

Meaning-Making Construction through Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) in EFL Context

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Abstract. The emergence of multimodality in the digital era has assembled it as having a pivotal role in language learning. Various modes of learning have given impacts to the behaviors of EFL learners in the meaning-making construction of the texts they learn. The present study aims at describing how the Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) modified from Thinking Frames Approach by Newberry & Gilbert (2016) is deployed in EFL learning so that it could contribute to how EFL learners construct meaning of the text by considering ideational and textual meaning construction. There are three stages of MIA employed in meaning-making construction, they are verbal, drawing, and writing stages. The case study was used by having multimodal tasks analysis, field notes of online learning observation, and interview. 10 EFL learners and 1 in-service teacher of secondary school were chosen as the participants. The results showed that (1) in the verbal stage, expression, movement, gesture and any other tools as modal symbols had important role in meaning-making construction both ideational and textual; (2) in the drawing stage, the learners experienced multiple modes to construct meaning of the text, for example from monologue to pictures they designed; (3) in the writing stage, the students connected the previous stage (drawing stage) with the sequence of their writing performance adopting available multimodal resources so that they could write well-structured paragraphs (textual) using correct grammar features to present suitable meaning (ideational). Therefore, through MIA stages, the ideational and textual meaning-making construction of the texts were achieved. It is considered that MIA can be used as alternative approach that assists EFL secondary school learners to meaning-making construction.

Keywords: EFL Context, Meaning Making Construction, Multimodal Instructional Approach.

1 Introduction

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, digital media at present has become more predominant and commonly used among EFL teachers (Jewitt, 2013;

Kustini, Suherdi, Musthafa, 2020). This is also in line with the ability of learners who are called digital natives as they are proficient to absorb different materials at the same time using two or more digital devices or media, for example, mobile phones and computers (Prensky, 2001; Jewitt, 2013). The EFL teaching materials (texts) delivered in online education nowadays are having different modes and media such as videos, pictures or imagery and audios, PowerPoint slides integrating fonts, colors, images, and audio (Peng, 2019). Teachers also use different platforms of online teaching, such as Zoom, Google Meet, learning management systems and any other social media. The use of digital technologies, hence, has increased their capacity for creativity, leadership, innovation, critical skills, multi and inter-disciplinary collaboration, emotional intelligence, collective problem identification and solving skills in a participatory environment (Phillipe, et al., 2020, Chan, Churchill, & Chiu, 2017). Also, the increasing multimedia usage in education and training offers the possibility of presenting content in multiple representations (text, image, video, audio, global media) to accommodate different teaching and training strategies, learning outcomes, assessment methods, and feedback mechanisms. Several learners, including language learners, have shown that they are more comfortable and perform better in a multimodal learning environment that furnishes their principal learning style (Paxton, et al., 2017). Multimodality has turned out to be a noticeable concept in communication and language education research (Canagarajah, 2018; Kress, 2010). It means that the concept represents human communication.

Meanwhile, regarding the teaching challenges, EFL teacher has to bring some usages of technology which has become more advanced to all levels of ages in providing tools and information in the education system which are increasingly multimodal (William, Tang, & Won, 2019). As many learners today can socialize into worlds communication through texts which are varied using digital media, multimodal texts in meaning-making today have different modes to achieve insightful understanding. Given the complexity of the issue, there should be more researches to be conducted to explore how language learners can benefit from multimodal teaching and learning since it relates also to technology which at present gives an impact on education. Multimodal can be presented as the representation or communicative events involving more than one mode (Danielsen, 2016). Thus, Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) framework (which was modified from Thinking Frames Approach proposed by Newberry and Gilbert, 2016) is considered to be applied in this study since it has multiple modes stages (verbal, drawing and writing).

Studies have shown that multimodality and digital technologies give impacts to communication and representation practices using modes in teaching, for example in delivering content and transferring information through voice, gestures, audio, posture and movement (Jewitt, 2013; Papageorgion & Lamas, 2017). The present study informs how MIA can assist the language learners in the EFL context to meaning-making construction of the texts during online learning. Meaning-making describes the process by which people interpret the situation, events, objects, or discourse, in the perspective of the prior experience and knowledge (Zittoun & Brinkmann, 2012). Meanwhile, the term of Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) which has been proposed by Newberry and Gilbert (2016) is an approach related to multimodal learning to assist the language learners in meaning-making of the varied texts used in their learning. The following is the figure of MIA.

