

## **Multimodal approaches to writing: meaning making**

### **Meaning making in ELICOS writing programs: Investigating the value of multimodal approaches**

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#### **Abstract**

Practices in ELICOS programs have not responded the needs of today's international students in a globalising and digitally mediated society. This paper reports on an action research project focused on teaching English in an ELICOS setting in Melbourne, Australia as a response to calls in the literature for change in current ELICOS writing pedagogy that lies in a disjuncture between the global digital forms of communication and traditional academic writing practices. Quotes from students interviewed for the study, as well as samples of their writing, demonstrate both the potential of multimodal writing for the development of their writing abilities and the important place of multiliteracies in the teaching of English in today's globalised world.

***Key words:** multiliteracies, multimodal writing, meaning making, ELICOS*

#### **Introduction**

Stepping outside the long tradition of seeing 'language' as a full means of making meaning, seeing it instead as one means among others, one can gain a 'satellite view' of language. That metaphor recalls 'our' first views of the Earth through photographs from a satellite – that is, from outside the Earth, beyond its atmosphere. That view gave 'us' on Earth a startlingly different perspective; for instance showing with frightening clarity the boundedness, the limits of our planet....The satellite view showed us what we had known and had been able to ignore, in a way: that our planet, our Earth, was one small part of a much bigger whole (Kress, 2013 p.15).

Kress' (1996) metaphor shows the limits of language and opens questions on the predominant view of the possibilities that linguistic form can offer. The semiotic theory of language pioneered by Kress' (1996) views language within a wider communicative view Kress & Leeuwen, 2001) in which "language isn't a big enough receptacle for all the semiotic stuff we felt sure we could pour into it" (Kress, 2013, p. 15). In 1988, Hodge and Kress (1988)

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developed a theory known as ‘social semiotics’ to address this kind of concern. In this theory, all modes of communication are viewed equally important. In a later publication, Kress (2000) suggests that multimodality expresses the complexity and interrelationship of more than one mode of meaning by combining linguistic and non- linguistic modes. Kress, like the New London Group (2000), argue that rigid linguistic conceptualisations of language are too restrictive in today’s diverse cultural and plurilinguistic contexts, where language and language codes regularly interact and overlap. Multiliteracies or multimodality are now seen as other ways language educators can respond to the restrictions of rigid linguistic conceptualisations of language identified by Kress and other sociolinguists. These developments impact on literacy practices in language classrooms and on the development of meaning making among students,

Inspired by Kress’ (1996) ‘satellite view’ of language, this research attempts to step outside the long tradition of teaching writing where meaning is constructed through the assembling of a particular set of semiotic symbols according to pre-existing forms or structures. Rather, this research embraces an approach to writing where ‘language’ is seen as a full means of making meaning, and a multimodal approach to writing in which a linguistic form is seen as one means among others. Using this approach in writing has been demonstrated to show advantages in that it is has been seen to help learners and children to make meaning in writing. Subject to critique in the literature on teaching writing, the ‘product approach’ that emerged in the 1960s (Khansir, 2012) is dominantly implemented by English teachers, syllabus designers and educators in ELICOS settings. This approach is seen by some to be prescriptive in nature and narrowly focused on imitating existing models to produce an accurate final product (Khansir,2012), and thus it imposes extra pressure on ESL learners who commonly consider writing as one of the most difficult skills to acquire (Hasbollah ,2010).

Making meaning in writing and generating ideas is one of the main problems for ESL learners. Noguchi (1991) argued that although sentences offer a form or a means to convey content, the content of the sentence structure can offer no help if writers have few ideas or confused content to convey. Halsted (1975) commented that “the obsession with the final product ... is what ultimately leads to serious writing block” (p. 82). Forty years later, Sommers (2011) is concerned about similar problems when students are writing without concern for the ideas they are writing about. He finds that less skilled writers revise in limited ways; they tend to be preoccupied with vocabulary and grammatical accuracy, and rarely

