

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, LITERACIES AND MULTIMODALITY: POSSIBILITIES OF TEACHING ENGLISH ORALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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- **ABSTRACT:** This article discusses an investigation on orality (e.g., listening and speaking) we developed with undergraduates in LetrasEnglish Course at the Federal University of Pelotas. Our aim is to build an innovative pedagogy for oral practices based on recent theories about language in the digital age. The design and creation of the learning activities are grounded on the studies about literacies, contextual diversity, and multimodality, following the principles of Social Semiotics. From the perspective of the qualitative research paradigm, the analysis reveals that the pedagogy created by us contributes to the construction of knowledge about the fundamental aspects of contemporary language by the undergraduates. The data analyzed point out that the participants were able to transfer what they have learnt to the process of creating multimodal oral texts, focusing on different contexts and purposes, with the integration of digital technologies.
- **KEYWORDS:** multiliteracies pedagogy, students' agency, grammar of visual design

Introduction

Recent studies on literacies highlight the three major systems of meaning through which human beings have been interacting with each other via language. The first, named 'synesthetic civilization' or first globalization, used orality (sounds) and images as the most common way for social interactions through different means of language representations, whose speakers were usually polyglots. Furthermore, communication was carried out by multimodal sets or oral semiotic landscapes, through the orchestration or ensembles of different modes, such as, images, gestures, sounds and space to represent meaning (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2020). In the second globalization, writing took a prominent role and languages started being written with alphabetical symbols (as in Portuguese, for example) or with characters as in Chinese or Japanese.

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The invention of the printing press established writing as the dominant mode in the verbal communications with little integration of other semiotic modes. The synesthesia among modes and their resources seemed to have been abandoned in human communication. Moreover, the nationalist ideological project in the perspective of Nation-State favored the homogenization and the uniformity of a society that needed to adhere to the same rules. The emphasis was on language standardized norms, linguistic diversities were not well-received, and the verbal mode was predominant. The pedagogy approach in language classes followed tradition, with focus on reading and writing (in addition to arithmetic). This pedagogy encouraged students' passivity and the use of canonical or illustrious texts. The development of citizenship and respect for diversity was not emphasized in the educational institutions of that time. The social, historical, political and ideological aspects that closely influence the production and construction of meanings were not addressed (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2020). All aspects of the school curriculum were restricted to the use of a single language, governed by rules in contexts that legitimized a monoculture.

In the third globalization, with the advent of digital technologies, diversity became the driving force behind changes in human communication. Texts evolved into multimodal landscapes with the meaning being constructed by the orchestration of different semiotic modes. Moreover, social contexts of human interactions became multiple because of the popularization of social media - this may imply a certain commitment to the previous 'synesthetic civilization', despite the significant differences brought by the digital age.

The verbal mode of the writing age thus loses prominence in human communication, which now encompasses linguistic diversity with the emphasis on two or more languages, including their varieties, and the recognition of previously underestimated dialectical diversities thus giving the necessary priority to linguistic pluralism. Education that once primarily focused on literacies for reading and writing, with emphasis on standard norms, advances to the concept of multiliteracies as defended by the researchers associated with the *New London Group* participants (The NLG, 1996).

For these language researchers, "the multiplicity of communication channels and the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in today's world demanded a broader view of literacy than that portrayed by the traditional emphasis on the written language" (The NLG, 1996, p. 63). According to the NLG scholars, there are two essential aspects of multiplicity in an innovative pedagogy - diversity and multimodality. With these two 'multis', the scope of literacies encompasses not only "culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies" (The NLG, 1996, p. 61), but also "the growing variety of multimodal texts [in different genres] directly associated with the affordances of digital technologies and multimedia" (The NLG, 1996, p. 64). A pedagogy aligned with the two 'multis' transcends the limitations of the traditional pedagogy (Kalantzis *et al.* 2020) and focuses on the development of learning experiences that are compatible with the plethora of semiotic modes combined with the current sociocultural diversity to the process of making meaning by our students.

In the context of the English Language and Literature undergraduate program in Letras, we observe that our students already live in the third wave of globalization due to their familiarity with the digital world as members of the generation P (for “participatory”). They play an active role in social media, comprehending multimodality and diversity as essential aspects in human communication although they are still learning theories and pedagogically applying them with our guidance and supervision. However, in the public education scenario for which our undergraduates are being prepared to work, our country’s social and economic inequalities continue to have negative impacts on the learning and teaching process. This may discourage our future teachers, mainly if we consider the high educational dropout rate in Brazil, especially in the final years of the secondary segment and in high school.

