

## Types of Multimodal Syntactic Constructions in Modern English Mass Media Texts

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**Abstract.** This article deals with sentences of a new type which are referred to as multimodal. On the basis of a corpus of multimodal texts a number of syntactic constructions have been singled out, some of which are homogeneous and others of which are heterogeneous. In this paper, detailed study has been devoted to the latter group. It includes several types of constructions such as multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal modus; multimodal syntactic constructions based on a non-verbal modus; multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal modus using special effects that can transform semantics; and multimodal syntactic constructions based on several non-verbal modules (without any verbal component). These types have in turn been subdivided further. The constructions referred to above have been described and some of the subtypes have been demonstrated on the basis of the multimodal constructions which have been identified.

**Keywords:** *multimodal, syntactic constructions, non-verbal means, heterogeneous, and homogeneous.*

Multimodality is a topic which is emerging more and more in modern linguistic schools. It is attracting the attention of scholars from different fields as it opens a number of new possibilities in various research areas. One of the problems which is of special interest for linguists involves the resources which can be used in the process of communicative interaction and the ways in which they can be combined for conveying thoughts. Non-verbal means are studied in the context of several related disciplines: visual communication, visual linguistics, multimodal linguistics, multimodal communication, social semiotics, cognitive semiotics, graphic linguistics, paralinguistics, text linguistics, computer paralinguistics, cognitive semiotics, media linguistics, and Internet linguistics. Susan B. Barnes [1], John A. Bateman [2], David Crystal [3], Norman Fairclough [4], Carey Jewitt [5], Gunter Kress [6], Theo van Leeuwen [7], and Kay O'Halloran [8], are key figures who have contributed to the development of the spheres mentioned above. However, many issues have not yet been resolved and require additional attention and research from linguistics scholars.

The emergence of multimodal forms of expression is contributing to a gradual expansion of the spectrum of problems examined within the field of linguistic studies, and a reorientation of traditional paradigms. These days more and more scholars are seeking to study non-verbal means which initially appeared to be non-linguistic; now it is becoming obvious that these apparently non-linguistic means can actually make a significant contribution to the semantic content created for dissemination using modern methods of communication. Most individuals feel impelled to search for optimal means of expressing themselves. In a sense, this search is now being facilitated by the tools available thanks to the information revolution and high-level technologies which make it possible to turn a dream into a reality and to instantly accomplish things that were previously beyond the limits of human imagination. To a certain extent, this involves both the oral and the written forms of the language, which are in the process of undergoing significant changes. There is evidently a linkage with the graphic tools which provide a 'shell' for many thoughts and ideas. Normal English graphic structures appear to be transformed in ways that seem unusual, but which are gradually becoming devices for influencing the recipient; these are capable of performing a number of functions.

The syntactic structures which we analysed include both verbal and non-verbal means. There is quite a large number of them, but sometimes they do not have the manipulative power which paralingual components have, such as colour, images and additional special effects, including variation involving font style and size, colour variation, and text positioning, which are integral components of advertising, whether in print or online periodicals.

In the classical sense, a sentence is a synthesis or combination of verbal means, the use of punctuation marks being a separate category of semiotic resources. If considered necessary, the use of additional symbols and numbers is not excluded. However, we disagree with this conception, and we intend to demonstrate the opposite, based on source material from English language media discourse, that a syntactic construction is a sequence of verbal means only. It becomes evident that paralingual components can perform alternate syntactic roles along with verbal ones. Their capabilities are striking, and the combination of different modes in one advertisement raises communication to a completely different level. Non-verbal means open up new perspectives in communication. Their spectrum is quite wide and can hardly be precisely fixed; this also applies to the number of variants of possible connectivity.

In modern linguistic schools, syntactic constructions that are increasingly appearing in English-language mass-media discourse require completely new approaches. In this regard, they absolutely do not fit into the traditional interpretation of syntax as a separate section of linguistics, the focus of which is the grammatical structure of phrases and sentences built up by the association of at least two words that conform to established norms and rules, taking into account semantic criteria, spelling, punctuation, and stylistics.

Analysis shows that under present-day circumstances, the monomodal syntax can be opposed to the multimodal, which in modern linguistic schools is completely unexplored; this has a bearing on relevance of the problem that has been chosen. The material that has been gathered points to the need for in-depth study of multimodal syntax, which has not been dealt with either in domestic or in foreign research papers. Unlike monomodal syntax, which is based on verbal means and punctuation marks, multimodal syntax is formed through the combination of verbal resources with intensive involvement of nonverbal components of varying structures

or forms, quantitative composition, appearance, and communicative and pragmatic orientation.