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modify their ideas. ESL writers pay so much attention to form that the on-going process of meaning making is constantly interrupted. Findings from literature on academic writing reveals that this pressure has been the main concern of scholars over the past decades. The difficulties are usually linked to confidence in getting started, generating the right ideas, expanding the ideas and using the appropriate vocabulary (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012). ESL beginner learners often find writing a challenge as they have to incorporate their understanding of grammar and to use the correct sentence structures to express their ideas in words (Mansor, Shafie, Maesin, Nayan, & Osman, 2011). The literature demonstrates that meaning making using linguistic form is a persistent problem, and in my experience as a teacher of English in ELICOS settings this still holds true. Against this backdrop, this research is a response to calls in the literature for change in current ELICOS writing pedagogy that lies in a disjuncture between the global digital forms of communication and traditional academic writing practices. The research presented in this paper aims to increase the ESL learners' experience in learning English by opening up the opportunities for them to more fully construct meaning using multimodality approaches to writing.

## **Multimodal approaches to writing: Towards meaning making for ESL learners**

In multimodal approaches to writing, meaning is constructed in and through different modes such as speech, writing, gesture, colour, three-dimensional objects and moving pictures. These have the potential to relate to each other differently in different cultural contexts. Kress (2010) explains that the multimodal dimension of his social semiotics theory is about the resources for meaning making and about the meaning potentials of “all signs in all modes as well as their interrelation in any one text”. (p. 59).

A multimodal approach to writing is not new. According to Luke (2003), the rapid change in the concept of meaning-making ‘revolutionized’ pedagogical practices in school education (Luke, 2003). While in some policy settings, discourses associated with literacy standards are driving the way students learn and teachers teach (Sachs, 2003), scholars in the area of multimodal research are arguing that there should not be just one set of standards or skills that constitute the objectives of literacy learning (Ajayi, 2008). Consequently, multimodality continues to become a more significant feature of mediated discourse analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). For some researchers (e.g., Stein, 2008), this increasing interest in the study of multimodal communication has implications for writing pedagogies (Stein, 2008).

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Multimodal writing is starting to become a significant issue which is being addressed in school classroom literacy teaching. Whilst there is a focus on classroom teaching in schools, more and more attention to multimodality in making meaning in academic or higher education writing is also occurring (Archer, 2006). Archer (2006) draws attention to this increased interest in multiliteracies and multimodal writing in higher education, stating

there has tended to be an overemphasis on the teaching and analysis of the mode of writing in ‘academic literacies’ studies, even though changes in communication landscape have engendered an increasing recognition of the different semiotic dimensions of representation. (p. 449)

Despite more and more findings in relation to the potential of using theories of multimodality there is still an overemphasis on monomodal forms of writing in higher education. Archer (2006) refers to this as “logocentricism to the neglect of other modes and their interconnectedness” (p. 451). Advocates for seeing literacy as multiple (multiliteracies), rather than singular (literacy), suggest that this encourages writers and communicators, especially those operating in digitally mediated spaces, to connect with readers and other writers and communicators using multiple modes to construct meaning when communicating information and to establish relationships. In this sense, communication is no longer seen as monomodal. Zhuanglin (2008), argues that any teaching and learning of language and communication must include multimodality. This includes exploring how multimodality may also assist L2 students in their writing, communicating and meaning making.

These new theories of meaning-making are illustrative of a new trend towards inclusion of multimodality into studies of meaning making, literacy and English language teaching, especially L1 English language teaching. Lillis (2012) stresses, however, that research into diverse ways of teaching ESL in schools is growing and she indicates that multimodality is growing in importance. The change is now moving into other areas of education, including tertiary education. Although there appears to be little research in relation to adults in an L2 higher education context, there is research in L1 contexts which shows that using multimodality in writing classrooms has been demonstrated to show advantages. Taylor (2014), for instance, claims it can help child learners to make meaning without being worried by grammatical correctness as well as enabling students to acquire linguistic competence (Archer, 2006). By using different modes to express meaning students are more engaged in learning and the process of meaning making (Mills, 2011; Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010), and show their identity through selecting a range of modes (Ajayi, 2008; Hornberger,

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2007; Vasudevan et al., 2010). Vasudevan, Schultz and Bateman (2010) suggest that by using video, images and other modes of expression with writing, the students in their study began to construct novel or more creative ideas and more richly layered texts. Multimodal writing encourages creativity and exploration of ideas (Ajayi, 2008; Vasudevan et al., 2010), and it can improve students' vocabulary (Bisson, Heuven, Conklin, & Tunney, 2014), which consequently improve meaning making.

