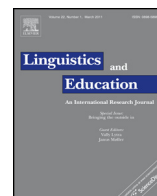




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Linguistics and Education

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/linged](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/linged)

# Infusing multiliteracies into English language curriculum: The visual construction of knowledge in English textbooks from an ontogenetic perspective

Nancy Songdan Guo<sup>a,\*</sup>, Dezheng Feng<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Professional Education and Executive Development, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Room S1201, 12/F, South Tower, PolyU West Kowloon Campus, 9 Hoi Ting Road, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>b</sup> Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Multiliteracies  
English language curriculum  
Knowledge construction  
Representational meanings  
EFL textbooks

## ABSTRACT

Addressing the need for multiliteracies in language education, this paper investigates the visual construction of knowledge in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks in Hong Kong and develops a social semiotic framework for infusing the senior primary (P4–6) and the secondary (S1–4) English language curricula with multiliteracies. By explicating the ontogenetic change of the representational meaning of visual images in textbooks, we find that textbook illustrations change from narrative to conceptual representations in terms of process, from specific to generic in terms of participant, and from local to global in terms of settings. The changes in image structure are found consistent with the change of text type from narrating to expounding, in accordance with students' cognitive abilities. Such ontogenetic change contributes to the change of knowledge domain from the concrete and commonsensical in early years of schooling, to the abstract and uncommonsential in later years of schooling.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

The multimodal construction of knowledge has been to the fore of education research in the last two decades (e.g. Kress, 2003; The New London Group, 2000; Unsworth, 2001; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). As Halliday (1996, p. 114) points out, the frontier of literacy has moved from writing to other systems of visual semiotic, expanding the meaning-making potential. This foresight was substantiated in the seminal paper by the New London Group (2000) under the term 'multiliteracies', which was coined to highlight the proliferation of multimodal ways of meaning making. Nowadays, knowledge construction relies on the semiotic interplay of images and written language, with images as a fundamental element in contemporary texts (Kress, 2003; Unsworth, 2001). Images as visual resources play a pivotal role in various aspects of education, for example, classroom teaching, teaching materials and assessment.

Despite the on-going interests in the visual construction of knowledge in education, few studies have explored textbooks as the key visual resource in foreign language learning (e.g. Chen, 2010; Weninger & Kiss, 2013; Yang, 2012). As foreign language textbooks are the fundamental carrier of knowledge in primary and secondary schooling in non-English speaking regions, they provide essential data for an understanding of how knowledge is constructed through visual resources.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 67951198.

E-mail addresses: [nancygsd@gmail.com](mailto:nancygsd@gmail.com) (N.S. Guo), [will.feng@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:will.feng@polyu.edu.hk) (D. Feng).

Foreign language textbooks are also the primary teaching resource for teachers in the mainstream classroom. The current study explores the potential of multiliteracies to enrich English language learning and teaching in Hong Kong primary and secondary schools. By investigating the visual construction of knowledge in currently used textbooks, the study aims to enable English language teachers and educators to infuse the primary and secondary English language curricula with multiliteracies, by providing a metalanguage for teachers to use visual images more effectively in the mainstream classroom teaching.

While there have been investigations of the interpersonal and textual meanings of textbook images (e.g. [Chen, 2010](#); [Royce, 2007](#)), the ideational aspect of the visual construction of knowledge and how this relates to the existing primary and secondary curricula remain unexplored. Methodologically, the study develops the currently dominant qualitative approach to the analysis of images in EFL textbooks by investigating aspects of knowledge construction both qualitatively and quantitatively. In order to explore the potential of embedding multiliteracies in the primary and secondary curricula, the study adopts an ontogenetic perspective, examining the representational change of image structure in the textbooks for primary and secondary schooling, and investigating how this relates to the change in students' cognitive abilities and knowledge domain. The study draws on a sequence of EFL textbooks for primary 4–secondary 4 students used in Hong Kong for its data, using all 348 images from these textbooks for its investigation of the ontogenetic change in representational meaning.

The paper first provides a brief overview of scaffolding multiliteracies in Hong Kong, followed by an account of the conceptual framework drawn upon to analyze the textbooks. This is followed by an account of the methodology. In the third part of the paper, we will present both qualitative and quantitative analyses exploring the visual construction of knowledge in textbooks and the ontogenetic change in image structure. By exploring the field of experiences construed by multimodal resources in these textbooks, the paper explores the potential for infusing multiliteracies into primary and secondary language curricula. The paper concludes that the systematic modelling of the ontogenetic changes of image structures in textbooks, and the elucidation of the co-relations between image structures and registerial changes in multimodal texts in textbooks, provide English language teachers with an explicit metalanguage to align with a multiliteracies pedagogy in EFL language learning and teaching.

### **Multiliteracies and English language teaching in Hong Kong**

Evidence of the influence of multiliteracies on English language teaching in Hong Kong can be found in the latest Hong Kong English Language Education curriculum. In the curriculum, exposure to visual elements in learning and teaching is highlighted: pictures and diagrams are mostly associated with pre-reading activities or vocabulary learning, e.g. predicting the content of a text from pictures, matching pictures with word cards, and learning vocabulary by using a picture dictionary ([Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007, p. 82](#)). Although the curriculum is not exhaustive in its account of semiotic understanding of visual resources, the need for implementing multiliteracies is addressed in the aims of the overall English Language Education curriculum throughout primary and secondary schooling: the aim includes interpretation, use and production of new materials, enabling every learner to prepare for the changing socio-economic demands that have resulted from advanced information technology (IT) ([Curriculum Development Council, 2002](#); [Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007](#)).

As the prerequisite step towards mastering multiliteracies, we need to understand the meaning-making mechanisms embedded in visual images, so that teachers can be equipped with a metalanguage to explain the images explicitly in their teaching. We will therefore provide a systematic description of visual images based on social semiotic theories, in particular, [Kress and van Leeuwen \(2006\)](#). As [Machin \(2009, p. 182\)](#) explains, describing visual images on the basis of a semiotic theory is “to replace commonsensical terms such as ‘evoke’ and ‘suggest’ that we often use with systematic and stable terms that allow us to talk in concrete terms about how such a composition communicates”. Such systematic terms, which are crucial for both teachers and students in the construction and unpacking of knowledge, are provided in the finding section (Section “Findings: an ontogenetic analysis of the changing structure of images”). We adopt an ontogenetic view in our exploration of the visual construction of knowledge in the textbooks, which is essential to an understanding of how multiliteracies may be infused into the current curriculum.

### **The analytical framework: dimensions of representational meaning**

In order to investigate the visual construction of knowledge or meaning-making processes by the visual images in the textbooks, we will use the conceptual framework developed in social semiotics theory proposed by [Kress and van Leeuwen \(2006\)](#) and [van Leeuwen \(2008\)](#). [Kress and van Leeuwen \(2006\)](#) set out a ‘map’ for the analysis of multimodal visual-based communicative discourse, thereby providing a ‘grammar’ of the possibilities of meaning-making that applies to all forms of visual presentation. Adopting the notion of ‘metafunction’ ([Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004](#)), they define the representational meaning of any semiotic mode, captured in the ideational metafunction, as ‘representing objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system’ ([Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 42](#)). Furthermore, they define the interactive meaning of any semiotic mode, captured in the interpersonal metafunction, as representing the social relations between producer, viewer and object represented. Lastly, they argue that as a semiotic mode has the capacity to form ‘texts’, complexes of signs which cohere both internally with each other and externally with the context in and for which they are produced. Different

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/366098>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/366098>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)