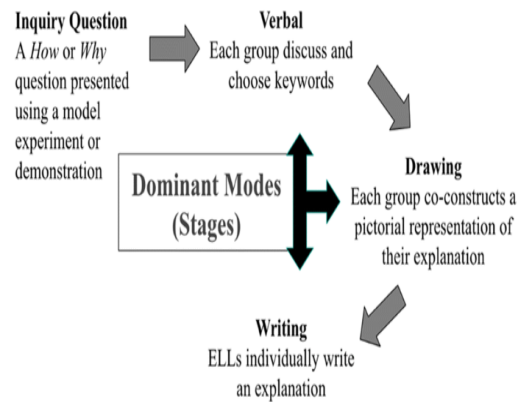


Figure 1. Multimodal Instructional Approach modified from Thinking Frames Approach (Newberry and Gilbert, 2016)

The figure of MIA which is modified from TFA above shows a series of lessons through some occurrences by having various modes of demonstration to explain the events. The informed modes based on the figure are included verbal, drawing and writing. This present study also considers the meaning-making construction of the texts which is vital for EFL learners. Meaning-making is related to the mode (Danielsson, 2016). Mode is defined as a meaning-making material or resource system which is formed and advanced over time in a community (Kress, 2010; Alvarez, 2016). Therefore, this study concerns ideational and textual meanings in analyzing the meaning-making construction of the EFL learners. The ideational meaning relates to presentation meaning regarding the content of the text delivered in the learning. It can be expressed in various writing genres. While, textual meaning analysis, in the most basic sense, means analysis which involves attaching themes to discrete units of texts (can be news media, or paragraphs) (Baxter, 2020). It includes a semiotic system like signs and symbols.

Therefore, informed by the objective, the research question of this present study is: How do the EFL learners make meaning of the texts delivered by the teacher through Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) in the online instructional process? Regarding the research question, this study attempts to investigate how language learners construct the meaning of the texts in online learning and instruction through the Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) which has been modified from the Thinking Frames Approach (TFA) proposed by Newberry and Gilbert (2016). The chosen modified MIA framework in the online instructional process of EFL context can contribute to content comprehension of the EFL learners and specifically assist them in meaning making construction of the various texts.

2 Methodology

The present study was framed in a descriptive qualitative study using a single case study that focuses on studying a person or group of people (Yin, 2003). This method was employed to analyze the classroom instructional process with a single (female) EFL teacher and 10 learners by focusing on how the learners construct meaning-making using multimodality worksheets and tasks in online learning. Therefore, in a case study, a 'case' can be seen as a bounded system that contains an individual, institution, or entity and the site and context in which social action takes place, determined by the scope of the researcher's interest (Hood, 2008 in Heigham & Croker, 2009).

The participants of the study were one female EFL teacher and 10 junior high school students who joined in online teaching and learning (synchronous and asynchronous meetings). The teacher participant was a class teacher who joined the teacher's development program. So, she was assigned to conduct a structured online classroom learning at that time. The synchronous online teaching and learning process was recorded as the data had to be analyzed meticulously. While, for the asynchronous meeting, the results of the task done by the learners were gathered after the teacher had finished the overall instructional process. The data were gathered through some instruments, they were field notes (description of instructional process activities using multimodal instructional approach), open-ended interview with the teacher, and the learners' multimodal tasks. The open-ended interview was done via what's app chats because it was in the pandemic condition, it caused the researchers were unable to conduct face to face interviews with the participants of the study.

MIA was first informed to the teacher as she had to prepare online instructional teaching plans and materials (both synchronous and asynchronous) based on the objective of the lesson on the day of observation to be conducted. The Procedure Text was the text to be discussed in the instructional process at that time. In this case, the learners were given chances of either synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences. There were three stages of deploying MIA in the synchronous online instructional process (verbal, drawing, and writing).

