Multimodal Visual Analysis in the First-Year Writing Classroom

**Introduction**

In the twenty-first century composition classroom, students are increasingly required to write about and analyze multimodal texts – texts that combine sound, image, video, and print. Teaching English 103, a first-year writing course that focuses on research and argumentation, I have noticed students have great difficulty writing about digital texts, such as images, videos, websites, and social media. Unit Two: Arguing from Sources, the major writing project of English 103, requires students describe and analyze visual texts in-depth, just as they would scholarly sources. The unit is a sequence of writing assignments – annotated bibliography, literature review, and argumentative paper – that familiarizes students with the steps to publish original academic research. In the unit, students choose a brand or celebrity to research; they collect, evaluate, and synthesize sources, and write a well-researched argumentative essay on a controversial issue related to their brand's marketing and advertising. In the annotated bibliography, students research, summarize, and evaluate scholarly and popular sources. In the literature review, students synthesize these sources, grouping sources into emerging threads, and in the argumentative paper, students construct an original argument based on a controversial issue related to a brand's advertising. Being able to analyze visual texts is essential for students in English 103 because they must use visual texts as the primary evidence for their arguments. Without in-depth critical analysis of visual texts, students will have difficulty producing a well-researched, persuasive argument.

Writing about and interpreting visual texts is a challenging process that involves the translation from images to words. Analyzing visual texts is significantly different than analyzing traditional texts. For instance, in the annotated bibliography, a student would annotate a scholarly source differently than a YouTube clip. Scholarly sources are summarized and evaluated in terms of how well the source contributes to one's argument, while visual texts need to be described visually for the reader, as well as interpreted and evaluated. One of the most prevalent issues when students are writing about visual texts is lack of description and detail; student have trouble "painting a picture" with their words. Some students' visual descriptions lack in so much detail the reader would have to refer to the original image to have any idea what the image depicts. Poor visual descriptions can negatively impact the overall quality of writing assignments as well as impact the strength of a student's argument. Lack of visual description can also affect the quality of critical analysis, in which students come to some deeper, critical awareness of texts. Without a curricular emphasis on visual analysis, students often miss the main purpose of the assignment – to propose a controversial argument based on the advertising and marketing of a brand. Students who do not successfully achieve the purpose of the assignment instead make rather rudimentary, factual arguments about the day-to-day operations of the company, and do not base their argument in the primary evidence of visual sources.

In this course, the primary method of visual analysis is the Aristotelian appeals as well as some handout on analyzing visual texts. While the Aristotelian appeals provide students with a basic method for analyzing advertisements, the composition classroom still does not have a unified method and framework for analyzing multimodal texts. Diana George situates the history of visual literacy within composition and draws attention to the recent "design turn" in composition studies. Along with the New London Group (NLG) and Gunther Kress, George acknowledges the growing influence of graphic design on composition. In "From Analysis to Design," George writes, "If I have given the impression that the media revolution of the fifties and sixties was a tough one for composition teachers, then I must say here that the world of graphic design, electronic text, and Web technologies certainly will prove even more difficult, though ultimately perhaps more useful for future understandings of composition as design" (223). George, Kress, and the NLG have called attention to the fact that composition is in the midst of a media revolution. The dominant medium of writing has shifted from the page to the screen, the screen having its own internal logic: "And whether it is true or not that their teachers are aware of the difference between the blank screen and the blank page, our students are certainly aware of this difference" (George 224).

The NLG and Kress recommend the development of a "*metalanguage –* a language for talking about language, images, texts, and meaning-making interactions" (NLG 197). Kress and van Leeuwen's sociosemiotic framework, which I adopt in this research, is a popular metalanguage for analyzing various meaning-making systems such as film, photography, and social media. Kress and van Leeuwen's framework is based in systemic functional linguistics (SFL), a functional grammar that is flexible enough to be used in a number of applications. Because Kress and van Leeuwen's metalanguage is based in functional grammar, by using the metalanguage students also gain understanding about language and meaning. Research has shown that using a metalanguage to meaningfully interact with language in the classroom can increase a student's powers of noticing, attention to detail, and even cause long-lasting, sustained academic success across content areas (de Oliveira and Schleppegrell 16). Additionally, in a design-based approach, students are viewed as designers and producers, not confined to a passive, consumer role in their education (George 213).

Over the past few years, I have been researching systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and Michael O'Toole, Gunther Kress, and Theo van Leeuwen's work in multimodality. SFL can serve as a rich metalanguage for interpreting and writing about multimodal texts. SFL is currently only used by specialists and has not yet been employed by students in first-year composition. SFL is based in a functional understanding of language, so the same methods students use to analyze visual texts can be applied to a textual analysis of written texts as well. This makes SFL a flexible metalanguage that spans mediums (print, film, websites, art, music) as well as genres in and across the academic disciplines. SFL could facilitate a tri-stratal approach to composition, integrating multimodal visual analysis, genre pedagogy, and critical discourse analysis (CDA) into a unified framework, a framework that would be particularly helpful to students working with visual analysis, such as those in first-year writing courses.

The emergence of digital environments has led composition teachers to reevaluate traditional methods of instruction. While a computer-facilitated approach to multimodality gives students some experience using technology, it does not prepare students to interpret and write about digital genres. This paper focuses on the development of a toolkit for students to analyze multimodal texts in a first-year writing course. To operate successfully, the visual analysis toolkit needs to be situated within a social semiotic framework. Based on Michael O'Toole, Gunther Kress, and Theo van Leeuwen's work in multimodal social semiotics and Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL), digital texts are viewed from three interrelated perspectives – the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The metafunctions offer three unique perspectives from which to analyze meaning. The metafunctions are responsible for "presenting ideas, enacting a relationship, and constructing a cohesive message" (de Oliveira and Schleppegrell 47).

In *Reading Visual Narratives*, Painter, Martin, and Unsworth write, "social semiotics has provided inaugural 'grammars' of image (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006; O'Toole, 1994, 1995), sound (van Leeuwen, 1999), movement (Martinec, 2000, 2001), three-dimensional space (Stenglin, 2004, 2008), and film (Bateman, 2007, 2009), all drawing on and complementing the model of language provided by SFL" (3). Along with providing the "grammars" of various semiotic systems, social semiotics provides "a framework for understanding the synergy between different modalities within a multimodal text" (3). A number of researchers have used Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework to analyze visual texts, such as children’s' picture books (Painter, Martin, Unsworth 6). SFL and a social semiotic framework are adaptable to the semiotic systems being mapped. In this case, SFL is adapted for the use of analyzing advertisements and popular media in first-year writing. I explore a method for integrating a multimodal visual analysis toolkit into an argumentative research unit investigating advertising and consumerism. In the unit students choose a brand to research, write an annotated bibliography, literature review, argumentative paper, and give a presentation. Along with analyzing digital texts, students learn how techniques for multimodal visual analysis can be applied to analyze written texts. In this research, I propose a case study using SFL as a toolkit for students to analyze and write about multimodal texts in first-year composition.

The proposed case study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) how do students recontextualize knowledge of SFL into their writing practices; (2) what, if any, context do students provide for readers about SFL; (3) does using SFL lead to significant critical analysis of texts; and (4) what are the potential benefits of an SFL-based composition classroom? In order to answer these questions, I will collect a variety of data, including visual analyses, major writing assignments, personal reflections, and interviews.

SFL could give students a dynamic metalanguage for describing various mediums, while reinforcing students' functional understanding of language and academic discourse. The study will explore the advantages of integrating multimodal visual analysis into the first year writing classroom, with implications for impacting students' literacy and critical language awareness. Composition in the United States currently lacks a metalanguage for analyzing and writing about multimodal texts. Multimodal composition in the U.S. is largely unaware of SFL-based approaches to composition and multimodality. SFL is currently only used by specialists, so integrating SFL into the first-year writing classroom through visual analysis is a new approach with exciting possibilities.

The capstone begins with a literature review of the major fields of research utilizing SFL – multimodality, social semiotics, genre-based pedagogy, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). I survey the literature of multimodal composition in the United States, pointing out the differences between multimodal composition in the U.S. and SFL-based approaches to multimodality. I explore two related methods of visual analysis, Michael O'Toole's method for interpreting the visual arts and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's method for interpreting screen-based texts. This section serves as a practical guide for teachers who want to integrate multimodal visual analysis into their classrooms. In the textual analysis section, I show how the same methods for multimodal visual analysis can apply to an analysis of traditional texts. Along with showing how multimodal visual analysis translates to an analysis of written texts, the textual analysis section also shows how students' writing samples can be analyzed using SFL. In the methodology section, I then propose a case study, where multimodal visual analysis is integrated into Unit Two of English 103, where students research and create a controversial argument related to some aspect of a brand's marketing. Finally, I discuss the potential implications of this study for the field of composition.

**Literature Review**

The current literature on multimodal composition focuses almost exclusively on production, using technology to create multimodal projects – brochures, PowerPoints, Prezis, videos, blogs, and webtexts. Multimodality, which began with Halliday's work in SFL and social semiotics as a descriptive, interpretive theory, has not yet successfully translated to composition studies. For instance, there is only one passing mention of Halliday in *Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook* and *Multimodal Literacies and Emerging Genres*, the two major anthologies of multimodal composition in the U.S. Collin Gifford Brooke's *Lingua Fracta: Towards a Rhetoric of New Media*, the definitive text of American new media,does not contain a single reference to Halliday or Kress. Composition theorists do acknowledge several of Kress's articles, like "Gains and Losses: New Forms of Texts, Knowledge, and Learning," but his more significant research in multimodal social semiotics, in which he outlines a method for visual analysis, is completely ignored by new media scholars. There are very few books on social semiotics. Halliday's *Language as Social Semiotic* established the field in the late seventies. Van Leeuwen's *Introducing Social Semiotics* and Kress and Hodge's *Social Semiotics* provide thorough introductions to the subject. Even though few books have been written on the subject, social semiotics is a hugely influential theory within semiotics and communications. Social semiotics is so pervasive as a framework that multimodality is often referred to as multimodal social semiotics[[1]](#footnote-1). The prime reason why social semiotic approaches to new media are not found in the U.S. is simply a lack of exposure and awareness of SFL-based English language instruction. Multimodality has developed into two drastically different disciplines: the product, technology-driven multimodal composition and the design-based, social semiotic approach practiced internationally. Composition in the U.S. is cut off, in isolation, from the innovative SFL and design-based work embraced internationally, which has limited multimodal composition as a field.

The second obstacle regarding multimodality, especially multimodal social semiotics, is the high level of specialization required to understand the literature. SFL is a metalanguage used almost exclusively by specialists. Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SFMDA), the study of multimodal texts using SFL, is a highly technical, abstruse field of research. Researchers in SFMDA, such as Jay Lemke and Kay O'Halloran, use an extremely difficult and unwieldy terminology. Researchers in SFMDA primarily investigate intersemiotic complementarity, how multiple modes of expression, such as video and text, compliment each other on the screen or in print. Because the terminology and concepts are easier to understand, Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework is a more relatable form of SFMDA that can be taught to college students. Due to teachers' heavy course loads and busy schedules, learning SFL independently is often unfeasible, but specialists regularly train teachers in SFL and disciplinary literacy through professional development. SFL and SFMDA have not yet been taught to students in first-year writing. To avoid confusion, I use the term "multimodal visual analysis" for the specific set of practices described in my research, visual analysis because it is an accurate description of what students are asked to do, analyze visual texts. The term "multimodal" denotes this method of visual analysis is based in a multimodal social semiotic framework, differentiating it from multimodal composition practiced in the U.S. As students can grasp the concepts of multimodality and visual analysis, the term "multimodal visual analysis" makes sense within the context of first-year writing.

**Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**

One of the reasons that Halliday's work and the work of Kress and van Leeuwen is not widely accepted in the U.S. higher education system is due to the U.S.'s embrace of formal grammar and Noam Chomsky. Michael Halliday has done groundbreaking research in SFL, primarily in Australia, since the 1950s. The functional grammar Halliday developed is far different than the formal grammar taught in the U.S., Noam Chomsky being formal grammar's foremost proponent. Halliday contrasts formal grammar's "philosophical-logical view" with functional grammar's "descriptive-ethnographic view" (*On Language and Linguistics* 99). Formal grammar "is prescriptive, or normative, in orientation; and concerned with meaning in relation to truth" (*On Language and Linguistics* 99). Functional grammar "is descriptive in orientation; and concerned with meaning in relation to rhetorical function" (*On Language and Linguistics* 99). In a descriptive, ethnographic, functional grammar, language is seen as a resource, not a set of rules (*On Language and Linguistics* 99). Formal grammar, on the other hand, "stresses the formal analysis of sentences, and uses for purposes of idealization (for deciding what falls within or outside it scope) the criterion of grammaticality (what is, or is not, according to the rule)" (*On Language and Linguistics* 100). Functional grammar, instead, uses "the criterion of acceptability or usage (what occurs or could be envisaged to occur)" as its standard of evaluation (*On Language and Linguistics* 100). In Chomskyan grammar, language is judged in terms of its grammaticality, while in functional grammar language is analyzed in terms of how it is used in social context.

Chomsky has a much different take on childhood language development compared to Halliday, which has had far reaching implications in educational psychology. Chomsky takes a "nativist" view, while Halliday holds an "environmentalist" position (*Language as Social Semiotic* 16). In the "nativist" view, "The child has been represented as learning language in isolation from his environment, instead of as constructing a social reality though interaction with it. The situation arises when an equation is set up such that what is inside the skin is identified with the potential, and what is outside the skin is identified with the actual" (*On Language and Linguistics* 78). This inner-outer divide sets up a dichotomy, where everything inside the child's mind is "competence," while everything outside the mind is "performance," or behavior. Halliday cautions that in the "nativist" position, "Reality then becomes psychological; meaning is located entirely within the organism" (*On Language and Linguistics* 78). The "nativist" view has had a great impact in education, where writing is seen as an inner, psychological process within the individual. This approach does not allow for the systematic study and understanding of language as interaction with the environment. In a functional system there is no split between "competence" and "performance." Every speech act is instantiated or realized within the functional system. Even transformational-generative grammar is a rules-based system. In transformational-generative grammar, grammaticality is still the criterion of acceptability. In functional grammar language is a meaning making resource, evaluated by how language is used within the social context. For the purposes of visual analysis and mapping new semiotic systems, a functional approach to language is essential.

