

## **Research Space**

Conference keynote

**Beyond language: multimodal literacy and ELT. Opportunities and challenges**

**Castaldi, J.**



# *BEYOND LANGUAGE.* MULTIMODAL LITERACY AND ELT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES.

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Jacopo Castaldi  
[jacopo.castaldi@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:jacopo.castaldi@canterbury.ac.uk)

# Outline of the talk

- Understanding *multimodal literacy*
- *Multimodality* and ELT
- Challenges and opportunities

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# UNDERSTANDING MULTIMODAL LITERACY

# First, a crucial clarification: mode vs. medium

**Multimodal** and **multimedia** are two separate things.

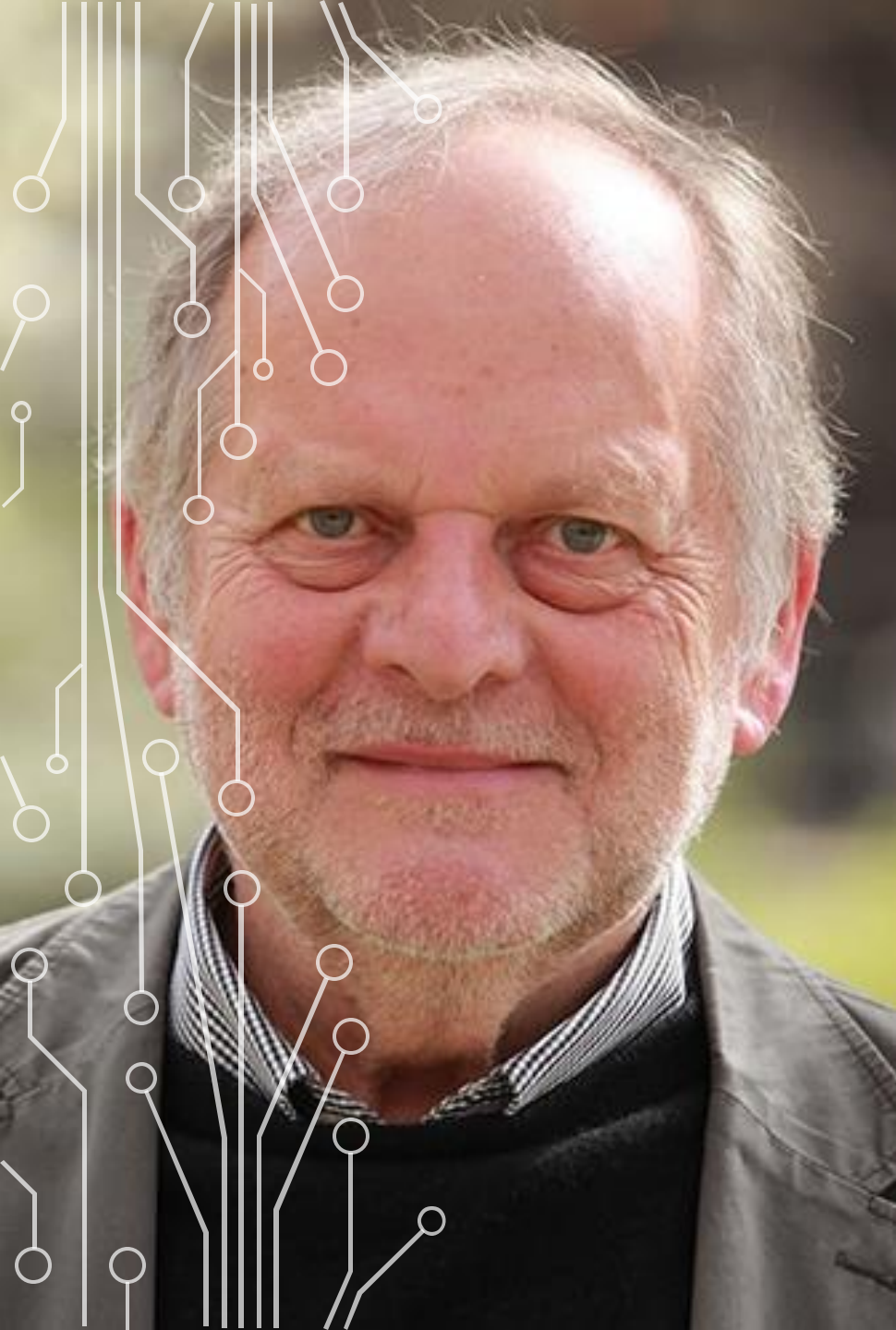
- A *mode* is a codified system for making and interpreting meaning: e.g. spoken language, written language, visuals, images, sound, music, colours, emojis, etc.
- The same *mode* can be deployed through different media, e.g. spoken language in face-to-face, radio or televised media.
- Two or more *modes* can be deployed through the same media, e.g. written language and photographs in newspapers, or spoken language, music and moving images in a video recording.