Despite the possibilities of meaning making that multimodal writing can offer ESL students, much still needs to be learned about the potential that different and/or multiple modes can offer them through alternative writing pedagogies. Research into multimodality in Higher Education academic literacies has been gaining momentum only in the last 10 years or so. However, there remain complexities and a lack of clarity about exactly what academic literacy means in the work of multiliteracies and multimodality. This results in confusion and disagreements about what is meant by the term 'literacy' or 'academic literacy'. As a teacher of English for twenty years in different teaching contexts in Arab-speaking countries and Australia, this dominant traditional approach to teaching has raised questions for me as a teacher: 'What are the potential challenges for learners are in ELICOS writing classes?' 'How could I help my students to fully make meaning in their writing?' 'How can I assist learners' meaning making through a writing pedagogy that includes multimodal forms of writing?' If the research that is conducted in multimodal writing assists children in making meaning in their writing in schools, it is worth investigating whether and how this might be applied to adult learners in an ELICOS context who also have limited linguistic knowledge but no lack of experiences to write about. What multimodal writing can offer to ESL student in ELICOS setting is what this study aims to explore.

## **ELICOS programs and teaching in Australia: The need for change**

In the early 1990s, there was a shift in federal Australian educational policy to embrace the concept of 'internationalisation' (Liddicoat, Eisenclas, & Trevaskes, 2003). Australian universities are more inclined to profit from international students to raise revenues (Wadhwa & Jha, 2014). Each year, around 300 thousand international students from 191 countries commence study in Australia (Group of Eight Report, 2014). This \$15 billion industry is Australia's fourth largest export, following iron ore, coal and gold (Group of Eight Report, 2014; Commonwealth Department of Industry, 2013). Recent changes in Australian

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government policy to broaden access to universities, especially to international students, have led to the emergence of private university providers within many higher educational institutions (Dooley, 2010) which provide intensive English courses (ELICOS). These centres have been growing in importance given the great increase in numbers of international students studying across the world (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014). The ELICOS ‘industry’, as it is now called, forms a significant part of Australia’s international education sector, and seeks to educate diverse students who come to Australia to study English for various purposes. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs are what ELICOS programs adopt to be in the form of courses for non-native speakers of English with the aim of helping them obtain much of their knowledge about and skills in academic literacy and writing (Coffin, 2003). The EAP courses are mainly based on a communicative approach to language teaching and learning (Ellis, 1982). Though EAP courses encompass different domains and practices (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), they share the same characteristic of being product-oriented when dealing with writing. This is due, as Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) state, to the fact that the knowledge base has been built up around traditional, university-based academic needs. Therefore, teaching writing focuses on the form and final product (Lotherington, 2007), and the main role of teachers is to assist students in their academic courses to perform better in an intensive time-frame by teaching them vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and the four macro skills (Nguyen, 2010). Therefore, it seems that focusing on meaning-making in writing receives limited attention.

Despite of the Australian government policies of addressing the 21st century needs in education, because of the predominant market-based approach to education, it seems there is a debate on what university curricula and research agendas would be, and what universities should be (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014). Doেকে, Parr, and Sawyer (2011) argue that the national curriculum continues to face contradictions when it comes to globalisation and an interconnected world. These developments are considered a burden, and the Australian curriculum for English seen as a paradox of recognising these effects of globalisation and minimising the risk of globalisation. At the formal level of curriculum, the definition of ‘text’ in the current Australian curriculum now includes multimodal texts (Doেকে, Parr & Sawyer, 2011). Multimodality is a frequent theme in literature, and a phenomenon that can no longer be ignored in schools and higher education. For years now, some teachers in schools have started to include multimodal writing in their teaching of literacy and meaning making. Yet,

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multimodality is still not widely integrated into the theories of teaching of academic writing in higher education, and the monomodal ideology still dominates.

