

Exploring Image Text Relation in College English Textbooks*

LI Hua-bing

Southwest University, Chongqing, China

The purpose of the present paper is to investigate the multimodality in college English textbooks. Because multimodality is closely associated with college English teaching and learning, it is necessary to probe into the multimodality in college English books. First, the study showed that the images in college English textbooks have the following functions: to illustrate the text, to consolidate the information in the text, to aestheticize the text, as well as to collaborate with the text to establish harmony between the author and the reader, therefore to convey the author's intentions well. Second, the study showed that the multimodality in college English textbooks reflects power relation and solidarity relation between the author and the reader. On the one hand, multimodality in college English textbooks implies unequal power relationships which are represented by unequal power opportunities for the author to select images while the reader has little influence. On the other hand, the learning activities provide a lot of chances for the reader to make contact with the images, hence establishing a familiar and harmonious relationship between the reader and the author. The findings of the present study have useful implications for college English teaching and learning and imply the need for further studies in this field.

Keywords: multimodality, college English books, functions, power relation, solidarity relation

Introduction

In recent years, much research has been focused on the field of multimodality in China and many other countries, such as, Australia, England, and more recently, the influence is even extended to the United States. Multimodality describes approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of communicational forms people use—image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on—and the relationships between them (Jewitt, 2009). This is the result of the widespread influence of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1978, 1985/1994). According to SFL, language is viewed as social semiotic and language has three metafunctions: ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning. Based on SFL, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996/2006) offered a framework to describe the semiotic resources of images and their work laid a foundation for further study in multimodality.

Until now, many other scholars have devoted themselves to the study of multimodality in many fields. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996/2006) analyze images from the perspective of representational, the interactive, and compositional metafunctions. O'Toole (1994) concentrates on the grammar of displayed art. Royce (1998, 2007)

* **Acknowledgements:** This paper is part of the result of the research project the author hosts "The Study of Multimodal Discourse Analysis in College English Teaching" that is supported by "the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities" (Project No.: SWU1009057).

LI Hua-bing, lecturer, Ph.D. candidate, School of Foreign Languages, Southwest University.

proposes a framework of intersemiotic complementarity to analyze multimodal cohesion. Matthiessen (2007) employs the multidimensional resources of SFL theory to expound the multimodal page. Much attention has been fixed on the field of educational texts to find out the role of multimodality in teaching/learning practice (e.g., O'Halloran, 1999; Unsworth, 2001, 2007; Bowcher, 2006). With the development of investigation into multimodality, it has been found that literacy should be understood from different angle. Unsworth (2008) pointed out that

There seems to be broad agreement that literacy can no longer be thought of as involving language alone and that images, in paper media texts, and also sound, movement and gesture in digital multimedia texts, need to be considered along with language as fundamental meaning-making resources in constructing text. (p. 3)

Since multimodality is closely associated with college English teaching and learning, it is necessary to probe into the multimodality in college English textbooks. Many efforts have been devoted to the investigation of single-image texts (e.g., O'Toole, 1994; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996/2006), but few scholars concentrate on the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks in China. It is therefore worthwhile to probe into the field and the corresponding study may result in productive findings.

This paper analyzes the intersemiotic relationships between visual and textual modes in *New Horizon College English: Speaking, Listening, Viewing* (2011), a textbook designed for non-English majors in Chinese colleges.

Theoretical Foundations and EFL Textbooks in China

Theoretical Foundations

There have been unrelenting attempts to find out the nature of images. Peirce (1985) once categorized sign into three types: icon, index, and symbol. Besides, he further divided icon into images, diagrams, and metaphors. Although Peirce's discussions touched upon images, he did not regard image as an independent mode, such as language, in constructing meaning. Despite Peirce's limitations in explaining parts of images, his contribution to images cannot be ignored. Sebeok (2001) followed Peirce and categorized sign into six types: signal, symptom, icon, index, symbol, name and thus broadened Peirce's research.

In the 1990s, much relevant study draw insight from SFL, and view image, together with action, sound, and so on as one of the equally important modes in meaning making as language. Later, Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996/2006) visual theory laid foundations for study in image from the perspective of SFL. A significant amount of work in multimodality centered upon the theories to analyze various multimodal text.