Another theory in which Chomsky and Halliday disagree is language acquisition. Language acquisition is the belief that language is something humans "acquire." Halliday writes that language acquisition "seems rather an unfortunate term because it suggests that language is some kind of a commodity to be acquired, and, although the metaphor is innocent enough in itself, if it is taken too literally the consequences can be rather harmful" (*Language as Social Semiotic* 16). Halliday's "environmentalist" position on language development instead relies much more on the child's external environment: "Rather than having built into his genetic makeup a set of concrete universals of language ... the child is more dependent on his environment – on the language he hears around him, together with the contexts in which it is uttered" (*Language as Social Semiotic* 17). Halliday's main concern with the "nativist" approach to language acquisition is that it centers language use in cognition, an internal, and therefore unobservable, inner phenomena. In *Working with Functional Grammar*, Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter explain, formal grammar "is concerned with the ways in which our genes constrain the shape of our grammars, and thus constrain what we can and cannot say" (1). Making language acquisition a biological or genetic process can lead to erroneous beliefs, such as the language deficit theory. The language deficit theory posits that certain students, especially minorities, suffer from a language deficiency due to genetic factors. Formal grammar can add a harmful, psychological layer to the study of language by viewing "incorrect" writing and speech as a symptom of developmental and genetic disorders, although such a theory has never been scientifically proven. To add to the confusion, formal linguistics is confusingly classified as branches of psychology and neurobiology, while functional linguistics is more appropriately part of the social sciences (Halliday 39).

Higher education has often associated remedial writing to pathological disorder. Mike Rose writes, " to be remedial is to be substandard, inadequate, and, because of the origins of the term, the inadequacy is metaphorically connected to disease and mental defect" (349). The belief certain groups are incapable of writing and speaking English "correctly" is patently false. In functional grammar, students' low performance in English language courses is a result of not being exposed to academic discourse outside of school. Studies have shown that students from middle class backgrounds, "who may spend an average of 1000 hours in parent-child reading before starting school," are significantly more likely to be successful in school than their non-middle class peers (Bergin qtd. in "Designing Literacy Pedagogy" 4).

In contrast to formal grammar, when Halliday developed functional grammar, he intended for it to be adaptable to the needs of researchers, educators, and institutions (Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter 2). Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter explain:

Halliday's main purpose in writing the IFG grammar, however, was not to orient the grammar to any single defined area of application, but to provide a general grammar for purposes of text analysis and interpretation. It is therefore a grammar which provides a basic lingua franca for text analysts working in a wide range of differing contexts and it is very effectively organized as a tool of this kind. (2)

Functional grammar was specifically created to serve as a metalanguage for emerging fields and mapping new semiotic systems. Halliday writes, "a new language is needed to encode a new view of reality" (*On Language and Linguistics* 123). Researchers tried using a Chomskyan framework for new areas of study, but it proved to be impossible. Chomskyan grammar separates the system (langue) and behavior (parole) into two separate systems, making any kind of unified theory of human thought and action impossible:

It soon came to be realized that the price to be paid for the Chomskyan type of formalism was much too high; it required a degree of idealization so great as to reduce natural language back to the status of an artificial syntax. Once its claims for psychological reality could no longer be sustained, transformation theory lost its original glamour; and today we are witnessing a retreat from these extreme positions. (*On Language and Linguistics* 111)

This division between system and instance caused Basil Bernstein, the sociologist of education, to give up the Chomskyan framework in favor of a functional system (*On Language and Linguistics* 259). Though still taught in schools, researchers in the social sciences have not seriously considered using a Chomskyan framework since the 1960s. For a new field such as visual analysis, researchers need a descriptive language capable of mapping various semiotic systems.

Formal grammar and functional grammar are complimentary systems, and teachers can shift between both approaches in the classroom. Formal grammar is more often used in advanced language instruction to label the individual parts of sentences and to teach specific grammatical rules that would benefit student writing. Functional grammar is often taught to L2 speakers and is used as a way to meaningfully interact with instructional content across the curriculum. In a functional approach, instead of labeling the constituent parts of sentences, whole clauses and clause complexes are examined to see how the phrases contribute to meaning. No matter one's views on grammar, social semiotics has used a functional approach to meaning for over a decade and will continue to do so. This makes a functional approach to language indispensable to multimodal visual analysis.

Functional grammar has a number of additional benefits in relation to education. SFL can be taught to teachers and students in a matter of hours – "between 26 and 39 hours of lectures" (Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter 2). Functional grammar views language as a resource, not as a set of rules, so students are seen as meaning makers, not rule breakers suffering from a "language deficit." SFL is used in the development of literacy programs and has proven to create dramatic improvements in the literacy of ELLs and students of low socioeconomic status at little cost.

**Multimodality**

Multimodality grew out of Michael Halliday's work in SFL and social semiotics. Using SFL, functional linguists and semioticians began conducting "systemic research investigating semiotic systems other than language, such as visual art and diagrams" (*Construing Experience Through Meaning* 427). Research into semiotics, the study of the language of signs, dates back even further to structuralism: "an analytical method which involves the application of the linguistic model to a much wider range of social phenomena" (Chandler 5). Researchers began studying the grammars of other mediums and social phenomena besides just print and the spoken word. The term grammar here has a much broader scope, referring to patterns of human phenomena. Halliday writes, "Grammar goes beyond formal rules of correctness. It is a means of representing patterns of experience... It enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them" (qtd. in Kress and van Leeuwen 2). Multimodality, or multimodal social semiotics as it is often called, should not be confused with multimodal composition. Multimodality is an interpretive theory, which uses SFL to investigate representation, how multimodal texts make meaning. Multimodal composition is product-based, utilizing technology to produce non-traditional writing assignments, such as videos, images, and websites.

With the explosion of visual images through television, film, advertisements, the Internet, and social media, researchers such as O'Toole, Kress, van Leeuwen, O'Halloran, and Lemke have used SFL and social semiotics to develop a grammar of visual design. These researchers have tried to account for the massive cultural shift from a print-based to screen-based society, which has caused a radical rethinking of literacy and texts. Halliday defines text as "any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language" (*Introduction to Functional Grammar* 3). Similarly, the discourse analyst Norman Fairclough writes, "that any actual instance of language in use is a 'text' – though even that is too limited, because texts such as television programs involve not only language but also visual images and sound effects" (*Analysing Discourse* 3). In the twenty-first century, the word text has come to stand for something more than just standard spoken and written communication. A text can be, well, a text message, a tweet, a Youtube video, a television show, a movie, a song, a website, an advertisement. These digital, screen-based texts are multimodal in the sense that they combine several modes of communication – print, image, video, sound, and gesture – to convey meaning.

Unlike multimodal composition, multimodality is not focused solely on production of multimedia and the use of technology. Multimodality is, instead, an inquiry into multimodal representations that investigates how texts make and shape meaning. From the onset, SFL was the metalanguage used in multimodality to analyze, interpret, and describe visual texts. O'Toole was the first researcher to develop a framework and method for multimodality using SFL. In *The Language of Displayed Art*, published in 1994, O'Toole borrows concepts from SFL, specifically the three metafunctions, to analyze the visual arts. O'Toole explains, "that semiotics – the study of sign systems – can assist us in the search for a language through which our perceptions of a work of art can be shared" (4). O'Toole's goal is to develop a functional language that facilitates the meaningful discussion of the arts across educational and cross-cultural backgrounds. Inspired by O'Toole's work in functional semiotics, Kress and van Leeuwen published their influential work in multimodality, *Reading Images: A Grammar of Visual Design*, in 1996. *Reading Images* takes what O'Toole did with SFL and expands on it greatly. While O'Toole only adapted the three metafunctions from Halliday, Kress and van Leeuwen recontextualize all facets of SFL, creating an elaborate, descriptive framework and language for interpreting images. Whereas O'Toole's method is geared toward interpreting the visual arts, Kress and van Leeuwen's method is based in the interpretation of screen-based texts. I describe both methods in the practical teaching portion of the methodology. Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SFMDA) is a specialized subset of multimodality. SFMDA is more concerned with how different modes of communication interact with each other in multimodal ensembles, such as the ways written text complements images. SFMDA extends SFL even further into elaborate analyses of the intersemiotic relationships of multimodal communication.

A persisting issue in multimodal composition is the terminology. What does multimodality actually mean? What is the difference between multimodality, multiliteracies, multimedia, new media, and digital rhetoric? For multimodal social semiotics, terminology is not an issue. Multimodal social semiotics is based in functional grammar, which defines language primarily as a meaning making resource and even maps language as a system of choices. For multimodal composition, however, which is taught within a formalist structure, defining terminology is essential; everything must be labeled, classified, and put under the appropriate heading. In "Contending with Terms: 'Multimodal' and 'Multimedia' in the Academic and Public Spheres," Claire Lauer attempts to make sense of the confusing terminology of multimodal composition. Lauer states, "Defining terms is an important and necessary practice in any field, including composition" (22). Lauer explains the term "multimodal" originated within the SFL-based work of the New London Group. According to Lauer, Cynthia Selfe, Anne Wysocki, as well as Jody Shipka and others are responsible for popularizing the term multimodality within composition (22). When multimodality was recontextualized within composition, educators had to fit the functional grammar of multimodality into a formalist framework. This is when multimodality lost its true meaning, as a theory of interpretation and became product-based pedagogy, integrating technology. Lauer finds that the term "multimodal" is used only in the confines of academia, while the term "multimedia" is favored in popular culture. In the past few years, the term new media has become fashionable. Lauer makes it clear that all of these terms are used interchangeably. The interchangeability of terminology points to the fact that experts within the field are still uncertain as to what these new digital environments are and how to approach them. Without a metalanguage and framework to interpret and socially situate new technologies, multimodal composition is really at a loss as to how to describe technologies as well as how to understand the effects emerging mediums have on the social environment and education. The one distinction I try to make clear in this research project is between multimodal social semiotics and multimodal composition.

**Social Semiotics**

Multimodality operates most effectively within a social semiotic framework. Social semiotics is a branch of semiotics based in Michael Halliday's groundbreaking work in SFL, especially his 1978 book *Language as Social Semiotic*. Social semiotics investigates how people make meaning within social contexts. In social semiotics, human beings are seen primarily as meaning makers. For Halliday, meaning is a matter of choice. The capacity for humans to make meaning is measured by "a semiotic 'potential' ... defined by the semiotic resources available to a specific individual in a specific social context" (qtd. in Kress and van Leeuwen 9). In other words, social context provides a speaker with a range of possible meanings, and it is the speaker's choice as to what meanings to use. Semiotic resources refer to the range of tools producers have to make meaning. A speaker may only have their voice and hand gestures, while a painter may use a paintbrush and palette. Unlike traditional semiotics, which views the connection between signifier and signified as arbitrary, in social semiotics all meaning is socially motivated.

Texts are not created in a vacuum, but for specific purposes within a given social context. Producers make conscious design choices using the semiotic resources available at the time. Designs are shaped by the people and social configurations that produce them. Only when someone performs a speech act or creates a design does meaning become *instantiated* or fixed. This process of realization ensures texts are interpreted in relation to their social context, providing a wealth of information for researchers. Social semiotics allows for in-depth investigation of a text's *kairos*, its social context.

Social semiotics is closely related to multimodality. In fact, most researchers refer to the field as multimodal social semiotics because social semiotics provides researchers with a framework in which to situate multimodality. In multimodal social semiotics, texts are analyzed and produced in relation to the semiotic resources and meaning potentials available to designers within a place and time. Social semiotics is a way to map the meaning potentials of semiotic systems.

**Genre Pedagogy**

Genre pedagogy utilizes the SFL metalanguage to provide students with explicit language instruction as well as for the development of literacy programs and curricula. A major premise of my research is students introduced to the SFL metalanguage through multimodal social semiotics could then apply that knowledge to written texts using genre pedagogy, improving their language skills and facility with academic discourse. However, more research into the relationship between multimodal visual analysis and genre pedagogy in first-year writing is needed. Genre pedagogy developed out of what is now called the Sydney School, starting in 1979. Australia had become increasingly diverse, with an influx of immigrants as well as a native aboriginal population. Process-based pedagogy had been imported to Australia from the U.S., but it became quite clear that this approach to education was not meeting the needs of Australia's diverse population. In process pedagogy, writing is seen as a cyclical, inner, creative process and teachers take a decidedly hands-off approach to instruction (Hyland 18). The only texts Australian students were capable of producing under process pedagogy were error-ridden, personal recounts (*Genre Relations* 2). The Australian school system was churning out graduates unprepared for the basic literacy demands of a career (*Genre Relations* 8). Functional linguists from the University of Sidney, including J.R. Martin and Frances Christie, engaged in action research and developed literacy programs to address Australia's educational decline.

Researchers used SFL to inform their theories of genre and catalog the types of writing students were required to produce. Martin and Rose define genre as "staged, goal oriented social processes. Staged, because it usually takes us more than one step to reach our goals; goal oriented because we feel frustrated if we don't accomplish the final steps ... social because writers shape their texts for readers of particular kinds" (G*enre Relations* 6). This broad definition shows that genre pedagogy is not simply a formulaic, cookie-cutter method of writing, requiring students to mindlessly follow a required format, as so often happens in formalism. Unlike formalism, "Genre theory seeks to (i) understand the ways individuals use language to orient to and interpret particular communicative situations, and (ii) employ this knowledge for literacy education" (Hyland 22). Genres do not dictate a model to follow; instead, genres are a reflection of social configurations (*Critical Discourse Analysis* 75). Researchers in genre have found students need explicit instruction in the types of writing they are required to produce. In most cases, teachers are completely unaware of the linguistic requirements of the assignments they are asking students to write. Teachers also lack a metalanguage to differentiate text types. For instance, teachers might refer to personal recounts, descriptions, observations, and narratives all as stories (*Genre Relations* 5). This implicit approach to instruction proves extraordinarily challenging for students from non-academic backgrounds, most of whom are not middle class. These students have to "read between the lines," hoping they will fulfill their teachers' unstated expectations (*Genre Relations* 7). The Australian educational system eventually adopted the Sidney School's genre-based approach to literacy, and literacy in Australia has improved dramatically as a result. Genre pedagogy and the SFL metalanguage have since been adopted throughout Australia, Europe, and Asia as the dominant form of language instruction, and, recently, even K-12 educators in the U.S. have begun to integrate functional approaches to instruction across the curriculum, especially for L2 speakers.

The United States is one of the last advanced nations not to teach SFL and genre pedagogy, but this trend may slowly be changing. The large numbers of ELLs and minorities in U.S. public schools, as well as the rigorous literacy demands of Common Core and the twenty-first century workplace, have caused parents and teachers to demand literacy programs that address students' growing needs. The statistics on literacy rates among students in the United States are dire: "More than eight million students in Grades 4-12 are struggling readers, and 26 percent of eighth graders and 23 percent of twelfth graders are unable to demonstrate an overall understanding of what they read, with fewer than one-third of eighth and twelfth graders reading at levels necessary for school success" (Schleppegrell and Fang 2). The poor, minorities, and ELLs are disproportionately affected: "only 4 percent of eighth grade English language learners are reading at grade level or higher, compared to 31 percent of all eighth graders" (Schleppegrell and Fang 2). With the influx of immigrants and a growing population of diverse students, the U.S. now finds itself in a similar situation to Australia in the 1980s. A student-centered curriculum geared toward liberal values of individuality and self-discovery will not meet the literacy demands of the diverse, twenty-first century student population.