### **My research**

This practitioner inquiry study (Marilyn & Lytleb, 2004) documents and critically investigates my attempts, as a teacher researcher in an ELICOS setting in Melbourne, Australia, to improve my practice in the teaching of writing critically through action research. My particular focus is on improving the teaching of writing in ‘Nour Language Centre’ (NLC), using evidence-based research to guide the development of the writing curriculum, the syllabus and classroom practices at NLC.

NLC is a private language centre offering intensive General English (GE) and English for Further Studies (EFS) language courses. Students participating in this study in general level and level 3 EFS. According to the Common European Framework (CEFR) level system, the participants are considered beginners and intermediate. The action research was completed with three classes, an approximate total of 40 international young adult students, who come from different countries such as Asia and the Middle East. The nationality and cultural backgrounds of the students are significant as the focus on this study is on students as writers. The writing tasks (monomodal and multimodal) were given to students in week 2 of the 5-week course.

This research, as part of my degree towards a PhD, aims to increase ESL learners’ experience in learning English by opening up the opportunities for them to more fully understand language, literacy and meaning making using multimodal approaches and resources. Implementing multimodal writing comes from my interest as teacher researcher in changing my classroom pedagogy and the students’ writing environment in order in order to enable my student to be fully engaged in the process of meaning making in writing. The study is set within the critical paradigm of research inquiry that explicitly foregrounds its intention to address an issue where those learners who are already disadvantaged – second language speakers of English in ELICOS programs – are currently further disadvantaged by a system that seems reluctant to utilise widely accepted knowledge that may be so valuable for those learners. To do so, I decided to harness students’ digital skills and engagement with mobile devices and computers to facilitate using different modes of expressing meaning in

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writing tasks. While the primary focus of this action research was student meaning making, I soon found that students' engagement in the process of meaning making extended to other facets of the classroom experience for both my students and me as teacher. I decided to investigate whether I could use technology to engage my students in writing and provide them with full potential of meaning making. This led to the main research question: Can multimodal writing pedagogy in an ELICOS setting assist ESL learners' meaning making?

### Methodology

Underpinned by a critical theory paradigm, the methodology in this research sought to gain a deeper understanding of ESL international students' meaning-making in academic writing. Various methods within the critical theory paradigm were employed. The results generating from the semi -structured interviews and the action research cycles will be the focus of this paper.

The action research was completed in two 5-week cycles over a 4-month period. This has been done with the general level and with EFS level. Each of the two cycles was patterned in a similar way, cycle one is viewed in response to my reflections and student feedback to do some adjustment to Cycle 2 (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Data collection: Action research phases

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### *Sample of students' writing*

In the two cycles of the action research, the participants were asked to compose two brief sample texts (monomodal and multimodal) on the same topic, which can provide the same kind of experience and can provide a basis for investigation about how meaning can be constructed in different modes of writing. In Cycle 1, the participants from general level composed a traditional text about a “memorable event”. The participants only used words as a way to express meanings and ideas. In Cycle 2, the participants from level 3 EFS were asked to write about their “country” as the writing syllabus for this academic level is to write a descriptive paragraph. In cycle 1 and 2, the participants were also asked to write about the same topic using modes such as: colours, fonts, photos, pictures, sounds and symbols to express their meanings and ideas. This has been done in computer room (CALL) where the internet and computers were accessible to the participants. A scaffold session was done to guide the participants to multimodal writing, as it is a new approach to writing in ELICOS. They were made aware that all modes are available for them to use. The participant used Word and Power Point for their multimodal writing. The reason for asking the participants to write in different types of writing is to provide a basis for investigation about how meaning can be constructed in both cases. These pieces of writing formed “rich sources of information” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) which enabled me to understand the perspectives and experiences of the participating students who are exploring multimodal approaches to writing and find out.

