Multimodal Discourse Analysis on *Vivarium*

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Abstract

The aim of this research article is to illustrate the use of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) on *Vivarium* (2019) directed by Lorcan Finnegan. Multimodal discourse was an expanded work of Halliday's theory *Systemic Functional Linguistic* (1961). Later on, it was analyzed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in the 1990 and the early 2000s. It upholds the notion that meaning and ideas can be understood by various modes such as gestures, color, spatial elements, structure, background and atmosphere rather than language alone. It is a qualitative research work. The researcher has analyzed some particular scenes of the movie from the perspective of multimodal discourse. Two protagonists in the movie, Gemma and Tom begin to live a meaningless and haunted life in suburban community named Yonder. There is no way out. The researcher has specifically examined the framework of the movie, designs and all these various modes mentioned above in order to convey the central meaning that is existential entrapment and forced imposed rules. Multimodal discourse promotes rich practice of deducing meanings out of these different modes to enhance the creative, critical and logical evaluation of the movie.

Keywords: Existential entrapment, gestures, multimodal discourse, modes, spatial elements

Introduction

Background of the Study

Language is regarded as one of the most crucial means of communication. Whenever an idea, thought or any message is about to conveyed, words in language play a central role in delivering the essence of conversation. Mostly words are given primary importance in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Whether it is a discourse, expression of opinions, or exchanging ideas, words hold a dominant position in all these categories. When a reader reads a book, listens to a conversation or writing anything, he or she always take the support of words. People use words in language in order to facilitate communication. So, overall language is dominant in order to understand perceptions, ideas, themes and discourse.

A new way of exploring and deducing the meaning of concepts, ideas and thoughts

have just been postulated. It is called multimodal discourse analysis. It is the expansion of Michael Halliday's theory *Systemic Functional Linguistic* (1961) in his famous work Language *as Social Semiotic* in 1978. Later on, it was studied and analyzed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in the 1990 and the early 2000s. Multimodal discourse refers to the idea that meaning is made and derived by using multiple modes of discourse such as sounds, images, gestures, music, background setting, color and atmosphere. These modes collectively combine to convey the desired meaning.

This article aims to the utilization of multimodal discourse on the movie *Vivarium* (2019) directed by Lorcan Finnegan. There are two important characters Tom and Gemma. The researcher aims to analyze how this movie depicts different shades of meaning through images, background, atmosphere, setting, color and the characters. It conveys a very different and weird message by using multiple modes of discourse.

Machin (2007) and Adami (2017) share their opinion about multimodality by saying that it has totally incorporated in advertisement, social media and the digital world. All of these things have been designed to have a great impact on emotions, feelings, perceptions and mindset of people. All linguists aim to use this theory in order to share their viewpoints so that the audience or the spectators can easily detect the meaning with the help of these multimodal modes of communication.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that readers will get to know that there are different methods of expressing opinions, feelings, emotions and imaginations. Communication can be understood by using different modes like sounds, surrounding, background, gestures, music and images. A movie, novel, drama, poetry and any other literary works can best be described and understood by using these multimodal modes of communication. This is completely a different type of learning. It is very much expected that it will enhance students' enhancement, comprehension, creativity and accessibility to the learning environment. Moreover, students can understand every complex topic more easily, interestingly and dynamically.

According to Theo van Leeuwen (2015), multimodality is totally different from conventional method of learning and teaching anything. Apart from being focused on

the language, students can understand the key aspects such as the setting, background, cultural era, societal expectations and the atmosphere. This method can entice all the students easily because it can help them to enhance their level of creativity.

By observing all these elements such as images, mood, atmosphere, setting, music, surroundings and gestures, students can effectively understand this point that only language is not the source or medium of communication but these certain modes can be applicable in order to express feelings, emotions, imaginations and most importantly the concepts, ideas and the message that the author wants to convey.

Statement of the Problem

The statement of the problem is that whether this theory can really help students in order to understand the themes, concepts and ideas of literary works as well as movies. Vivarium (2019) directed by Lorcan Finnegan offers a complex theme of artificiality, entrapment and disturbed lifestyle with no one around. This article holds the opinion how this movie can be analyzed and explored by Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and its various elements such as images, gestures, music, setting, background and symbols. Whether these various modes are combined to deduce different meanings or enhance the analysis of complex literary works as well as cinematic investigation.

Research Questions

1. What is multimodal discourse analysis?
2. How can this theory help the students better understand literary works?
3. What is the role of multimodal discourse in *Vivarium*?

Research Objectives

1. to understand the concept of multimodal discourse analysis
2. to identify the role of multimodal discourse analysis in helping students better understand literary works.
3. to implement the use of multimodal discourse analysis in *Vivarium*

Organization

The entire study has been carried out in five chapters. Chapter one is the Introduction, it further contains the background, significance, research questions, research objectives and statement of the problem. Chapter two is the Literature Review, it carries the opinions and reviews of scholars, critics, researchers and different authors

on the relevant literature. Chapter three is the research methodology. It carries the method of data collection, limitations of the study and the framework. Chapter four is the analysis. This chapter analyzes the topic in a detailed manner. Chapter five is the conclusion. It concludes the entire study and further gives recommendations ahead.