Mary Schleppegrell, a functional linguist at the University of Michigan, is one of the few scholars researching SFL-based approaches to genre in the U.S. Her book *The Language of Schooling* examines the linguistic challenges of academic discourse in primary education, while *Reading in Secondary Content Areas* explores the advanced literacy requirements of middle and high school. Schleppegrell explains academic discourse is so challenging because it is decontextualized (8). Academic discourse is nowhere near as contextual as non-academic discourse, which relies on verbal cues, interactions, and gestures for clarification.

Academic discourse requires students be explicit, logical, and organized in their writing. Writing must be cohesive; for instance, students must not use referentless pronouns. Academic discourse is distanced. Students must write in a detached, objective manner. Academic discourse can be extremely difficult for students to master because it is so unlike the written and spoken interactions that take place outside of school, which is personal, emotionally charged, and contextualized. ELLs, minorities, and the poor have the most difficulty using academic discourse because they are less likely to be exposed to that sort of writing and speaking outside of school. Even expressivist writing, which favors voice, personal reflection, and a conversational tone, can be a potentially alien form of discourse for students from cultural backgrounds that do not emphasize individualism, inner-directedness, and self-discovery.

Because process-based approaches to education often discourage explicit instruction in academic discourse, marginalized students may be subject to education's "hidden curriculum." Hidden curriculum, in this sense, refers to the fact that, "Writing tasks are assigned without clear guidelines for students about how a particular text type is particularly structured and organized ... language use in school tasks remains couched in teachers' vague admonitions to 'use your own words' or to 'be clear'" (Schleppegrell 2). In "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know about Writing," Patricia Bizzell defines "hidden curriculum" slightly differently, as "the project of initiating students into a particular world view that gives rise to the daily classroom tasks without being consciously examined by teacher or students" (387). To Bizzell, the hidden curriculum refers to implicit worldviews and belief systems in the classroom, while in SFL-based genre pedagogy the hidden curriculum refers to lack of explicit instruction in writing tasks, although language, from a functional perspective, is a reflection of society's worldviews. Jean Anyon observes the hidden curriculum is not only implicit beliefs but also allocation of educational resources and knowledge based on social class (Anyon 67). In "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work," Jean Anyon acknowledges "that public schools in complex industrial societies like our own make available different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes" (67). According to Anyon's research, "a more 'practical' curriculum is offered (e.g., manual skills, clerical knowledge)" to working class students in public schools (Anyon 67). In "I Just Wanna Be Average," Mike Rose gives a first-hand account of the hidden curriculum in action, as he was wrongly placed in a working-class, vocational track for two years of schooling (1). Rose writes, " If you're a working-class kid in the vocational track, the options you'll have to deal with this will be constrained in certain ways: you're defined by your school as 'slow'; you're placed in a curriculum that isn't designed to liberate you but to occupy you, or, if you're lucky, train you" (3) By perpetuating the hidden curriculum, progressive education predominantly benefits middle class students, who are usually exposed to academic discourse and a Western value system more frequently than their peers. Progressive education serves a gatekeeping function, ranking students into performance groups, where only a few students will be successful. Ken Hyland argues that while process pedagogy "directs us to acknowledge the cognitive dimensions of writing and to see the learner as an active processor of information, it neglects the actual processes of language use. Put simply, there is little systematic understanding of the ways language is patterned in particular domains" (18). Genre pedagogy seeks to address these disparities by giving students explicit instruction in language and by offering a systematic understanding of language. Students could be introduced to SFL through multimodal visual analysis and then apply these concepts to better analyze and produce written texts. As students learn SFL concepts doing multimodal visual analysis, the knowledge of SFL concepts could be transferred to the analysis of written texts using genre pedagogy.

Two popular models used in genre pedagogy are the teaching-learning cycle and initiation-response-feedback (IRF). The teaching-learning cycle consists of three phases – text deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction. In the first phase, text deconstruction, the teacher deconstructs the linguistic features of a text type for students. In the next phase, joint construction, the teacher and students produce a given text type together. Finally, in independent construction, students produce a text in a specific genre on their own. Closely connected with the teaching-learning cycle is IRF. Accelerated students need much less feedback from teachers, but it is crucial for struggling students, especially ELLs, to consistently receive teacher feedback. Teachers have to keep giving struggling students the chance to meet their expectations. When students fall short of the performance benchmark, teachers need to be there to provide constructive feedback. Eventually, struggling students will be "brought up to speed," as it were, and begin performing on par with the other students.

Unlike pedagogies which rank students into performance groups (ELLs and African Americans are often ranked into the lowest groups), the goal of genre pedagogy is to ensure all members of a class receive a successful evaluation from the teacher. With this approach, average and low achieving students make considerable advancements, while accelerated students improve in specialized areas. Researchers consider genre pedagogy a matter of social justice because it challenges the prevailing class structure in democratic societies, arming ELLs, minorities, and the poor with the tools necessary to enter privileged discourse communities. Lisa Delpit, an African American educator, argues:

[A]dherents to process approaches to writing create situations in which students ultimately find themselves held accountable for knowing a set of rules about which no one has ever directly informed them. Teachers do students no service to suggest, even implicitly, that 'product' is not important. In this country students will be judged on their product regardless of the process they utilized to achieve it. And that product, based as it is on the specific codes of a particular culture, is more readily produced when the directives of how to produce it are made explicit. (qtd. in Hyland 19)

Those who argue imposing academic discourse on ELLs and minorities is somehow culturally insensitive are unaware they are perpetuating racial stereotypes indicative of progressive education, the belief certain groups of people are psychologically or genetically incapable of speaking and writing language "properly." Once students are given explicit instruction in language, so-called "language deficiencies" magically disappear. The ultimate goal is for a diverse group of students to be able to critically analyze texts of all mediums, whether those texts are visual or print.

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

In *Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis: Studies in Social Change*, editors Lynne Young and Claire Harrison explain, "Researchers, who work in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) share several commonalities" (1). The three commonalities Young and Harrison say SFL and CDA share are: (1) "language as a social construct"; (2) a " dialectical view of language"; and (3) "emphasize the cultural and historical aspects of meaning" (1). The primary goal of SFL is "the examination of 'real' language events to understand the purposes language serves in a variety of contexts, and to understand the way language itself functions" (Young and Harrison 1). A secondary goal of SFL is education, "the teaching of English as a first and second language as well as on discourse analysis of a wide range of discursive issues" (Young and Harrison 1). CDA, on the other hand, is, "as Tuen A. van Dijk (2002: 96) says, "'analysis with an attitude – analysis of different public discursive events that explores the relation between language and power and the ways in which language is being used to produce, maintain, and reproduce positions of power through discursive means (Young and Harrison 2). CDA is a form of social research exposing how power relations are encoded within language as well as the ways in which discourse has the power of making changes within the real world.

In the method I am proposing, the SFL metalanguage would allow educators and students to navigate composition from the tri-stratal approach of multimodal visual analysis, genre pedagogy, and CDA, giving the composition classroom an in-depth method of investigating multimodal texts, literacy, and analyzing discourse. CDA helps teachers and students critically analyze ideologies and worldviews. In "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know about Writing," Bizzell explains CDA is "The kind of pedagogy that would foster responsible inspection of the politically loaded hidden curriculum in composition class" (388). In other words, CDA allows for students to critically uncover social class and power relations implicit or explicit within a text and the classroom.

Though there are several variants of CDA, I will focus on the CDA developed by Norman Fairclough, using the SFL metalanguage. Fairclough's seminal, 1989 book *Language and Power* "provided an introduction to the critical study of discourse by carefully setting out CDA theory: its intentions, its goals, and its basic tenents as well as providing a model for analysis. As with earlier works in CDA, much of his analytical framework is based on SFL theory" (Young and Harrison 3). Fairclough's CDA addresses the restructuring of power relations in the global economy, what is termed new capitalism or neoliberalism. Fairclough writes, "Neo-Liberalism is a political project for facilitating the re-structuring and re-sealing of social relations in accordance with the demands of an unrestrained global capitalism" (*Analysing Discourse* 4). Neoliberalism, which developed after the Fordism of the post-WWII era, is a corporatist system with major implications for politics, business, education, and the arts (*Analysing Discourse* 4). Fairclough argues that language now plays a crucial role and the "socio-economic order" has become "discourse-driven": "Bordieu and Wacquant for instance point to a 'new planetary vulgate', which they characterize as a vocabulary ('globalization', 'flexibility', 'governance', 'employability', 'exclusion', and so forth), which 'is endowed with the performative power to bring into being the very realities it claims to describe'" (*Critical Discourse Analysis* 282). Far from being neutral or unbiased, students can study language as a form of social justice and critical pedagogy. For example, Amber Simmons, a high school A.P. English teacher, used critical language-based literacy instruction to get students to analyze how characterization in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* helped "to create particular ideological worldviews" (Harman and Simmons 76). In their action research, Harman and Simmons note, "little SFL research focused on how content area teachers engage with students as *critical* text analysts, even if critical meta-awareness has been shown to afford learners with pivotal resources to appropriate and challenge dominant knowledge domains in our increasingly discursive society" (76). The SFL metalanguage allows students to interact with language and instructional content in exciting new ways, such as exposing the underlying power relations expressed in texts or how particular characters of a story are portrayed in relation to social class.

CDA differs from rhetorical criticism in that language itself is the primary tool of inquiry and investigation. Power relations are encoded within language, which can then be studied using functional grammar. The aim of any SFL-based research is to come to a deeper critical awareness of texts. Though the metalanguage may seem unwieldy and impractical at first, CDA allows students to critically analyze discourse of all kinds. In a tri-stratal approach that navigates print and digital media, CDA allows teachers and students to perform critical analysis of a variety of texts, whether the texts are videos, images, or print.

**Multimodal Composition**

The second half of the literature review examines multimodal composition. Multimodal composition is far different than the multimodal social semiotics and SFL-based disciplines discussed above. Multimodal composition as a pedagogy acknowledges that communication now involves multiple modes of communication (text, image, sound, gesture) and attempts to prioritize mediums of expression beyond just writing. Multimodal composition is product-driven and concerned with incorporating technology into the classroom. In multimodal composition, educators unfamiliar with SFL have attempted to fit multimodal social semiotics into a formalist framework, as though simply integrating technology into the classroom constitutes multimodality. Networked classrooms relying on new technologies have glaring privacy and security issues, which pose serious problems for students and universities. Educators are reacting to a rhetoric of need and progress. Integrating computers into the writing classroom is extremely costly and actually discourages accessibility for poor students and schools without large funding.

The most serious issue with multimodal composition, however, is that it lacks a metalanguage and method for interpreting digital texts. Even with the integration of technology, multimodal composition cannot provide students with a language to analyze and produce new media. Multimodal composition's focus on technology and product, as if using technology leads to a meaningful understanding of technology, cannot help students critically analyze new media. Multimodal composition does not make students better writers, which should be the main focus of composition, and, in fact, research has shown that integrating technology into the curriculum actually makes students' writing even worse. Without a metalanguage, multimodal composition will never be able to provide students with a meaningful way to understand and produce digital media.

Multimodal composition can be divided into two waves. The first-wave, from roughly 1996 to 2004, is more utopian in its view of technology, yet much of it retains the design influence of multimodal social semiotics from the New London Group. A lot of the literature, like Kathleen Blake Yancey's "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," makes sweeping generalizations about the need and relevancy of incorporating technology into the classroom. The second wave, from 2004 to the present, takes a more realistic approach. The second wave of multimodal composition coincides with the rise of Web 2.0 and social media. Teachers have had more experience using technology in the classroom and are aware of the limitations. Now students have the digital world at their fingertips. Youtube has become nearly ubiquitous as a teaching tool in the classroom. Software programs like Google Docs have made collaboration in the online world realizable. The two waves of multimodal composition are ideological rather than strictly chronological. Some literature published during the second wave, such as Wysoki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, and Sirc's *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*, is still utopian and alarmist, while much of the first wave literature, like the NLG's "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies" and Kress's essays, are years ahead of their time.

**Design-Based Pedagogy**

The most important founding document of multimodal composition is The New London Group's "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures" written in 1996. This essay set the stage for multimodal composition and brought awareness to the growing need for composition to address the societal shift brought about by new technologies and media. The New London Group consists of a team of influential educators across several fields of research, including multimodal social semiotics and CDA. The questions that the NLG raise and the terminology they use created a precedent for the academic work in multimodal composition that followed. From the outset, the New London Group concerns itself with two things: the "what" and "how" of literacy pedagogy (193). The question concerning "what" educators should teach and "how" they should teach it continues to resurface. To the question of "what" multimodal pedagogy should be, the NLG answers that a new pedagogy should be based on the principles of design (193).

The NLG re-envisioned a pedagogy that meets the technological demands of education in the twenty-first century. The new information age requires educators to not merely be authority figures, transmitters of knowledge, but to be active designers, designing "new learning processes and environments" (New London Group 193). Because information is now at our fingertips, something to be located, not memorized, traditional education's emphasis on content mastery and memorization is outdated. Kress underlies the importance of this shift from traditional education to design in his book *Literacy in the New Media Age*: "It is no longer responsible to let children experience school without basing schooling on an understanding of the shift from competent performance to design as the foundational fact of contemporary social and economic life" (37). Kress does not see the shift in focus from competency to design as simply a way to keep education relevant, he views this shift as an economic imperative if educators are going to prepare students for the new economy of the twenty-first century. The transition from a competency to design-based curriculum speaks to the larger epistemological shift from a society based on *knowledge* to a culture of *information* (*Literacy in the New Media Age* 37).

The NLG uses the term design because it is "free of the negative associations for teachers of terms such as 'grammar'" (193). The NLG breaks design into three processes: Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned. Borrowing from SFL and social semiotics, "Available Designs – the resources for Design – include the 'grammars' of various semiotic systems: the grammars of languages, and the grammars of other semiotic systems such as film, photography, or gesture" (New London Group 194). Available Designs are the potential designs given a certain genre, style, social, or institutional space (New London Group 195). Designing is an iterative process. Designing with Available Designs always creates a new production, The Redesigned. The Redesigned is not "a simple reproduction ... The Redesigned is founded on historically and culturally received patterns of meaning" (New London Group 196). This is not only a matter of design but the reshaping and renegotiating of social and cultural identities (New London Group 196). This three-stage process of design – Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned along with the Hallidayan metafunctions – serves as the underpinnings of a design-based pedagogy. Design-based pedagogy is functional and endlessly adaptable to meet the demands facing education today.