The components of the multimodal syntax include an extensive number of resources. In our research they have been divided into a number of groups and subgroups:

- segmentation;
- supplementary graphic effects;
- font and colour;
- non-pictorial and non-photographic graphic elements;
- iconic elements ((images);
- infographics.

The group which is termed “**Segmentation**” comprises the positioning of text on the page, line spacing, page orientation, margins, text width, text positioning/orientation (vertical, horizontal, diagonal, situational (arbitrary)). Another group, “**Supplementary graphic effects**”, includes correction-oriented devices such as *strikeout text* (for letters, words or sentences), underlining, insertions of various elements (whether alphabetical or non-alphabetical) within a word, or the non-standard juxtaposition of words without intermediate spacing. The group termed “**Font and colour**” includes italicization, capitalization, boldface accentuation (partial or full), highlighting, and unusual patterns of writing words by manipulating fonts. In the group “**Non-pictorial and non-photographic graphic elements**” we include punctuation marks (full stops/periods, commas, semicolons, exclamation marks, question marks, colons, dashes, single and double quotation marks, round brackets (parentheses) and square brackets, double dashes, apostrophes, hyphens), diacritical marks (*acute accents*, *grave accents*, *circumflexes*, *diaereses*, *tittles*, *macrons*, *breves*, *cedillas*, and *tildes*), typographical and subsidiary signs which include other elements even of an alphabetical nature; figures (numbers), which may be interspersed with letters, mathematical symbols and various formulas (which may also be based on letters in the English alphabet). The combination of the semiotic resources which are fall within the various groups enumerated above can form mixed abbreviations (of a verbal and non-verbal nature at the same time). The one which is termed “**Iconic elements (images)**” includes pictures of varying natures (still lifes, landscapes, paintings, drawings created with in pencil or with paints, or produced using computer software); cartoons, comics and other non-photographic illustrations; pictograms (iconic, abstract, logotypic) logotypes or emblems, maps, photos, and smileys. “**Infographics**” comprises graphs (bar graphs, line graphs, pie graphs and scatter plots), and tables.

All the devices which have been enumerated above and which are included in the groups referred to can be used in the formation of multimodal syntactic constructions. One analysis that was carried out shows that multimodal syntactic constructions can be divided into two types, multimodal homogeneous and multimodal heterogeneous. Multimodal homogeneous constructions consist of verbal means and punctuation marks or only non-verbal means which belong to a single system. Heterogeneous syntactic constructions are based on various sign systems. They can be composed of both verbal and non-verbal means at the same time, or only non-verbal means which belong to at least two or more sign systems.

Heterogeneous constructions can be divided into four groups:

- multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal modus;

• multimodal syntactic constructions based on a non-verbal modus;

- multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal modus using special effects that can transform semantics;
- multimodal syntactic constructions based on several non-verbal modules (without any verbal component).

The group which is called “**Multimodal syntactic constructions based a on a verbal modus**” has been divided into seven types:

- verbal means and images;
- verbal signs and mathematical symbols;
- verbal means and punctuation marks;
- verbal means, images and decorative elements;
- verbal means, punctuation marks, and font variations;
- verbal means, numbers, and font variations;
- verbal means, numbers, punctuation marks, and font variations.

The second one “**Multimodal syntactic constructions based on a non-verbal modus**” can be subdivided into four types:

- images, verbal means and mathematical symbols;
- images, verbal means, pictograms and other modes;
- images, verbal means, photographs and mathematical symbols;
- images, verbal means and mathematical symbols and other non-verbal modes.

The third group “**Multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal modus using special effects that can transform semantics**” comprises the following types:

- verbal means plus *strikeout structures*
- verbal means plus underlining;
- verbal means involving the horizontal reversal of a word’s image;
- verbal means plus dashes;
- verbal means (with font variations);
- verbal means plus arrows;
- verbal means plus framing.

The fourth group “**Multimodal syntactic constructions based on several non-verbal modules (without any verbal component)**” includes four types:

- images, mathematical signs and punctuation marks;
- images and punctuation marks;
- images and mathematical signs;
- images of various types

The peculiarities of some of these constructions are illustrated below. The use of additional special effects (underlining, *strikeout text*, and the horizontal reversal of a word’s image) which are used in multimodal sentences is a technique of focusing the attention of the reader on the basic message, even if overwhelmed by the mass of information and unable to differentiate items of primary and secondary importance.

The techniques we have described cannot be referred to as an integral part of English-language graphics. The technique of underlining (as in figures 1 and 2), the horizontal reversal of a word’s image (figure 3) is not typical in printed mass media texts, even though they may be observed occasionally. In view of this, we understand that in a sense the overall range of graphic devices available is being transformed, introducing the prospect of much greater diversity in the presentation of information. These devices, used alone or in tandem with other techniques, arrest the attention of readers to a greater degree and offer the possibility of prompting

them to consider the reasons behind this presentation of the material, and its semantic content.

