be seen in figure 7.



**Figure 7: Absence of colour to portray a particular genre**

In another PowerPoint presentation, the student begins by using black and white alone which gradually transforms into colour. This presentation is from 2012 and is thus an advertisement for AELS. Through the use of black and white, she tries to portray a world without colour. This is reflected on the lexical level where she poses the following question to the audience: “Can you imagine a world without colour?”. She compares life without AELS to a world without colour by presenting a series of black and white pictures and then introducing AELS with the words “BE PART OF THE COLOUR CULTURE”, followed by a burst of colours (see figure 8). This contrast is very effective as the transition from black and white to multi-coloured images is unmistakable. Her knowledge of the meaning potential of colour is not only evident in her visual depiction (and absence) of colour, but is explicitly evident in the written mode as well. She proclaims that “A WORLD WITHOUT COLOUR IS A WORLD ON MUTE” as well as “A WORLD WITHOUT... CONVERSATION... EXPRESSION... CREATIVITY” (figure 9). This reveals her understanding of the importance of colour in making meaning and her unquestionable acceptance of colour as a mode.





**Figure 8: Transition from black and white to colour for contrastive effect**



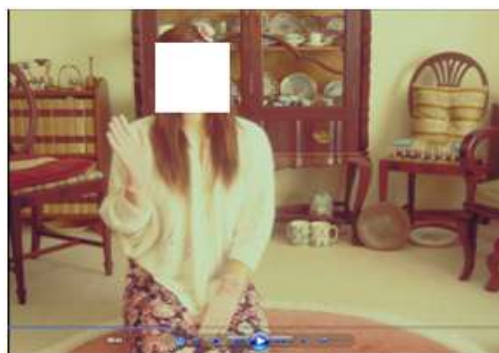
**Figure 9: Importance of colour expressed linguistically**

The saturation levels of colour were modified in one of the stop-motion films in order to communicate a specific idea. This stop-motion film was from an advertisement for AELS from 2012. The title of the film is “AELS in Wonderland”, thus playing on the classic book and movie *Alice in Wonderland*. The student adjusts the saturation

levels of the colour in order to draw a contrast between different scenes of the film, namely the scene before and after “Alice” enters Wonderland, and the scene where she is in Wonderland. For the scenes before and after Wonderland, the student utilises bright and vivid colours (see figure 10). This is in contrast with the scene where she is in Wonderland. Here, the student exploits hazy colours and decreased saturation levels to imitate the dream-like state that is Wonderland (see figure 11). Adjusting colours for this purpose is reminiscent of Kress and Van Leeuwen’s claim that “[w]hen colour becomes more saturated, we judge it exaggerated, ‘more than real’, excessive. When it is less saturated we judge it ‘less than real’, ‘ethereal’, for instance, or ‘ghostly’” (2006: 159).



**Figure 10: Bright, vivid colours to portray reality**



**Figure 11: Decreased saturation levels to portray a dream-like state**



In the multimedia advertisements, students exploited the affordance of colour in quite different ways than the students who created printed advertisements. While the printed advertisements predominantly used colour for attractiveness and to link similar ideas, the multimedia advertisements used colour to portray particular genres, contrasted black and white with colour to make explicit points about the affordance of colour and tweaked saturation levels in order to distinguish between different realms of reality (dreams versus reality).

### **5.6.2 The affordance of sound**

Sound is another meaning potential realised by the multimedia mode. In these advertisements, sound either took the form of music, speech or sound effects, although music prevailed. As I lack the expertise to delve into the technicalities of this mode, and as there is a limited scope of research that exists to provide a medium of analysis for this mode, I will present the general ideas that are conveyed in the students' multimedia advertisements using the mode of sound.

In terms of the music employed in these assignments, the main objective was to set the mood of the advertisement. Thus, where an advertisement dealt with serious or upsetting matters, melancholic music with a slow tempo was used, such as melodies from the genre of classical music. Conversely, advertisements that dealt with light-hearted subject matter exploited upbeat, jovial songs, as is often found in the music genre of pop. Music is a strong factor in evoking emotions thus making for an apt semiotic resource in advertising (Kress 2010: 70).

A compositional element that was used by a great deal of students in the mode of sound was framing. While framing is realised in the visual mode by the layout, such as lines and spaces between elements acting as separators of distinct ideas, framing in the mode of sound is realised by rhythm where "the ongoing equal-timed cycles of rhythm are momentarily interrupted by a pause, a rallentando, a change of gait" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006:203). These breaks and changes of rhythm or tempo also achieve the effect of separating distinct units. For example, in the "AELS in Wonderland" advertisement (discussed in section 5.6.1), the student chooses to begin the advertisement with upbeat background music which fades out as "Alice"

enters Wonderland, where it is then replaced with music of a much slower tempo. This represents the transition from scene to scene or, in this case, from reality to dreams. As the dream or the Wonderland scene closes, the music fades out once again and the slow rhythm transforms to a fast, jovial beat where we see “Alice” waking up at her desk, thus back in reality. This switch from one rhythm or music genre to the next in order to distinguish between different scenes or distinct units of information was evident in a number of multimedia advertisements designed by the students. Thus, they appear to understand the conventions of framing for effect using music as a semiotic resource.

Some students used a narrative voice over their music, while others simply used music and let the visuals tell the story. Kress and Van Leeuwen’s notion of ‘perspective’ can be utilised in this regard, where foregrounded elements are taken to be more salient than backgrounded elements (2006: 202). Therefore, if the voice is louder than the music in the advertisements, then the voice is foregrounded and more salient while the music simply functions as a background element and is not the primary semiotic resource in the advertisement. This is also reminiscent of Martinec’s hierarchical approach to rhythm where, if “there is more than one voice or instrument in a piece, each one of them has its own rhythmic hierarchy” (2000: 289). In the case then of a narrative voice and music existing together in an advertisement, where the voice is foregrounded in terms of loudness, the voice will be higher up on the rhythmic hierarchy and the music will play more of a background role.

Interestingly, the *lack* of sound was also used as a semiotic resource. In this particular advertisement, the student drew on the discourse of Charlie Chaplin’s silent films. In order to achieve the full effect of this discourse, the student omitted the mode of sound, thus emulating silent film discourse (see figure 7). Additionally, this was an advertisement for the National Institute for the Deaf (NID). The use of silence thus also replicates the sensation of deafness in order to create deaf awareness, thereby achieving the goal of the advertisement.

### 5.6.3 The affordance of movement

Multimedia advertisements were additionally able to utilise the affordance of movement. Movement was realised by bodily movements, gestures, transitions between slides (or frames of images for the stop-motion films) as well as animations within the PowerPoint presentations.

Movement in the multimedia format utilises space and time as semiotic resources. In other words, the sequence or temporal situation of images and events, as well as the layout of the screen in each successive still or slide, can be used as meaning potentials (Kress 2010: 81). For example, in stop-motion films, the succession of images is vital in making meaning as the end-product is supposed to imitate real-time movement, as though a video recorder was used rather than image stills. Thus, the affordance of movement makes it possible for an action to be played out through the combination of these image stills. This method was used in a number of the students' assignments, examples of which can be seen in figures 12 and 13.



**Figure 12: Portraying movement through the use of image stills**



**Figure 13: Portraying an action through the use of image stills**

Additionally, the layout of each frame can also communicate meaning. For example, in figure 12, the clay figurine is given salience in the first three stills as it is foregrounded in the screen, while the teapot is foregrounded and given salience in the last still. This communicates a shift in emphasis from one character to the next (the clay figurine to the teapot), forcing the audience to switch their point of focus and hence allowing the creator of the film to get her intended meaning across.

Bodily movements and gestures were also used by a number of students as semiotic resources in their multimedia advertisements. These movements and gestures can also be referred to as “paralinguistic resources” which are used to portray particular meanings, such as relationships between actors on screen, and emotions experienced by the actors. For example, figure 14 is a screenshot of a group of girls hugging. This tells the audience something about their relationship with each other (i.e. that they are probably close friends). Figure 15 is a screenshot of a group of boys jumping up and down and clapping their hands, indicating their feelings of utter delight. In figure 16, the gesture of a yawn indicates that the character is tired or bored (although it is evident from the context of the film that she is more likely bored than tired).



**Figure 14: Actions that portray relationships**



**Figure 15: Actions that portray emotions**



**Figure 16: Gesture to indicate a mood**

## **5.7 The website**

I will not go into too much detail regarding the website, considering that it offers the same affordances as the multimedia presentations. I will therefore focus only on that affordance which cannot be realised in multimedia advertisements, namely hyperlinks.

### **5.7.1 Hyperlinks**

Hyperlinks have the potential to create non-linear reading paths as the reader can jump from one link to the next without necessarily reading all of the content on each page or in each section. Therefore, websites that utilise hyperlinks enable the reader to create his/her own reading path, rather than having it determined by the designer of the text (Kress 2005: 7). Additionally, hyperlinks offer more than one entry point and therefore “multiple perspectives, and [can] even accommodate multiple authorship of a web” (Lemke 2002: 307). The website created by the student only utilised hyperlinks in the form of tabs which take the reader from one page within the website to the next, for example, from the home page to the contact details page. She thus does not make use of hyperlinks that take the reader to other websites. Doing this could be detrimental to the discourse of advertising, as the designer of the website “cannot count on readers staying within the grasp of their argumentation”, and could potentially lose the attention of the audience which, in advertising, translates as failure (Lemke 2002: 322). Through utilising tabs, however, the reader

is still given the freedom to create his/her own reading path without detracting from the focus of the website.