### *Semi-structured interview*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two stages: before and after the writing tasks. At some stage of the interview, students' writing was used as guidelines for the interviews questions, with the focus on the difference in making meaning between the monomodal and multimodal writing tasks. The interviews with students helped me learn about how the participants make meaning. Interview data were used to illuminate and elaborate upon the reasons why certain semiotic decisions and choices were made by the learners in constructing their texts, and how this differs from the way they make meaning using traditional ways of writing. The lines of inquiry in the interviews has covered the following three broad question groups:

- difficulties the students face in writing,
- the most important things learners focus on while writing and

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- the making of meaning from two types of writing (monomodal and multimodal texts)

## Findings and Discussions

Data collected from students' interviews revealed that participants' experienced a fear of writing, a reluctance and at times disinterest because they tend to focus more on the accuracy of their writing more than on meaning and idea. Students' multimodal writing demonstrate deep layers of meaning and more sophisticated ideas than those presented in their monomodal writing. Multimodal writing not only assist students' meaning making, but also engage them in writing and in the process of learning. In this section I will report of data generated specifically from the writing of international students' studying English in ELICOS programmes and from interviews conducted during the action research...

### Students' English writing difficulty and apprehension

According to Nik, Hamzah, and Hashollah (2010), writing is a highly demanding process. It requires a wide range of skills, such as accuracy in choosing the right words, and ability to understand grammatical structures as well as being able to organize all this in the development of the ideas so that there is no ambiguity of meaning. This specifically supports Milian and Camps (2005) finding that writing is the main obstacle ESL student's encounter in their academic studies. In pre-writing interviews, the students acknowledged that they have a low level of oral and written English, and they often expressed an apprehension towards writing because of the insecurity resulting from their limited knowledge of English spelling and vocabulary. They are aware that academic writing is mainly about linguistic knowledge, where the attention is very much on the mechanics of writing such as syntax, vocabulary and linguistic knowledge. During their interviews, many of the participants expressed difficulty in writing and meaning making because this requires a wide range of skills, such as accuracy in choosing words. As one student said in his interview:

*"=Writing is so hard, difficult because if I writing subject I don't know some vocabulary and grammar is so difficult. I don't know which grammar is correct, not correct, just write", another student mentioned that he "should focus on grammar...if*

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*I don't focus on grammar something is not perfect.. the writing is not perfect (46, China background)*

This monomodal sense of writing was often expressed by students as 'just write the words'. For this reason, I notice when teaching these students that they focus on spelling of the vocabulary and grammar when they write. The below excerpt of Akiko's writing, a Japanese student studying in general level, reveals grammatical and spelling errors and a limited range of sentence structure and vocabulary, the reason why Akiko considers herself "not a good writer.. just I study grammar because almost I mistake.. I have many mistakes in writing"

When I was eight years old, I had a sick.  
Also it sick was not only havey but I got  
a long time. At that time, I really  
thought my life will be end....  
I was in the hospital almost three month  
and every day, nars took my bread there for  
I'm not afraid it.

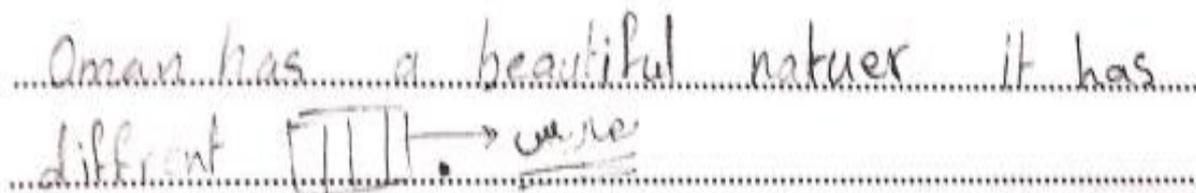
In the below excerpt, Muller, a student from Thailand studying in general level, seemed hesitant over choosing the words or spelling them: 'I am searching about what word I know in my mind but forget the spelling'

I remember that once I have been to  
McLaurie Zoo, it is ~~the~~ one of the funniest ever  
in my mind heart. That day ~~was~~ was sunny and  
good. the sky was blue, the cloud was  
extremely white. I went there with my classmate  
who ~~was~~ ~~over~~ ~~in~~ my are studying here  
with me.. ~~we~~ bought ~~it~~ tickets The first