With careful foresight, the New London Group identifies the need for a metalanguage for teachers and students to discuss and interpret multimodal texts. The goal "is to develop an educationally accessible functional grammar; that is, a metalanguage that describes meaning in various realms" (New London Group 197). This language must be able to describe text and visuals without "mak[ing] unrealistic demands on teacher and learner" (197). They go onto explain that this metalanguage "should be seen as a tool kit for working on semiotic activities" (197). Based in SFL, multimodal social semiotics is the perfect choice for this metalanguage. Multimodal social semiotics offers an interdisciplinary framework to analyze various communicative languages – writing, speech, photography, painting, film, art, and architecture. The basic principles of multimodal social semiotics can be taught to educators and students of all ages and abilities. Additionally, multimodal social semiotics provides an epistemological framework to situate meaning within a relevant social context. Although multimodal composition looks to the NLG's "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies" as its founding document, it is unfortunate that educators working in multimodal composition have not followed the NLG's most important recommendations, the need for a metalanguage in composition as well as a design-based curriculum.

What makes Diana George's essay, "From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in the Teaching of Writing," exceptional is her focus on design. George looks at the influence of design on composition as she situates visual literacy in the classroom, examining composition's strained relationship with visual communication. Although visual texts have been an important part of science education and technical writing, composition has not always valued visual literacy as a valid mode of communication. The Dick and Jane readers, written in 1946 for elementary school students, were the first instructional books to feature images in composition, which made teachers start questioning the role images play in relation to print (George 215). The advent of television brought visual literacy into the forefront, as young people were being exposed to images as their primary mode of communication. The 1961 NCTE report *Television and the Teaching of English*, co-authored by Neil Postman, urged teachers to view television as a valid, educational medium, even if it is not on par with literature (George 215). The pervasive influence of television on children's lives became undeniable. It became imperative for teachers to help students think critically about television as a medium. George writes, "this report, like the Dick and Jane instructors' manual fifteen years earlier and the New London Group's manifesto thirty-five years later does acknowledge a changing world in which 'a redefinition of 'literacy' is required, one that would extend beyond the printed page'" (216). George looks at the inclusion of visual elements in composition textbooks as a way to trace the larger relationship composition has had with visual texts. The 1950 edition of *Writing with a Purpose* contained some visual elements, but the 1972 edition was the first to include assignments based on images (George 216). Robert Connors notes the later visual designs of the textbook "indicat[ed] a 'lowered evaluation of its audience's abilities' signaled by 'wide margins and a two-color format to open up the text's appearance'" (qtd. in George 218). With the rise of television and mass media, students were no longer as print literate, so textbook publishers had to make their textbooks more like TV.

George explains that education has used visual texts and non-traditional writing assignments as a form of remediation, to "dumb down" writing instruction, primarily for working-class students (218). The "NCTE Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies" recommends teachers promote multiliteracies in the classroom, "drama, art, text, music, speech, sound," etc. for "Children who grow up in impoverished or repressed literacy environments [who] may not experience this important literacy foundation" (17). The NCTE statement on multiliteracies suggests that students who missed fundamental instruction in literacy, due to poverty or environment, may still be reached through multiples modes of expression – visual arguments, music, gesture, and drawing – besides print.

Although visuals in textbooks were often used to "dumb down" the material and make boring classes more exciting, some researchers were doing significant work in visual analysis. Visual analysis developed during WWII as a way to critically analyze advertisements and propaganda (George 219). In the seventies, expressivists tied visual texts to theories of perception and self-discovery. It was not until the late-eighties with the cultural turn that compositionists like David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky started making connections between ways of reading and ways of seeing (George 220). With the cultural turn, visual texts like film began to gain the same credibility as literature. Usually in the composition classroom, the only aspect of design students learn is formatting documents in Microsoft Word and possibly designing PowerPoint presentations. George believes composition needs to integrate the design focus laid out by the New London Group. Composition needs to borrow from graphic design to begin to understand the logic of the web and screen-based texts.

In "Gains and Losses: New Forms of Texts, Knowledge, and Learning," Kress also emphasizes a design-based approach to composition, within a social semiotic framework. Kress lucidly explains the revolutionary societal shift from a text-based to screen-based society as well as the equally revolutionary shift from a pedagogy based in critique to one based in design. Kress writes there are two "central assumptions" of multimodality: "(a) that communication is always and inevitably multimodal; and (b) that each of the modes available for representation in a culture provides specific potentials and limitations for communication" (283). Even spoken language is multimodal, combing both speech and gesture. Communication is a movement or translation across several modes. The second assumption is of rhetorical sensitivity or affordances. Considering a medium's affordances brings about an understanding of the rhetorical situation and materiality of texts, how producers compose texts with particular semiotic resources at a specific point in time.

Kress notes the disparate reactions to multimodality within composition, "from outright despair, anger, and nostalgia to some still utopian voices on the other end of the spectrum" ("Gains and Losses" 283). Kress sees multimodality "as a focus in representation" and that "a social semiotic theory to account for meaning making, offers the theoretical and descriptive possibility of looking at the issue of changes in representation in a historical perspective, freed from either nostalgia and despair or utopianism" ("Gains and Losses" 284). Those adamantly for or against multimodality are reacting emotionally, based on their beliefs and experiences. Kress is advocating for educators to view multimodality objectively, as a shared framework and metalanguage that empowers students to discuss, interpret, and produce multimodal texts. This philosophy would create a shared sense of community, encouraging collaborative work among educators, researchers, and students. Kress writes, the "semiotic changes," from a print-based to screen-based culture, "warrant the term 'revolution,' of two kinds; of the modes of representation on the one hand, from the centrality of writing to the increasing significance of image, and of the media of dissemination on the other from the centrality of the medium of the book to the medium of the screen" (284). Writing print texts is fundamentally different than writing for the screen. Reading screen-based texts is also drastically different. With print-based texts, the author can presume the reader’s “life-world." Authors can reasonably assume the kinds of experiences a reader might have, as well as the kinds of narratives their readers like to read. These somewhat predictable meanings are placed into the sequential order of chapters, creating a book ("Gains and Losses" 285). Screen-based texts are markedly different from the old, print-based texts. Unlike traditional texts, screen-based texts contain multiple points of entry or reading paths. There are no assumptions as to the "life-worlds" of the readers who make up the audience of screen-based texts. Screen-based texts share multiple audiences as well as multiple entry points. Readers are no longer seeking knowledge; they are seeking information ("Gains and Losses" 287). Readers "fashion their own knowledge" out of information gathered from multiple sites and mediums ("Gains and Losses" 287).

In section four of the essay, "Beyond Critique to Design: Interest, Subjectivity, and Rhetoric," Kress explains that social critique, the preeminent academic activity since the political and social upheaval of the 1960s and 70s, now only serves to undermine our already collapsing social institutions, and instead advocates for a pedagogy based on the socially productive principles of design. Kress writes, "Critique attempted to unsettle the naturalization of the social and did so particularly through showing the workings of power, whether in representation and communication or elsewhere" (295). One major issue with critique is that it only exposes purely discursive texts such as speech and writing. Non-discursive formations, concepts and processes that are not physically printed or distributed text, which account for the majority of meanings, are completely overlooked. Object-Oriented Philosophy has recently done an admirable job addressing non-discursive meaning. But, oddly enough, critique is still very tied to the old, print medium. Much of this is due to the role academics play. Many academics define themselves primarily through print, situating meaning purely in written communication. Their reliance on print makes some academics believe that texts are reality, the ultimate form of social constructivism, as if printed pages make up the world's topography. Fairclough, instead, takes a critical realist approach to social constructivism: "A realist would argue that although aspects of the social world such as social institutions are ultimately socially constructed, once constructed they are realities which affect and limit the textual (or 'discursive') construction of the social" (*Analysing Discourse* 8). Texts serve the dual function of "construction" and "construal," meaning that takes can shape society or solely represent it (*Analysing Discourse* 8).

**Technology, Urgency, and Idealism**

So far, I have reviewed the innovative, foundational documents of multimodal composition. These early essays possess much of the original impetus of multimodality, a design-based pedagogy based in social semiotics. I will now review the literature of multimodal composition as it is currently practiced. Several surveys define multimodal composition solely as the integration of technology into the classroom. Anderson et al.'s 2006 survey "Integrating Multimodality into Composition Curricula: Survey Methodology and Results from a CCCC Research Grant" and Claire Lutkewitte's 2010 dissertation "Multimodality is ...: A Survey Investigating how Graduate Teaching Assistants and Instructors Teach Multimodal Assignments in First-year Composition Courses" both define multimodality solely through technology usage. The surveys show the majority of students are taught in or have access to networked classrooms. By far, the most pervasive software programs used are Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. As far as multimodal assignments go, the vast majority of students either create images, advertisements, or flyers (Anderson et al. 17). What these surveys show is that multimodal composition is seen as technology driven and product-oriented[[2]](#footnote-2). Neither of the surveys asked instructors what, if any, theories or frameworks teachers used to help students interpret new media. With the capability to do more with technology than ever before, students are using technology in the formulaic, preplanned ways dictated by programmers, when we could be teaching students how to build programs themselves, an infinitely marketable skill in the information economy.

"Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," Kathleen Yancey's Chair Address to the CCCC in 2004, is a prime example of the alarmist tone which educators use in multimodal composition to call for the adoption of technology in the classroom. Although the essay kicks off the second-wave of multimodal composition, the essay's call to action and pleading for relevancy is really a prime example of the first-wave. The essay is in a non-traditional format that includes images, quotes, and meta-commentaries. A common issue with this kind of multimodal scholarship is that it can look "busy" and poorly designed. There is no clear reading path due to the many pictures, quotes, and secondary commentaries strewn throughout. Adding to the dated feel of the essay is that all the photos are in black and white. In the essay, Yancey continually stresses, "We have a moment." Composition must seize this moment and embrace the writing students are doing outside the traditional classroom. Jason Palmeri provides a counter-balance to Yancey's perspective, "Although I agree with Yancey that our current digital moment is unique, I nevertheless would contend that contemporary compositionists have much to learn from the mostly forgotten ways that writing teachers sought to transform their pedagogical practices and materials to account for the seemingly 'new media' of film, television, and Xerox machines" (88). Yancey uses the crisis narrative of technology to full advantage. To describe these technological shifts, Yancey uses metaphors of geological disaster such as "seismic," "tectonic," and "tremors." Yancey asks, "These shifts: are they minor tremors signifying routine academic seismic activity that makes the world more stable? Alternatively, are they tremors occurring along the fault lines of tectonic plates that will in the not-too-distant future change the very topography of education" (68)? These "seismic" metaphors add to the address's urgency, while provoking anxiety among educators to keep up with "progress."

Yancey worries education "may already have become anachronistic" (67). English programs are apparently not preparing students for the digital age. Yancey notes the gradual disappearance of literature programs and the tendency for English studies to move elsewhere, to communications, cultural studies, and rhetoric/composition programs (69). While she views this as negative, for those in rhetoric and composition, this is good news. Yancey is puzzled that despite the disappearance of English programs, composition and rhetoric is thriving. There are several reasons for rhetoric's survival. One is that composition is usually required of all college freshmen, and most in universities believe this course is critical to students' success. Secondly, with the economic recession, the study of literature is not practical or economically feasible. Rhetoric and composition, however, continues to develop into an exciting, interdisciplinary field that combines new media, technology, communications, critical theory, and philosophy. Rhetoric and composition will continue to expand as it attracts programmers, artists, scientists, educators, and designers to the field.

Yancey does admit blindly adopting new technologies creates the same problems education is trying to avoid: "If we continue to partition [technology] off as just something technical, or outside the parameters governing composing, or limit it to the screen ... or think of it in terms of the bells and whistles and templates of the *PowerPoint* screen, students in our classes learn only to *fill up* those templates and *fill in* those electric boxes" (83). New technologies can quickly become as boring and stifling as the books educators have been trying to avoid. Using only proprietary software like Microsoft Word and PowerPoint discourages teachers and students to break out of the mold of templates. Relying strictly on Word and PowerPoint creates boring and unimaginative final products.

**Second-Wave Multimodal Composition**

After several years of teaching multimodal composition courses, Cheryl Ball is more cautious of making sweeping claims about the urgency and importance of multimodal composition. Reflecting on a multimodal composition class she taught, Ball comments, "In some other chapter, in some other collection, a teacher writes about how great her semester went ... That, however, is not this chapter. It would have been if written several years ago. Now, the then-brilliant reflections by the teacher seem comically naive" (Ball, Bowen, and Fenn 16). The course focused on digital narratives, and the major project "was an inquiry-based video" (Ball, Bowen, and Fenn 21). What Ball learned throughout the course is that multimodal projects can become just as formulaic as written assignments. When a student's video project was played for the class as an example, the students realized "the video's five-paragraph-like theme – it had an introductory scene, three supporting scenes, and a conclusion scene" (Ball, Bowen, and Fenn 22). Students latched onto this format and started making five-paragraph video essays for their projects. This led to students' final projects lacking "wowfullness"; "the documentaries ... were 'safe'" (Ball, Bowen, and Fenn 26). All the requirements of the assignment were met, but the end product lacked that wow-factor. Ball believes much of the blame for the "'wowlessness' is connected to the genre limitations I implicitly imposed on the documentary form, a form I persuaded the students to implement in a course that was really intended to be an introduction to digital, multimodal composition (not a course about documentaries)" (Ball, Bowen, and Fenn 26). Ball compares the students' final assignments to a traditional five-paragraph essay: "Few students embrace the unexpected when fulfilling a project ... What is more typical is for students to uptake ... a familiar genre like the five-paragraph essay, or for graduate students the academic/research essay, onto a new medium such as video" (28). Ball reflects on the "lessons learned" in the multimodal composition class. One, "If you ask for five-paragraph videos, you will get five-paragraph videos" (Ball, Bowen, and Fenn 31). Secondly, Ball found that "offering students the opportunity to compose completely open-ended assignments – may not be the answer" (Ball, Bowen, and Fenn 31). When faced with open-ended assignments, students will default to what feels "safe." Ball also says, "Avoiding scholarship in multimodal theory in a class on multimodality ... is stupid" (32). Ball's essay takes an honest look at multimodal composition, identifying its potential weaknesses. Teachers should always be concerned with students' multimodal projects becoming like "five-paragraph-video essays," contrived work that plays it "safe," and not assume that just because they assigned a multimodal project it will be somehow groundbreaking or original.

In "Including, but Not Limited to, the Digital: Composing Multimodal Texts," Jody Shipka reminds educators that the "tendency to equate 'multimodal' or 'multimodality' with digitized, screen-mediated (i.e., 'new/digital media) texts may severely limit the kinds of texts and communicative strategies or processes students explore in our courses" (74). The "pro-digital bias" assumes that students have already exhausted all modes of expression other than the digital (Shipka 74). The pro-digital bias also assumes that students would only want to publish work digitally (Shipka 74). Similar to what Cheryl Ball terms "five-paragraph-video essays," Shipka discourages "'like' texts (i.e., where the goal is to have a student produce the same or similar types of text such as a webpage or a podcast or a research-based essay" (78). To prevent a proliferation of "like" texts, Shipka advocates for "an activity-based multimodal framework ... attending to how language, combined with still other representational systems, mediates communicative practice" (Shipka 78). Students need a framework that is easy enough to use but in-depth enough to handle the interpretation and production of multimodal communication.

*Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* provides a practical way for teachers to integrate multimodal composition into the writing classroom. The book first walks students through the various modes – the Linguistic, Visual, Aural, Spatial, and Gestural modes (Arola, Ball, and Sheppard xv). Students are taught the differences between modes and mediums, and the concept of affordances and semiotic resources. Throughout the multimodal composition course, students still get grounding in traditional rhetorical concepts, such as audience and context, but here traditional rhetoric is supplemented with concern for the affordances of various mediums. Students are taught to analyze websites and multimodal ensembles using the principles of design. For the main project, students choose a genre to produce a multimodal text, pitch their project to the class, and then go about producing it. The guide goes into genre conventions and explicitly defines and models genres for students. The pitch is an opportunity for students to share their ideas and receive feedback. The drafting and revision process for creating multimodal texts is actually quite similar to standard methods of writing. Finally, students publish their projects on the Web. *Writer/Designer* shows that freshman multimodal composition classes are, in fact, feasible. *Writer/Designer* could be the sole text of a composition course or act as a supplement to a more traditional textbook.

One of the biggest problems educators face when integrating multimodal composition into the writing classroom is stability and security issues. Jerome Bump raises these concerns in "Thinking Outside the Text Box":

We all assume that electricity will always be available for us, like a force of nature. Even when it is, we are still at the mercy of the kinds of problems Howard Besser (2011) enumerates: failures of display devices, of servers, of network connections; data or application corruption; copyright restrictions; link rot; embedded video content that is that is multiple hops away; and, of course, rapid disappearance of the content (about half a million YouTube videos have already been taken down). (112)

Multimodal composition is at the mercy of technology. Hyperlinks that worked one day could be broken the next. And an even bigger concern besides the technology is copyright law and security. Most educators do not realize that when they ask students to take images from Google to create multimodal projects, they are, in fact, breaking copyright laws, leaving the university open to lawsuits. Net Neutrality, and the end of the "free" Internet, makes Internet usage in the classroom even more rife with legal concerns. Students' privacy is at risk. Programs like Google Docs, Facebook, and Twitter allow students' work as well as personal data to be collected and shared with thousands of corporations. There is also the question of digital preservation. If students create a webtext or class blog, there is no certainty it will be preserved, or if it is even legal to keep students' work online once they graduate due to FERPA laws. Bump explains, "I anticipated some of these problems but not the uncertainty of institutional support for research on the new operating systems caused by ever-changing security, disability, privacy and financial issues" (113). A MOO (multiuser object-oriented) virtual world one of Bump's classes created:

was removed by the systems analyst on the grounds of security and access issues, never to be seen again, with nothing effectively archived ... A similar fate met even [his] students' electronic portfolios ... the institutions' lawyers and [his] department, terrified by FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) guidelines, demanded that all the portfolios that had been published by [his] students on the Web over the past fifteen years be deleted. (113)

The utopian view of technology expressed in multimodal composition, as if we were still in the exciting early days of the Internet, is incompatible with the regulatory, tightly controlled Internet under Net Neutrality.

The technical difficulty of some multimodal composition assignments can lead to issues as well. Very complex assignments, like programming and interacting in virtual worlds such as *Second Life*, can be extremely difficult for students without experience in computer programming. Even for students with a background in computers, the technical issues of multimodal projects can be challenging. Educators should not assume that just because students are digital natives they are experts in technology. One must ask in regards to urgent calls for technology within the composition classroom the most important question: how does technology usage benefit student writing?

Bump has noticed a significant "antiverbal bias" among software developers, students, and even educators (114). The antiverbal bias puts multimodal composition at direct odds with Kress's belief that "writing will remain the preferred mode of the political and cultural elite" (qtd. in Bump 116). Being able to write will always help people gain political and cultural capital. That is why English classrooms in elite private schools and colleges remain virtually computer-free.

Technology in the classroom is an easy fix to a troubled education system. Integrating technology makes schools appear to keep up with the rapid pace of social and technological change. Technology fosters a "dumbed down" and less rigorous curriculum because it allows for students to do the kinds of "writing" they are used to doing outside the classroom. The only studies that have researched this topic show that technology actually has a negative impact on student writing. Skill sets learned while using technology do not transfer over to writing practices. Without explicit instruction in writing or new media production, students' writing just becomes worse.

In summary, multimodal composition has a mistaken view of what multimodality actually is. What began as a metalanguage for the interpretation of multimodal texts has become a product-based, technologically driven pedagogy. Even with the integration of technology, students are not given a metalanguage to write about and produce digital genres. The calls for urgency, relevancy, need, and progress by educators in multimodal composition is a bit misguided considering multimodal composition is incapable of addressing the nation's drastic literacy problem, particularly among the most disadvantaged. However, multimodal composition has made admirable steps in pushing the field of composition forward. Most educators are not artists, designers, or programmers; they are composition teachers trying to make their profession meet the critical demands of students and our ever-shifting technological environment.

Composition theory, for various reasons, has been isolated from the SFL metalanguage and a functional approach to language, so multimodal composition cannot help but try to fit multimodal social semiotics into a formalist mold. Composition could benefit from at least considering functional approaches to language instruction. After the SFL metalanguage is introduced into first-year composition through multimodal visual analysis, then it can gradually be introduced into writing practices using genre pedagogy and CDA. As the demands for functional approaches in the U.S. increase, those working in SFL will be able to train teachers in their disciplinary literacies through professional development. As of now, more research will have to be conducted as to how multimodal visual analysis, genre pedagogy, and CDA can be integrated into the composition classroom. The practical teaching guide that follows gives teachers a theoretical and practical method for integrating multimodal visual analysis in the writing classroom.

**Methodology**

The methodology section begins with a practical guide to multimodal visual analysis and provides strategies for integrating the SFL metalanguage into first-year composition. I first developed this guide to teach multimodal visual analysis to students in Engl 103 as a way to help them produce in-depth descriptions and analyses of visual texts. In the unit two assignments, students research the marketing and advertising strategies of brands. Students must base their claims in the primary evidence of their brand's advertising, ads and commercials. As a genre, the unit two assignments require in-depth analysis of advertisements, which is a new and unfamiliar task for students, who have never before described and analyzed images or video. Although SFL has been used as a metalanguage in multimodal social semiotics for some time, no one has yet taught this method to students in first-year writing. The multimodal visual analysis toolkit provides non-specialists, teachers and students, with a metalanguage to analyze a variety of multimedia in-depth. In the practical guide, as well as the visual analysis PowerPoint and handout, I have recontextualized multimodal social semiotics for teachers and students in first-year writing. I have tried to distill the most important features of multimodal social semiotics into a metalanguage that teachers and students can easily learn, which can facilitate in-depth description and analysis of multimodal texts, especially advertisements.

With the multimodal visual analysis toolkit, students use a variety of different tools to analyze each metafunction – the ideational, interpersonal, and textual. In the practical guide, I outline two related approaches to visual analysis, both using SFL as a metalanguage to analyze multimodal texts. First, I discuss O'Toole's method for interpreting the visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture). O'Toole's was the first method to use SFL as a metalanguage to analyze art. Next, I present Kress and van Leeuwen's method, which is geared specifically for screen-based texts. Both systems use the SFL metalanguage and Halliday's metafunctions to analyze multimodal texts, yet O'Toole's method was developed before the computer revolution, so his method was intended for interpreting the kind of art someone would see in a museum, while Kress and van Leeuwen's method is specifically for analyzing texts which appear on the digital screen. In the practical guide, the various tools of the multimodal visual analysis toolkit will be explained in relation to each metafunction.

In the textual analysis section after the practical guide, I show how the SFL-based toolkit used to interpret images can be applied to written texts as well. The final section of the methodology proposes a case study researching the integration of multimodal visual analysis within a first-year writing class. The study is designed to answer the following research questions: (1) how do students recontextualize knowledge of SFL into their writing practices; (2) what, if any, context do students provide for readers about SFL; (3) does using SFL lead to significant critical analysis of texts; and (4) what are the potential benefits of an SFL-based composition classroom?

**Teaching Multimodal Visual Analysis: SFL and System Networks**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Metafunction | Definition | SFL Tools |
| Ideational | What the image represents. The narrative, themes, logical relations. The view of the world the image conveys. | Narrative Representations  Participant(s)  Vector  Actor/Goal  Reactor/Phenomena  Conceptual Structures  Carrier/Possessive Attributes  Taxonomies |
| Interpersonal | The interaction between the participant(s) in an image and the viewer. The mood an image conveys. The interactivity between software/hardware and user. | Demand/Offer  Modality  Modality Scale (Cline of Instantiation)  Color, light, depth, brightness, representation, contextualization  Coding orientations (technological, sensory, abstract, naturalistic) |
| Textual | The arrangement or composition of an image. | Given/New  Ideal/Real  Star  Tree  Table  Network  Information value  Salience |

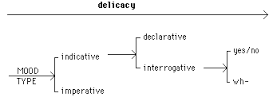
*Figure 1*. The Multimodal Visual Analysis Toolkit

Teaching multimodal visual analysis relies on Halliday's three-tiered approach to language and meaning called the metafunctions (see Figure 1). The metafunctions are three independent but overlapping strata of meaning: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction views what is happening in a text – the narrative action, themes, logical relationships, and experiences. The ideational metafunction consists of two major components – experiential and logical relations. The interpersonal metafunction examines the relationship between the producer and viewer of a text, the social interactions and relationships in a text, and the mood a text evokes. The textual metafunction investigates the composition of a text, its materiality, as well as the arrangement and information flow. Though each metafunction operates independently, they overlap in many areas and should be used simultaneously for comprehensive analysis.

Students can use the metafunctions to analyze their brands' slogans. Brand slogans use interpersonal, textual, and ideational meanings. Slogans like "Just Do It." and "Taste the Rainbow" create an interpersonal relationship with the viewer. In fact, the subject of many advertising slogans is an understood "You." Slogans interact with viewers, calling on them personally to buy the product. Brand slogans are instantiated through the textual metafunction. The textual metafunction is useful when analyzing how layout, arrangement, and typography cohere to form persuasive visual arguments. Slogans use the ideational metafunction to express experiential and logical relations, the ideology or worldview brands want consumers to believe. Nike's slogan "Just Do It." is a call to physical action without excuses. From a textual level, the period at the end of the clause creates a simple, yet definitive, statement conveying high modality – honesty or truthfulness. SFL gives students a much more thorough and systematic way of critically analyzing the language of commercials and brand slogans.

SFL maps language as a system of meaning potential using system networks. System networks are syntagmatic and paradigmatic. Syntagmatic meaning proceeds from left to right in sequential order, while paradigmatic meanings divide into a system of choices. System networks begin at a point of entry and branch out into paradigmatic choices of meaning. System networks begin at the most general levels of meaning, and as the network progresses, the choices become more detailed or *delicate*. System networks are useful for mapping the possibilities of meaning. Meaning is realized from a set of potential semiotic resources when it is instantiated in a social context. It is useful for students to view various semiotic systems not as fixed but allowing for a range of potential meanings. Students can even use system networks for concept mapping during invention and prewriting activities.

When using system networks, meanings are mapped at the broadest levels and become more delicate the more in-depth the system goes. English Mood, one of the fundamental aspects of grammar that students usually learn in primary school, can be mapped using a system network (See Figure 2). I provide a system network of English Mood above to give a basic idea of what a system network looks like and how a functional approach to Mood differs from traditional grammar. In SFL, English Mood is part of the interpersonal metafunction, which dictates how people interact with each other through language. Mood deals with speakers' attitude. Mood can be declarative, interrogative, or imperative. Declarative sentences are statements of fact. Interrogative sentences are questions, and imperative sentences are commands. To read a system network, in this case for English Mood, one begins with a point of entry: Mood Type. For Mood Type, there are two possible choices: indicative and imperative. The indicative branch is further broken into declarative and interrogative sentences. At the most delicate level, interrogative sentences are either yes/no or wh- questions. System networks can map multiple systems at once. Ideational (transitivity), interpersonal (mood), and textual (theme) meanings can be mapped in a system network simultaneously (Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter 15). After students learn how to read system networks, teachers can use them to instruct students on the meaning options of a various grammatical forms.



*Figure 2*. System Network for English Mood

The benefit of system networks is that language is seen as general or as in-depth as possible. An elementary school teacher would not go into the most delicate structures of English Mood, but knowing that sentences are declarative, imperative, or interrogative, and that interrogative sentences are fundamentally different, requiring a yes/no response or beginning with a wh- question, is highly useful information. Unlike formal linguistics, which is concerned with the "proper" usage of grammar, language as a hierarchy of rules, SFL sees language as an open, functional system. System networks map the choices and potentialities of language in actual, not hypothetical, use. Students can use system networks to map meaning potentials and the affordances various semiotic systems offer.

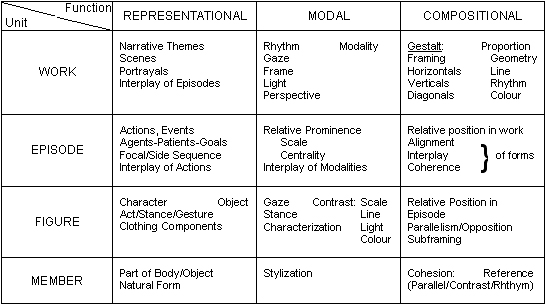
***The Language of Displayed Art*: Analyzing the Visual Arts**

After providing a brief overview of SFL, I will now show how SFL can be used to analyze images. In *The Language of Displayed Art*, Michael O'Toole uses SFL to analyze the visual arts. O'Toole adapts Halliday's metafunctions to analyze painting, architecture, and sculpture. O'Toole writes, the metafunctions serve "three main functions: 1) to engage our attention and interest, 2) to convey some information about reality, and 3) to structure these into a coherent textual form" (5). O'Toole's goal for creating a functional method for the visual arts is to level the playing field, giving non-specialists a language to intelligently discuss the arts. This method does not require specialist or insider knowledge of the art world that would exclude the average person. O'Toole renames the metafunctions the representational, modal, and compositional, corresponding to the ideational, interpersonal, and textual (6). O'Toole's terminology might work better in the classroom. "Representational" may be a better choice of term than "ideational" because students have a greater understanding of representation. Since "modal" is an unfamiliar concept to students, it is probably best to stick with the term "interpersonal metafunction." The terminology, whether it is ideational, interpersonal, and textual, or representational, modal, and compositional, is up to the teacher's discretion.