## Second, some questions:

Talk to the person next to you about the communicative exchanges (synchronous and asynchronous, with or without specific/specified participants) you have had over the last couple of days:

- What *modes* did the participants use to get their messages across, e.g. spoken language, written language, gestures, body language, visuals, sounds, music, colours, emojis, etc.?
- What *media* made those communicative exchanges possible, e.g. instant messaging, face-to-face, video-call, internet webpage, printed newspaper, television, radio, etc.?
- Why did the participants choose those specific modes and media?
- How many of those communicative exchanges occurred using only 1 mode?





“Nearly every text that I look at uses two modes of communication: (a) language as writing and (b) image. Yet TESOL professionals continue to act as though language fully represented the meanings they encode and communicate. Yes, they admit that other features are important, but if pressed, the linguist and the applied linguist (the language teacher, let us say) would maintain that their business was language, after all, and these other things were someone else’s to look after.

It is time to unsettle this commonsense notion. It is now impossible to make sense of texts, even of their linguistic parts alone, without having a clear idea of what these other features might be contributing to the meaning of a text. In fact, it is now no longer possible to understand language and its uses without understanding the effect of all modes of communication that are copresent in any text.” (Kress, 2000, p. 337)

# What is Multimodal Literacy?

The ability to communicate using two or more modes of meaning-making (Mills, 2016)

# Why should we worry about it?

- Most communication is inherently multimodal
- Non-linguistic modes can be as effective (if not more effective!) for communicative purposes – e.g. think about the use of music to convey emotions and set moods
- Mastering multimodal literacy can provide an advantage in the global job market
- It exploits existing strengths of the digital natives
- In marketing terms, it can be more appealing

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# MULTIMODALITY AND ELT

# Recent findings in multimodality applied to literacy

## **Multimodal practices:**

- enable learners to develop multiliteracy skills (Vinogradova, Linville, & Bickel, 2011)
- enhance critical perspectives of sociopolitical issues (Ajayi, 2008)
- enable learners to negotiate their identities (Wilson, Chavez, & Anders, 2012)
- motivate learners to engage in autonomous and independent learning (Hafner & Miller, 2011)
- learners who participated in collaborative multimodal writing assignments outperformed a control group in terms of their texts' perceived communicative effectiveness, lexical diversity, text length, and other measures (Vandommele *et al.*, 2017)

# Classroom practice: weak vs. strong versions of multimodality

**TABLE 1**

**Key Features of the Weak and Strong Versions of Multimodality**

	Weak version of multimodality	Strong version of multimodality
Who uses multiple modes?	ELs use multiple modes until they have developed proficiency in English.	All students, regardless of EL status or proficiency in English, use multiple modes to engage in disciplinary practices.
How are multiple modes used?	Use of multiple modes is seen as compensatory.	Use of multiple modes is seen as strategic.
Which modes are valued?	Language is the default privileged mode.	All modes are valued based on their particular affordances and limitations as well as norms and conventions of each discipline.

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# Integrating multimodal practices in ELT contexts

# Implementation of multimodal practices:

- Receptive practices:
  - Raising awareness of the *meaning potentials* of different modes
  - Raising awareness of how different modes interact in texts and contribute to *meaning-making*
- Productive practices:
  - Creating multimodal projects (Yi and Angay-Crowder, 2016)
  - Designing multimodal instructional materials (Yi and Angay-Crowder, 2016)

# Example 1

**Context:** workshop at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Strictly speaking, not an ELT context, but rather an EMI context

**Learners:** adult Greek university students

**Input:** talk about multimodality and ideology in travel documentaries

**Output:** group project (time allowed approx. 1 h) – analysis of a multimodal text followed by short presentation

[Workshop Padlet](#)

## Example 2

**Context:** university lecture. Strictly speaking, not an ELT context, but rather an EMI context.

**Learners:** native and non-native English-speaking students

**Input:** lecture about business communication and marketing

**Output:** group project (time allowed approx. 1 h) – production of marketing materials for a product or service of their choice

[Lecture Padlet](#)

## Example 3

**Context:** EAP programme

**Learners:** adult university students

**Input:** module on 'English Language and Communication'

**Output:** individual assessment through portfolio tasks

# Portfolio task 2



## TASK (600 words)

Watch the extract from [ITV's Good Morning Britain](#) and analyse the nonverbal aspects of communication of ONE of the following people:

Columnist- Natasha Devon,

Former Deputy Head Teacher - Ruth Kudzi

Host - Piers Morgan.

Comment on their use of nonverbal communication over the interaction and what type(s) of identity they display. You can focus on any of the nonverbal aspects covered during the lecture, e.g. paralanguage, kinesics, body posture, appearance, facial expressions, proxemics, etc. Please focus on at least three of them.

This Task refers to content covered in Session 4.

## Commentary

Write your commentary in the box below. Don't forget to include the name of the person you are writing about.



# Portfolio task 3



## TASK (equivalent to 400 words)

Choose a static advertisement (for example a poster, a billboard, a leaflet, etc.) and discuss any issues you find that relate to gender.