## 5.8 The audio clip

### 5.8.1 The affordance of sound

The only modal affordances realised by the audio format is that of oral language and sound. As previously mentioned, sound can take the form of speech, music or sound effects. The audio clip that I analysed consisted of both narrative voice and music. It was an advertisement for SA Music Scene, an organisation that supports South African music. The student's choice of mode is therefore apt for the content of her advertisement because there is not a more suitable way to present music than via the audio mode. The narrative voice and the music do not occur simultaneously in the advertisement, thus eliminating the prospect of one being foregrounded while the other is backgrounded. Rather, music plays the role of complementing and enhancing the content of her speech. For example, when the narrator speaks about a specific song, it is followed by a short excerpt of that song which provides listeners with something tangible to which they can refer, rather than leaving it up to their imaginations.

A lot of the content of her speech utilises a play on words that requires background knowledge of South African music in order to be understood. For example, she says, "Wondering what *Aking* listens to?" which could be interpreted as "Wondering what a king listens to?". However, listeners familiar with South African music will realise that she is referring to the band called *Aking* (bearing in mind that this student pronounces the word as /əkɪŋ/ rather than the common pronunciation /æɪkɪŋ/). She then goes on to say, "*Die Antwoord* lies in South African music" which could be interpreted as simple Afrikaans-English code-mixing but, once again, is actually referring to a South African music group known as *Die Antwoord*. Paralinguistic features such as intonation and rhythm are utilised to emphasise these ambiguous words, making listeners attentive to them which thus enables the humour to be carried across. For example, the tempo decreases when she enunciates the words "Aking" and "Die Antwoord". In addition, she pauses slightly before and after these words

which frames them from the rest of the utterance. Furthermore, the second interpretation of *Die Antwoord* (the music group) is hinted at by including an excerpt from one of their songs subsequent to the utterance.

Although the audio mode prohibits the use of visuals, the student has improvised by using paralinguistic features (such as intonation, rhythm and tempo) and music as semiotic resources.

## **5.9 Limitations of the modes and materials**

While these various modes and materials for presenting advertisements have proved to exhibit a number of meaning potentials, I will now turn to the limitations of each.

Generally, the audio mode has the least amount of meaning potentials as it is only able to utilise the semiotic resource of sound. Thus, one of its limitations is that it cannot utilise the visual mode in the form of images, layout and colours. Not only do these semiotic resources add to the aesthetics of the advertisement, they are also useful in making meaning as well. Images have the ability to evoke strong emotions in the audience. For example, as was seen in figure 3, including images of starving children creates sympathy in the reader; support is thereby gained for the organisation said to help this situation.

Layout is also beneficial in conveying a message as it is able to indicate what is most salient in the advertisement, what should be focused on as well as the relationship between particular elements within the advertisement. Additionally, the use of colour can assist in attracting attention as well as communicating specific ideas, both of which were explored in the previous sections. Nevertheless, despite these limitations of the audio mode, students who used this mode still managed to meet the requirements through the use of intonation, tempo and rhythm as meaning potentials.

While printed material is able to utilise layout and colour as semiotic resources, it lacks the potential to include sound and movement as well as hyperlinks. Sound, in the form of music, is a valuable resource for evoking emotions in the audience. Examples from the previous section include the incorporation of upbeat music to create a feeling of excitement and enjoyment of the advertisement, or slow, heart-



rending music for the more serious advertisements in order to play on the viewers' emotions. Music can thus aid in exaggerating emotions, resulting in the advertisement having a greater impact on the audience. Jewitt (2002: 6) notes that movement or "actional modes" have different meaning potentials than sound. While modes of sound use rhythm and tempo to make meaning, actional modes can additionally utilise space and direction as a resource for making meaning. For example, elements that are in close view will presumably be more important than elements placed in the distance. In addition, the direction in which these elements move or appear on the screen can also communicate different meanings as was evident in the multimedia advertisements presented in section 5.6. Prominence of actional modes can also be realised through size, brightness and speed in that the bigger, brighter and faster an element, the more prominence it receives (Martinec 2000: 291). Martinec (2000) details the rhythmic affordances of sound and movement in multimodal texts. Although this information would probably benefit a multimodal analysis, his work is too specialised and technical for the scope of this thesis.

While multimedia presentations are able to utilise sound and movement, a limitation that it shares with printed texts is its inability to include hyperlinks. Hyperlinks, or hypertext, have the ability to effortlessly take readers from one page or document to the next, or move between elements within a document. In other words, such texts have more than one entry point (Kress 2005: 9). It thus allows readers to create their own reading path as they are able to choose which links they want to click on and in which order they want to do so (Kress 2005: 7). In contrast, printed and multimedia texts have only one entry point and the reading path is designed by the creator of the text, thus giving readers or viewers no freedom to navigate their own way around the content.

Hyperlinks also have limitations of their own. For example, it becomes more difficult to carry an argument across when you are not guaranteed to hold the readers' attention until the end. This is because hyperlinks act as gateways onto other texts, therefore leading the reader away from the original argument (Lemke 2002: 306; 322). That being said, the absence of hypertext in advertisements may be a strategic choice of the advertisers as, by dictating the reading path that the audience must



follow, they are able to impose their opinions on the audience which is ultimately the goal of advertising.

Regarding the materiality of these advertisements, the printed advertisements are not really restricted to size as designers can select the size according to the amount of content that needs to be included (for example, an A5 flyer versus a large poster advertisement). Conversely, advertisers using the multimedia mode have to select their content according to the size of the screen. While websites are also viewed on-screen, information is able to go beyond the size of the screen through utilising scrollbars as well as hyperlinks. Audio presentations are not technically restricted by size, but the duration must naturally be considered in order to function as an advertisement.

All of these limitations had to be considered by the students before deciding upon the modes and material to utilise in order to realise their presentation or advertisement. In this way, they were able to discover which modes and materials were most apt for their requirements of the assignment as well as their subject matter.

### **5.10 Exploitation of social discourses**

The social discourses that were realised in students' advertisements were primarily popular culture discourses. The use of these discourses did not only entail the use of actual source texts but also an active engagement with more "abstract communicative resources", which includes discourse structures, specific generic conventions or voices representing particular ideas or ideologies (Ivanić 2004: 283). For example, they made references to popular movies, songs, actors or characters, and comics. Many students also made reference to digital and cyber literacies by using, for example, internet memes, social networking sites and gaming discourse, as well as making use of the generic conventions of text-speak. Indeed, these digital literacies could also be categorised under "popular culture discourse" but I will keep them apart for the purpose of my analysis. It was evidently easier to utilise popular culture discourse in the 2012 assignments, as the 2013 assignments advertised non-profit organisations, some of which dealt with serious issues, thus making it difficult to be light-hearted. Moreover, the 2012 assignments were targeted at first-year

students, hence making the use of popular culture discourse logical. Nevertheless, many students from the 2013 class still chose to include elements of popular culture, as was seen in figure 6 where the student made use of gaming discourse as a metaphor for the fight against cancer.

A number of students made reference to classical discourse or literature, but did so in a non-traditional way by, for example, combining it with popular culture discourse. This, I believe, is evident of the fact that students did not simply copy or reproduce these discourses but created something new, reappropriating the original discourse for their own purposes. I will now turn to some examples of assignments to illustrate these types of discourse that were exploited. First, I will focus on popular and digital discourses, but will also refer to other discourses used in the advertisements I selected as examples.

Figure 17 makes use of the popular culture discourse of Hollywood films by including an image of Spiderman. The speech bubble that accompanies Spiderman contains, amongst other things, the colloquial phrase “PARTY ROCKING!!!” which draws upon the popular culture discourse of music, as “Party Rock” and “Sorry for Party Rocking” are both popular songs from a well-known American electronic duo. The abbreviation “OMG” (“oh my gosh”) in the speech bubble draws upon digital literacies as it is an

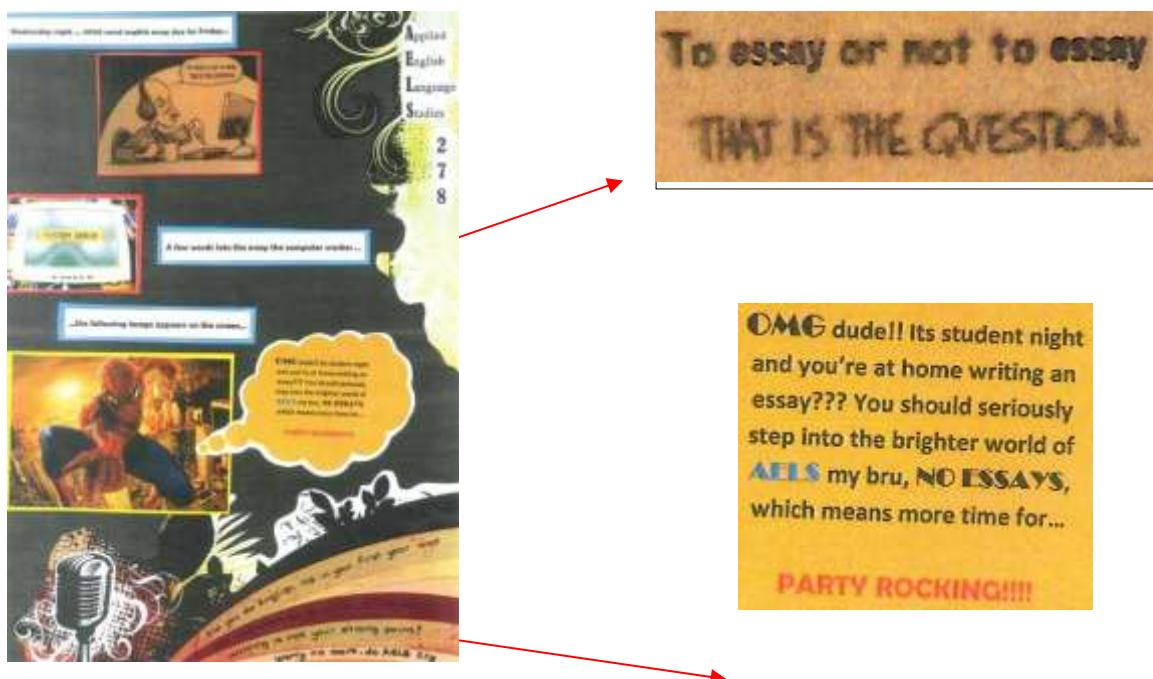
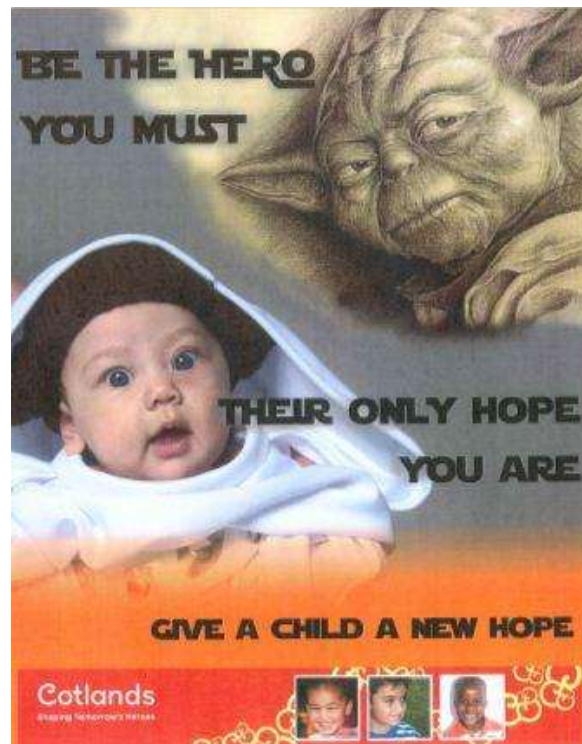


