

The Visual Transitivity System in Two ELT Books Series

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the system of the visual transitivity by analyzing the images of *American English file* (2014) and *Cutting edge* (2005) series based on Halliday's (1976) systemic functional linguistics and Kress and van leuween's (1997-2006) social semiotics. The system of visual transitivity refers to a type of process which determines how represented participants are labelled, how many of them are involved, and what roles they play. As a result, two points emerged: The first point showed the usefulness of these theories in determining the fact that these images are not neutral. In the second place, the analyses of these images determined many processes (e.g., action, reaction, and symbolic) and (e.g., material, mental, and relational) which were required in representing and interpreting these images and their processes.

Keywords: Visual Transitivity, Systemic Functional Theory, Social Semiotics Theory, Visual Grammar.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, English teachers have used wide range of materials as a basic component in every teaching/learning situation (Ajayi, 2012). These materials can be textbooks, diagrams, drawings, and photographs. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) explained that "a textbook is a guide for a teacher and a memory aid for the pupils and a permanent record or measure of what has been learnt" (p. 315). Also, they introduced a textbook as "a universal element of teaching and no teaching/learning situation is complete until it has its relevant textbook" (p. 315). Moreover, Ur (1996) claimed that a textbook is a systematic principle and a basis for language course.

Nowadays, textbook designers use different types of modes to facilitate students' learning. These multimodal textbooks integrate images and texts for making meaning. Through multimodality, teachers and students can analyze the principles which allow learners to get hidden meanings in relation to placement of element, framing, salience, and proximity (Liu, 2005).

In English books, visual and verbal layers are used simultaneously. However, images are different from linguistic texts, they are so related to each other and many researchers have sought parallels between these two aspects. These layers are two sides of a coin. In one side, the verbal layers relate to nouns, verbs, moods,

and theme and rheme. But in other side, the visual layers relate to processes, framing, color, and semiotic modality (Motta-Roth & Nascimento, 2009).

With regard to multimodality, Halliday's Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) and Kress and van Leeuwen's Social Semiotic Theory (SST) combine verbal and visual layers of textbooks together. Whereas many linguistic theories are based on language as a mental process, SFT is concerned with sociology. In an overall sense, SFT considers language as social semiotics. But, "SST looks at how signs are used in certain social practices. It also seeks to integrate various semiotic modes" (Stockl, 2009, p. 207).

In order to tackle these principles, this paper presents the analysis of images and their related text of *American English File* (2014) and *Cutting Edge* (2005) series. The analysis provides pedagogical application of Kress and van Leeuwen's SST and Halliday's SFT in two parts. In the first place, some of the main categories of transitivity system in SFT will be presented. In the second place, the ways the system of transitivity of SFT are used in visual Grammar will be presented.

2. Method

2.1 The System of Transitivity in SFT

The system of transitivity is introduced by SFT. This system classifies the kinds of doings and beings that human experiences during life time (Halliday, 1985). The system of transitivity refers to a system for describing the whole clause, rather than the verb and its object (Thompson, 1997). There are two essential parts in every clause: the process and the participant(s). Sometimes, there is another element in a clause namely circumstance (conditions or manners of the process).

The transitivity system has three types of processes, including physical (Material), thinking (Mental) and Relational. Each process has specific features with different types of participants.

2.1.1 Material processes

The material processes are processes which involve physical actions, such as running, cooking, throwing, and sitting down. These kinds of processes have two main parts, including an *actor* (the "doer" of the action) and a *goal* (the Participant whom the action is aimed at).

2.1.2 Mental processes

The mental processes refer to actions which occur in the internal world of the mind, such as thinking, imagining, liking, wanting. In this kind of process, the participant who performs the action is called *sensor* and the mental process which is created by the sensor is *phenomenon*.

2.1.3 Relational processes

The Relational processes create a relationship between two concepts. There are two types of relational processes, including attributive process and identifying process. In the first type, two participants are the *carriers* (the entity which carries

the attribute) and the *attribute* (adjective or noun phrase). In the second type, the function of process is to identify one entity (identified) in terms of another (identifier).

2.2 The System of Transitivity in SST

The SST offers to two main processes: narrative and conceptual. The narrative processes are dynamic processes which indicate actions, events, and processes of movement. According to Harrison (2002), narrative processes allow “viewers to create a story about the Represented Participants (RPs) because the image includes vectors of motion” (p. 51). There are two different kinds of narrative processes namely actional and reactional (Rezai, 2013; Ruppert, 2004). During the actional process, a story is created by vectors which can be in the form of tools, limbs, and roads. During the reactional process, a story is created by eye line of RPs (Harrison, 2002).