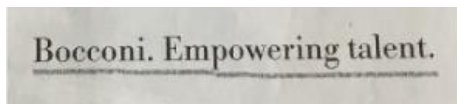


Figure 1 [9]

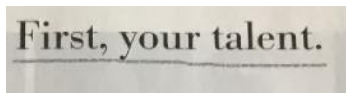


Figure 2 [9]



Figure 3 [9]

The following figure belongs to the group "Multimodal syntactic constructions based on the verbal mode using special effects capable of transforming semantics" (figure 4, below). On it, apart from the square, no other elements of a nonverbal nature are used. Part of the sentence is framed, with the exception of the subject. This provides a basis for concluding that the functional purpose of this non-verbal resource is to attract the attention of the recipient to the part of the sentence that the producer considers to be the most important. In our opinion, the subject in this incident is no less important than the other part of the sentence "knows no borders". If you do not take into account the subject which was placed outside the framed part of the sentence, then it is entirely unclear what it is that knows no boundaries. Instead of Ambition, you could substitute any other subject, such as John, leadership, or respect. Consequently, frame technology is one of the possible mechanisms for focusing attention—one which is not always effective, since the delimitation of the subject in the analyzed case complicates understanding and potentially leads to multiple possibilities for reading and interpreting the message; in this sense, it becomes polysemantic.

Figure 5 contains a syntactic construct that is constructed using verbalizers, numbers, and an exclamation mark. As we have already mentioned, using numbers is a common pattern for replacing words or portions of words. An example of this is *Chat 4 less!*. In this example, the figure '4' is used in place of the preposition "for". It successfully performs the functions assigned to it, and can be easily read and perceived by recipients. We consider such tactics to be justified and appropriate. Constructions of this type are some of the simplest in terms of representation and perception.



Figure 4 [10]



Figure 5 [10]



Figure 6 [10]

In contrast to Figure 5, Figure 6 at first glance seems to direct the attention of readers to the beginning or the end of the sentence. However, this is an erroneous conclusion. When we examine the two images, we realize that the recipients will not have to invent anything, since the beginning of the sentence is placed on a music record. There is a very clever integration here of the abstract meaning, involving the record (background) of the company, and the image of an object which happens to be referred to as a 'record', in a physical and utterly different meaning. The modern MP3 player points to the future, in contrast with the outdated medium displayed on the left. The meaning of this definition can only be understood when we can observe the combination of text and image. Otherwise, it would have been necessary to provide the reader with both the beginning and the ending of the sentence. As a result, a multimodal sentence of this kind might be interpreted in a large variety of different ways.

We draw attention to illustrative components that are semantically consistent with their verbal counterparts. They create a kind of contrast between the present and the past. One aspect of this advertisement is that it suggests a contrast between possibilities of the past and of the present. The record suggests outdated patterns, whereas the MP3 player is illustrative of the evolution in the world of technology, and presents present-day capabilities. Another aspect, when we consider the complete sentence which is being analysed, is the discrepancy between the graphic antonymy and its verbal counterparts. The verbal sentence "Our record says much about our past, but more about the future." focuses more on the past, connected with remembering, than with the future. Other elements within the advertisement make it possible to understand that the financial centre is proud of its many years of history and believes that a good foundation is the basis of success: without the past there can be no future.

As we have already seen, there are numerous possibilities for forming and presenting texts and sentences. There are no elements which cannot be used in their formation. The reasons for using them are varied but the most common constructions are heterogeneous; this category has been subdivided into four groups: multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal modus; multimodal syntactic constructions based on a non-verbal modus; multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal modus using special effects that can transform semantics; multimodal syntactic constructions based on several non-verbal modules (without any verbal component).

Our analysis shows that for a long time, non-verbal graphical units constituted the only means of exchanging information. They have evolved significantly and now in the 21st century have acquired completely new features and functions, which have led to the necessity of considering non-traditional issues. Not least, the technology is developing at

ultrahigh speed and is contributing to significant changes in written expression, greatly increasing the range of communicative means. The volume of the non-verbal graphic components which function in written (printed) messages is quite massive; this points toward the need for a thorough analysis of the linguistic areas of knowledge whose objects have been

analyzed (graphical linguistics, paralinguistics, visual linguistics, linguistics text, and multimodal linguistics). This approach opens up new avenues for the development of linguistics and impels researchers to deal with issues that correspond to the preferences and needs of modern communicants.

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