Figure 17: Utilising popular culture

example of text-speak. The layout of the advertisement is that of a comic strip, and the use of the speech bubble is also typical of this genre. It can therefore be said that the student draws on the discourse of comics as well. She also makes reference to classical literature by including a picture of William Shakespeare along with one of the most famous quotes from Hamlet, “To be or not to be? That is the question”. However, both the image of Shakespeare and the quote have been transformed to resemble modern day culture: Shakespeare is seen sitting in front of a computer and, instead of the original quote from Hamlet, the speech bubble reads “To essay or not to essay. THAT IS THE QUESTION”. Therefore, although the student makes reference to classical literature, she still makes it applicable for the audience of young adults to whom the advertisement is targeted (first-year English Studies students).



**Figure 18: Making reference to popular movies**

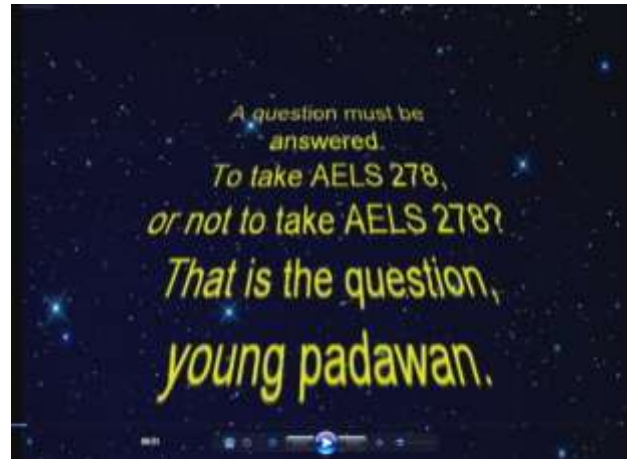
Figure 18 portrays an advertisement for Cotlands, a non-profit organisation offering early childhood development programmes. This student has also chosen to integrate popular culture in her advertisement, realised on both the lexical as well as the visual levels. She makes reference to the popular Star Wars saga by including a picture of Yoda, a well-known character from these movies. People familiar with these films will also notice that the baby in the advertisement resembles Princess Leia (a central character in the story) as she has the same defining hairstyle as this central Star Wars character. The white cloak that the baby is wearing also resembles one of the outfits that Princess Leia wears. Additionally, the writing that appears on the advertisement is in the same font in which the Star Wars title is written. The arbitrary syntactic structure of these sentences (BE THE HERO YOU MUST / THEIR ONLY HOPE YOU ARE) is associated with Yoda as he is known to speak in this manner (switching his clauses around). The student has thus used the hero theme of *Star Wars* to entice the audience to also want to be heroes by donating to Cotlands.

In fact, *Star Wars* was alluded to in a large number of advertisements, examples of which can be seen in figures 19 and 20. Figure 19 is also an example of a popular internet meme containing an image of Yoda with sentences used in a manner that he would say them (i.e. switching the clauses around). Furthermore, figure 19 draws upon popular culture discourse as it alludes to a well-known song called “Who Let the Dogs Out”.

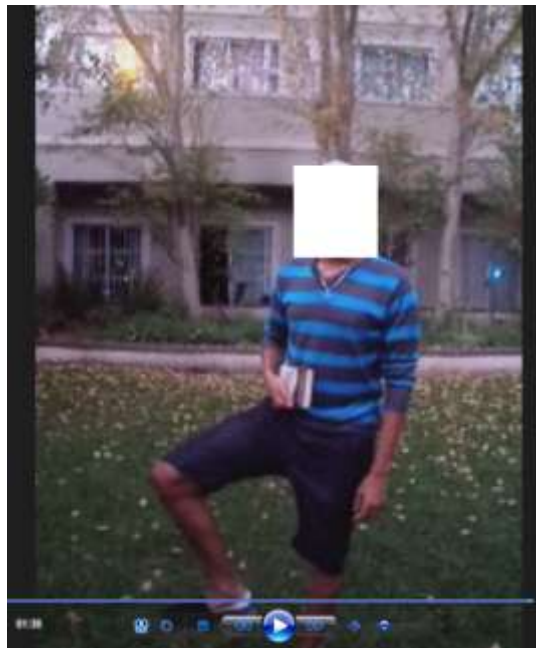
In figure 20, the term “young paddawan” is an expression taken directly from *Star Wars*. Additionally, this student has utilised sound and movement to make reference to *Star Wars*: The manner in which the words move up the screen is reminiscent of the *Star Wars* saga, as these movies begin with a written prologue that appears on the screen in the same way that this student has presented it. Furthermore, he has utilised the *Star Wars* theme song which is a form of explicit intertextuality. Thus, not only were popular culture discourses realised on the visual and lexical levels, but also via the utilisation of the modes of movement and sound.



**Figure 19: Making reference to a popular movie, song and internet meme**



**Figure 20: Utilising the written mode and mode of action to make reference to a popular movie**



**Figure 21: Using bodily movements as a reference to a well-known brand**

In another video advertisement, the student uses a simple bodily movement to draw on a well-known series of Captain Morgan<sup>11</sup> advertisements (see figure 21). This pose reflects the image that appears on Captain Morgan bottles, which is that of the character “Captain Morgan” placing his one foot atop a barrel. The pose is immediately recognisable by people familiar with the brand, especially after the company launched “Strike the Captain Morgan Pose”, a global competition where people sent in photographs of themselves striking this pose in order to stand a chance to win prizes. The use of this pose in the student’s advertisement is an example of resemiotisation (Iedema 2003), as the semiotic resource originated as the printed logo of the Captain in the pose, but transformed to the action of the pose being performed by the Captain in the television advertisements, and eventually to the pose in isolation. This pose has thus become symbolic of the Captain Morgan brand, even when removed from its context.

In this same advertisement, the student draws on another brand, namely Spur (a family restaurant), through an adaptation of their slogan. He achieves this by means of the mode of speech, where he plays on Spur’s slogan “People with a taste for life” by altering it to read “AELS 278 - for people with a taste for language.” Accordingly, he, and many other students, has turned the table on traditional discourse and texts in order to relate to the subject matter of his advertisement, or to appeal to its target market.

Another social discourse that was drawn upon in many of the 2013 advertisements was community/connectedness discourse. Here, students used discourses which emphasised unity between people. The requirements for the 2013 assignment lend itself well to this type of discourse as students were required to create an advertisement for a non-profit organisation. It seems then that students associate such organisations with kinship or unity. This was often realised on the lexical level by utilising the pronoun “we”, thus making the audience feel as though they are a part of the proposed community. Examples include, “**We** are all in this together...” in figure 22, and “Seeing **we** will have COMPASSION, hearing **we** will RESPOND” in figure 23 (all emphasis is my own). The visual mode also played a role in bringing the

---

<sup>11</sup> Captain Morgan is a brand of spiced rum.



community discourse across by including pictures of groups of people standing together, thus creating a sense of community. This can be seen in figure 24.