This article discusses the two multiliteracies ‘multis’ with special attention on the multimodal approach related to Social Semiotics (Hodge; Kress, 1988) that serves as its theoretical foundation. It will also discuss the fundamental role sociocultural contexts play in meaning making. As Kress (2010) points out, the context motivates semiotic mode choices from those who produce meanings, and these choices are motivated by their own interests. This article will also provide a brief review of the categories or metafunctions *The Grammar of Visual Design* (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006) as they guide our data (video) analysis based on the representational and the interactional categories. Finally, it will address some concepts related to autonomy in language learning (Freire, 1996), to raise undergraduates’ awareness of their relevant role in a transformative pedagogy in which they must take autonomous positions and not simply follow the content of a textbook.

During our investigation, we observed that national and international research on the multimodal approach has primarily focused on written texts from different contexts. The ones on oral genres, such as interviews and documentaries, are relatively scarce, especially in academic scenarios.¹ Recognizing this gap, we will discuss and exemplify some aspects of our pedagogical intervention that was guided by the principles of Social Semiotics, multiliteracies and the multimodal approach for the development of undergraduates’ oral expression in English. Students from the Brazilian Federal University of Pelotas majoring in a Letras-English program were our subjects and participated actively in all stages of our pedagogical intervention aimed at listening and speaking.

The digital age and the two ‘multis’: diversity and multimodality

The changes brought about by digital technologies are decidedly impactful in various ways on today’s society. This has led us to a new identity, the “third globalization”,

¹ The articles published from 2015 to 2020, in the most prestigious Brazilian journals, showed a reduced number of studies related to speaking and listening, especially in relation to multiliteracies (*Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada, Revista ALFA, Ilha do Desterro, The Specialist e D.E.L.T.A.*).

that took the place of the previously written age, which had been the dominant mode in the process of meaning making for several decades. We have become virtual in many aspects of our lives since the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic after 2020. The teaching and learning processes have shifted to remote ways of interaction with students in all segments of education, from primary school to the university context, making educators (re)signify their commitment to quality education in diverse Brazilian contexts.

In the educational process of languages, whether native or additional, the key theoretical framework of the two ‘multis’ of multiliteracies (NLG, 1996) goes along with an innovative pedagogy, aiming at developing learners’ abilities to construct multiple meanings from highly multimodal texts also considering the multiplicity of sociocultural contexts. Contact with multifaceted diversity comes from online interactions and virtual games, readings and research in different browsers that enable connections between the local and the global. Within the scope of diversity, today’s learners have access to texts in a variety of genres, both oral and written, in several languages, through which they build attitudes of respect for what is different.

Multimodality adds the other equally important ‘multi’, due to the opportunities it provides for text producers to orchestrate a combination of various semiotic modes to create meaning. The digital technologies that permeate today’s society and students’ familiarity with multimodal texts contribute to the development of respect for diversity. Digital resources align with the two ‘multis’ in a transformative pedagogy (Freire, 1996) that is innovative, creative, relevant and, above all, capable of involving “the dimensions of social life, the world of work, and civic and personal participation” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2020, p. 52) in the process of preparing individuals for citizenship. A transformative pedagogy for languages also assumes the role of educating teachers to act critically in their context, understanding that the act of teaching is a politically charged action full of ideologies and cannot, therefore, be considered neutral.

In this article, the transformative pedagogy we are proposing focuses on multimodal oral language practices closely related to the social, cultural, political, economic and ideological changes caused by digital technologies, as pointed out by Kalantzis *et al.* (2020). We acknowledge that the continuous integration of technological resources into the teaching and learning process requires the development of different literacies by both teachers and learners. By transcending merely linguistic knowledge to include the diversity of contexts and the ubiquitous presence of multiple semiotic modes (visual, gestural, sound, spatial, imagery, among others), multiliterate meaning-making is based on the choices and interests of those who create meanings according to their purposes and audience.