EFL Textbooks in China

Since the inauguration of reform and opening up, English has been one of the compulsory subjects in Chinese colleges. The English textbooks have experienced a lot of changes over the past 30 years. The images in them have also undergone incredible changes. Nowadays, because of the nature of textbooks and the specific characteristics of EFL in China, the textbooks are rich in images. The images and texts work together to make meanings in various ways. Some research has been done in this field, for example, Economou (2009) gives a detailed social semiotic descriptions of visual meaning in photos in the news mainly from three evaluative aspects of attitude, graduation, engagement, and interdiscursivity. What is more, Chen (2009) investigates interpersonal

meaning in Chinese textbooks and explains how linguistic and visual semiotic resources work together to construct meaning in Chinese textbooks. Based on the previous studies, this paper aims to broaden the scope of research in Chinese textbooks by doing the following tasks.

Functions of Images

Since the textbooks are designed for Chinese students to learn English as a second language, the various backgrounds of college students in China have great impact on the design of textbooks. Since some provinces do not inquire listening in entrance examination, therefore some students are poor at English listening. Other provinces that have listening comprehension in the entrance examination do not set a high standard for that. As a result, college students in China on the whole are not especially strong in listening and speaking. The design of college English textbooks is likely to reflect this reality and works out some ways to cope with this situation. Taking all these factors into account, the study indicated that these books (here *New Horizon College English: Speaking, Listening, Viewing (1, 2, 3)* are chosen as the analysis materials) have the following functions: to illustrate the text, to consolidate the information in the text, to aestheticize the text, as well as to collaborate with the text to establish harmony between the author and the reader, therefore to convey the author's intentions well.

To Illustrate the Text

The study suggested that some images are created to illustrate the contents of the whole unit. Here the images are imbedded in the first page of the unit with the theme to the unit expressed in words. For example, the image on page 2, book 1, describes smiling college students. On the upper-left space of the image, there is "Unit 1", in the upper part, there is "How's your college life?" There are college boys and girls holding books in their hands, smiling, with green meadows and trees as the background, which indicates the college is an environmentally friendly place for college students to learn in and the smiles indicate their happiness and confidence in college years. The study also showed that the boys and girls in the image are from foreign countries, giving the viewer (most of them are from China) an exotic impression, thus motivating them to learn English with greater enthusiasm. At a glance of the image, the viewers are encouraged to have a rough idea about what this unit is going to be and will soon get familiar with the materials in the unit, which may help them to adapt to the learning environment quickly. This sort of images covers every unit in three books (1, 2, and 3), adding up to 24 images altogether.

Besides, in the listening part, images are related to the listening materials. Lest the students are not familiar with the content of the teaching materials, the images here are to illustrate the text, helping the students listen to the dialogue with better understanding and in this way to promote their interest and confidence in English listening. After careful statistics, the study showed that the images with this function are 72 in total.

To Consolidate the Information in the Text

There also exists another type of images, where the image is intended to consolidate the text, such as in the part of "Speaking out", to aid the students in better understanding of the dialogue with some sentences missing out. At a first glance, the image is likely to be misinterpreted as an illustration, because at the bottom of the image, there are some words which seem to illustrate the image. In fact, the image (together with the words as a whole) employed here is to consolidate the information in the dialogue. This is a dialogue between a teacher and two

students. Without the image the viewer may have difficulty in working out the correct meaning intended by the author and may be puzzled at the relationship between the three speakers. So the students with consolidated information may be at ease when practicing speaking with their partner(s). The images which can be attributed to this sort add up to 72.

To Aestheticize the Text

College students are not only educated for the purpose of becoming learned people. On the one hand, they are educated for the learning of knowledge, here, in the case of English learning, to acquire a second language. On the other hand, learning in an enjoyable atmosphere is of key significance for young minds to form beautiful pictures, and then they also should learn to appreciate all the beauty in the world. To reach this goal, it is important to incorporate aesthetics in the textbooks. It is thereafter natural for textbook designers to consider the beauty factor when designing the images in the books. For example, the image on the upper part of page 139 (in unit 10, book 1) whose topic is holiday depicts the beautiful lake and trees nearby with two yachts to form a fascinating scene, which is so beautiful that it can easily arouse the love for life in the viewers.