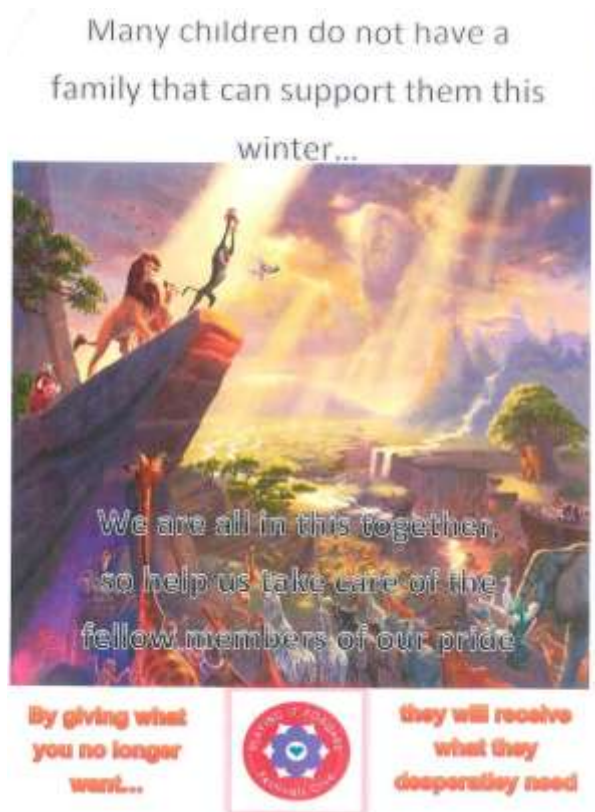


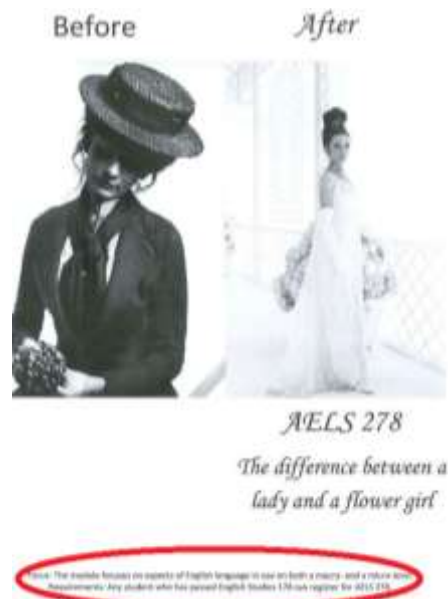
Figure 22: Community discourse realised on the lexical level



Figure 23: Community discourse realised on the lexical level



**Figure 24: Community discourse realised on the visual level**



Focus: The module focuses on aspects of English language in use on both a macro- and a micro-level.  
Requirements: Any student who has passed English Studies 178 can register for AELS 278.

**Figure 25: Using small print as an advertising technique**



Of course, all of the students included elements of advertising discourse in their assignments, considering that the assignment required them to advertise either AELS or a non-profit organisation. Advertising discourse was realised by making use of fine print (as can be seen in figure 25), including logos of the organisation (see figures 26 and 27), using slogans which a common feature of advertisements (for example, the slogan “people with a taste for language” in the previously mentioned advertisement), as well as utilising the logos for social networking sites (see figures 28 and 29) to indicate that the organisation is accessible online.



**Figure 26: Including the logo of the organisation**

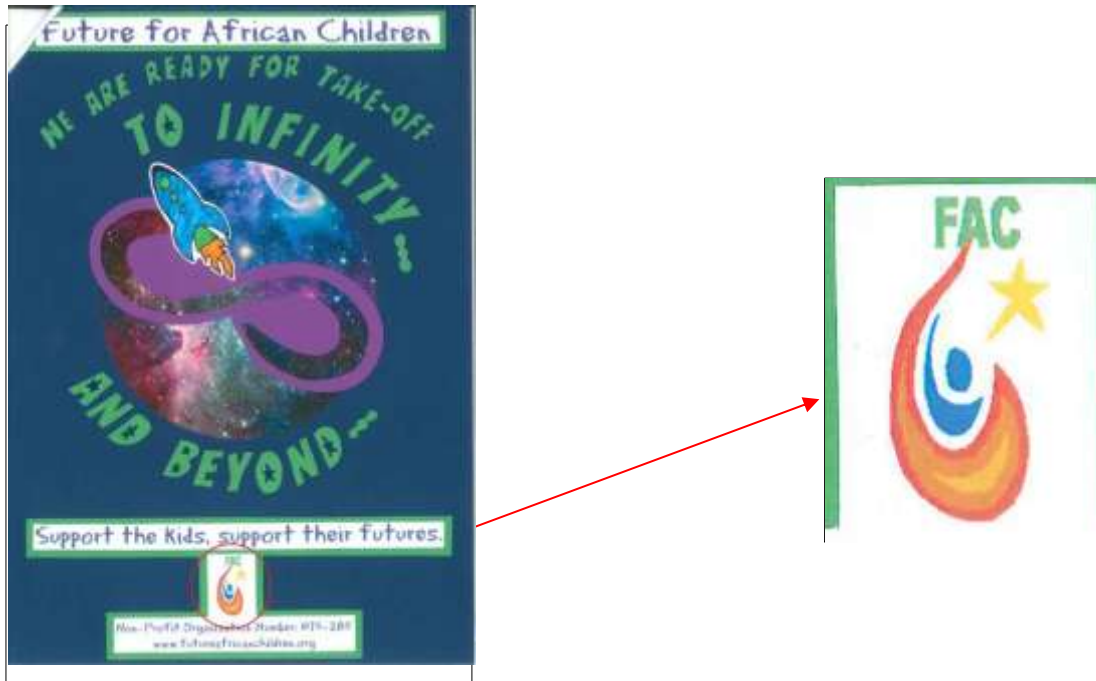


Figure 27: Including the logo of the organisation



Figure 28: Utilising logos for social networking sites (Twitter and Facebook)

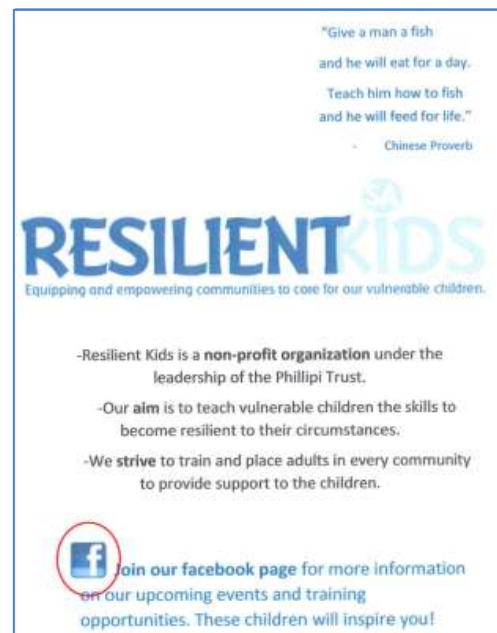


Figure 29: Utilising a logo for a social networking site (Facebook)

Additionally, many students employed rhetoric typical of advertisements. One way of achieving this was through the utilisation of competition discourse, providing “positive consequences following purchase” (Simpson and Mayr 2010: 94). For example, in one of the video advertisements, the student says “Stand a chance to be the proud owner of...”. The “before-and-after” scheme is a classic tactic used by advertisers (Phillips and McQuarrie 2004:116; Simpson and Mayr 2010: 90) and was also exploited, for example in figures 4 and 25. In addition, the inclusion of people’s testimonies (Simpson and Mayr 2010: 36), as in figure 30, was another typical advertising feature which was employed. Students also made use of an advertising scheme that is characteristic to infomercials, namely offering a solution to a problem (Simpson and Mayr 2010: 36). The problem is presupposed by advertisers by asking questions such as “tired of X,Y and Z?” and then offering a solution. This was employed in the audio advertisement, where the student begins by saying “Are you tired of ‘sakkie-sakkie’, ‘boeredans’ and ‘Gangnam Style’?”. He then eventually provides listeners with a solution by introducing the organisation SA Music Scene.



Figure 30: Utilising testimonials

In general, the students have proved to be able to draw on a wide variety of discourses in their advertisements while keeping their target audience in mind. Thus, they did not include discourses to which their target market would not be able to relate. This is an important skill to possess in advertising.

According to Ivanić (2004: 310), the use of social discourses in texts produced by students also constructs the identity of the text producers. They claim some sort of membership of the social groups which are enacted through the social discourses that they use, as well as participating in particular ways of viewing the world. However, he Ivanić states that “there is nothing static or deterministic in this process”; instead, they are “always uniquely transforming and recombining communicative resources for their own purposes, and thus constructing subjectivities for themselves which do not necessarily conform to type” (Ivanić 2004: 310). The implications of the use of social discourses and identity construction for multiliteracies in higher education will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

## **5.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the various semiotic resources that students draw upon when given the opportunity to use modes other than the written mode. Mode here is used to refer to both the formal requirements of a mode (is the mode able to represent the different metafunctions of language) and the social requirements of a mode which refers to a community of users agreeing on the meaning of particular modes (Kress 2009: 59). It is clear that students are able to use the technical or formal aspects of mode (e.g. the composition of layout), but that these practices are widespread enough to suggest that they engaged in agreed-upon meaning-making resources.

It was discovered that students are more versed in making meaning with alternative modes to the written mode. This can be linked to Bezemer and Kress’s description of a “mode” as “a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning” (2008: 6), clearly the students in the study have been socialised in such a way that the visual mode is used extensively for meaning-making potential. Kress (2010: 19) highlights that communication and society are interrelated in the sense that societal

changes play a vital role in shaping communication, but that communication also initiates changes in society. This was attributed to their literacy practices as students engage more with multimodal, digital texts than they do with academic texts. It was also found that students have knowledge of a variety of social discourses and are able to exploit those discourses that are suitable for the target audience as well as the subject of the advertisement. Furthermore, it was revealed that students possess an assortment of skills that are disregarded in the academic context. This topic will be elaborated on in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 6: Multiliteracies: Learning and Assessment in Higher Education**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will discuss the findings from chapter five with regard to the implications for general literacy and academic literacy. Specifically, I will investigate the implications that these findings have for assessment practices in higher education. I will then present some of the limitations of a multimodal approach to pedagogy and conclude with recommendations for future research.