Regarding the data analysis, the recorded online instructional process was analyzed using MIA framework before proceeded to tasks results analysis. Pre-analysis was done to the lesson plan designed by the teacher before the recorded teaching process analysis. In the inquiry lesson stage, a semiotics unit was adopted to analyze the construction of the meaning (Wright, 2011). The Semiotics unit in this study was used to predict the text meaning-making by the students. There were two meta-functions used in the analysis, they were ideational and textual meanings. The ideational meaning would refer to presentation meanings, while the textual meaning refers to organizational meanings. So, the ideational analysis focused on the content matter of the Procedure text given by the teacher. The EFL learners' content comprehension was necessarily being analyzed in this study. Meanwhile, in MIA stages of verbal and writing, the tasks done by the learners were investigated using textual meaning analysis, for example in the writing stage, the meanings were analyzed

through how learners used words and grammar. While, in the drawing stage, the learners' tasks results were analyzed through the use of shapes, colors and lines. In addition, all the analyses were done by the modes of communication used in the online instructional process.

3 Findings and Discussion

In presenting the findings and discussion of this present study, it is necessary to portray the result of all data analysis to answer the research question: *How do the EFL learners make meaning of the texts delivered by the teacher through the Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) in online teaching and learning?* Therefore, the findings comprise of some discussions based on the MIA stages and meaning-making analysis employed in the online EFL instructional process, they are verbal, drawing and writing stages using multiple modes (as modified from Newberry & Gilbert, 2016). By reporting the analysis results on the multimodal tasks that had been done by the learners, and interview results. However, the inquiry lesson process was reported as the initial finding.

1.1. The Inquiry lesson Process

The first data analysis was related to the inquiry lesson process which related to the verbal stage because during this process there were experiencing stage and language learning opportunities using varied modes (Wright, 2011; Yang, 2018; William, *et.al*, 2019). The EFL learners were asked to give the interpretation of the concept from pictures and video of the *Procedure text*. In this case, the learners gave verbal response mode. The inquiry lesson was administered by the situation of the teacher who provided pictures and instruction in the mode of exercises contain words and pictures with the title "Melon Squash". The following is the figure of multimodal text prepared by the teacher.

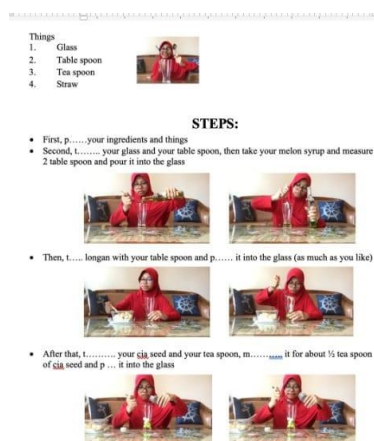


Figure 2 . Multimodal material of *Procedure text* designed by the EFL teacher

The above figure illustrates the multimodal text which was applied in the inquiry lesson by the teacher. In the inquiry lesson stage, learners try to make meaning through

various modes (Wright, 2011; William, *et.al*, 2019). In this case, the EFL learners were allowed to give verbal response mode to comprehend the text from the video (audio visual mode). However, it was found that the questions related to the multimodal text provided above had a lack of critical inquiry since the teacher-designed closed- questions which meant the students would give verbal responses by completing the missing letters from the available words written in the worksheet, for example:

(First, p... your ingredients and things"; Second, t... your glass and your tablespoon, then take your melon syrup and measure 2 tablespoons and pour it into the glass")

The questions above seemed to bound the learners' responses. However, from the analysis results of observation using field notes, the teacher also provided video downloaded from online materials via You-Tube. The communication modes employed by the teacher were respectable since she stipulated the multimodal text using audio-video, pictures and gestures. Some responses from the learners were also proper in comprehending the text. Thus, it shows how the learners as participants in this study participated in the multimodal discourse regarding language comprehension and online learning processes.

During the inquiry episode, the learners absorbed the vocabulary stock regarding the procedure text and comprehended the context of the text using audio visual modes. This is related to what William, *et.al* (2019) assert that by having inquiry lesson, learners have more experiences since authentic materials are provided and learners incorporate student-centered meaning making. Subsequently, in this stage, the teacher provided a verbal stage task. The learners were grouped and asked to discuss some action verbs related to the text given, later they were asked to perform the verbal process or monologue of procedure text. This first stage was necessary for the learners as they had an initial concept of comprehending the multimodal text and