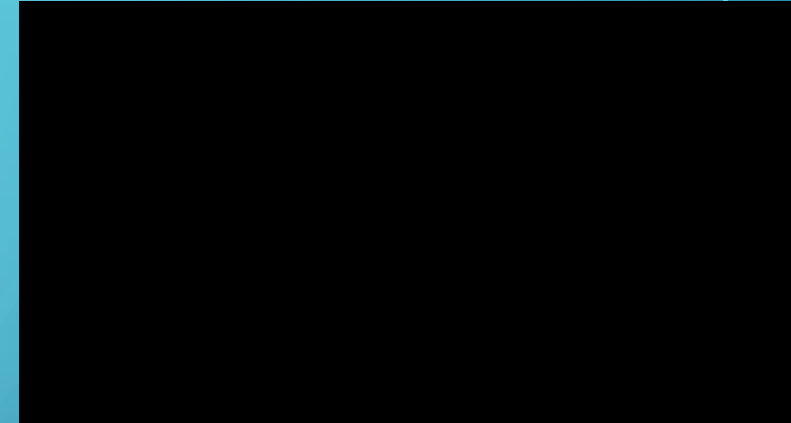
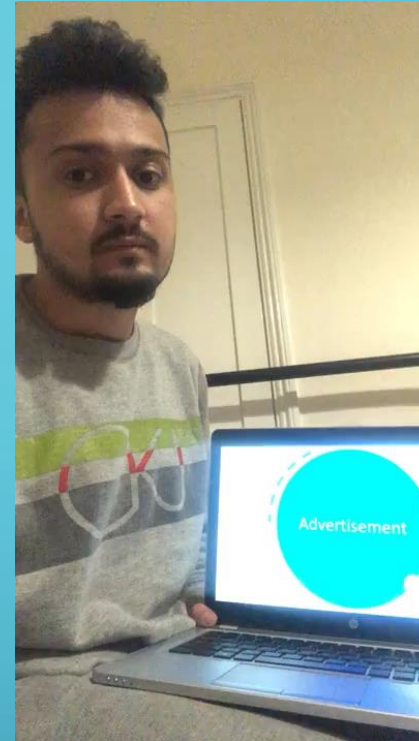
If you prefer, you can choose two different advertisements for the same product or service and compare them.

The analysis should take the form of a 5-minute recorded presentation. Please make sure both you and your presentation are visible in the video.

Please upload:

- 1) image file(s) of the advertisement(s);
- 2) the PowerPoint presentation;
- 3) the video recording of your presentation.

This Task refers to content covered in Session 5.



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# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INSTITUTIONS

# Challenges in implementing multimodal ELT courses

## Assessment

- Deciding which elements or components should be considered to evaluate multimodal projects (Yi and Angay-Crowder, 2016).
- A standardized testing culture that favours flat literacy practices (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011).

# Challenges in implementing multimodal ELT courses

## Training

- Some teachers' (and students?) resistance to digitally mediated multimodal practices. This resistance to multimodal practices seems to stem from teachers' concerns, challenges, and negative attitudes toward multimodal practices (Yi and Angay-Crowder, 2016).
- Teacher education and L2 certification programmes, like educational institutions, have been slow in providing opportunities to learn about and explore new technologies for language teaching (Lotherington and Jenson, 2011).
- Teacher training programmes do not put enough emphasis on the multimodal nature of communication and on how different modes can be used to make and interpret meanings.

# Facilitating factors in implementing multimodal ELT courses

- Younger generations are well-versed in using technology and a variety of media platforms.
- They are used to ‘consuming’ and creating multimodal content, from social media posts to more complex media texts (vlogs, animations, reels, memes, etc.).
- ‘Younger generations’ also apply to our teachers! Multimodal curricula and programmes, alongside more traditional ones, will function as a motivating factor for younger staff as well as take the pressure off those teachers and learners who are more reluctant to deviate from more “traditional” teaching methods.
- Multimodal pedagogies align very well with task-based pedagogies. The latter are already well-integrated in ELT and can form the basis for an emphasis on multimodal communication.

# Marketing opportunities

- Offering courses that foreground the use of different media can attract those students (by now the majority) who are able and willing to engage with multimedia and multimodal pedagogies.
- Multimodal courses can target those students who aspire to work in (or study for) internet-based industries: developers, game and app designers, content creators of any kind.
- Likewise, multimodal courses can also target those students who aspire to work in (or study for) 'traditional' media industries: video-makers, journalists, creative and publishing professionals.

# Conclusion

- Virtually all communication, regardless of the medium, is multimodal.
- Not addressing this issue in ELT courses results in an artificial contextualization of language teaching and learning.
- Multimodal pedagogies can be integrated in ELT curricula, but some challenges remain: teachers' (and some learners') attitudes; teacher training and professional development; assessment.
- Multimodal pedagogies can offer opportunities for institutions who want to appeal to students who are interested in internet-based professions and more traditional media professions alike.

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THANK YOU!

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