### **6.2 General findings**

From the analyses of the advertisements created by the students, it is evident that they possess a wide variety of skills that are not usually exploited in traditional academic assessment. For example, they are able to utilise the affordances of various modes in order to make meaning without having to use the linguistic (written or verbal) mode. Where students did use the linguistic mode, it was simply to complement the other modes (such as the visual) rather than assuming the role of primary meaning-making resource. Their aptitude in utilising alternative modes to make meaning, rather than the traditional linguistic mode, raises the question of whether these modes should be introduced to the pedagogical arena in both teaching and assessment.

It also appears that students have access to a wide variety of social discourses as they drew on a number of discourses in their advertisements in order to construct the ideal audience, as well to position themselves socially. Furthermore, most of the students displayed advanced technical and visual literacy skills in designing their advertisements. The academic environment does not accommodate for these skills, as what students are assessed on does not extend past their ability to memorise facts and work under time constraints (Boud 2009: 102). Apart from these skills, students were able to utilise the processes of recontextualisation and resemiotisation in their advertisements, as will be detailed in this chapter.

A look at the essays that accompanied the students' advertisements revealed that most of the students struggle with the conventions of academic discourse.



Referencing was particularly problematic for many students. Another issue that stood out was the students' inability to properly define concepts, in this case the intertextual devices of 'parallelism', 'direct intertextuality' and 'interdiscursivity'. However, their usage of these intertextual devices in their advertisements shows that they know how to use these devices for successful advertising, as well as a means to attract the ideal target audience. Therefore, they must have some understanding of these concepts. The problem, it seems, does not lie in the application of the devices but in the explanation of these devices. This leads me to believe that, in general, the students are more comfortable using non-traditional, multimodal texts to make meaning than they are with academic essays.

### **6.3 Position of multiliteracies within higher education**

Currently, the principal mode that is utilised in higher education teaching and assessment is the linguistic mode. Learning materials such as textbooks have, admittedly, shifted over time from being writing-dominant to increasingly including more images and graphic representations (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 166). Furthermore, the sites of display or materiality by which academic material is represented is becoming ever more digital, so that books are becoming overshadowed by the internet and other digital resources (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 166). Nevertheless, the written mode remains the favoured mode for assessment in higher education, as realised by written tests and formal essays. There is thus a disparity between the way that students receive information and the way that they are expected to relay this information. This is especially the case when students' literacy practices are taken into consideration. They engage more with digital, multimodal texts than with the traditional, largely monomodal written texts. As was illustrated in the previous chapter, the majority of the students claimed to engage with social networking sites, watch series on their computers, and use text messaging on a daily basis. These literacy practices are all digital and multimodal<sup>12</sup>.

The presence of digital, multimodal texts has increased progressively with the development of technology, as it has become possible to display a number of modes

---

<sup>12</sup> Although text messaging appears to be monomodal, it too is becoming increasingly multimodal due to emoticons as well as the sharing of images, videos, music and voice notes.

concurrently, such as written text, moving or still images, as well as sound (Iedema 2003: 38). Accordingly, new technologies have brought about new ways of communicating and making meaning (Cope and Kalantzis 2009: 167). Yet these new ways of communicating are not utilised enough in higher education. Higher education institutions still give prominence to the linguistic mode, usually to the detriment of other modes (Archer 2006: 451). This poses a problem, particularly with the current generation of students who have grown up in an era in which they are exposed to multimodal texts on a daily basis.

According to the New London Group, the objective of education is “to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (Cazden et al. 1996: 60). However, this objective is inconsistent with the current situation in higher education systems, considering that the linguistic mode is the primary mode in which students are taught and assessed, essentially starving students of the necessary skills that they need in order to “participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (Cazden et al. 1996: 60). Although many students possess other types of skills due to their daily exposure with digital literacies, it still seems beneficial to draw on these skills in the pedagogic context in order to enhance them and prepare students for their social futures (Cazden et al. 1996: 71).

I will now turn to some of these skills that students possess which were revealed in the advertisements that they designed.

## **6.4 Implications of multimodal pedagogies for higher education**

### **6.4.1 The use of multimodal skills**

As was discovered in chapter five, students appear to have knowledge of how to utilise layout, sound, movement, colour, as well as a combination of these modes, as meaning-making resources. Students also attested to having access to a wide variety of social discourses and demonstrated great skills in drawing on them. Additionally, students demonstrated an ability to select the most appropriate means of representing information. For example, the student who communicated the fight against cancer through the visual analogy of gaming heroes fighting the antagonists,



realised that the visual mode would best suit the advertisement, considering that it was for a gaming company. Utilising gaming characters is thus appropriate for the context of the advertisement and ultimately proves to be more effective than utilising the linguistic mode. Subsequently, it can also be said that students have a sound knowledge of appropriateness in terms of selecting which type of mode or material would best represent and convey their message.

Students also appear to be skilled in utilising processes such as recontextualisation and resemiotisation, which resulted in the final products being quite humorous. Recontextualisation and resemiotisation are similar concepts, where the former refers to a change in the medium or mode used to make meaning which causes a change in social context (Bezemer and Kress 2008: 183), and the latter is the transfer of meaning-making elements from one mode to another or from one context to another (Iedema 2003: 41). These concepts are thus often used interchangeably. I will now illustrate how students utilised these processes in their advertisements.

As can be seen in figures 1, 18, and 19, the advertisements make reference to the film series Star Wars. The students utilise well-known characters, catchphrases and even the iconic font that is used in these films, as a way of ensuring that the audience can relate to these advertisements. The process of resemiotisation is thus evident in the transfer of meaning-making elements from film to print. Star Wars was also alluded to in one of the short film advertisements that I analysed (figure 20). Here, the student has exploited the way in which the story line is introduced in the films in the written mode, moving from the bottom to the top of the screen, as well as applying the same celestial background and iconic theme song that was used in the films. In this case, the student has stuck with the same medium (film), yet the semantic content has been altered to fit the social context, namely an advertisement for AELS. In both the printed advertisements and the short film advertisement, the elements from Star Wars have been taken out of their original social context and given a new meaning, thus allowing new realities to be formed (Iedema 2003: 42).

Star Wars is colloquially referred to as a “cult classic” . It is an old saga (the first film being released in the 1970s), yet is still popular today due to its dedicated fan-base as well as its appeal to various age groups. It is thus understandable why so many

students chose to draw on this film in their advertisements: it appeals to a wide audience, and even those people who are not avid fans of this film series will be able to relate to it as its prevalence in society almost guarantees that they have come across Star Wars references at some point in their lives, whether they realise it or not.

Many students also made reference to the well-known book and film *Alice in Wonderland*. They drew on famous scenes from the film, such as Alice falling down the rabbit hole into Wonderland, as well as the Mad Hatter's tea party. However, these scenes were taken out of the film's original context and modified to complement the focus of the advertisement (i.e. AELS). In one instance, the character of Alice was portrayed as a university student, and the Mad Hatter was depicted as a type of oracle, informing the student about the benefits of AELS. Thus, the process of recontextualisation was utilised in their advertisements. This process can also be viewed as a "transformed practice", a component of pedagogy proposed by Cazden et al. (1996: 83) which entails taking elements out of its original context and analysing it within a new context.

These are just some of the examples where recontextualisation and resemiotisation were used in students' advertisements. Overall, the students displayed great proficiency in their use of these processes and achieved their anticipated effects on the audience.

Apart from the abovementioned skills that are evident in the content of their advertisements, students also displayed remarkable aptitude in the development and creation of their advertisements. From the visual literacy skills evident in the printed advertisements, to the technical skills that are required in developing multimedia advertisements, these students boasted great dexterity in their designs.

#### **6.4.2 Written academic discourses**

From the essays that accompanied the advertisements, in which the students were required to explain the design of their advertisement in light of their target audience, it was revealed that most students struggle with the conventions of academic writing.

Referencing and providing clear and concise definitions were found to be the primary stumbling blocks.

Referencing proved to be particularly problematic and, in many instances, was omitted completely, despite the fact that the essay instructions clearly asked for appropriate referencing (see Appendices A and B). This is construed as plagiarism as the students have used other authors' work without acknowledging that they have done so. Hyland and Hyland (2001: 200-201) have noted how teachers are reluctant to accuse students of plagiarism as they do not wish to tarnish the "public self-image of students". Additionally, many teachers are aware "that plagiarism is, at least partly, a western cultural concept" and are thus averse to directly accusing students of plagiarising when they are non-native speakers of English (Hyland and Hyland 2001: 201). Teachers usually take an indirect approach in their feedback by using rhetorical questions such as "Where did you get this information?" or "Have you used quotations?" (Hyland and Hyland 2001: 201). Similarly, the lecturers who marked the AELS students' essays also often used an indirect approach in dealing with possible cases of plagiarism, rather than blatantly accusing the students. For example, where lecturers believed that students did not use their own words, or where information was not common knowledge, they would simply write "reference?" alongside the aberrant sentence or paragraph. Although it is not clear whether the abovementioned reasons are the reasons why the lecturers were often indirect in their feedback regarding incorrect referencing, these are certainly possibilities to consider.

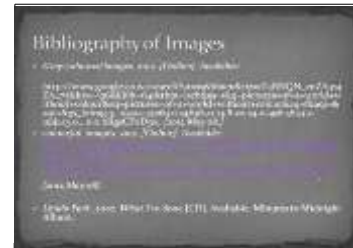
Interestingly, however, in the multimedia advertisements, students showed awareness of having to acknowledge the sources that they drew on through their utilisation of rolling credits at the end of their presentations, as is typical at the end of films (see figures 31, 32 and 33). This may confirm that students do indeed understand the notion of plagiarism, but that they are more familiar with the way in which acknowledgements are carried out in popular media, such as films and television series, than they are with the conventions of referencing for academic essays.