Social Semiotics, Multimodality and the Grammar of Visual Design

The NLG seminal manifesto (1996), which draws a new era for language education through multiliteracies, was preceded by the publication of the book, *Social Semiotics*,

by Hodge and Kress (1988). It introduces us to Social Semiotics, a field of knowledge that emphasizes the social and cultural aspects of human communication, whose semiotic resources are socially produced and already available in the communities where they are orchestrated for making meaning. In this sense, the Social Semiotics theory encompasses “social meanings constructed through the full range of semiotic forms, through semiotic texts and semiotic practices, in all kinds of human society at all periods of human history” (Hodge; Kress, 1988, p. 261). Thus, these researchers propose a theory that considers other semiotic modes for the creation of meaning within a sociocultural perspective.

Aligned with Critical Linguistics focusing on the ideological language complexities, Social Semiotics has its interest centered on the meaning produced in the process of human communication. This theory also considers that human communication is always multimodal and can occur through social interactions in speech and writing, in a dance, in a symphony, in a soccer match, for example. The social context is the source, the origin, and the generator of meanings. Therefore, meanings are created considering the interest and motivation of those who make them.

According to Kress (2010), multimodality is not a theory, but rather an approach to the analysis of multimodal written or spoken texts. It is also an inherent characteristic of any written or oral landscape once there is no such thing as a *unimodal text*. All of them are always composed of multiple semiotic modes and their resources. An important contribution to the multimodality approach is related to the book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, published by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) for the analysis of images in multimodal texts.

These two researchers emphasize that the process of constructing/interpreting visual representations in oral or written multimodal texts is rooted in the socio-semiotic theory (Hodge; Kress, 1988). This theoretical framework offers essential underpinning for the creation of categories or metafunctions, that can be seen as valuable tools for the analysis of multimodal texts in language research and also in our pedagogical practices (Kress; Van Leeuwen (1996; 2006; 2021). They renamed Halliday’s 2004 metafunctions – ideational, interpersonal, and textual – mainly about the verbal mode – into representational, interactional, and compositional metafunctions for the analysis of multimodal landscapes that include different semiotic modes and resources.

Through the dimensions of the representational function, our focus of analysis is on the different semiotic modes and respective resources that have been chosen and combined by meaning makers to represent a visual “proposition whose narrative patterns serve to present [participants’] unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements”. There are two representational structures: narrative (with the presence of vectors) and conceptual (without the presence of vectors). “Vectors may be formed by bodies or limbs or tools, [for example]. The Actor is the participant from whom or which the vector departs” (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 59). The narrative can be classified into different processes: (a) a unidirectional transactional action in which “a vector [...] connects two participants, an Actor and a Goal”; (b)

a bidirectional transactional action: a vector emanates from and is directed at both participants, the Interactors (c) non-transactional action, in which a vector emanates from a participant, the Actor, but does not point at any other participant; (d) transactional reaction, an eyeline vector connects two participants, a Reacter and a Phenomenon; and (e) a non-transactional reaction, an eyeline vector emanates from a participant, the Reacter, but does not point at another participant. The narrative also involves two other processes, verbal and mental. In the verbal ones, a vector formed by a “speech balloon” connects two participants, a Sayer and an Utterance. A vector formed by a “thought balloon” connects two participants, the Sayer and the Phenomenon” and in the mental ones (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 74-75).

From the interactional functional perspective, an analysis of images “involves two kinds of participants, the represented participants (the people, the places and things depicted in images) and the active participants”. Producers and viewers are real people who produce and make sense of images in the context of social institutions which, to different degrees and in different ways, regulate what may be said with images, how it should be said, and how it should be interpreted (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 114). The following categories create the interactive meanings: (a) contact: one of demand (the gaze at the viewer) and one of offer (absence of gaze at the viewer); (b) social distance: intimate as represented in close shots, ii. social distance as in medium shots, and iii. impersonal, when the image is captured in a long shot; (c) attitude or perspective: the frontal angle means involvement and the oblique indicates detachment; (d) angle: high angle represents the viewer power; eye-level angle means equality (equal power), and the low angle that means power of the represented participant. Another crucial aspect in an interactional analysis is that of modality that means the truth of credibility of the represented image. An image modality can be represented in the following ways: (a) naturalistic (high modality as in a photography); (b) sensorial (dominance of the principles of pleasure and affect as in advertising); (c) technological (as in graphs and diagrams), and (d) abstract (typical of some artistic images). Colors are markers of naturalistic modality in terms of three scales: color saturation; color differentiation, and color modulation.