## Students' construct meaning in monomial writing

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The findings show that meaning is as important to the participants as the accuracy of language. Cherry, a student from Vietnam, said that “*ideas are important because I want to write different from students I want to write something special but I write normal essays because of vocabulary*”. Despite their efforts to present as grammatically accurate and free of error, a piece of writing as possible to meet expectations, the participants’ writing demonstrates a difficulty in constructing meaning through the use of language alone. In fact, it seems that by depending solely on linguistic forms, participants are restricted to the superficial layer of meaning. This is expressed by a student who described his “monomodal writing as “*basic*” and “*simple*” despite what he called his “*wide reading and knowledge about the world*”. The participants mention that they cannot construct their intended meaning. As Akiko suggested “*if I want to say hello or how are you if I don’t know how to say this my emotion will not know*”. As a result, most students mentioned that they are always forced to change their intended meaning to a much more simplistic one which demands less linguistic competence. Whilst some students mentioned that they change their ideas if they do not know the correct word or spelling, some participants decided not to change the idea, even though they do not know how to spell the words. For this reason, they sometimes leave it blank, write it in their native language, or explain the word.



.....Oman has a beautiful nature it has  
different [ ] -> were

In the above example, Mona, an Oman student in level 3 EFS, left a space “*because I don’t know how to spell*”, and an Arabic word was written because the student knows that her intended meaning will be conveyed as I -the teacher- can understand Arabic. All the participants showed a certain degree of difficulty with writing as seen in their limited spelling and use of vocabulary. This apprehension and fear of writing seemed to restrict their ability to make meaning.

### *Students’ Construction of meaning in multimodal writing.*

Once students are encouraged to use multimodal communication a number of improvements are immediately seen. Firstly, the anxiety the participants encounter when engaging in monomodal writing seems to be overcome as they describe their experience in

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writing multimodally as “*interesting*”, “*relaxing*” and “*enjoy*”. Secondly, the sophistication of their communication increases as they also construct different layers of meanings that are not evident in their monomodal writing. Thirdly, complexities of signs, whether linguistic or visual, are also evident in the multimodal writing scripts. These signs align internally with each other. The findings reveal that by combining the visual with the linguistic, learners are given an increased opportunity to make meaning. Bayan, a Saudi student, mentioned that she can only express her intended meaning she knows about the topic, so “*sometimes more vocab, sometimes no, not more vocab... topics easy because more vocab but little vocab difficult*”. In her multimodal writing, she used images when did not know the correct vocabulary:

**TOday I will talk about ‘Eid al Fitr. It is coming after  
Ramadan. Muslims are very people.**

**I am week UP in 6 cloak and I wiring new clothes. I**

**meet with my family. Gave my children**



In the example above, the type of images is an independent feature of the whole; the picture becomes a text in itself. This image can be regarded as ‘lexical’ especially when there is a gap in the producer’s knowledge (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001, p. 113).

Visual images, whether they are used to add meaning to the linguistic form, or to duplicate it, or to present meaning of their own, are tools or semiotic resources, just as relevant as linguistic form, in meaning making. Connection between pictorial meaning and text meaning may be described in terms of the relative contribution of each mode to the overall meaning and purpose of the text. When words and pictures have essentially the same meaning, the meaning is repeated or duplicated. Images can also have an additive: when the picture elaborates the words. Images also have their own meaning which is separate from the words. In this case, the writer leaves out what is visually obvious (Tin, 2011). Sunny, a Chinese student, tried to write about a concert that she attended as a memorable event, and about her favourite singer. The excerpt from her monomodal writing reveals that she misspelled the word ‘concert’, which makes it unclear what she was trying to write about, whereas her multimodal writing seems to make that clear. These pictures repeated the written word. This is a ‘mutual reinforcement of text and image’ (Baetens, 2005, p. 187).

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Furthermore, the picture that represents the singer also adds more information. Consequently, it provides additional meanings to the linguistic form 'singer'. Sunny used this picture because she did not "know how to say she is very beautiful"

singer. She live in Shanghai, so concert in Shanghai.  
She concert started at 6 o'clock in the night. But I  
hope to early meet her, I arrived the concert at  
5 o'clock in the night. More 12000 fans watched the  
concert. She was beautiful the night, and she played  
h-pop music, dance music and lovely music. All audience  
together called her name. It is amazing! The concert  
finished at 11 o'clock in the night. It's good experience.