**Figure 31: Using rolling credits**



**Figure 32: Using rolling credits**



**Figure 33: Credits at the end of presentation**

Another problem that was evident in the essays was the students' ability to explain or define concepts. According to Hyland, this often proves to be a difficult task for students as it requires them to move beyond their own experience, as well as to utilise "structure and features [that are] more complex and demanding" (2007: 157-158). In their essays, students were required to explain their use of the intertextual devices of parallelism, explicit intertextuality and interdiscursivity in constructing the ideal audience (see Appendices A and B). Many students explained how they used these devices and yet failed to define them, even though they were explicitly instructed to do so. Some students defined the concepts incorrectly, while others failed to mention these devices at all. However, the utilisation of these devices in majority of the advertisements, as well as a means to construct the ideal audience, indicates that the students must have some understanding of these concepts. As mentioned earlier, the problem does not lie in the application of these devices, but in the explanations thereof. As Unsworth (2001) and Thesen (2001) argue, it seems as if students lack a metalanguage to describe aspects of language itself. This reinforces the idea that students are more versed in creating unconventional, multimodal texts than they are in formulating an academic essay.

#### **6.4.3 Using non-linguistic modes as an entry point into academic discourses**

From the findings laid out in the previous section, it seems as though the students' strength does not lie in the written academic essay. Although their advertisements demonstrate their understanding of various concepts, they are unable to portray this understanding in academic discourse via the written mode. Thus, there seems to be

a disparity between the knowledge that students have and the type of texts that they are expected to produce in higher education. Stroud and Kerfoot (2013: 8), who also propose a multilingual, multimodal pedagogy, do not underplay “the importance of academic English but rather argue that the development of appropriate repertoires in English is not best achieved by offering merely bilingual support as this can serve to maintain prevailing constructions of cultural identities and to reinforce asymmetric relations of power among linguistic groups”. Similarly, I argue that there are various ways in which academic English can be improved by using resources to which students already have access.

Many researchers have argued that today’s students do not think in the same way that students did in the past (Prensky 2001, Cope and Kalantzis 2009, Lewis 2007). This is attributed to the way in which society has changed and the way that technological advancements have rendered new approaches to making meaning (Cope and Kalantzis 2009: 167). Subsequently, students are engaging with texts that exploit much more than the written mode alone. As indicated by Miller (2007: 62), “the millennial generation, immersed in popular and online cultures, thinks of messages and meanings multi-modally - not just in terms of printed words, but also in terms of images and music”. Additionally, as was detailed in chapter three, researchers such as Prensky (2001), O’Halloran (2011), Unsworth (2001) and Lemke (2002) have noted how students no longer think linearly as devices such as hyperlinks have made it possible to jump from document to document or to jump between sections within a document. Accordingly, students’ literacy practices as well as their patterns of thought have changed over time.

It seems sensible then to devise a pedagogy based on these new literacies, rather than focusing on an outdated model that places the written mode at its core. This multiliteracies approach is proposed by a number of researchers such as Lillis and Turner (2001), Cazden et al. (1996), Lewis (2007), Unsworth (2001), Lea (2004), Archer (2006) and many others. Not only is the old, narrow view of literacy unfair to students, but the system also produces alumni who are not ready for the outside world as the skills that are taught at university do not properly prepare students for

their future, and are inconsistent with the expectations from most employers (Cazden et al. 1996: 65).

These findings provide interesting alternatives for assessment, which finds support in other theories developed around cognition and retention of information. One such approach is schema theory, the proponents of which propose that “a new experience is understood by comparison with a stereotypical version of a similar experience held in memory” (Cook 1994: 9). In other words, people use the knowledge that they already have in order to interpret any new information that they encounter. Cook distinguishes between “world schemata” and “text schemata” (1994: 15). World schemata is concerned with our knowledge of the world and how we use this knowledge to interpret discourse, while text schemata relates to our knowledge of particular types of texts which assists us in interpreting discourse (Cook 1994: 15). Schemata theory has aided researchers in their understanding of how students make sense of the knowledge that they receive and, in turn, has helped in the development of suitable curricula designs (McVee, Dunsmore and Gavelek 2005: 531-532).

Contrary to popular belief, students do enter university with world and textual knowledge as was explained in the previous section. This knowledge is simply disparate to educators’ knowledge. Therefore, perhaps an effective way of bridging the gap between students and lecturers would be to utilise students’ existing knowledge as a frame on which to build new knowledge.

Indeed, if a multiliteracies approach to pedagogy is implemented, the assessment practices will have to reflect this transformation as well. This is a discussion to which I will now turn.

### **6.5 Implications for multiliteracies assessment**

I argue for an approach that exploits multimodal and digital literacies as an entry point to enhancing linguistic skills and abilities, in other words, where these new literacies are used as schemata for the enhancement of linguistic knowledge.

A multimodal approach is consistent with students’ literacy practices and is thus a fairer approach for the students. Additionally, multimodal assessment will enable

lecturers to discern whether the problem lies in understanding or whether the students are simply lacking in genre knowledge (that is, of the academic essay genre). Furthermore, multimodal assessment methods are able to test skills that are not assessed in the written essay. A multimodal approach will ensure that students draw on a variety of skills that are consistent with their literacy practices, while written assessment focuses predominantly on their writing skills and their ability to retain facts. The latter form of assessment is incompatible with the digital era in which we live, where meaning is increasingly made with a number of modes concurrently and where effortless access to information makes memorising facts redundant.

The set of literacy skills with which today's students arrive at university should be perceived as an asset, instead of simply ignoring them. These skills should be exploited by lecturers as a means of relaying knowledge as well as providing students with the opportunity to exhibit their skills, which simultaneously allows them to develop these skills and prepare for their social futures.

However, students cannot graduate with knowledge of multimodal and digital literacies alone. They will inevitably require linguistic skills as well, whether it be for writing a report or knowing how to comprehensively construct an email. Therefore, I argue for the utilisation of a multimodal approach as an entry point to enhancing linguistic skills and abilities.

### **6.5.1 Multimodal designs as schemata for linguistic learning**

Creating multimodal printed designs as well as websites requires a conscious knowledge of how to use Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006: 177) principles of composition, specifically the information value, salience, and framing of the design, in order to construct meaning. Thus, students would need to know how to utilise layout in order to communicate messages. This is a skill which most of the AELS students proved to possess, as discussed in section 5.5.1. In the same way that elements are framed in a layout for comparison, made salient to convey importance and positioned according to their information value, so must linguistic elements be organised in a written piece in order to convey information. Therefore, lecturers can exploit students' knowledge of layout as a schema on which to build their essay-writing skills, for

example, by requesting that students explain how they would go about realising salience in a multimodal design, and then showing students how this same meaning is achieved in the linguistic (or written) mode. In this way, students would be able to draw on material that is familiar to them in order to improve their knowledge of a somewhat unfamiliar genre.

Creating digital videos (including stop-motion films) also necessitates a set of skills that are currently not tested in higher education. According to Miller, utilising digital video composition as a form of literacy may resolve the issue of teachers focusing solely on the written mode, as it warrants the inclusion of modes such as “visual, aural, kinetic, and verbal” (2007: 66). Additionally, digital video is a familiar genre for students as they regularly engage with television and films (Miller 2007: 66). It seems then to be an ideal medium to use as a schema for relaying other types of knowledge. This is coherent with Cope and Kalantzis’ recommendation for exploiting literacy practices, of which students have implicit knowledge, in order to successfully relay knowledge (Miller 2007: 66).

Miller notes how composing digital videos requires the same sort of processes as writing an essay: it needs “an introduction, body and conclusion”, students need to edit and proofread as well as inspect the spatial, musical, social, emotional and technical aspects of their work (Miller 2007: 70). Using digital video compositions as a form of assessment may thus be an effective way of bridging the gap between students and lecturers as it utilises the same creation process as essays (thus not forcing lecturers too far out of their comfort zones), and students are able to engage with a genre that is familiar to them and which they enjoy. Moreover, students become designers in the knowledge process, rather than just passive consumers. In this way, they are able to learn curricular concepts through their design process, which is referred to as “knowledge-in-action” (Miller 2007: 71). This gives students more agency in the learning process and allows them to see the purpose behind their work, thus remaining motivated (Miller 2007: 71). Digital video composing also requires students to find the most appropriate manner in which to communicate their message which requires the use of “advanced problem solving methods of meaning making” (Miller 2007: 77).



Apart from the abovementioned skills that digital video composition entails, Mills notes how creating digital films additionally requires the utilisation of the four components of pedagogy that were proposed by Cazden et al. (as explicated in section 3.5.1), namely situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice (2006: 62). Situated practice is manifest in students “situating meaning making in real world contexts”, as their engagement with films serves as a preparatory space for creating their own films (Mills 2006: 62). Overt instruction is evident in their use of a metalanguage for their design process, as digital video composition requires them to engage with various terms associated with film-making (Mills 2006: 62). Critical framing is realised through students’ self-analysis of their films in the process of designing and editing. Finally, transformed practice is apparent in the students’ final product (their films) as it requires them to “transform existing meanings [in order] to design new meanings” (Mills 2006: 62).

Consequently, because digital video composition utilises the same design processes as writing an essay as well as requiring the use of the four components of pedagogy, it proves to be an effective tool to use as schemata on which to build students’ linguistic knowledge and skills.

## **6.6 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further studies**

This study, although providing a glimpse of the possibilities of a multimodal pedagogy in higher education, also has a number of limitations due mostly to the limited scope of a Masters thesis.