Literature Review

This chapter carries the reviews of relevant literature regarding multimodal discourse analysis and its implication on a movie Vivarium. It covers the standpoints and opinions of different scholars, critics and researchers.

A critic as well as researcher, McIntyre (2008) says that multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is very crucial in order to analyze thematic expressions. By integrating this theory on different movies, characters can best be analyzed and studied.

Cheng and Liu (2014) explore the use of multimodal discourse analysis on a movie *life of Pi* to analyze the relationship between Pi and the tiger. By delving deep into the functional grammar, both of them tell these different communicative resources like dialogues, background, setting, visual representation, and sound offers a profound insight in helping to explore the relationship between the characters and the emotional impact it had on the viewers.

Zhang and Liu (2019) conducted multimodal discourse analysis on *Mulan* (2020). By the use of camera movement, sound track, costumes, dialogues, setting, background and music, this movie conveyed a sound message about heroism and valor. Visual effects were amazing and the readers were impressed as well as entertained by watching it.

Azizah (2021) implemented a multimodal analysis on *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*. It focuses on the representation of black people and their identity. By exploring and studying verbal and visual elements, the study shows how this cinematic work communicates and delivers themes of race and heroism, using MDA's utility in unfolding complex social narratives and stories in media.

Firmansyah and Julia (2021) examined the Korean historical drama *Dong Yi*, focusing on how music, language, images, movement and sound unite to convey complex stories. Their study underscores the cultural importance of multimodal elements and their starring role in storytelling.

Linh (2021) implemented a multimodal discourse analysis of fifteen top ranking American romantic comedies, utilizing Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar framework. The study shows how semiological elements such as color, imagery, structure, background and composition combine to deliver genre-definite and particular stories that tempt audiences. Linh determines different patterns in the use of images that not only attract viewers but also disclose the comedic and thematic themes integral to the genre.

Mekheimar (2021) examined the Egyptian film *Ahl El Kemma* (*Cream of the Crop*) to demonstrate how multimodal elements depicts and analyze social justice and issues. The study highlights the interaction between visual imagery, sound and dialogues in expressing political messages, exhibiting MDA's efficacy in political film analysis.

An overarching multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) of *Joker* (2019) by Taymour, Sarwat, and Sedde (2024) further peep into how the film shows Arthur Fleck's psychological dive and isolation through various cinematic patterns and techniques. Utilizing Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework, the study delves into how non-verbal facts such as angles of camera, framing, and gaze convey the protagonist's internal disruption, sufferings and hostility as well as alienation from society.

A recent study shows female representations in Filipino film posters that is available on Netflix from 2010 to 2023. It employs Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SFL-MDA) as a theoretical framework. The researchers have used this theory to determine how visual elements such as posture, gaze, color, pattern, background details, setting and composition combine to the construction of femininity. By displaying soft pink flowers and more floral designs, women have been shown as submissive and romantic to their male counterparts.

In the recent study of 2024, Wildfeuer and his partners used Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to study how facial expressions in a movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) help tell its complex multiverse story. The entire story is told in complex patterns by interpreting gestures, body movement and facial expression, emotions and analyzing the lighting, camera angles and editing. All these patterns and gestures are combined to create a literary work that is another way of

producing something without being dependent solely on words and their meanings.

Research Methodology

Method of Data Collection

The researcher has applied Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) on Vivarium (2019 directed by Lorcan Finnegan. Following methods have been followed for the collection of data:

➢ The researcher has watched this movie for three times in order to get the background knowledge, theme, purpose, form and mood.

➢ The researcher has read this theory thoroughly in order to clear all its concepts.

Method of Data Analysis

Following steps have been followed for the analysis of this research work:

➢ The researcher has taken some pictures from the movie where this MDA fits perfectly.

➢ The researcher has properly analyzed each and every scene of the movie in accordance with Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

Primary Data

Primary data is the movie Vivarium (A young couple named Gemma and Tom, their arrival in Yonder and a weird circular house loops).

Secondary Data

Secondary data is research articles, journals and different scholarly studies.

Main Focus

The main focus of this research will be on:

➢ Sound Pattern, diegetic and non-diegetic sound.

➢ Color Theme

➢ Visual setting and background

➢ Boy's presence

➢ Scratching on TV

➢ Cuckoo's nest

Delimitation

The entire study revolves around Multimodal Discourse Analysis on *Vivarium* (2019) by Lorcan Finnegan. No other irrelevant material has been included in this research. This article only discusses this movie in accordance with the implementation of MDA.

Analysis

The researcher has chosen the movie Vivarium (2019) directed by Lorcan Finnegan as a study for Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) postulated by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in the 1990. As it is explained earlier, it is the analysis of a literary work by its focus on gestures, sound, setting, background and environment as means of communication and understanding concepts apart from language. By watching the entire movie, the researcher has captured some scenes of the movie for the better understanding of both the theory and its use in the film.