In the composition function of the visual design, the analysis “relates the representational and interactive meanings of the images to each other through three interrelated systems”: (1) information value, (2) salience, and (3) framing (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 177). As these authors remark, the informational values are attached to different “zones” of the image: (a) left and right zones that correspond to what is already known and to what is new respectively, (b) top (ideal value of the information) and bottom (the real value of the information), and (c) not polarized zone or placement in the center or in the margin of the visual composition. Salience, another resource of visual design, refers to “the degree to which an element draws attention to itself due to its size, its colors, its sharpness, and other features” (p. 210). The framing resource in a visual composition has two main goals: (a) to show “the degree to which an element is separated from other elements of information through frame lines” [...], for example,

and (b) to show “the degree to which an element is joined to another element, through the absence of framing”, for example (p. 211).

Orality in the English teaching and learning process

Oral comprehension (listening and speaking) is fundamental for language learning (whether native or additional) in the multimodal interactions that take place in school and beyond its walls. For the BNCC (Brasil, 2018, p. 248), orality in English as *lingua franca* involves “[p]ractices of oral comprehension [listening] and production [speaking], in different [discursive-multimodal] contexts [whether face-to-face or in simulated situations] with a repertoire of different types of oral interactions [informal conversations, greetings, movie clips, etc.], including the teacher’s interactions with the students” [*our translation*].

Always multimodal and polyphonic, language “provides students with the means for the creation of multimodal ensembles of meanings to enable them to engage and actively participate in an increasingly globalized and multicultural world” (Brasil, 2018, p. 241). Thereby, the activities we proposed for students’ development of listening comprehension contribute to the improvement of their multimodal use of English in different contexts if we take into account that it is through oral interactions between speakers that meaning is made in effective ways. Regarding the workplace, as Kalantzis *et al.* (2020, p. 57-58) point out, teachers need to educate students to be “engaged communicators” and be “attentive, reflective, transcultural, and multimodal” citizens who are “capable of contributing to the quality of professional and community environments around them”.

In the context of teaching and learning oral expression in English, we observe that, in general, the pedagogical practices still in current overlook the changes brought about by digital technologies as well as their affordances for educational use. Additionally, they do not yet consider the fundamental aspects of multiliteracies as discussed by Kalantzis *et al.* (2020) as well as the main premises of the BNCC (Brasil, 2018). Thus, oral texts materialized in various genres, fundamental tools in learning situations, are not yet seen as multimodal landscapes that are created through a combination of various semiotic modes that are intertwined in the construction of their meanings. For example, recent analyses of listening comprehension activities in English language textbooks published by international publishers, developed by Nyugen and Abbot (2016) and Marques (2018), reveal that the tasks proposed in these materials primarily focus on testing students’ knowledge, neglecting the development of their understanding of the spoken language. A few years ago, Campoy-Cubillo and Queról-Julian (2015, p. 196) remarked that activities for students’ oral development prioritize “grammar and [the] lexicon” at the expense “of issues of meaning inference or [those] related to the interpretation of contextual aspects”, in addition to a reduced interest on interactive and multimodal aspects in oral communication. Learners are not prepared to listen, let

alone to speak, except through activities that hark back to the traditional approach of teaching through listening and repeating, listening, repeating and memorizing. Marques (2018, p. 145) states that

[...] listening comprehension activities [in newly-published textbooks] seem to resist changes regarding the concept of language [...] and they are merely exercises of] completing gaps, indicating true or false, connecting two columns and marking the correct alternative, repeatedly used in textbooks and proficiency exams [...] [Thus,] they reinforce the traditional notion that meaning resides in words and that the meaning of the text is in the sum of the meanings of the words that compose it.² [our translation]

There are also limited research studies that focus on the multimodal approach for the development of students' literacies in oral communication (listening and speaking). Most of them were conducted in university contexts to investigate the effectiveness of audio and video recordings in activities for listening comprehension, aimed to identify how these tools can contribute to the interpretation and to the meaning-making process (Gomes Jr. *et al.*, 2019, among others). The same happens in relation to speaking: only a few researchers concentrated on the multimodal approach for the development of oral practices (Dias; Pimenta, 2015; Macnish, 2019). The research reported by Dias and Pimenta reveals that Letras undergraduates produced oral documentaries to discuss the English varieties around the world and uploaded them to *YouTube*. The researchers also reported that the documentaries were weaved by a combination of various semiotic modes (verbal, visual, gestural, typography). Macnish's (2019) research was about the creation of multimodal oral presentations by undergraduates and their presentations to a real audience of elderly people who lived in a care home near the university where the study was conducted.