Future research regarding a multiliteracies approach to pedagogy could benefit from conducting interviews with students and lecturers. In this way, first-hand opinions from both parties can be obtained and analysed which is likely to render more accurate results. Another limitation of the study is, of course, the fact that it was only carried out for one module in one subject. Further analyses of multimodal assessment in higher education could be carried out in various subjects, perhaps even across various universities or higher education institutions. This will enable researchers to obtain a more accurate overview of the implications of multimodal assessment from which they can make more informed decisions about changing the

pedagogic system. Additionally, a longitudinal study may prove to be beneficial for future research, where, for example, students' performance is compared before and after the employment of a multiliteracies approach to teaching linguistic skills. In this way, results of the research will be able to divulge whether this approach is successful or not. Studies which are more ethnographically grounded will place the focus much more on the practices and processes of multimodal pedagogies, rather than just the products or end results. There is currently a dearth of these types of ethnographically motivated studies so this is another consideration for future research.

Although a multiliteracies approach to teaching and assessment would be beneficial for most students, it is important to consider the limitations that accompany such an approach. One such issue is that of socioeconomics. In a third-world country such as South Africa, many students do not have access to the same types of technology and schooling as students who are higher up on the socioeconomic ladder. Thesen (2001: 138), for example, cautions that, despite using a multimodal pedagogy, some students (those who do not have the dominant linguistic cultural capital) might still be disadvantaged. One way of making assessment **more** fair, even in view of differing student backgrounds, is providing students with choices between a selection of presentation mediums such as the traditional essay format, an oral presentation or a multimedia presentation. Indeed, this approach would require a standardised rubric for awarding marks to ensure impartiality and consistency.

It is important to note that lecturers need to be considered alongside the students. If lecturers do not have these digital and visual literacy skills that students possess, it will prove to be a difficult feat to utilise such skills in teaching and assessment. As Vygotsky maintains, in order for a student to reach his/her "zone of proximal development" (where the student performs at his/her best level), the student needs to collaborate with "a more skilled person" (Yorke 2003: 478). Thus, lecturers necessitate a more advanced knowledge of new literacies practices in order for students to be able to progress to their "zone of proximal development" (Yorke 2003: 478). However, by and large, this is not the case. Lecturers' "understanding of creating such multimodal texts and [their] ability to analyse these texts is much less

developed than [their] understanding of the conventions of linguistic communication” (Matthewman, Blight and Davies 2004: 155). This could be solved through special training for lecturers which allows them to progress on the scale from “digital immigrants” to “digital natives” (Prensky 2001). However, the cost of such training also needs to be considered. Another possible solution is group work as students will then be able to draw on and benefit from each other’s skills. The employment of younger tutors, who are at a higher level than the students in terms of their multimodal and digital skills, could also assist in resolving this issue. Alternatively, this issue could resolve itself over time as new, younger lecturers, who are competent in new literacies practices, enter the system.

Ultimately, higher education will become increasingly diverse and will continue changing. If, almost 20 years after the New London Group proclaimed that the goal of education is “to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (Cazden et al. 1996: 60), we still limit the extent to which students can benefit from education by constraining the ways of learning, we urgently need to investigate and implement interventions that will allow full participation in education for all students.

## References

- Archer, A. 2006. A multimodal approach to academic 'literacies': Problematizing the visual/verbal divide. *Language and Education* 20(6): 449-462.
- Aziz, S., M. Shamim, M.F. Aziz and P. Avais. 2013. The impact of texting/SMS language on academic writing of students: What do we need to panic about? *Elixir Linguistics and Translation* 55(2013): 12884-12890.
- Bakhtin, M. 1981. Discourse in the novel. In M. Hoquist (ed.) *The dialogic imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp. 259-422.
- Barton, D. 1994. *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language*. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Baynham, M. 1995. *Literacy practices: Investigating literacy in social contexts*. London and New York: Longman Publishing.
- Bennett, S. 2012. Digital natives. In Z. Yan (ed.) *Encyclopedia of cyber behavior: Volume 1*. United States: IGI Global. pp. 212-219.
- Bezemer, J. and G. Kress. 2008. Writing in multimodal texts: A social semiotic account of designs for learning. *Written Communication* 25(2): 166-195.
- Bezemer, J., C. Jewitt, S. Diamantopoulou, G. Kress and D. Mavers. 2012. *Using a social semiotic approach to multimodality: Researching learning in schools, museums and hospitals*. National Centre for Research Methods working paper. Southampton: NCRM.
- Bloome, D, S. Carter, B. Christian, S. Otto and N. Shuart-Faris. 2004. *Discourse analysis and the study of classroom language and literacy events: A microethnographic perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Borsheim, C., K. Merritt and D. Reed. 2008. Beyond technology for technology's sake: Advancing multiliteracies in the twenty-first century. *The Clearing House* 82(2): 87-90.

- Boud, D. 2009. Assessment and the promotion of academic values. *Studies in Higher Education* 15(1): 101-111.
- Busch, B. 2011. *Building on heteroglossia and heterogeneity: The experience of a multilingual classroom*. Presentation held at the 3rd International Conference on Language, Education and Diversity (LED), 22-25 November 2011, Colloquium: Language, Education, and Superdiversity. University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Cazden, C., B. Cope, N. Fairclough, J.P. Gee, M. Kalantzis, G. Kress, A. Luke, C. Luke, S. Michaels and M. Nakata. 1996. A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review* 66(1): 60-92.
- Cook, G. 1994. *Discourse and literature: The interplay of form and mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cope, B. and M. Kalantzis. 2009. "Multiliteracies": New literacies, new learning. *Pedagogies: An International Journal* 4(3): 164-195.
- Dicks, B., B. Soyinka and A. Coffey. 2006. Multimodal ethnography. *Qualitative Research* 6(1): 77-96.
- Drouin, M. and C. Davis. 2009. R u txtng? Is the use of text speak hurting your literacy? *Journal of Literacy Research* 41(1): 46-67.
- Fairclough, N. 1992. Discourse and text: Linguistic and intertextual analysis within discourse analysis. *Discourse Society* 3(2): 193-217.
- Fairclough, N. 1995. *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Longman.
- Forceville, C. 1999. Educating the eye? Kress and Van Leeuwen's reading images: The grammar of visual design (1996). *Language and Literature* 8(2): 163-178.
- Gee, J.P. 1989. What is literacy? *Journal of Education* 171(1): 18-25.
- Gee, J.P. 2003. What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy. *ACM Computers in Entertainment* 1(1): 1-4.

- Goffman, E. 1986. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Gough, D. and Z. Bock. 2001. Alternative perspectives on orality, literacy and education: A view from South Africa. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 22(2): 95-111.
- Gumperz, J.J. 1982. *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1978. *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. Baltimore: University Park Press.
- Helsper, E. and R. Eynon. 2010. Digital natives: Where is the evidence? *British Educational Research Journal* 36(3): 503-520.
- Hodge, R. and G. Kress. 1988. *Social semiotics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hodge, R. and G. Kress. 1998. *Social semiotics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Howe, N. and W. Strauss. 2000. *Millennials rising: The next great generation*. New York: Vintage.
- Hyland, F. and K. Hyland. 2001. Sugaring the pill: Praise and criticism in written feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 10(3): 185-212.
- Iedema, R. 2003. Multimodality, resemiotization: Extending the analysis of discourse as multi-semiotic practice. *Visual Communication* 2(1): 29-57.
- Ivanic, R. 2004. Intertextual practices in the construction of multimodal texts. In N. Shuart-Faris and D. Bloome (eds.) *Uses of intertextuality in classroom and educational research*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing. pp. 279-311.
- Jacobs, D. 2007. More than words: Comics as a means of teaching multiple literacies. *The English Journal* 96(3): 19-25.
- Janks, H. 2006. Games go abroad. *English Studies in Africa* 49(1): 115-138.

- Jewitt, C. 2002. The move from page to screen: The multimodal reshaping of school English. *Journal of Visual Communication* 1(2): 171-196.
- Jewitt, C. 2009. An introduction to multimodality. In C. Jewitt (ed.) *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 14-27.
- Jewitt, C. 2009. Different approaches to multimodality. In C. Jewitt (ed.) *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 28-39.
- Jones, C., R. Ramanau, S. Cross and G. Healing. 2010. Net generation or digital natives: Is there a distinct new generation entering university? *Computers & Education* 54(3): 722–732.
- Kalantzis, M. and B. Cope. 2008. Language education and multiliteracies. In S. May and N. H. Hornberger (eds.) *Encyclopedia of language and education Volume 1: Language policy and political issues in education*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. pp. 195–211.
- Kerfoot, C. 2011. Making and shaping participatory spaces: Resemiotization and citizenship agency in South Africa. *International Multilingual Research Journal* 5(2): 87-102.
- Kress, G. 2009. What is mode? In C. Jewitt (ed.) *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 54-67.
- Kress, G. 2010. *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. and T. Van Leeuwen. 1996. *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kress, G. and T. Van Leeuwen. 2002. Colour as a semiotic mode: Notes for a grammar of colour. *Visual Communication* 1(3): 343–368.



- Kress, G. and T. Van Leeuwen. 2006. *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lankshear, C. and M. Knobel. 2007. Sampling the “new” in new literacies. In C. Lankshear and M. Knobel (eds.) *A new literacies sampler*. New York: Peter Lang. pp. 1-24.
- Marsh, J. and J. Larson. 2005. *Framing literacies: Studying and organizing literacy learning in primary schools*. London and New York: Sage.
- Lea, M.R. 2004. Academic literacies: A pedagogy for course design. *Studies in Higher Education* 29(6): 739-756.
- Leppänen, S., S. Kytölä, H. Jousmäki, S. Peuronen and E. Westinen. 2013. Entextualisation and resemiotization as resources for (dis)identification in social media. *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies* 57: 1-46.
- Lewis, C. 2007. New literacies. In C. Lankshear and M. Knobel (eds.) *A new literacies sampler*. New York: Peter Lang. pp. 229-238.
- Lillis, T. and J. Turner. 2001. Student writing in higher education: Contemporary confusion, traditional concerns. *Teaching in Higher Education* 6(1): 57-68.
- Mahiri, J. (ed.) 2004. *What they don't learn in school: Literacy in the lives of urban youth*. New York: Peter Lang. pp. 247-268.
- Martinec, R. 2000. Rhythm in multimodal texts. *Leonardo* 33(4): 289-297.
- Matthewman, S., A. Blight and C. Davies. 2004. What does multimodality mean for English? Creative tensions in teaching new texts and new literacies. *Education, Communication & Information* 4(1): 153-176.
- Mavers, D. 2009. Image in the multimodal ensemble: Children's drawing. In C. Jewitt (ed.) *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 263-272.