The Role of Multimodal Discourse in Vivarium (Gemma and Tom)

This is the beginning of the story when Tom and Gemma (the protagonists) encounter each other outside the school. Gemma is the school teacher whereas Tom is the handyman/gardener. Both of them try to find a suitable house for themselves where they can settle in. Everything sounds good from the start of the story until they meet a man named Martin who completely changes their course of life. A young couple with their own ideals and inspirations led to their downfall and disintegration. The meanings and concepts are hidden in specific symbols that have been shown in this movie.

This is the person named Martin who shows different houses in a community called Yonder. He is wearing a white shirt and a black tie which symbolizes lifelessness and something mysterious yet horrific. He is already subjected to something else that is hideous and gruesome. He leads this couple to Yonder where they find identical houses everywhere.
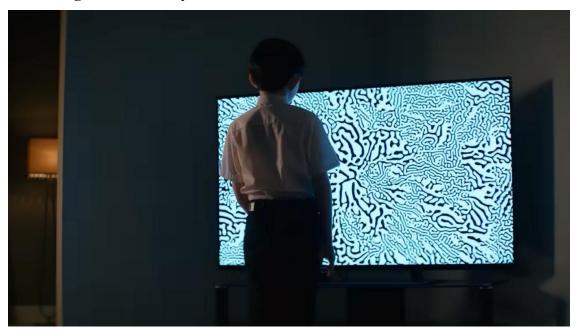
Identical Houses and the Same Route

This is the area where the young couple is trapped for their entire life until death sets them free. The alignment of the houses and the color scheme symbolizes boredom, uncertainty, lifelessness and frustration. There is no social interaction. Nobody lives there except this couple. This multimodal discourse serves the purpose of conveying the meaning and theme of the movie through various modes like mentioned above.

Too much discipline without any interaction from others leads this couple to suffocation and irritation. This scene indicates unsettlement, annoyance, disturbance and also conveys the concept of existentialism. It gives the idea that a man's existence in the world is less significant and important than some pre-historic essence. It also puts emphasis on the importance of existence which clearly lacks in this movie.

Scratching on TV and Boy's Presence

In this scene, here scratching according to Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) serves as a symbol of boy's interaction with something unusual. Here black and white patterns indicate the route of escaping from this artificial community of Yonder. It also refers to the significance of non-verbal confabulation and its meaning. Black color also symbolizes something horrific and terrifying as indicated by the boy's connection with the monster that has not been shown directly in the movie. It also signifies the fact that media also plays an important role in helping to convey the desired message. The boy's black and white dress matches with the black and white patterns on the TV. Again, it alludes to the strong connection with the physical world in which the boy was living and the inner demonic world of something suspicious and unwelcomed.

Cuckoo's Nest

This cuckoo's nest here implies the theme of enforced parenthood which later on shows in the movie. The director already gives the hint of involuntary parenthood and loss of autonomy in the shape of showing these birds. The bird is feeding its child which shows the dependency of a child on its mother. Similarly in the later scenes of the movie, the boy is found as an infant in the box to the young couple. On the lid of the box, this line was written *Raise the child and be released*, it metaphorically represents the frustrated and suffocated life of Tom and Gemma which ultimately leads to their end.

It indicates spatial arrangement in accordance with Multimodal discourse. Spatial

means occurrence, space and the setting that the director has designed for the movie. This maze-like structure ensures the idea of entrapment and the universality of unfortunate, dangerous and difficult situation of the young couple. According to Freudian psychology, it also indicates the journey into the subconscious, its horrors, imposed roles and surely the loss of identity.

Conclusion

To sum up all this, it is said that multimodal discourse analysis is an extended version of Halliday's theory *Systemic Functional Linguistic* (1961). It covers the notion of conveying the meaning and understanding the concept of any literary work through various modes such as gestures, background, color theme, structure, atmosphere, sound, characters, designs and the frame work in which the entire work has been created or produced. These modes collectively combine to convey an effective meaning apart from solely dependent on the language that is usually considered as a mean of communication.

The researcher has effectively examined and analyzed some particular scenes of the movie *Vivarium* in accordance with multimodal discourse (MDA). This movie constructs a haunting suburban society and existential entrapment where the two characters Gemma and Tom were living an isolated life full of anxiety and repeated actions. All of these things are the symbol of emotional struggle that people normally face in modern life and lack of control make their life empty and boring. By analyzing movies and literary works in this way, the readers will be able to get to know the difference between understanding the language used by the author and the multiple modes of communication that are present in it. It will help boost their critical and analytical skills. Discourse also occurs in non-verbal texts.

The role of multimodal discourse is definitely increasing in digital worlds. That is why it has gained prominence in fields such as education and media. Multimodal discourse enriches and shapes people's perception and opinions. In accordance with this Jewitt (2008) emphasized his point that multimodal discourse in classrooms grooms students' ability to remember one thing over a period of time. It promotes a sound meaning-making practice than simply language alone. It refines comprehension and cognitive abilities of the students. It also pushes up this idea that not only language but external factors such as the sound, gestures, spatial elements,

non- verbal communication, background, setting and environment also matter a lot in help conveying the meaning. In short, meaning is not only conveyed through dialogues but different modes of communication help to illustrate the essence of it.

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