Concert



Time: 6:00pm-11:00pm  
Audience: 12000  
Feel: Excited

My favorite singer star



NAME: Yitong Li  
She is a singer

Therefore, by using the image, she made the linguistic form more contextualized because the image contains minimum context in itself. In this case, the picture was used as an alternative to writing. In other words, images –as (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006) state, are treated as seriously as linguistic forms. The findings indicate that these participants are able to construct meaning that is very close to their intended meaning

In Cycle 2 of the action research it is seen that each multimodal writing task demonstrates the participants' varying perspectives in writing about their countries. It is through the use of images, the dominant mode used in this study by the participants that learners are able to elaborate their meaning making to reveal aspects of their identities. The

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participants are more confident in their use of vocabulary and are assisted by the use of pictures which they use to contribute to their meaning. The participants see pictures adding meaning to their meaning and providing layers of meaning for what they cannot tell in words. It is also obvious that in the monomodal text, by relying only on language, the participants lose important information. Consequently, they lose the meaning they intended to convey. What meaning is made in these kinds of monomodal text depends on which words are 'available'. Piza, a Turkish student who has higher level of English than the other participants said "I'm a good writer just if I have dictionary". Her multimodal writing reveals more complex ideas than those in her monomodal ones. She said that using pictures is like 'having a dictionary'

pain and heart attack. The doctors found my dad's  
close damar. (i don't know this word in English maybe  
i can write blood way-road) At the same time my  
dad has sugar ill. Diabetic. Actually he didn't use

TWO YEARS AGO MY FATHER WAS A HEART ATTACK. IT WAS THE WORST DAY IN MY LIFE. WHILE HE PASSED IN FRONT OF THE HOSPITAL, HEART ATTACK CAME. →

SOMETIMES HE WAS FEELING A PAIN IN OWN STOMACH BUT THE DOCTOR TOLD US TOO MUCH PEOPLE CONFUSED THIS PAIN BETWEEN STOMACH PAIN AND HEART ATTACK.

THE DOCTORS FOUND MY DAD'S CLOSE → AND THEY CHANGED HIM FOUR VESSELS.

AT THE SIME TIME MY DAD HAS DIABETES.

ACTUALLY HE HAS NEVER USED BUT HE MUST BE CAREFULL ALWAYS.

BEFORE THE OPERATION MY DAD'S SUGAR LEVEL MUST BECAME STANDART LEVEL. THAT WAS VERY HARD. HE DIED TWICE AND HE CAME BACK.

TODAY HE IS VERY HEALTHY 😊 AND I HAVE A ADVICE FOR YOU. DON'T SMOKE NEVER EVER!!!!

**NO SMOKING**

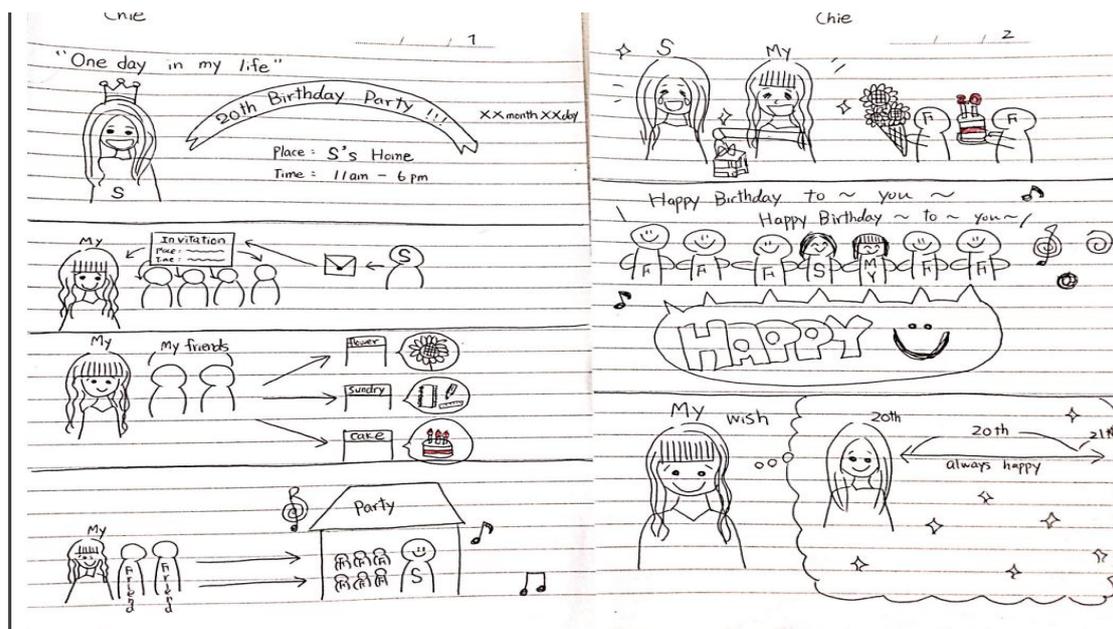
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These images are complex signs of cultural, social and symbolic differences. By doing so, multimodal writing is shown to open up new space for meaning-making, creativity and the potential to produce more complex, layered texts. The findings show that learners are not only able to construct the meaning they intend to create, but also they do so in more sophisticated ways as seen in the deeper layers. Chie, a Chinese student mentioned that if she "couldn't write, I can draw or use a picture.. I'll be free for communication ... free to communicate my ideas". As seen in her writing below, Chie decided to draw in her multimodal writing.