O'Toole recommends students begin analysis using the interpersonal function. Every work of art strikes the viewer in a particular way, evoking a certain mood. On the interpersonal level, it is not necessarily important who created the artwork or what time period it is from. You do not need specialist knowledge to describe how a painting makes you feel. Once students can identify the mood, they can then look at deeper levels of the modal function, to see how art creates mood. Students can investigate how gaze, light, perspective, framing, and characterization combine to evoke mood, helping create an interpersonal connection with the viewer. Looking at the modal function, one can ask questions like is the subject of the image staring at the viewer with a *demand* gaze or looking away from the camera, in an *offer*? Does light highlight a participant or object, creating salience? How are the episodes of the painting framed? Is there a high degree of modality, truthfulness and realness, in the painting, or is the painting surreal or abstract? How are the characters in the painting depicted, and what are their relationships to one another? All of these aspects of modality affect the image, contributing to the mood and one's interpersonal connection.

The next metafunction students can analyze is the representational function. The representational function explores the action of a text, the themes and narrative. Here, it is helpful to have some specialist knowledge, but it is by no means necessary. Teachers can identify important thematic elements and relationships to mythology, psychology, and history. The most important thing for students is to know what is happening in a text and to understand that texts construe experiential meanings about the world and mediate our relationship with it.

Finally, students can analyze the compositional function. The compositional function explores the materiality of texts. With the compositional function, one can ask questions like what semiotic resources does the producer use to create visual art – oil on canvas, clay, a computer? What material and mental processes go into the composing process of a text? The compositional function deals with the gestalt of images. Gestalt theory studies how the parts of a composition fit together in a unified whole, how the balance, the way geometrical proportions, lines, diagonals, splashes of rhythm, and color make cohesive meaning (O'Toole 24).



*Figure 3*. O'Toole's Functional System Table

What makes O'Toole's system so useful is the three metafunctions are stratified into four ranks of depth – Work, Episode, Figure, and Member (See Figure 3). At the highest rank, Work, a text is seen from a global level, the work as a whole. A rank down, Episode views the particular scenes depicted in a painting and how the episodes contribute to the larger meaning. A step down from Episode, Figure sees participants on an individual level, how the characters in a painting are depicted. Lastly, Member is made up of things smaller than Figures, like hands, feet, objects, and symbols. O'Toole's system provides teachers and students with a powerful, yet flexible, toolkit for analyzing images. This system for visual analysis views texts from three separate but overlapping strata of meaning – the representational, modal, and compositional – while looking at each metafunction from four ranks of depth, from the global to most detailed levels of meaning. In all, the system provides twelve unique perspectives for interpreting visual communication.

***Reading Images*: Analyzing Screen-Based Texts**

While O'Toole's method uses SFL to analyze the visual arts, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* adapts SFL and O'Toole's functional system to create a framework for understanding screen-based images. This method is especially helpful in the twenty-first century classroom because it was created to help students understand the digital texts they encounter everyday, such as websites, digital images, and social media. Kress and van Leeuwen's aim is "to develop a descriptive framework that can be used as a tool for visual analysis" (14). This descriptive framework has many applications and employs the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. This social semiotic framework serves as a metalanguage for educators, students, and researchers in many interdisciplinary fields.

I will first talk about how students can use the ideational metafunction to analyze digital texts. The ideational metafunction has two components: narrative representations and conceptual structures. Narrative representations tell stories with participants – humans, animals, objects, and symbols. To classify the roles of participants in narratives, Kress and van Leeuwen use Halliday's terminology – actor and goal (50). The actor, like the subject of a sentence, is the one doing the action. The goal is the participant receiving the action. In grammatical terms, the goal would be the direct object. In the sentence, "She walked the dog," she is the actor, and the dog is the goal. In SFL, the transitive verb *walked* is called a process. Narrative action is expressed through vectors. Vectors are real or imaginary lines extending from the actor to the goal. In the example above, the dog leash connecting the actor to the goal and the woman's gaze form vectors. Vectors are formed by participants' gaze or eye lines as well as angles formed by limbs, hands, feet, and objects. Vectors are like the action verbs of the visual world. Vectors propel the action of visual narratives forward.

Representational structures do not have to be narratives; they can also be conceptual. While students use representational structures to analyze images that tell stories, conceptual representations show how pieces logically fit together as a whole. Narrative structures convey experiential meanings, and conceptual structures show logical relations. Students encounter conceptual structures when reading scientific diagrams and models. Advertising, magazines, and websites use conceptual structures to organize and arrange items. Conceptual representations, like tree diagrams or taxonomies, depict the logical relations humans use to order knowledge and experience into meaningful structures. Classificatory structures are analytical. They do not depict participants in action. Classificatory structures show how things fit together in logical part to whole relationships. Classificatory structures are made up of a carrier and its possessive attributes (50). The carrier is the whole structure in its entirety. Possessive attributes are the parts that make up the carrier.

Carrier and possessive attributes are often used in fashion advertising as well as military and defense promotions to identify pieces of clothing or the advanced features of weaponry. When students are analyzing fashion advertisements for brands such as Lily Pulitzer, Victoria's Secret, and American Eagle, they will often see images where a model is wearing designer clothes and accessories with labels branching off from the model that identify the designer and price of the accessories and apparel. The designers of the magazine use classificatory structures to identify information like the price and designer of clothing and accessories. In this case, the fashion model is the carrier and the labels branching off identifying the items that the model is wearing are the possessive attributes. Possessive attributes can be shown in exhaustive detail, in which case the attributes completely fill the screen (Kress and van Leeuwen 95). In navigable webpages, like *Google Maps*, the viewer can zoom in and out of the carrier to view the possessive attributes in exhaustive detail. Classificatory structures are used in advertising to convey the rhetorical appeal logos, logic or reason, depicting the hi-tech features and advanced capabilities of products. Classificatory structures are used in videogames, movies, car commercials, and promotional materials for the defense industry to simulate advanced weaponry, technology, and software.

Moving to the interpersonal metafunction, in screen-based texts the interpersonal metafunction involves the interaction between the producer and viewer of a text (Kress and van Leeuwen114). Students use the intepersonal function to analyze how the participants interact with the viewer, the mood of a text, as well as a text's intended audience or coding orientations. Students can first view the gaze of participants. Gaze establishes a powerful personal connection between the participant and viewer. When a participant stares directly at the viewer, it is called a demand because the participant is demanding the viewer's attention. When a participant is looking away from the camera, it is called an offer. In an offer, the participant is subject to the viewer's gaze. Even animals and objects can create human-like connections with the viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen 118). Cars often appear anthropomorphic, the headlights and bumper forming eyes and a mouth.

When participants in an image look at the viewer with a demand gaze, it can create a powerful connection with the viewer. Mascots for kids' cereals create lifelong brand loyalty in young people by exploiting the interpersonal metafunction. Mascots look down at an angle on kids' cereal boxes to be at eye level with the children walking by in the grocery store, creating a personal connection with the young consumer and lifelong brand loyalty. Models on the covers of fashion magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, stare seductively at the viewer, drawing in the viewer's attention. Looking at demand and offer is one of the easiest ways for students to begin analyzing a text, because it is not difficult to tell whether a participant is looking at or away from the camera. Even though this is a simple method, it still provides a wealth of data for students, exposing what interpersonal interactions the designer intended between the text and the viewer and how the interaction conveys a specific mood. The concept of demand and offer comes from the function of language in spoken exchanges. One can either demand information or offer it.

Modality is another important aspect of the interpersonal metafunction. In English grammar, modality expresses probability or conditionality using auxiliary verbs like *may*, *would*, and *could*. Modality is a measure of the reliability or truthfulness of texts. Modality markers are different modal elements that can be evaluated using a graded scale, *the cline of instantiation*. The cline of instantiation works on a scale from the total absence of an attribute to its full usage. Color operates on a scale from the complete absence of color, black and white, to full color saturation. Modality measures how real or unreal images seem, on a scale from naturalism to fantasy. An image with a greater degree of naturalism conveys higher modality.

In advertisements, students should pay attention to whether an ad is in black and white or color. Black and white images convey high modality because they do not appear altered or tampered with. Brands use black and white ads to convey authenticity. One of my students in English 103 noticed how The *Uggs* campaign featuring Tom Brady is in black and white. The commercials take a low-key, behind-the-scenes look at the quarterback interacting with his family, appreciating the little things in life. The ads evoke a high degree of modality that lends *Uggs* a certain level of authenticity. Perhaps, the first campaign to use high modality, black and white ads successfully was the 1991 Calvin Klein commercials featuring Mark Wahlberg. In these "stripped down" ads, shot in black and white, Wahlberg is seen in nothing but his underwear. The ads convey an authentic and honest message that is not flashy, instead relying on the underwear and Wahlberg's "real" and down-to-earth persona to sell the product.

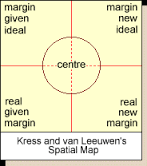
Designers also use bright, sensory colors in advertisements. These advertisements have the opposite effect as high modality black and white images. Bright colors appeal to the senses, promoting sensationalism. High sensory ads are said to have low modality, little truthfulness, because they do appear to be somewhat false – tampered with, manipulated. Tabloids, fashion magazines, and commercials for fast food often use bright colors to excite the senses, making consumers impulsive and likely to spend more. Students can uncover the hidden intentions and target audiences of advertisers by analyzing how advertisers use color, whether high or low modality.

Besides color, other modality markers include brightness, representation, and contextualization (Kress and van Leeuwen 160). Brightness operates on a scale from total darkness to the image fully lit. Representation runs on a scale from the complete absence of representation to an image represented in full detail. The scale for contextualization runs from no background to the background being fully contextualized. Modality markers are like the controls on a television or computer screen. Brightness can be increased or decreased, which alters the picture's realism. Modality is socially motivated. Social groups define what they constitute as real. The criteria for naturalism differ from group to group. In mathematics, geometrical drawings and sketches convey high modality, while in photojournalism detailed color photos have the highest modality (Kress and van Leeuwen 164). Pushing any modality marker to its extreme affects the naturalism, creating hyper-real or surreal imagery (Kress and van Leeuwen 163).

Coding orientations refer to different communities' criteria for modality. Each coding orientation has different criteria for what is deemed credible or important. Coding orientations require various levels of expertise for the audience to participate in them. The four coding orientations are technological, sensory, abstract, and naturalistic (Kress and van Leeuwen 165). Technological coding orientations consist of models, simulations, and blueprints intended for the scientific community. Sensory coding orientations appeal to the senses and are used in advertising, entertainment, and the media. Sensory coding orientations grant higher modality to full color, sensory images and do not require specialist knowledge. Sensory coding orientations are aimed at consumers. Abstract coding orientations are used by academics and cultural elites in the arts and sciences. Artists, academics, and scientists are the only ones with access to abstract coding orientations. Naturalistic coding orientations are the one coding orientation accessible to everyone. It is the down-to-earth, everyday view of reality everyone shares. Coding orientations are a specialized form of the rhetorical concern for audience. Students can use coding orientations to understand genre conventions and how texts are organized to persuade different audiences.

The last metafunction students analyze is the textual metafunction. The textual metafunction deals with the composition of images ­– the layout and information flow. The textual metafunction looks at features like salience, framing, arrangement, and spatial positioning (Kress and van Leeuwen 177). One important aspect of the textual metafunction is the given/new relationship. In functional linguistics, the given/new contract refers to the fact in speech and writing that we communicate given or known information first and then present new information. In a clause, the slot at the beginning of the sentence is called the given, while the rest of the sentence is the new. A screen is a four-quadrant grid. In screen-based images, the left side of the screen is called the given and the right side of the screen is the new. Advertisements take advantage of the given/new relationship. Designers frequently juxtapose images on the left and right side. The image on the left presents known information, while the image on the right shows something new, a twist or departure from what has been already established.

Designers also arrange layouts using a top/bottom structure. The top of the screen displays an ideal image, while the bottom half of the screen shows more realistic imagery. Many websites have an imaginative banner at the top of the screen. The bottom half of the screen is usually more down-to-earth, showing actual images of the product. The given/new and ideal/real relationships can be mapped paradigmatically onto the four quadrants of the screen (see Figure 4). The top-left portion of the screen is the ideal/given; the top-right is the ideal/new; the bottom-left is the real/given; and the bottom-right is the real/new. With this system, one can evaluate the information flow – the relative significance of an element's spatial positioning.



*Figure 4*. Kress and van Leeuwen's Spatial Map

Several other popular screen arrangements include the tree, star, network, and table. Trees are taxonomies that classify how elements fit together in part to whole relationships. They order knowledge into hierarchies and are commonly used to illustrate the animal kingdom and family trees. The top position of a tree is the superordinate, while the subordinates branch out underneath. Websites do not usually use overt tree structures, but do use covert trees for navigation (Martinec and van Leeuwen 108). A horizontal index of hyperlinks often serves as a site's table of contents. When the mouse hovers over a navigational link, a vertical tree appears, providing in-depth navigational options (Martinec and van Leeuwen 108). Horizontal navigational bars often appear at the top of a website in the ideal range, while a vertical tree index will be placed to the left side as the given. One can judge the information value of a navigational tree by its spatial positioning on the screen.

The star configuration consists of a central figure, the nucleus, with satellite elements surrounding the nucleus along the periphery (Martinec and van Leeuwen 24). Star patterns are used to highlight a central figure while also showing dependent relationships (Martinec and van Leeuwen 25). Networks show how participants, or nodes, are interconnected. Networks, unlike trees, are non-hierarchical. They have a horizontal, not vertical, structure. Networks can represent massive amounts of information, such as global Internet traffic or users' social networks. The table or matrix compares information by columns and rows. Items are listed vertically, while comparative attributes are arranged horizontally (Martinec and van Leeuwen36). Overt and covert tables are used throughout new media such as in the comments sections of websites. Facebook, for instance, has a table structure.

Words themselves are an important aspect of the textual metafunction. Typography should be a central focus of any visual analysis. Students are familiar with 12' Times New Roman font, but the design principles of typography will most likely be completely new to them. Font, size, bolding, italics, alignment, and spatial positioning all play key roles in conveying a text's meaning. Advertisements and magazines often use bolding and large fonts for headlines. Bolding can create a hierarchy, where the headline is bolded in large letters, and the main content is arranged in smaller text-blocks underneath. Logotypes are an essential aspect of branding. Logotypes are the lettering and logos corporations use to establish brand identity. Much time and money goes into a logo and the associated lettering brands use to convey a worldview. Logotypes such as McDonald's Golden Arches are an instantly recognizable part of the brand experience. Logotypes help establish the highly engineered "language" of a brand (Lupton 146). Students can analyze the logotypes in a brand's advertisements to better understand the message a brand wishes to convey to consumers.

