

Book Review

Yumin Chen. 2022. *Interpersonal meaning in multimodal English textbooks.*

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Multimodal discourse analysis has sparked wide interest in educational linguistics, bringing forth fruitful works in this domain. The book *Interpersonal meaning in multimodal English textbooks* written by Yumin Chen shares insightful views on the multimodal nature of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks in China, which belongs to the series of Bloomsbury Studies in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The author competently draws upon SFL and social semiotics to explore how image and verbiage work in tandem within APPRAISAL system to manage interpersonal meanings in multimodal EFL textbook discourse. The book makes innovative contributions in both theoretical and pedagogic dimensions, aiming for a more comprehensive model of APPRAISAL that encompasses verbal and visual semiotic systems, as well as bringing knowledge of multimodal pedagogic materials to support Chinese English-language teaching.

Structurally, this book is comprised of three parts: (1) explaining research background and theoretical foundation (Chapters 1–3), (2) analyzing and discussing interpersonal meanings in multimodal EFL textbook discourse (Chapters 4–6), and (3) synthesizing research findings and contributions (Chapter 7).

Chapter 1, as an opening section, briefly presents the research background, design, and objectives of this study. It has stressed the key concepts such as multimodality and semiotics, along with the interpersonal meaning of EFL pedagogic context. It also introduces the corpus of multimodal EFL textbooks established in this book. Chapter 2 provides a critical review of studies on multimodality and multiliteracies, and then it illustrates the development of the multimodality research and relevant textbook studies in China, identifying major research gaps to be addressed in this book. Those research areas include: (1) the multimodal features in Chinese primary and secondary education context; (2) the multimodal resources used to adjust dialogic space in textbooks; (3) the way how multimodal resources are deployed to achieve attitudinal goals in the curriculum standards; and (4) image producer's anticipations about the readers. Chapter 3 is devoted to a detailed explanation of the theoretical foundation underlies this study. It begins with some basic tenets of SFL as far as stratification, realization, instantiation, and metafunction are concerned. It then introduces interpersonal semantics across

verbal modality of communication (APPRAISAL system and its sub-systems) and visual communication (representation, interaction, modality, composition). Another major purpose of this chapter is to outline the reasons accounting for the adoption of systemic functional semiotic approach. According to Chapter 3, this approach is particularly valuable in modeling the interaction among different voices, in analyzing the intermodal construal of attitude, and in developing a multilevel perspective of visual modality.

From Chapters 4 to 6, this book examines the interactive (Chapter 4) and personal (Chapters 5 and 6) dimensions of the interpersonal meanings in EFL textbook discourse. Chapter 4 begins with the identification of the multiple voices in the EFL textbooks (i.e. editor voice, character voice, reader voice). It then investigates five multimodal resources that serve to manage heteroglossic space: labeling, dialogue balloon jointly-constructed text, illustration, and highlighting. Labeling interpolates editor voice and is often used to prescribe language goals. Dialogue balloons projects character voice and realize diverse functions: supporting editor voice, explaining game rules, and giving directions to students. Jointly-constructed text brings in reader voice and seeks to elicit participation in completing the learning task. Illustration utilizes visual resources to elucidate verbal texts, which can serve as the link between verbal texts, the display of improper behaviors, and the background or foreground in the multimodal text. Highlighting situates certain elements in visual importance in order to attract reader's attention. These five devices encode the ENGAGEMENT meanings and adjust the dialogic space in the multimodal textbook discourse: labeling [proclaim/disclaim]; dialogue balloon, jointly-constructed text, and illustration [attribute]; highlighting [entertain]. It also examines the gradability continuum of [attribute] value in terms of the amount of responsibility undertaken by the characters in dialogue balloons, as well as the degree of indispensability of images in jointly constructed texts. This chapter further discusses the interactive meaning (voice interaction) encoded in multimodal EFL textbook discourse. It distinguishes 'observe' image and 'contact' image, elucidating their respective functions of focalizing characters and making eye contact with viewers. It points out that different choices of social distance have an impact on the interaction between characters and readers. Furthermore, it illustrates how power relations are constructed and reflected in placing point of view (shooting angle).

Chapter 5 addresses the evaluative meanings in multimodal EFL textbooks, with a particular focus on verbiage-image relations. It investigates two types of verbiage-image relations concerning different attitudinal meanings encoded in different categories of drawing styles, i.e. cartoons, portraits, and photographs. Inscribed happiness of English learning is frequently found in cartoons in the primary textbooks, where positive emotion is explicitly expressed in the visual

display of the cartoon character. However, its verbiage has no attitudinal meaning counterpart, conveying ideational experiences instead. Therefore, the image-verbiage relation is complementarity. There are other types of cartoons that invoke appreciation via logogenetic recontextualization, inviting attitudinal response from the readers. In portrait and photograph, invoked judgment and appreciation are co-instantiated with verbal resources. Their attitudinal meanings often have a multiplying effect, where both verbal and visual resources in the EFL textbooks commit attitude, guiding readers to a putative position. These types of images are more serious, suggesting a sense of growing social responsibility, which corresponds with the transition from childhood to adolescence. In addition, this section critically illustrates how attitudinal meanings in multimodal EFL textbooks have changed due to the process of socializing and curriculum goals in different educational stages. For example, the inscribed affect has gradually declined from primary to senior secondary education, meanwhile, the institutionalized feelings of judgement and appreciation have accumulated along the way. According to this chapter, judgement and appreciation embody greater capability in symbolizing evaluation, which shows a natural process in language development. Furthermore, the shift in attitudinal encoding essentially reflects and contributes to attitude and moral education stipulated by the reformed curriculum standards in the EFL education in China.