Methodology

Research context

From the perspective of the theoretical principles of Social Semiotics, studies on the multimodal approach (Hodge; Kress, 1988; Kress, 2020; Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2001) that consider education as a transformative practice (Freire, 1996), as well as those based on the categories of analysis provided by *The Grammar of Visual Design*, especially

² Original: "as atividades de compreensão oral parecem resistir [às] mudanças com relação ao conceito de língua [...] e elas se traduzem em meros exercícios de] completar lacunas, indicar verdadeiro ou falso, ligar duas colunas e marcar a alternativa correta utilizados reiteradamente em livros didáticos e nos exames de proficiência [...] [Assim] reforçam a noção tradicional de que o significado está nas palavras e o sentido do texto encontra-se na somatória do sentido das palavras que o compõem".

the representational and the interactional ones (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006), the two researchers (authors, here) created activities for the teaching of oral expression (listening and speaking) in English. The main objective of this interventionist pedagogical practice was to develop the Letras-English Graduation Program Course at the Federal University of Pelotas undergraduates' orality.

The pedagogical intervention was conducted by one of the authors of this article in 2020 and lasted 12 weeks. All activities were carried out online, mainly in the asynchronous mode through the *Moodle* platform. Weekly synchronous 90-minute meetings were held with the aim of providing the undergraduates with opportunities to use the English language through oral discussions about the topic covered in the learning activities they completed. During the whole educational process, they had to bear in mind that it is "in rebellion against injustice that we affirm ourselves" (Freire, 1996, p. 31) and that every text is multimodal, all of which, whether oral or written, can be seen as semiotic landscapes (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 35).

The interest in developing this study is related to our proactive role as researchers and educators who are responsible for English students who will be future teachers in our public schools. We know that "change is difficult, but it is possible" (Freire, 1996, p. 31). Given the small number of studies on orality (listening and speaking in English) based on the perspective of multiliteracies, we intend to collaborate with studies that focus on this aspect of language teaching/ learning/ considering the multimodal approach with the integration of digital resources, adding Freire's inspiring views of the educational process. Our intention is to consolidate this field of study in our academic research and thus positively contribute to innovative pedagogical practices in the process of educating English teachers to overcome adversities in "acting to transform".

Research participants and corpus

The research project involved the participation of seven students in initial education for future teaching, one B2 student, four B1 and two were A2 learners, according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (British Council, n.d.). Out of the seven students, two had already used the *Moodle* platform and the others were accessing it for the first time.

During the project implementation, twelve (12) listening and speaking activities were created based on our theoretical foundations and uploaded to the *Moodle* platform, all of which combined different semiotic modes in highly multimodal texts. The themes were consistently thought-provoking aimed at developing students' proactive attitudes, always bearing in mind the agency they must assume to act and transform through their teaching actions (Freire, 1996) in their classrooms.

To comprise the *corpus* of analysis of this article, due to the scope of this publication, we selected two of the oral activities that were developed, one related to the oral comprehension (listening) of the video poem *Reinvent yourself* and its multimodal

analysis. The other involved the production of this oral genre by one of the participants based on the knowledge constructed during the interactions with *Reinvent yourself* and on what was read and discussed in the course meetings during the implementation of the project.

Analysis

In all learning activities, videos were used as a starting point for the asynchronous tasks aimed at developing students' orality (in listening and speaking) and for discussing each of their different themes related to their individual work in the synchronous meetings. They always watched two videos on current views of language and education for participating in the interactive debates that occurred at the beginning of the synchronous meetings. The videos were about the theoretical and methodological foundations (e.g., Social Semiotics, multiliteracies, imagery analysis) on which their work would be based. They would always provide a brief oral report on what they had read. Following that, they developed the learning activities that we proposed aimed at enhancing their oral use of the English language. Our pedagogical practice considered their understanding and creation of oral texts in various genres in a cyclical way: from understanding to creation. Students had to consider the conditions of the production of all texts they created, such as who produced them, for what purposes, with what support and the reasons why they created them. The synchronous debates were based on prior readings they had done about the ubiquitous presence of multimodality and diversity in social, cultural, and discursive practices through language (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2020).