" One day "

Hi, I'm Chie. I'm going to introduce one day in my life. Last weekend, I was go to my friend's birthday party. She is my good friend. She is Chinese. The day is her 20th birthday. Her invited many friend to come her birthday party. I'm also invited from her. The day in the morning, I got up at 7:00 am. And soon, I hang out with my friends to buy presents. The first, we are go to the flower shop and bought some flowers, she very like sunflower. Sunflower have means " I always look you " I think, there is very romantic words on the sunflower. Next, we went to the amenity shop to buy something, the last we went to cake shop bought a big and beautiful birth day cake. When we arrived her home, The party be start. We enjoy eating and drinking. End of the party we were sing a birthday song together to give her. She was very amazing for it. Also, she was very happy and make a pretty smile. I wish her can spend a good time for her 20th years old.

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Consequently, revealing not only facts about their lives and worlds, but also what social relations they have with those worlds and others who live in them. This information certainly does not seem to exist in their monomodal writing. Most interestingly, using images, sounds and videos allows participants to reveal some unique dimensions of their identity and the inherent beliefs they possess. Together the action research demonstrates that given the opportunity to use other kinds of modes to express themselves, participants are able to maximize the ability to make meaning.

In addition to negotiating their linguistic identity when writing academically in English, the participants also negotiate their socio-political identity. This is obvious when dimensions of their characters showed themselves on the surface in multimodal writing. Canagarajah (2011) refers to the concept of identity when discussing the challenges faced by ESL learners writing in English for academic purposes. Using semiotic modes, particularly images, provided a path for the participants to reveal complex social, political and religious meanings. The example below is from Piza's multimodal in Cycle 2, it is obvious that by being more confident about multimodal writing, Piza showed a political stance when she described her country in relation to the previous political era.

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Our capital is Ankara



but Istanbul is the most famous city



Here is Anitkabir. Ataturk's cemetery is there. Ataturk is the founder of Turkey.



### *Piza's Multimodal writing*

Because of the lack of linguistic competence students show their social, political and religious identity, which was not obvious in their monomodal writing. In their multimodal writing, the participants emphasize their national identities by using the flags of their countries and their political and religious views and traditions, which they say that was not possible in their monomodal writing because of “lack of vocabulary”.

## Conclusion

The findings of this action research reveal that linguistic theory based only on purely structured pieces of writing can significantly constrict ESL low level learners' ability to make meaning in their academic writing. Furthermore, it is seen that different modes of communication extend the range of meaning which is made multimodally without anxiety and stress. Given the opportunity to express meaning using other modes of expression, the participants are less anxious about vocabulary and spelling and also show a mature and more expert use of language. Their writings show a wider and more sophisticated range of vocabulary and sentence structures, consequently create more meaning making. In short, it is by using multimodal approaches that participants' meaning becomes visible.

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