Chapter 6 is concerned with modality in multimodal communicative context. It draws on the social semiotic approach to investigate the reliability of the multimodal resources in EFL textbook discourse. After reviewing relevant studies on linguistic modality and visual modality, it presents an analysis of the modality markers and the coding orientations that contribute to modality judgements in pedagogic contexts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 160–163) identify eight modality markers to determine visual modality, which include color saturation, color differentiation, color modulation, contextualization, representation, depth, illumination, and brightness. These analytical dimensions underpin the analysis of visual modality in this chapter. The author compares the coding orientations in different pedagogic stages, in order to probe into the “interdependence” (Hodge and Kress 1988: 161) between modality and social relations. The analysis has a particular focus on the naturalistic coding orientation which is often observed in portraits and photographs. It is noted that within the same image, not all modality markers are simultaneously amplified or reduced. The various levels of amplification or reduction are configured to elicit a certain judgement of modality. This chapter also discusses how the field variable influences the choice of visual style within a macrogenre (i.e. a teaching unit). The analysis indicates that truth is “culturally defined and specific to a given communicative content and members of a certain social group” (p. 159). For example, cartoons in primary EFL textbook

discourse adopt a sensory coding orientation to evoke pleasure in learning language. As students moving to junior secondary, it brings in certain degree of abstractness and seriousness while retaining vibrant coloration as pleasure, creating abstract-sensory coding orientation. Senior secondary EFL textbooks adopt naturalistic coding orientation through photographs, treating students as one of the general publics who shares the prevailing cultural beliefs. The multimodal meaning-making resources realize the solidarity relationship between various groups of language learners and textbook editors.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter of this volume. It commences with a summary of three major research findings of the study. It has been found that the given evaluation in EFL textbook discourse can be attributed to character voice and reader voice in addition to the editor's voice, meanwhile it can be gradable, through multimodal *ENGAGEMENT* devices. The study also shows how different types of verbiage-image relations have inter-modally construed the 'emotion and attitude' goal in the curriculum standards. The third major finding reveals that the modality value in EFL textbook discourse is influenced by and can enact solidarity between textbook editors and learners at different educational stages. This chapter moves on to synthesize the research contributions and implications in terms of both theoretical and pedagogical strands. In the end, it outlines potential directions and makes pertinent recommendations for future studies.

Overall, this volume makes several exciting contributions in both theory and practice. Theoretically, it expands studies in the visual semiotic system to the aspects of *ENGAGEMENT* and *GRADUATION* within the *APPRAISAL* system. It shows how visual resources and *APPRAISAL* work in tandem in pedagogic textbook discourse. In addition, this volume demonstrates the co-instantiation (verbiage and image) of attitude from the corpus, illustrating how different types of feelings emerge in multimodal EFL textbooks of different educational stages. This study further explores the shift in coding orientation from a sensory modality in early childhood to a more abstract modality in adolescence. Practically, it provides valuable implications for English-teaching curriculum and textbook design. The illustrations and examples in the analysis have vividly revealed how various semiotic resources in the multimodal EFL textbooks have managed to fulfill the desired purposes designed for language learners of different ages. It also points out potential improvement directions for future textbook design, for example, as indicated in the book, the neglect of generic structure in the verbal texts may hinder language learning in primary and junior secondary English teaching. Considering the above contributions, this volume provides a great asset for a broad readership: for scholars whose research interests involve educational linguistics, *APPRAISAL*, *SFL* and social semiotics; for students who seek to learn applications of systemic functional linguistic and multimodal discourse analysis, since this book is highly

accessible and reader-friendly; and for textbook designers who intend to reexamine their current practice. Regarding the limitation of this volume, it is noteworthy the corpus of EFL textbooks examined in the study were published between 2002 and 2006, which is not the version currently used in Chinese schools after several curriculum reforms. Therefore, as reading the edited volume, it is as well to bear in mind that it is a critical reflection of textbook design practice and its multimodal nature during a particular time under a specific social context, rather than a fixed interpretation that stays unchanged.

This volume fosters the development of SFL, social semiotics, and APPRAISAL studies in the field of educational linguistics. It is in general well-written and nicely structured. Compared with this volume, other works with similar interests (e.g. Danielsson and Selander 2021) are more oriented to a digitized educational environment. Throughout the book, there is a consistent focus on the interpersonal meanings and multimodal features of EFL textbook discourse. It furthers our understanding about the ENGAGEMENT sub-system of APPRAISAL across modalities, the intermodal co-instantiation of verbiage and image, as well as the modality issue in visual resources. It brings exciting research opportunities in and has significant academic values for SFL, social semiotics and APPRAISAL theory, meanwhile, the book is expected to make positive contributions to English language teaching and textbook design in Chinese primary and secondary education.

References

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