- McVee, M.B., K. Dunsmore and J.R. Gavelek. 2005. Schema theory revisited. *Review of Educational Research* 75(4): 531-566.
- Miller, S.M. 2007. English teacher learning for new times: Digital video composing as multimodal literacy practice. *English Education* 40(1): 61-83.
- Mills, K.A. 2006. Discovering design possibilities through a pedagogy of multiliteracies. *Journal of Learning Design* 1(3): 61-72.
- Norris, S. 2004. Multimodal discourse analysis: A conceptual framework. In P. LeVine and R. Scollon (eds.) *Discourse and technology: Multimodal discourse analysis*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. pp. 101-115.
- O'Halloran, K.L. 2011. Multimodal discourse analysis. In K. Hyland and B. Paltridge (eds.) *Companion to discourse*. London and New York: Continuum. pp. 120-137.
- Pahl, K. and J. Rowsell. 2005. *Literacy and education: Understanding the new literacy studies in the classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Phillips, B.J. and E.F. McQuarrie. 2004. Beyond visual metaphor: A new typology of visual rhetoric in advertising. *Marketing Theory* 4(1/2): 113-136.
- Prensky, M. 2001a. Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon* 9(5): 1-6.
- Prensky, M. 2001b. Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon* 9(6): 1-9.
- Rowsell, J. and K. Pahl. (eds.) In press. *Crossing multimodal literacies: Multiliteracies at home and at school*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Schwarzer, D., A. Haywood and C. Lorenzen. 2003. Fostering multiliteracies in a linguistically diverse classroom. *Language Arts* 80(6): 453-460.
- Scollon, R. and S.W. Scollon. 2000. *Intercultural communication: A discourse approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Scollon, R. and S.W. Scollon. 2003. *Discourses in place: Language in the material world*. London: Routledge.

- Scollon, R. and S.W. Scollon. 2007. Nexus analysis: Refocusing ethnography on action. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 11(5): 608-625.
- Simpson, P. and A. Mayr. 2010. Language and advertising. In *Language and power. A resource book for students*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Stein, P. and D. Newfield. 2006. Shifting the gaze in South African classrooms: New pedagogies, new publics, new democracies. *Thinking Classroom* 5(1): 28-36.
- Stone, J. 2007. Popular websites in adolescents' out-of-school lives: Critical lessons on literacy. In C. Lankshear and M. Knobel (eds.) *A new literacies sampler*. New York: Peter Lang. pp. 49-66.
- Street, B.V. 1984. *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B.V. (ed.) 2004. *Literacies across education contexts: Mediating learning and teaching*. Philadelphia: Caslon.
- Street, B.V. 2005. At last: Recent applications of new literacy studies in educational contexts. *Research in the Teaching of English* 39(4): 417-423.
- Stroud, C. and C. Kerfoot. In press. Towards rethinking multilingualism and language policies for academic literacies. *Linguistics and Education*. Corrected proof available online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2013.09.003>. (Accessed 30 October 2013).
- Tannen, D. 1987. Repetition in conversation: Toward a poetics of talk. *Language* 63(3): 574-605.
- Tapscott, D. 1998. *Growing up digital: The rise of the net generation*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Thesen, L. 2001. Modes, literacy and power: A university case study. *Language and Education* 15(2-3): 132-145.

- The New London Group. 2013. *A pedagogy of Multi-Literacies: Concepts of design*. Available online: <http://www.newliteracies.com.au/what-are-new-literacies?/138/> (Accessed 3 November 2013).
- Unsworth, L. 2001. *Teaching multiliteracies across the curriculum: Changing contexts of text and image in classroom practice*. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Van Dijk, T.A. 1977. *Text and context. Explorations in the semantics and pragmatics of discourse*. London: Longman.
- Van Leeuwen, T. 2005. Typographic meaning. *Visual Communication* 4(2): 137-143.
- Yorke, M. 2003. Formative assessment in higher education: Moves towards theory and the enhancement of pedagogic practice. *Higher Education* 45(4): 477-501.

## Appendix A

### Assignment Requirements 2012

A. Design an advertisement for AELS 278, geared towards first-year students who have passed English Studies 178 and are eligible to do AELS 278. Your advertisement can be in printed or electronic format (saved on a CD). Use visual elements to attract the attention of your audience.

You should make use of the following intertextual devices:

- Parallelism
- Explicit/Direct intertextuality
- Interdiscursivity

B. Write a short essay in which you explain how you used these intertextual devices and the visual elements to construct the identity of the ideal AELS 278 student. The essay should be no longer than two typed pages and it must conform to typical essay writing conventions. When referring to theoretical concepts please reference appropriately.

## Appendix B

### Assignment Requirements 2013

- a) Design an advertisement for a non-profit organisation of your choice (preferably a small local organisation). Your advertisement can be in printed (e.g. poster, brochure, or “magazine type” advertisement) or electronic format (a PowerPoint presentation, video, website, audio advertisement which you can save on a CD or flash disk). Use visual elements or paralinguistic features to attract the attention of your audience.

You should make use of the following intertextual devices in your advertisement:

- Parallelism
- Explicit/Direct intertextuality
- Interdiscursivity (making use of a register that is associated with another type of discourse)

- b) Write a short essay in which you explain how you used these intertextual devices and the visual elements to construct the identity of the *organisation* as well as the *intended audience*. The essay should be no longer than three typed pages (1.5 spacing, font size 12) and can either take the form of a narrative essay OR an academic essay. When referring to theoretical concepts, it is essential that you reference appropriately. Use the following questions to guide your essay:

- What are *intertextuality*, *parallelism* and *interdiscursivity*?
- How did you use the above-mentioned devices in your advertisement?
- Why did you use these specific intertextual references?
- What impression does it create of the organisation that for which you designed the advertisement?
- Who is your target audience?
- What kind of impression does the use of your intertextual devices create of your target audience?

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent Form and Ethical Clearance

**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

---

**Multi-semiotic modes of expression in student assessment in higher education:  
Investigating the multi-semiotic resources in student assessment in a higher educational context in the Western  
Cape Province.**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Tamzin du Toit, BA(Hons), from the Department of General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University. The results will be used in a Masters thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you completed an AELS 278 assignment for the module *Intertextual English* (either in 2012 or 2013), overseen by Dr Marcelyn Oostendorp.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study will attempt to investigate the meaning-making potential of multimodal assessment methods in higher education. The main aims are to investigate the extent to which students use modes other than language in assessment, when given the option to do so; and to investigate the meaning-making potential offered by the different modes that students use.

#### **2. PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you do not have to be physically present. You would simply be giving us permission to use your assignment, or part thereof, in our study.

#### **3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Participation in this study will not put you at any risks or discomfort you in any way.

#### **4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The outcomes of the research may have an impact on the way in which higher education and assessment is conceptualised within a diverse, transformative context such as South Africa. The research will also contribute to the wider field of linguistics, by investigating how modes other than language interact with language and contribute towards meaning-making.

#### **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

No payment can be offered for participation in this project.

#### **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the use of pseudonyms. Data will be kept electronically which will be protected by passwords and to which only the main researcher, supervisor and examiners of the project have access.

#### **7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.



## 8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Ms T du Toit, or the supervisor, Dr M Oostendorp.

Contact details: T du Toit

e-mail: [15733475@sun.ac.za](mailto:15733475@sun.ac.za)

e-mail: [moostendorp@sun.ac.za](mailto:moostendorp@sun.ac.za)

MCA Oostendorp

Tel nr. 0218089288

Address: Department of General Linguistics  
Stellenbosch University  
P/bag X1 Matieland, Stellenbosch 7601  
Room 516, Arts Building.

## 9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maryke Hunter-Husselmann, ([mh3@sun.ac.za](mailto:mh3@sun.ac.za)) at the Unit for Research Development.

### SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

*I hereby consent to participate in this study.*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Participant**

**Date**

### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_ [*name of the subject/participant*]. [*He/she*] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY  
Jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

11 September 2012

Tel.: 021 - 808-9003  
Enquiries: Mr. Winston A Beukes  
Email: [wabeukes@sun.ac.za](mailto:wabeukes@sun.ac.za)

**Reference No. DESC54/2012**

Dr M Oostendorp  
Department of General Linguistics  
Stellenbosch University

Ms Oostendorp

#### LETTER OF ETHICS CLEARANCE

With regard to your application, I would like to inform you that the project, *The explicit teaching of "intertextuality" in academic literacy: Popular texts as a bridge to understanding academic texts*, was approved on the following proviso's:

1. The researcher will remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal, particularly in terms of any undertakings made in terms of the confidentiality of the information gathered.
2. The research will again be submitted for ethical clearance if there is any substantial departure from the existing proposal.
3. The researcher will remain within the parameters of any applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of research.
4. The researcher will consider and implement the foregoing suggestions to lower the ethical risk associated with the research.
5. This ethics clearance is valid for one year from 22 June 2012 – 21 June 2013

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards

  
MR WA Beukes

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humaniora)

Registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC): REC-050411-032