**"Reading" Websites**

The reading experience of screen-texts is drastically different than reading print. The printed page is linear, read from left to right. Books are highly ordered, organized into chapters, with a table of contents at the beginning and an index commonly at the end. They are read from front to back without much deviation. Websites, on the other hand, have multiple "entry points" and "reading paths" (*Literacy in the Age of New Media* 137). Reading a website is an act of creative design (*Literacy in the Age of New Media* 50). Readers have become users. Users navigate webpages using navigational tools embedded in the sites. Websites consist of image-blocks and text-blocks, which are interactive hypertexts, linking users to additional content in the site and throughout the Internet (*Literacy in the Age of New Media* 68). The way people find information on websites is also different. Websites are "a place of searching and finding, scanning and mining" (Lupton 100). Websites are designed "in actuality, to help readers *avoid* reading" (Lupton 87). Users mine websites for information pertinent to them. As ensembles of image, text, sound, video, and gestural interaction, websites are perhaps the greatest example of a multimodal text.

**Using The Aristotelian Appeals with The Metafunctions**

Logos Ideational

Pathos Interpersonal

Ethos \*Textual

*Figure 5***.** Relationship Between Aristotelian Appeals and Metafunctions

The Aristotelian appeals and metafunctions are complementary and students should use both together for in-depth visual analysis (See figure 5). Logos, logic or reason, relates to the ideational metafunction. Logos and ideational meanings both convey logical relationships and a text's worldview. Pathos, mood or emotion, directly relates to the interpersonal metafunction. Both pathos and the interpersonal metafunction are concerned with audience. In functional terms, audience is expressed through coding orientations. Ethos, the character of a text, is a combination of ideational and interpersonal meanings. Often students will view a spokesperson in an advertisement as the embodiment of ethos. A spokesperson conveys goodwill, developing a trusting, interpersonal relationship with the viewer while expressing logical reasoning and the worldview the brand wants the viewer to believe. The Aristotelian appeals and metafunctions are all instantiated through the textual metafunction (to remain easy to read, figure 4 does not have arrows pointing to it). In other words, the rhetorical appeals and metafunction are encoded within the arrangement and composition of a text. Logic, mood, and emotion are all conveyed by a text's particular design – the color, arrangement, navigation tools, and information flow.

**Textual Analysis**

The SFL metalanguage used for visual analysis can be applied to a textual analysis of spoken and written texts as well. I have included a section on textual analysis, where I analyze a sample student writing, to show how multimodal visual analysis tools translate to textual analysis as well as how students' writing samples will be analyzed in the case study. My belief is that students can learn SFL through multimodal visual analysis and then apply these analytical techniques to traditional texts. My research uses SFL and CDA as described in the literature review as methods for textual analysis. Multimodal visual analysis is a form of CDA, only applied to images. Unlike formal grammar, CDA is not merely content with identifying and labeling parts of speech. CDA allows students to engage deeply and critically with texts, to discover how language functions in social contexts, exposing power dynamics, ideology, and uncovering systemic issues of race, class, and gender. CDA is especially helpful for ELLs and students of low socioeconomic status because it provides them with explicit instruction and experience with language.

In SFL, an important part of textual analysis is analyzing the context of a situation, a text's register. Every text has a specific register, a social context, which influences how a text is organized and its particular lexicogrammatical features (word choice and syntax). Register is the social configurations, lexicology, and linguistic features that shape text. As students learn about register, they learn to identify the particular lexicogrammatical features that define various academic disciplines and genres. The registers of academic discourse vary greatly from non-academic discourse. The registers between academic disciplines vary as well. For instance, science values different terminology and linguistic features than history. The concept of register could possibly bridge the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) divide because the register of each academic discourse is basically the same; different academic discourses just value certain lexicogrammatic features over others. For instance, creative writing encourages writing in first person, while scientific writing favors third person. What is essential for students to know is the concept of first, second, and third person, so they are aware how to navigate point of view within various academic discourses.

Context of situation is made of field, tenor, and mode, corresponding to the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Field, tenor, and mode work similarly to the metafunctions but are geared specifically to understanding a text's social context. Field is "what the language is being used to talk about"; tenor is "the role language is playing in the interaction"; and mode is "the role relationships between the interactants" (Eggins 90). Field or ideational meanings are realized through participants (nouns/noun phrases), processes (verbs/transitivity), circumstances of time and place (prepositional/adverbial phrases), and logical connections (conjunctions) (Schleppegrell 47). Tenor is expressed through Mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative), modality (auxiliary verbs/adverbs), intonation, and appraisal resources (Schleppegrell 47). Mode, the textual organization, is organized through thematic structure (theme/rheme), cohesion, conjunctions, and clause complexes (Schleppegrell 47). After students become familiar with the metafunctions through multimodal visual analysis, they can then begin learning register or the context of situation, field (ideational), tenor (interpersonal), and mode (textual). The context of situation facilitates in-depth understanding of texts by students, helping them uncover the social context, which created the text.

**Analyzing a Sample Student Writing**

To illustrate how SFL can be used to analyze written texts as well as images, I will perform a textual analysis of a student's reflection as to why she chose to research the Apple brand for her unit two assignment. Written at the beginning of the unit, this assignment asks students to reflect on their personal history with their brand, why they chose it, and their potential working argument. Forty students' reflections on this topic were collected from two sections of English 103. I have chosen to do a textual analysis of this particular student's reflection on Apple because it provides a nice example of what kinds of meaning can be uncovered using textual analysis.

As a genre, the student's reflection is a personal recount. The text consists of an orientation, sequence of events, and an evaluation (Schleppegrell et al. 30). In the orientation stage, the student sets the scene, providing background information: "I chose Apple because their products have been in my life for years." The next paragraph is a sequence of events, explaining how she first received her iPod and the impact it had on her social life:

(1) In seventh grade I received an iPod 3 from my grandparents as a reward for doing well in school. (2) At the time it was the most advanced music player and I thought it would make me part of the elite group at social gatherings. (3) Even though I was homeschooled during seventh grade I participated at the local art center, and my classmates were nerdy. (4) All we talked about were the newest electronics and the announcement of others. (5) Therefore when I received my iPod as a gift I was instantly popular.

To analyze field, what language is being used to talk about, we can look at participants (nouns), processes (verbs), and circumstances of time and place (prepositional and adverbial phrases). The participants in the text are: *seventh grade*, *I*, *an iPod 3*, *my grandparents*, *a reward*, *school*, *the time*, *it*, *the most advanced music player*, *elite group*, *social gatherings*, *the local art center*, *my classmates*, *all*, *we*, *the newest electronics*, *announcement*, *others*, *iPod*, *a gift*. The participants give a clear idea of what the text is about, a constellation of participants revolving around seventh grade, grandparents, receiving an iPod as a reward, and classmates. By identifying the participants, we can get a general idea of the context of situation.

The processes of the text include: *received*, *was*, *thought*, *would make*, *was homeschooled*, *participated*, *were*, *talked*, *was*. Processes enact actions and relationships. The text contains material, relational, mental, and behavioral processes. In the first sentence, *received* is a material process. Material processes are actions, "describing processes of *doing*, usually concrete, tangible actions" (Eggins 215). As transitive verbs, material processes have a subject and direct object, but in SFL terms these functions are referred to as actor and goal. The actor is the pronoun *I*, and the goal is *iPod 3*. The second sentence contains relational, mental, and material processes: "At the time it *was* the most advanced music player and I *thought* it *would make* me part of the elite group at social gatherings." The linking verb *was* is a relational process. A relational process "involves establishing a relationship between two terms, where the relationship is expressed by the verb *be* or a synonym" (Eggins 239). In a relational process, the subject of the sentence is the carrier and the noun or adjectival complement is the attribute. The attribute is a quality of the carrier or classifies the carrier as part of a group. In the second sentence, the writer uses a relational process to attribute the quality "the most advanced music player" to the iPod. The second sentence also contains a mental process, *thought*. Mental processes have to do with "what we *think* or *feel*" (Eggins 225). The participant doing the thinking or feeling is called the senser, and the second participant is the phenomena. A mental process like *thought* often contains an embedded clause as the phenomena: "I thought *it would make me part of the elite group at social gatherings*." The first clause projects the embedded clause, reporting what the senser thought. Sentence three has two behavioral processes: "Even though I *was homeschooled* during seventh grade I *participated* at the local art center..." Behavioral processes are somewhere in between material and mental processes (Eggins 233). Eggins writes, "Behaviourals are typically processes of physiological and psychological behaviour," usually with just one participant (233). In this case, the participant is called the behaver. A behavioral process is often followed by a circumstance of time or place, or, in some cases, a phenomena.

Tenor is established through Mood, modality, turn-taking, social distance, and appraisal resources. The English Mood system consists of statements, questions, and commands – declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences. The sample text contains only declarative sentences. In academic discourse, sentences are most often declarative, except when a writer poses a rhetorical question. Rarely do writers issue direct commands. Since the assignment is a reflection, not a formal academic paper, the language is rather informal. The student uses the personal pronoun *I*, which is discouraged in more formal academic writing. The writer uses few auxiliary verbs that would express modality. The student writes, " I thought [the iPod] *would* make me part of the elite group at social gatherings." The modal *would* shows conditionality. She was not sure the iPod would make her popular, but she believed there was a probability that it would. The adverb *instantly* in the phrase "instantly popular" expresses the manner in which she believed she would gain popularity after receiving the device.

In the interpersonal realm, a speaker or writer's attitude can be encoded through affect, judgment, and appreciation (*Meaning Beyond the Clause* 26). Affect expresses emotion, judgment assesses people's character, and appreciation is an evaluation of things (*Meaning Beyond the Clause* 26). A person can experience positive or negative emotions and have positive or negative views of people and things. Although the student does not state her emotions directly, she does express the positive benefits of receiving the iPod, such as making her "instantly popular." The student does make judgments in the text. She says the iPod would make her part of an "*elite* group" and she classifies her friends as *nerdy*. She also expresses appreciation of the device. She calls the iPod "*the most advanced* music player" and says her and her friends always talked about "*the newest* electronics."

Mode is developed through thematic organization and cohesion. Like the given/new relationship, sentences can be broken into theme and rheme. The theme is the first functional slot of the sentence, and the rheme is the rest of the sentence. The theme provides already known information, while the rheme offers new information. The themes in the student's text establish place and time – *In seventh grade*, *At the time* – as well as background information, like the fact that she was homeschooled but talked with friends at the local art center about the newest electronics. Thematic organization provides cohesion. The given/new contract ensures that known information is presented first, followed by new information. The rheme, or new information, then becomes the theme of the following sentence. Another way of establishing cohesion is pronominalization – the use of pronouns. Throughout this rather informal text, the student refers to herself as *I* and her group of friends as *we*. After introducing the iPod 3 by name in the first sentence, she refers to the device as *it* and a *music player*. In the last sentence, she calls the iPod by its proper name again, possibly to avoid a referentless pronoun. I have only scratched the surface of SFL's use in textual analysis, but wanted to make it clear that the methods of analysis students learn to interpret images can also be applied to spoken and written texts.

**Context of Study**

The case study will take place in a first-year writing course at a four-year university. In the major unit of the course, students research the advertising strategies of a brand and produce an annotated bibliography, literature review, argumentative paper, and presentation. The argumentative paper focuses on a controversial topic related to a brand or celebrity's marketing. The research assignment requires students to describe and analyze visual texts – print ads, commercials, websites – as primary evidence for their argument, just as they would print sources. Currently, students do not have a method or toolkit to analyze visual texts in-depth. The only tools students have to analyze advertisements are the Aristotelian appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos). Although the Aristotelian appeals help students perform a basic visual analysis of ads, whether the ads are portraying character/goodwill, emotion, or reason, the appeals do not help students analyze advertisements in terms of narrative, logical relations, mood, arrangement, and overall design. It is essential for students to have a method to visually analyze images because all the assignments in the unit rely heavily on visual sources. To help students do in-depth critical analysis of their brands' advertising, I propose teaching first-year writing students multimodal visual analysis, which combines SFL and rhetorical concepts. Multimodal visual analysis has the potential to provide students with a metalanguage and toolkit for analyzing visual texts such as advertisements in-depth. My research questions once again are: (1) how do students recontextualize knowledge of SFL into their writing practices; (2) what, if any, context do students provide for readers about SFL; (3) does using SFL lead to significant critical analysis of texts; and (4) what are the potential benefits of an SFL-based composition classroom?

I will teach students multimodal visual analysis during the first week of unit two, while introducing the annotated bibliography. In each class session, I will devote part of each class period to teaching a metafunction – the ideational, interpersonal, and textual. I will use a PowerPoint as well as perform model visual analyses of advertisements and videos from popular culture to instruct students in multimodal visual analysis. On the first day of the unit, I will begin with a short lesson on semiotics. I will play the students a video for the song "Signs" by *Five Man Electrical Band*, which features a compilation of road signs, political messages, and billboards. After providing a crash course in semiotics, I will tell the students they are now social semioticians, and their job is to perform a semiotic inventory of their brand's advertising. I will review the concept of multimodality as well as how the Aristotelian appeals are used to analyze visual arguments.

**Role of the Researcher**

My role in the case study is as a teacher and action researcher. As a teacher researcher, my interest is in solving local problems within the context of the classroom. Responding to the classroom situation, the immediate problem posed is how to get students to describe and analyze multimodal texts. However, in terms of knowledge making within the field of composition as well as the organization of the university, I very much see this project as action research. Action research deals with "the intersection of social justice, research methods, and organizational change" (*Teacher Research and Action Research* 263). To me, giving students a metalanguage to critically analyze screen-based media within the 21st century landscape is a matter of social justice. By tying critical visual literacy directly to written texts, students may become better analyzers and producers of written text as well. This method is interventionist in that it addresses the literacy demands of all students, especially ELLs and students unfamiliar with academic discourse. The action research project also seeks to promote organizational change within the university and the field of composition. If multimodal visual analysis proves successful in the case study, other first-year composition teachers could adopt the method. The project also urges those within the field of multimodal composition to begin thinking about and integrating a functional rather than formalist approach to language.

Action research is a recursive cycle of investigating, planning, implementing, questioning, responding, and reflecting, which allows a flexible approach to research in the classroom (*Teacher Research and Action Research* 264). As participatory action research, I will treat students less as subjects and more as co-researchers (*Teacher Research and Action Research* 264). Students' co-researcher role will be made explicitly clear to students. Though I will model visual analysis of advertisements and videos in class, the students will have to rely on their own knowledge base and ingenuity to integrate multimodal visual analysis into their writing.