In the conceptual processes RPs are in stable and timeless fashion (Ruppert, 2004). One type of the conceptual process is the symbolic category. In this process, a researcher does not try to find relationships between components of image, but he tries to find the meanings of that image in the form of symbolic attribute or symbolic suggestive (Oyama, 1996). In the symbolic attributive, there are two parts as carrier and symbolic attribute. Meaning of carrier has determined by the symbolic attribute which represents its meaning or identity itself. The suggestive symbolic process represents meaning and identity from qualities of the carrier themselves. In this type of process, there is just one participant namely carrier.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Material and Narrative Processes

Both verbal and visual layers indicate that Figure 1 is a multimodal image. The narrative process in visual image depicts a physical action which expresses an event or a movement (Kress & Leuween, 2006). Figure 1 realizes the narrative process by presenting what is happening or being done. The image depicts an athlete who is carrying out a certain scope of physical activity related to a game (golf). The purpose is not only to describe what is happening, but also who is performing the action. In verbal terms, the image could be represented in Table 1:



Figure 1. A sample shot of listening exercise.
(Taken from *Cutting Edge*, preintermediate, p. 109)

Table 1. Verbal representation of the Nike's ad (Image 1)

Tiger Wood	is playing	Golf
Actors	Material Process	Goal

Alternatively, Image 1 can also be represented verbally by a clause involving a 'ball', the second Participant (the Goal). However, the ball is not actually visible in Image 1. Thus, the Goal (golf ball) is not represented and the emphasis is on the golf player and the way he is playing.

Table 2. Another verbal representation for the Nike's ad (Image 1)

Tiger Wood	Is hitting	a golf ball
Actor	Material process (actional)	Goal

The participant who is performing the action, Tiger Wood, is not an average golf player, but one of the best in the world. He is among the best American professional golf players and as such is a sport celebrity. Most importantly, he is wearing Nike (shoes and cap). The brand takes advantage of those sport man's status as a marketing strategy to sell its products. When consumers buy Nike sportswear items, they are not just purchasing a product, but they are purchasing the symbolic value attached to that product. Nike sells an idea of strength, beauty, and power by showing the image of a famous athlete. The kind of narrative process of this image is actional which has both actor (golf player) and goal (golf ball).

3.2 Mental and Narrative Processes

Figure 2 is multimodal because it has both verbal and visual layers. There are two participants in this image. They are sitting at a table in a restaurant. There are two orange juice glasses on the table. This image is narrative in the

representational layer. The woman is looking at the man and she is the reactor who is resting her head on her hands. The man is the phenomenon. In the other process, the man is the reactor and there is no clear phenomenon. He looks as if he is daydreaming, maybe about something she said to him about the party.



Figure 2. A sample shot of grammar exercise.

(Taken from *American English File 2*, p. 80)

For translating this visual composition in SFT terms, we could have the clauses in Table 3. In this image the persons in whose minds the mental process occur is not really 'acting', but they are undergoing the process of thinking.

Table 3. Sensor and phenomenon

He	is thinking	about the party
Sensor	Mental process (cognition)	Phenomenon

Table 4. Sensor and phenomenon

She	is thinking	About him
Sensor	Mental process(cognition)	Phenomenon

3.3 Relational and Conceptual Processes



Figure 3. A sample shot of writing exercise.

(Taken from *American English File 2*, p. 135)

This image shows an ideal black family, children and parents, that is formed around father and children have tranquility beside their parents. The Father's hands are placed on the mother's and son's shoulders. The Mother's left hand is placed on girl's shoulder. This indicates that the father has a supportive role in the family and other members have supportive roles for each other. The participant who is the focus of attention is the family's father due to the fact that he is more salient in the composition through his size. The mother is closer to her daughter than the father to his son. This Figure has the conceptual pattern and the RPs are static and inactive. This image is symbolic because it shows a fortunate family. Symbolic suggestive has a carrier; the family is the carrier of fortune. There are no disconnection between family members. In other words, they are intimate and close. One possible verbal representation of Image 3 is in the Table 5:

Table 5 *Verbal Representation of Image 3 in SFT Terms*

This Family	is	True reflection of fortunate, healthy, and intimate family
Carriers (four participants)	Relational Process	Attributes

In Table 5, there are three occurrences of relational attributive processes. The Participant in the left column to whom the Attribute is ascribed is the Carrier. There are four carriers (the boy, the girl and parents) who 'carry' the Attributes listed in the right column. These Attributes are associated with real family as a way of establishing some common identity between real learner and represented Participants (English family).

4. Conclusion

The analyses presented in this paper illustrate a novel way to explore multimodal texts. In order to make students more critical about images, teachers should foster students' perception that images are a common meaning-making resource in contemporary societies and that their combination with verbal text is a powerful tool for enacting relationships and identities. All in all, the findings of this study suggested that teachers need to consider how this kind of visual grammar can contribute to language teaching, also language learners can benefit from it in improving their ability to figure out the hidden processes behind every image.

This paper constitutes an attempt to describe the system of transitivity in visual grammar and to explore some of its pedagogical applications of multimodal texts. The multimodal texts analyzed in this paper are some images of *American English File* and *Cutting Edge* series. Further research is needed to identify the pedagogical applications of Visual Grammar's system of transitivity to the analysis of the dynamic semiosis of movies and computer graphic images.

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