At the beginning of the asynchronous meetings, our students, preferably in self-organized groups of two or three, watched the video, *Multimodal literacies*³ and read the introductory chapter of the book *Letramentos* by Kalantzis *et al.*, published in 2020. Based on what they had learned from these two learning activities, they had to create a list of keywords for discussions that would occur in the synchronous meetings. The main goal of this pedagogical practice was to contribute to our students' professional development, which was soundly grounded on current views of language and education that encompass multimodality and diversity. Additionally, this practice integrated Freire's (1996) revolutionary and inspiring assumptions on education, such as, the notion of citizenship as active participants in the democratic process that involves the development of students' conscientization of their commitment to fight for their rights.

Several texts from different oral genres on current issues and various sources were the focus of multimodal and critical analyses in our pedagogical practice. Our analyses deeply considered the semiotic oral landscapes in joint discussions with the students. We assumed that these landscapers were orchestrated by a combination of different modes of representation in their compositions. In addition to this, we also analyzed whether

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IX3EzVdZMDk>

or not they expressed a positive view towards a changing world from the perspective of rebellion for justice (Freire, 1996). Cartoons and comic strips were our focus of multimodal analysis as well as poems with the aim of emphasizing the resources from the verbal mode, such as rhymes, alliterations and word choices according to the poet’s motivation and interest. Our analyzes also encompassed the poet’s stance towards injustice and the unquestioned *status quo*, seen by many of us as “the” correct and “the” adequate. Diagrams, tables, and book chapters from the academic domain were also analyzed, with emphasis on typography as a relevant semiotic mode to emphasize information that deserves highlighting.

As a wrapping up activity, the groups of students created a word cloud about literacies, multimodality and semiotic modes and resources that are often orchestrated in the creation of multimodal oral texts (Fig.1), using the free digital tool *mentimeter*.⁴

Figure 1 – Keyword cloud



Source: Research data

Next, they were challenged to engage in a learning activity for the development of their English oral expression (listening and speaking), which involved the recording of one of their favorite poems that could be used to express their voices against all forms of discrimination, bearing in mind Freire’s (1996) assumptions on a liberating education. First, the participants watched the multimodal video of the poem, *Reinvent your life*, written by Charles Bukowski, narrated by Tom O’Bedlam with a soundtrack by Tony Anderson. Various other semiotic modes were combined to express its meaning which, broadly speaking, focuses on the theme of “being free” to reinvent oneself.

Following a general understanding of the video poem, the students were challenged to analyze its multimodal composition to understand its social purpose, basic

⁴ <https://www.mentimeter.com/s/c2a1f697efd5f435d724e5cf62c5705a/f27346f3b88a>

characteristics, and its noticeable aim at criticizing what is considered an “acceptable standard” in today’s society. Besides being a highly multimodal oral landscape, it contains a message of rebellion against “pre-established social norms”. Then, after a deeply developed analysis with the participation of all students, they had to write a short summary and create a list of semiotic modes contained in its composition. Below are two excerpts of their production.

Short summary

It is a poem that tells us to live life, reinvent ourselves, and be independent, not allowing others to have a say on what we want to accomplish and also on our future.

List of semiotic modes:

Verbal: words and phrases, verses, intonation, rhythm, pauses.

Visual: colors, moving images, perspectives.

Gestural: somersaults, close-up of faces.

Spatial: people in motion (walking, running, flying).

Oral: soundtrack, deep voice.

Typography: upper-case letters.

Subsequently in a synchronous meeting, we encouraged students to get involved in a debate to further discuss the themes of the poem and its multimodal composition including its soundtrack. Freire’s assumptions in favor of a “liberating education” underpinned our discussions. The verses were narrated by O’Bedlam with a tone of voice that emphasized resources of the verbal mode, such as, rhythm, intonations, alliterations, rhymes, and sounds, while moving colorful images reinforced the poem’s communicative purpose through the participants of the scene: buildings, landscapes, and human characters leaping towards the new to reinvent themselves, for example. Regarding the truth value (or modality or models of reality as termed by Kress, 2010), the images represent the participating characters in a naturalistic way with a clear correspondence between them and what the viewers could watch. In other words, the setting of the video was “real” to what it showed.