1.2. Analysis Results of the Verbal Stage

Based on the results of the verbal task done by the learners, it showed that when they performed a monologue to make their verbal mode was more accurate, they used another mode like gestures to balance the speed in performing the monologue. It can be inferred from the results of a spoken analysis that the ideational meaning could be viewed from a discourse analysis of text content, and the textual meaning can be shown from the way the learner's performance related to a monologue of procedure text. They showed the proper capable manner in conveying textual meaning since they were able to create structured texts and express their ideas in communication and performing monologues using well-organized sentences. The result shows that using multimodal learning environment which used different modes can symbolize knowledge in verbal stage (Moreno & Meyer, 2007). Meanwhile, the verbal task of performing a monologue of procedure text individually was instructed to be recorded by the learner as the extended assignment. In the verbal task stage activities, expression, movement, gesture and any other tools all belong to modal symbols (Yang, 2018). Those modal symbols have important role in meaning-making construction. Thus, the verbal stage had promoted the

EFL learners to meaning-making construction of the texts in this study. Further, this present study also reported the extended tasks done by the learners.

1.3. Analysis Results of the Drawing Stage

The next discussion is related to the drawing stage mode of comprehending the *procedure* text. The drawing mode was applied based on MIA stages referred to the way the learners had the more detailed vocabulary and sentence meaning to get more suitable ideational and textual meaning through pictures they created. Yeo and Nielsen (2020) have asserted that drawing of a solid in learning science text can be used to signify the concept. Meanwhile, this present study used drawing stage to represent the concept comprehension of the procedure text. Since the EFL learners in this study were junior school pupils, they were enthusiastic in drawing mode. This was stated by the teacher and could be viewed from the meeting observation. The following is the example of drawing mode in comprehending the procedure text created by the EFL learners.

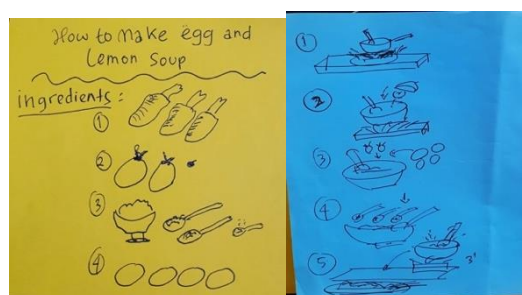


Figure 3. The Drawing mode was designed by EFL learners in the meaning-making of *Procedure text*.

The above drawing mode of *procedure* text meaning making construction was one of the examples designed by EFL learners from the various titles provided by the teacher. It can be seen that EFL learners had tried to express ideas in well-structured pictures of *how to make egg and lemon soup*. The process of drawing mode was challenging for the EFL learners since they had to construct drawing from what their friends in the group express ideas verbally based on the instruction given in the worksheet. So, there were modified modes exactly during this stage. Multiple modes to be used will assist learners to meaning making of the text concept (William, *et.al*, 2019; Alvarez, 2016). Thus, the learners tried to connect the ideas from the drawing stage results to their verbal stage performance. In this stage, they experienced multiple modes to construct meaning. The teacher's role was more to be a facilitator at that time in online learning. The time of drawing mode stage included synchronous and asynchronous activities. The synchronous one was used to give detailed instructions of doing the multimodal task and the learners discussed how to finish their task. Then, the asynchronous was applied when the learners did the drawing based on the discussion with their friends in the group in synchronous activity. This stage was considered crucial in online learning because meaning-making construction was fulfilled through multiple modes, not only from a written text but also from pictures (Alvarez, 2016, Peng, 2019, Phillippe, 2020). In addition, the important point in this stage was also could be seen from the learners' ability in conveying ideas through different modes at the same time as online

teaching and learning process. Regarding the EFL teacher's perspective from the interview results, she said that the more challenging the variety of modes experienced by the learners, the more comprehensive meanings to be made by the students in this study.