To Collaborate With the Text

The image on the bottom left of page 139 (in unit 10, book 1) depicts two kids playing on the sand happily, one of them gazing the viewer with a hearty smile. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996/2006), the gaze reflects interpersonal meaning which is interacted between the gazer and the viewer. On the surface of explanation, it is a communication between the gazer and the viewer; on further thought, it is the communication between the author of the book and the viewer, with an intention to convey the delight felt by the kids to the viewer, giving people an impression that holiday stands for happiness, children are innocent and then people should embrace holidays and life with a positive attitude. The veiled hints lie in that the author expects to establish a harmonious relationship with the viewer and thus influence the viewer's attitudes towards English learning for the better.

Unequal Power Relations

According to Fairclough (2001), "the hidden power of media discourse and the capacity of the capitalist class and other power-holders to exercise this power depend on systematic tendencies in news reporting and other media activities" (p. 45). Likewise, the relations between the designer of the textbook and the viewer is unequal, with the designer on the authoritative side imposing their opinions and attitudes on the viewers in an implicit way, hence exerting their influence on the viewers unconsciously. The unequal status of power between the author and the viewers can be categorized into the following types.

Biased Power Relations Between Author and Viewer(s)

As textbook designers, they have sufficient power to select the materials according to their understanding of life and the world, and hope to convey their thoughts to the viewer. Since college students are not adults yet, their minds are still prone to be molded in different shapes. For example, the image here (on page 100, book 1) is a beautiful red-brick teaching building in college in the shade of woods. Though the topic in this unit is a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of living on or off campus, the image presented here reflects the author's point of view clearly: The teaching building here on campus is a good place to live and study in, and affecting the

students' attitude towards living on or off campus; the viewers' attitudes are influenced (though for the better here) at the very beginning of the unit. The intention of the author is surely good, but the power relation is biased, because the viewers have no other alternatives. In this view, it becomes even more important for the author to take a balanced position and view things from various perspectives.

Harmonious Relationship Between the Author and Viewer(s)

According to Fairclough (2001), "Mass-media discourse is interesting because the nature of the power relations enacted in it is often not clear, and there are reasons for seeing it as involving hidden relations of power" (p. 41). This is true of EFL textbooks in which there are rich images. The selection of images on the one hand enhances various functions as discussed in 2.1-2.3; on the other hand, the deliberate option of different images also communicates the designer's hidden power over the readers/viewers. For example, in the image on page 6, book 3, in correspondence to the topic of "How to get straight A's?", the image presented here is the library with crowded students totally absorbed in the study or discussion. By choosing this image, the designer wishes to convey the idea that success in study mainly results from hard work. This idea is imposed on the students with implicit suggestion here in the vivid image. There may be other alternative ways for students to succeed, however, by selecting the image here, the designer exerts a powerful influence on the reader, indicating that the power relations between the designer and viewer is unequal and thus the selection of images is of great significance, because the appropriate choice of images may have a positive affect on the students, otherwise, the students may be influenced for the worse. The unequal power relations lie in the designers' expertise and rich experience and their insight into the nature of the world, which are prone to exert positive influence on the potential viewers on the whole. Therefore, the unequal power relation in this sense is beneficial either for the students' academic career or for their healthy growth.

Conclusion

With the comprehensive development of SFL, it leads to the birth of another concept of "applied linguistics", which intends to unite the theory and the practice to form a synergistic whole. The present study attempts to use the SFL, multimodal discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis to investigate the multimodality in college English books in China, and finds that there exists close association between multimodality college English teaching and learning. The four functions of the images in college English textbooks discussed here are of key importance for book designers to take into account. Besides, unequal power relationships between the author and the reader are also fundamental factors that influence the designing and choosing a textbook. The present probing into multimodality in college English books is of great value in promoting the college English teaching and learning in China and suggests that further studies in this field should be broadened to satisfy the new requirements on college English teaching.

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