The verse “stay out of the clutches of mediocrity” (0:32-0:34), in figurative language (a feature of the verbal mode), shows a background of a crowd of people crossing a street and thus emphasizing a social distance between the video’s viewers and the scene in a totally impersonal way from the viewpoint of the visual interactional design (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006). The video also shows people crowded together at a close social distance, perhaps indicating some intimacy. In one way or another, its communicative intention is to portray people without defined life purposes. In other words, the human participants seem completely conditioned and uncritical to what happens around them and to their own existence. The central appeal to viewers is the idea of reinventing themselves in constant positive changes so that no one could ever label them as either

an extreme conservative, or a left-wing radical. Their stance to life would rather be aligned to Freire's "education is a form of intervention in the world" (1996, p. 38).

The plea for continuous change is also expressed in the verse *change your tone and shape so often that they can never categorize you* (0:42), represented in the image of a person doing acrobatic movements with the sunset in the background (0:52). This illustrates the transactional narrative action, meaning that there is only one participant and a vector with no specified goal, according to the representational metafunction of the visual design (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006). The naturalistically represented sunlight pointing towards the horizon symbolizes energy, strength, and renewal. Similarly, the verses *reinvent your life because you must, it is your life* (1:00-1:03) show that reinventing oneself or one's rebirth is a necessary process, especially in times of abrupt changes, insecurity, and uncertain future. The representation of two skydivers in a free fall emphasizes that though change is "liberating", it also involves taking risks. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), this representation illustrates the transactional process as the gaze is the vector that connects the two human participants. In this video, the representations of the participants involve narrative structures of actions that unfold in space and time to portray the verses of the poem in a well-executed and competent production.

The classroom synchronous debates that involved all students focused on the present times, on what they expect for their lives, and the idea of whether or not they agreed with the themes discussed in the video poem: reinvention, rebirth, revival, especially concerning the commitment to constant vigils against social injustices. Additionally, some other topics addressed to lifelong learning such as learning how to learn, developing positive habits for consistent studying, and preparing for the changes to come. Considering the classroom debates and the studies on multimodality and multiliteracies, as well as the concept of a liberating education, the undergraduates were encouraged to create videos of their own based on their favorite poems in order to emphasize which of the current conservative rules of personal conduct need to be broken and that would involve persistence, struggle and courage.

[It is remarkable to mention that] one of the undergraduates chose the poem *What every girl needs to hear* written by the Canadian author, Rupi Kaur. To create the video, she orchestrated some of the semiotic modes into a multimodal oral landscape by using images to represent the diversity of the female universe in addition to her voice exploring the verbal mode to orally narrate it. The soundtrack was suited to the narration, and it helped her express a tone of anguish in her voice to depict the theme of "being a woman". Her main purpose was to involve her audience of listeners in the process of reflecting about women who still live in a patriarchal world, meaning that substantial actions are still necessary towards the fulfillment of their civil and personal rights.

The verbal mode was again used in the title *Feminine* and in the closing sentence of the narration, *Girl Power*. The purposeful use of these two phrases highlights women's efforts to change their roles, from traditionally qualities expressed in the title, *Feminine* (usually associated with submission, dependence, permissiveness, beauty)

to independence and empowerment expressed by *Girl Power*. This phrase symbolizes the struggles of women of all ages, races, and social classes to be treated as equal in all realms of their lives.

Colors as a visual semiotic resource are often used for emphasis in multimodally orchestrated compositions. They are also used to frame and distinguish one section from another in a book or website, for example. Regarding the poem, the author chose red to write the phrase *Girl Power* in lipstick on the surface of a mirror. This illustrates the message she wants to convey to all society that is further amplified by the reflection from the mirror (Fig. 2). Red also signifies urgency in taking actions, in such case, to transform society, which does not traditionally accept diversity, nor eradicates aggression against women, depriving them from their civil rights, and also disregards their roles for the improvement of the world. This color also symbolizes passion, courage, and a type of power that, when combined in teams, can make a difference against sexism and violence, which are prevailing in many women's lives.