1.4. Analysis Results of the Writing Stage

The third stage of MIA application in the online EFL teaching and learning process was the writing stage. Multimodality contributes to more composition practice of constructing texts in language learning since writing is being displaced by image as the central mode of representation (Kress, 2010; Serafini, 2015). This stage was the one that was perplexing for the teacher herself. The teacher had to stimulate the learners to produce better writing of *procedure* text to fulfil the lesson objective. In this writing stage, the task was completed in asynchronous activity since the EFL learners needed to contemplate the ideas and to memorize the stock of grammar and lexical attributes in their writing. The learners were given opportunity to meaning-making construction by connecting verbal and drawing stages to their writing stage activity. However, based on the evaluation done by the teacher, the EFL learners were better at expressing and organizing ideas using appropriate vocabulary and well-structured sentences. The thematic development showed that the EFL learners in this study were able to write the logical sequence of events. They could organize messages to make sense in context. This is shown that multimodal could engage language learners with audio visual text using verbal and images to provide text comprehension (Kim, *et.al*, 2020). The data analysis showed that almost all students in this study had written correct conjunctions related to a sequence of events, such as *first, second, third, next, after that, and finally*. Some action verbs that they wrote were *stir, cut into, chop, slice*, etc. Some adverbs were also written in some *Procedure* texts, for example *slowly* and *carefully*, then adverb of time like *in five minutes, few seconds*, etc. So, the EFL learners' writing ability related to chronological events of *procedure* text in the writing stage of MIA application was considered respectable after the learners followed the stage 1 and 2 (verbal and drawing).

1.5. Interpretation of the Meaning-Making Construction through MIA stages

From all the stages of MIA that were applied in the online instructional process, meaning-making construction of the texts using multiple modes shows that the ideational meaning construction can be represented continuously in each stage of learning (William, *et.al*, 2019). In the stage of drawing, it portrayed the EFL learners' context comprehension of multimodal *procedure* texts. Their drawing represented images and participants. Meanwhile, in the verbal stage, when the EFL learners tried to perform monologue tasks from the teacher, they constructed meaning-making from their comprehension of the text content. They tried to convey meaning that they already constructed through the monologue they performed. It was considered as broaden the meaning they constructed (Yang, 2018). Then, in the stage of writing, it is seen that they tried to create texts from what ideas they had and wanted to share with the others in their classroom. The meaning-making construction of ideational meaning message conveying was based on the context through written mode. Regarding the textual meaning-making construction, by having the stages of MIA (verbal, drawing, and writing), the EFL learners in this study had suitable practices in meaning-making construction as multimodal materials delivered by the teacher were capable to stimulate them to produce well-structured sentences in paragraphs. Thus, meaning making construction is also be called as the result of natural influence and learning environment created in learner's surrounding (Mahn,

2016), in this case the study used MIA in creating the learning environment. Also, the facts show that the learners produced *procedure* texts with correct various conjunctions, adverbs, and action verbs using the present tense. Therefore, meaning-making construction can be gained appropriately when Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) is employed in the online instructional process since it enriches learner's comprehension of the texts given in various modes.

4 Conclusions

Since technological usage nowadays has been important in education for all levels, the term multimodal is considered to be recognized and well comprehended by EFL teachers and learners. The reasons why multimodality is essential are first, it can assist teachers to gain better learners' comprehension of the text content and sentence development because the multimodal perspective draws on the element related to the semiotic system like signs and symbols using multiple modes in learning; second, it promotes learners to be aware of meaning-making construction of the texts they learn through multiple modes (Alvarez, 2016). Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) is introduced and tried to be applied in this study to solve the discrepancies of EFL teacher's dilemma when facing with the learner's text comprehension, and to assist the learners to meaning-making construction.

In summary, each stage of MIA that was applied has an essential role in assisting the EFL learners to have meaning-making construction. Started with the inquiry stage as the initial activity of the teacher and learners. It provided language opportunity to the learners by exploiting their prior knowledge and experiences to give respond to the multimodal materials delivered by the teacher. In the next stage, which was the verbal stage, the learners could elaborate the keywords given to them related to the procedure texts as the materials in this study. It generated the learners' awareness of meaning construction through multimodal texts (Kress, 2010; Alvarez, 2016; William, et.al, 2019). Next, in the drawing stage, it had a role to allow learners to express and share ideas through the mode of pictures which were related to procedure text, and it was challenging at that time. The third stage was writing, it provided language learners to construct meaning-making by connecting what they had done in the verbal stage by using the multimodal resources as designed and delivered by the teacher (Yang, 2018). Therefore, Multimodal Instructional Approach (MIA) is considered to be employed in language learning in the EFL context to assist the learners to have meaning-making construction of the texts they are learning.

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