**Data Collection**

For the case study, I will collect a variety of data to answer the research questions – visual analyses, major writing assignments (annotated bibliography, literature review, argumentative paper), reflections, interviews, and classroom observations. The most important data to be collected will be the writing samples, especially students' visual analyses of their brand's website and an advertisement. The website and advertisement writing samples are one to two page visual analyses. The guidelines for writing the visual analyses are purposefully vague, to observe how students recontextualize knowledge of multimodal visual analysis into their writing practices. Students are asked to analyze the texts in terms of the metafunctions. From the ideational perspective, students may examine the participants, vectors, actor/goal, and representational/conceptual narrative structure. With the interpersonal metafunction, students can analyze demand/offer, modality, and coding orientations. Finally, using the textual metafunction, students analyze the information flow (given/new, ideal/real), navigational features, and typography. I will provide students with the PowerPoint on multimodal visual analysis as well as a two-page outline of terminology and concepts taken from the practical guide above to aid them in the visual analyses.

Along with the two visual analyses, all major papers (annotated bibliography, literature review, and argumentative paper) will be collected electronically, creating a rich database of visual analysis writing samples. The major papers will not strictly contain visual analyses, like the two writing samples, but examples of visual description and analysis will be weaved throughout the papers. The database will provide real world examples of how students use multimodal visual analysis within the context of first-year writing. Written personal reflections, student interviews, students' grades, and extensive reflective and descriptive writing by the teacher will provide holistic information on whether students potentially benefit from multimodal visual analysis and an SFL-based composition classroom.

**Participants**

The participants of the case study will be the students enrolled in one section of a first-year writing course. Although all students' work will be collected and analyzed, the students showing the greatest facility with multimodal visual analysis will be documented in detail. As co-researchers investigating a new method of analysis, students are contributing to knowledge making and the field of multimodal social semiotics. Student work representative of the potential problems with multimodal visual analysis will be analyzed as well. Although all students' data will be collected, only the work of students who have given permission to share their work will be analyzed and discussed.

**Data Analysis**

The data will be analyzed using content analysis and SFL-based textual analysis of the writing samples (two visual analyses and major papers). Lauer and Asher explain that content analysis involves "*coding* – the setting up and labeling of categories, which then become the *variables* of the study ... Researchers analyze the communication data, notice patterns, identify and operationally define variables, and relate them to one another" (27). The variables to be identified in the case study are the terminology discussed in the practical teaching guide as well as the multimodal visual analysis handout provided to students. The variables include the terminology reviewed above, such as *demand*/*offer*, *ideal*/*real*, *given*/*new*, and *modality*. The writing samples will be coded by circling every instance of a variable being used within the writing sample. Alternatively, the database of student papers can be queried to locate specific variables. After a content analysis of the data is complete, an SFL-based textual analysis will be conducted to answer the research questions (a sample of this potential research is provided in appendix A). SFL is an internationally recognized method of textual analysis, which has been practiced for decades, so the validity and reliability of the results of the study can be verified by outside researchers.

To answer the first research question, how do students recontextualize knowledge of SFL into their writing practices, implicit and explicit usage of the terminology will be identified. Implicit usage means students use a visual analysis tool but do not identify the term by the exact name. Explicit usage means the student uses the visual analysis tool with the appropriate vocabulary. After identifying implicit and explicit usage of the terminology, an SFL-based textual analysis will reveal in what ways students specifically integrated multimodal visual analysis into their writing practices.

The second research question, what context do students provide for readers, will be answered by identifying instances where students give explicit definitions of terminology and concepts for the reader. This context is usually provided in a sentence following the appearance of the visual analysis tool to help readers understand unfamiliar terminology and concepts.

The third question, does using multimodal visual analysis lead to significant critical analysis, is a qualitative judgment. Critical analysis will usually be embedded in the sentences following the visual description. In the critical analysis, students go further than just describing a multimodal text. They say something significant about how the design conveys meaning, and the analysis will lead to a questioning of ideology and underlying power relations.

The fourth research question, what are the potential benefits of an SFL-based composition classroom, will be answered through qualitative and descriptive research of all the data. In the case study, "SFL-based composition classroom" is defined as a composition classroom that takes a functional, SFL approach to language instruction. This is a tri-stratal approach incorporating multimodal visual analysis, genre pedagogy, and CDA. The potential benefits of a functional composition classroom will take into account the quality of students' papers, interviews, personal reflections, final grades, and teacher reflections.

After a preliminary investigation integrating multimodal visual analysis into first-year composition, some possible problems with the method include students' writing becoming laden with jargon, overly descriptive visual analyses that do not express critical awareness, and difficulty in training additional teachers and their students in the method. Since students are using new and unfamiliar terminology, it is essential that students provide explanation and context for SFL tools. Otherwise, students' analyses could appear to be confusing and impenetrable to readers outside the context of the classroom. Students also have the potential of writing overly descriptive visual analyses that fail to answer the so what question. Finally, since most composition teachers will be unfamiliar with this method, it might be difficult to find time to train teachers.

I believe the potential benefits of multimodal visual analysis outweigh the negatives. In my own personal classroom experience,I have noticed students' visual analyses are much more descriptive, while showing critical awareness, over previous semesters, where visual analysis was not used**.** Students' visual analyses included in appendix A of this project can attest that students are certainly capable of analyzing complex multimodal texts in-depth with the SFL metalanguage. Students report that learning visual analysis has made them pay more attention to detail in their writing and research, a benefit I had not anticipated. Students also reported that learning visual analysis has made them more confident writers and researchers.

**Potential Implications of the Study**

Students currently do not have a method or toolkit for analyzing multimodal texts in-depth in the composition classroom. Although specialists have used SFL to visually analyze texts for a number of years, SFL has not yet been taught to students in first-year composition, making multimodal visual analysis an exciting new arena within composition studies. As of now, multimodal composition relies heavily on computer-facilitated production, which does not address the greater need for students to analyze and write about digital texts. Multimodal visual analysis has the potential of providing students with a rich metalanguage and framework for interpreting and describing multimodal texts. Because multimodal visual analysis is based in a functional understanding of grammar, visual analysis skills may be transferable to the analysis and production of written texts as well. Composition classrooms in the U.S. rarely use SFL. If the case study proves successful, multimodal visual analysis could provide an engaging entry point into functional approaches to language within the composition classroom.

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Appendix A

**Sample Results**

Here is a preliminary textual analysis of students' writing samples. Two writing samples, an analysis of a brand's website and advertisement, were collected from forty students, resulting in eighty samples total. The student examples provided below give a general idea of the writing students produce using multimodal visual analysis. For each metafunction, examples of student writing are given, followed by a textual analysis.

The preliminary analysis found students were overall quite skilled at applying multimodal visual analysis to multimodal texts. Students were able to utilize a variety of analytical techniques using a tri-focal perspective – the ideational, interpersonal, and textual. SFL proved to be a flexible, descriptive metalanguage that students used in creative and innovative ways.

From the ideational perspective, students readily identified features of narrative representations – participants, vectors, actor/goal, reactor/phenomena. Describing an ad for Patagonia, a student wrote:

One advertisement I found online for the clothing brand, Patagonia, is of two participants, a man holding a baby bear in the woods. The middle aged, bearded man is wearing a knit beanie, and deep red, vintage style, zip-up fleece Patagonia jacket. This man is the actor participating in this advertisement, his gaze is angled downward towards the goal of the ad, the baby bear.

The student identifies both the man and the bear as participants and describes the characteristics of the human participant in detail. The student labels the man as actor and the bear as goal, the two participants being connected by the gaze of the man. The student did not use the term vector to describe the transactional relationship between the man and the bear, instead using the more relatable term *gaze*.

Locating instances of reactor/phenomena and conceptual structures, such as carrier and possessive attributes, were less frequent, in part because the class spent more time learning about narrative representations, as well as the fact that conceptual structures tend to be less common in ads. As a whole, however, students were confident in identifying narrative representations, leading to a deeper understanding of the role narratives play in images.

Students also examined images from the interpersonal perspective, using concepts such as demand/offer, modality, color saturation, and coding orientations. Analyzing an advertisement for Carhartt's line of dog beds, a student wrote:

The yellow Labrador is the participant of the advertisement, while the gaze and alignment of the dog's body are vectors. The body and gaze lead the viewer's gaze to the left one- third of the image. The dog's gaze is a demand, because the dog is making eye contact with the viewer. The modality of the advertisement is high, because the advertisement is in natural colors, no bright unnatural colors.

The student analyzes the ad from a tri-focal perspective quite seamlessly. In the first two sentences, the student looks at narrative representations – participants, gaze, vectors – as well as composition, how the visual arrangement leads the viewer's gaze to one side of the screen. In the last two sentences, the student analyzes the ad from the interpersonal perspective. She identifies the dog as having a demand gaze and explains why: "because the dog is making eye contact with the viewer." She then classifies the advertisement as having high modality, honesty or truthfulness, "because the advertisement is in natural colors, no bright unnatural colors." The student implies the advertisement has naturalistic coding orientations, rather than sensory, but does not say so explicitly.

Another visual analysis, this one for the website of TOMS shoes, shows how the interpersonal function can be applied creatively:

The modality of the image is accurate. This image conveys truthfulness and a sense of happiness. Offer is demonstrated in this image, as the baby is not directly staring at the viewer. The viewer would most likely look at the baby's gaze. The image is in color, but the colors are very faded. It is appealing to the senses, but because the colors are dull, also demonstrating somewhat high modality. The image represents a naturalistic coding orientation because this is an everyday action and genuine relationship between parent and child.

In this text, the student is actively engaged in knowledge making, wrestling with new concepts and terminology. The statement "The modality of the image is accurate" at first seems ambiguous, but upon closer reflection what the student means is the modality of the image is suitable for what the image depicts, a familial scene between mother and child. The student identifies the interpersonal connection between the participant and viewer as an offer because the baby is looking away, functioning as the object of the viewer's gaze. The student refers to the scale of instantiation when she labels the modality as "somewhat high." Though the image is in color, "the colors are dull," expressing a modality somewhere in the middle of the scale. The student classifies the image as having naturalistic coding orientations because it depicts the "everyday action and genuine relationship between parent and child."

Students were able to provide in-depth visual descriptions and analyses of websites using the textual metafunction. Since websites are arranged in a highly organized fashion, students can judge the information value of image-blocks, text-blocks, and navigation tools by their spatial positioning with relative ease. Students identified given/new and ideal/real relationships, the star, tree, table, and network configurations, typography, and navigational tools such as hyperlinks, indexes, and table of contents. Students showed an increased awareness of the information flow and composition of websites. Breaking the screen into four quadrants – the ideal/given, ideal/new, real/given, and real/new – helped students analyze the placement of images, texts, and navigational tools. Students described the navigational tools in detail and exhibited an understanding of the non-linear organization of websites. This is how the student researching TOMS described the information flow of the site:

The Toms website is divided into the Ideal and Real. The top portion of the website, the Ideal, shows the Toms logo and shows a few images of their products. The bottom portion, the Real, is very realistic. It shows images of the people that Toms has helped and some of their customers in other countries wearing their shoes.

Another student analyzing the LUSH cosmetics website discussed the ideal/real split, calling the ideal the "promise," and incorporated the Aristotelian appeals:

Pathos is used in the large slide show of images at the top of the page, where an image included shows young people dressed as rabbits protesting animal testing. This slide show serves as the horizontal division of the page. The top portion is the promise LUSH is making to its customers, which includes seasonal images of products that appeal to the younger viewers as well as integration of their promise of fresh, vegetarian, cruelty-free cosmetics. The bottom portion includes the actual products themselves as well as the pricing and a small summary – making it the more realistic portion of the page.

The heightened awareness of the spatial arrangement of websites led students to a greater understanding of design and helped them "read" websites as informed critics, not simply consumers. By combining the Aristotelian appeals with visual analysis, students can express how design choices convey specific meanings and persuade audiences.

Students described the navigational tools and non-linearity of websites in great detail. A student analyzing Sephora's website wrote:

As soon as you get to the homepage, you see "Sephora" in big black bold letters centered at the top of the website. Under that, you have a horizontal index with the different titles of "Make-up, Skincare, Fragrance, Bath & Body, Nails, Hair, Tools & Brushes, Men, Gifts, Sales, Brands, and Advice and How-To's. They are all hyperlinks that will direct you to whatever category you are interested in. Under the horizontal index there is a picture of a woman ... On the left side of the picture there is a vertical index labeled "Quick Links" that has the options of "Just Arrived, Value Sets, Bestsellers, Travel Size, and Weekly Specials." Above that is a search bar for the website and this is the given ideal.

The textual metafunction helped students describe navigational features, as well as spatial positioning and information flow, with specificity. Although I pointed out some navigational tools to students beforehand, they relied on their own knowledge and expertise to apply terms such as horizontal index, vertical index, search bar, table of contents, and slide show. Several students described the navigational features of their websites as tables, taxonomies, or trees. A student researching Kanye West had a particularly difficult challenge describing Kanye's website because it only featured a mysterious symbol, which linked viewers to his new single when clicked. The student, however, was able to write over a page of description and analysis of the site. She identified the symbol as a star configuration and discovered the symbol's thirteenth century monastic origins.

Analyzing the students' work, I was surprised just how quickly they were able to begin using SFL as a toolkit as well as the high level of detail and analysis they were capable of producing. After approximately an hour of instruction, including a PowerPoint and study guide, students were independently analyzing their brands' websites and advertisements. Students used their background knowledge to actively construct new knowledge. The textual metafunction was especially useful for students when analyzing websites. Breaking the screen into four quadrants helped students evaluate the information value of text-blocks, image-blocks, and navigational tools. Students were more proficient at analyzing websites and still images rather than video, because moving images require any even more in-depth set of tools.

Compared to the visual description and analyses of the previous semester, which did not use multimodal visual analysis, these students' writing samples, as can be seen from the excerpts above, where significantly better. The students' visual analyses are extraordinarily rich in detail. One does not have to refer to the actual image the student is describing to gain an understanding of it. All aspects of the image are analyzed, from the narrative, to interpersonal interaction, mood, intended audience, and arrangement. Students said that multimodal visual analysis helped them gain confidence in their observational and analytic skills, and visual analysis also helped students pay closer attention to details in their analysis of traditional texts as well, an important outcome that had not been anticipated. Multimodal visual analysis also led to deeper critical analyses of texts. It helped students come to realizations about design choices, how visual arguments are arranged to persuade viewers and promote consumerist ideologies. Students now have a metalanguage and toolkit to critically analyze the barrage of advertisements and media they experience on a daily basis. These students are now keen observers and critical analysts of new media.

1. In this paper, the U.S. version of multimodality is referred to as multimodal composition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The software used in the composition classroom is mostly proprietary, meaning it is for-profit software made by large corporations such as Microsoft. The licenses for proprietary software are extremely costly to universities. The software itself, unlike open-source software, is very limited in its functionality for students. Students can only use proprietary software in the restricted ways established by the software's programmers. In his 2010 talk at SXSW "Program or be Programmed: Ten Commands for a Digital Age," media theorist Douglas Rushkoff warns, "if you are not a programmer, you are one of the programmed." Using proprietary software in the classroom put students in a passive consumer role. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)