Figure 2 – Last screen illustrating of the narration



Source: Research data

Throughout the video, the author represents young women of different races, physical characteristics, and their clothing in naturalistic ways (Fig. 3) (Kress; Van Leeuwen, 2006). They are sometimes shown in medium shots to show some social distance between them and the viewers, neither intimate nor distant. However, the represented young women are more often portrayed in close shots to interact with viewers in an intimate or more personal form. Consequently, they gaze directly at them, demanding their attention with the purpose of inviting them to join in the fight against any type of discrimination towards women. The last scene frames the phrase *Girl Power* in a close shot. The author makes the written message on the mirror continually

resonate until the end of the video while the last verses are narrated by her in a tone of anguish: *from now on I will say things like, you are resilient / or, you are extraordinary / not because I don't think you're pretty / but because you are so much more than that.*

Figure 3 – Mosaic of young women's images throughout the video



Source: Research data

Conclusion

Our research study pointed that the innovative pedagogical practices we proposed in this article are theoretically well-grounded and played a positive role in Letras undergraduates' journey in relation to their professional development in English, especially in listening and speaking through the interpretation and production of videos. As future teachers in the primary and secondary levels of the Brazilian school system, we believe that they will assume their pedagogical practices with the strength of a liberating attitude imbued with the in-depth knowledge about recent theories on language they built during the intervention. We observed their deep commitment and active engagement in the process of understanding and expressing themselves orally in English. Our intervention clearly showed a shift from a “monomodal” to a multimodal focus in the oral interactions in English in which the undergraduate students were involved. The oral semiotic landscapes they created revealed the combination of different semiotic modes about socially significant themes relevant for contemporary society.

As longstanding teacher educators, dedicated to the professional development of future English teachers, we strongly encourage and emphatically plea for the integration of the principles of multiliteracies, diversity and multimodality, social semiotics, and the categories of *the Grammar of Visual Design* into the regular Letras-English curriculum, especially in graduation courses aimed at educating future teachers. These

theoretical underpinnings along with approaches for the development of literacies and the analysis of contemporary multimodal landscapes are of paramount importance for their understanding of a view of language that is heavily influenced by digital technologies. All this understanding must also be integrated into their future pedagogical practices when they prepare primary and secondary students to a different ever-changing life that characterizes the current age. We stand for an innovative pedagogy that blends the “new” emerging from up-to-date theorizing and the critical awareness of the nonexistence of neutrality in language use that is further enriched by Freire’s (1996) assumptions on a “liberating education”.

Assuming that teaching is a creative adventure, so is learning. We encouraged our class of undergraduates to creatively weave semiotic resources to create multimodal oral landscapes to be shown in videos. Their sound involvement with what they were building enabled them to develop not only oral expression in listening and speaking, but also knowledge related to pedagogical practices. Embracing the idea that future teachers are meaning makers (and not just consumers) is an act of pedagogical rebellion that needs to be assumed in our current teaching practices. Freire inspires us to fight for a better world and to be hopeful even against social injustices, especially in our country.

OLIVEIRA, Flávia Medianeira de; DIAS, Reinildes. Tecnologias digitais, letramentos e multimodalidade: Possibilidades para o ensino da oralidade em inglês no ensino superior. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v. 68, 2024.

- *RESUMO: Este artigo relata uma investigação sobre oralidade (i.e., escuta e fala) desenvolvida com licenciandos em Letras-Inglês da Universidade Federal de Pelotas. Nossa intenção é construir uma pedagogia inovadora para práticas letradas orais fundamentadas em teorias recentes sobre a linguagem da era digital. O design e a criação das atividades de aprendizagem se apoiam nos estudos sobre letramentos, contextos de uso, diversidade e multimodalidade a partir dos preceitos da Semiótica Social. Sob a perspectiva do paradigma da pesquisa qualitativa, a análise revela que a pedagogia criada contribui para a construção de conhecimentos dos aspectos fundamentais da linguagem contemporânea pelos licenciandos. Os dados analisados evidenciam que os participantes foram capazes de transferir o que aprenderam para o processo de criar textos orais multimodais, enfocando contextos e propósitos diferenciados, com a integração das tecnologias digitais.*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Tecnologias digitais; Letramentos e multimodalidade; Expressão oral.*

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