BEYOND WORDS: MULTIMODAL TEXT ANALYSIS

ЗА МЕЖАМИ СЛОВА: АНАЛІЗ МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНИХ ТЕКСТІВ

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Larysa MAKARUK
Doctor of Philology, Full Professor,
Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (Ukraine)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8988-2753

MULTIMODAL SYNTACTIC CONSTRUCTIONS: A STRIKING FEATURE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN MODERN ENGLISH

Статтю присвячено дослідженню мультимодальних синтаксичних конструкцій, що характерні сучасній англомовній рекламі страхових компаній. *Мета* роботи полягає в класифікації типів мультимодальних синтаксичних конструкцій шляхом здійснення ґрунтовного аналізу вербальних, невербальних та паравербальних засобів, які входять до їх складу; виокремленні кількох груп на основі превалюючих конституентів; окресленні їх семантичного навантаження та прагматичного потенціалу; формулюванні дефініції, що розкриває зміст поняття «мультимодальна синтаксична конструкція»; апробації методу візуального синтаксису як інноваційного інструменту дослідження обраного ілюстративного матеріалу.

Залучення *методу* суцільної вибірки уможливило виокремлення вербальних, невербальних та паравербальних компонентів, що підлягають аналізу. За допомогою структурно-семантичного аналізу вдалося виявити семантичні та структурні особливості вербальних, невербальних та паравербальних одиниць, їх функційне навантаження та функціювання на синтаксичному рівні. Дистрибутивний аналіз дозволив простежити оточення складників мультимодальних синтаксичних конструкцій та сформувати можливі способи поєднання аналізованих засобів. Соціально-семіотичний підхід мав на меті виявити імпліцитне та імпліцитне навантаження одиниць для ідентифікації істинних смислів. Порівняльний метод сприяв виокремленню типів мультимодальних синтаксичних конструкцій на основі спільних ознак. Метод мультимодального синтаксичного аналізу уможливив ідентифікацію способів поєднання вербальних, невербальних і паравербальних засобів у семантично місткі, змістовно завершені конструкції, та дозволив виокремлення кількох груп та підгруп.

На підставі аналізу усі ідентифіковані мультимодальні синтаксичні конструкції поділено на гомогенні та гетерогенні, останні з яких структуровано у чотири групи за превалюючим компонентом: мультимодальні синтаксичні конструкції на основі вербального модусу; мультимодальні синтаксичні конструкції на основі невербального модусу; мультимодальні синтаксичні конструкції на основі вербального модусу з використанням спецефектів, здатних впливати на семантику; мультимодальні синтаксичні конструкції на основі кількох невербальних модусів (без вербальних складників, але з залученням знаків, що належать принаймні до двох семіотичних систем).

Ключові слова: мультимодальні синтаксичні конструкції, вербальний, невербальний, паравербальний.

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Introduction

The research described in this article is based on the fact that linguistic phenomena and processes are no longer confined to the realm of traditional language resources: their scope has been strikingly broadened by the use of non-linguistic theories and paradigms, which facilitates the formulation of new suggestions and new breakthroughs in linguistics. Since pure linguistics sometimes lacks instruments that are needed in this digital age, it's necessary to adopt ones from other fields. This trend is evident when we observe the syntactic patterns which have become increasingly popular in English-language mass media discourse.

This underlines the fact that a new approach needs to be developed as an integral part of modern linguistic studies. It is quite evident that current common traditional paradigms and conceptual theories, embodying the classic approach to syntax, do not enable us to access the full potential which exists in this area, and to be equipped with the tools for deciphering these constructions. The modes used in multimodal constructions are so diverse in terms of structure and meaning that a new linguistic vision is required, one which has the capacity to encompass the multimodal specifics of modern communication in the digital age. The syntactic possibilities inherent in these constructions make it necessary to basically rethink several fundamental questions: what a lexical unit can be; what rules of visual grammar should be followed; what makes a sentence meaningful in terms of semantics; and what potential the non-verbal means of communication have in terms of pragmatics and cultural background.

In this research, it is noted that this contemporary phenomenon has not been studied carefully by some scholars in the field of linguistics, but reaches beyond that in seeking to suggest appropriate descriptions and specialized observations as the basis for future studies. Multimodality is a relatively new and rapidly-growing field, and up to now, no unanimously-accepted approach exists which distinctly regulates the modes on which our attention is focused in this paper. More specifically, we are referring to the mixture of verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal devices which function independently or which are part of an 'enclave' and which, separately or in tandem with each other, involve the graphic manipulation of text in various ways, and which have become integral components of advertisements in the mass media.

Theoretical and methodological background of the research

According to Webster's Dictionary, syntax can be defined in two different ways: (a) the way in which linguistic elements (such as words) are put together to form constituents (such as phrases or clauses); (b) the part of grammar dealing with this. The second one involves a connected or orderly system, a harmonious arrangement of parts or elements [Gove, 1986]. It can be seen that on the basis of these explanations, the classical definition of a sentence can be seen as a symbiotically-constituted structure of verbal components involving punctuation marks and a number of other graphic symbols as a separate category of semiotic resources. Our intention is to explain the inadequacy of this perspective, and to utilize examples drawn from English-language media discourse in order to demonstrate the type of codification that is called for in view of the circumstances which now exist. It is becoming apparent that non-verbal and paraverbal components are able to perform alternative syntactic roles alongside verbal elements. In terms of the syntactic characteristics, sentences which are fully verbal bear a close resemblance to those which have parts containing both verbal and non-verbal components. The expressive capacities of non-verbal and paraverbal have been increasing to a striking degree, thanks to the combination of different modes within a single advertisement. Non-verbal and paraverbal techniques are opening up new communicative opportunities, with a scope that is constantly broadening via the endless combination variants that are possible.

There has been a rapid increase in studies devoted to multimodality in recent decades: among the most prominent scholars who deal with multimodality from varying perspectives are such scholars as J. Austin [1962], J. Bateman [2014], J. Bateman et al. [2017], B. Bergström [2008], C. Jewitt [2014], K. O'Halloran [2014], G. Kress [1996], T. van Leeuwen [1996], P. Lester [2006, 2007], S. Mealing [2008], N. Nørgaard [2018], L. Unsworth and C. Cleirigh [2009].They are involved in various areas of research in terms of styles and genres, as well as in terms of the aspects considered and the research methods applied, but it appears that few, if any of them have focused attention on the topic of multimodal syntax as we are seeking to do now.

The notion “multimodal syntax” was first used in the 1990s in computer science to describe the creation of online graphical editors [Bos, 1996]. Although it is still used today in computer science discourse (in particular, as “artificial intelligence grammar” [Loghday, 2024] and has even been picked up by psycholinguists in studies of sign language of children with speech developmental disorders (“gestures can enhance the use of more complex syntactic structures” [Bellifemine, 2024]), the expression “multimodal syntax” has not yet been substantiated as a term to denote this scientific concept. No research papers have been found which give an in-depth analysis of the concept of multimodal syntax, and how this field can be improved.

It is with these various considerations in the background that we use the terms non-verbal, paraverbal, and multimodal. These can be lexemes, syntactic constructions (sentences) or texts. We would define multimodal syntactic constructions as those which consist of a lexeme or a number of lexemes which undergo a partial or complete transformation of their form and, a structure incorporating an inextricable link with the non-verbal component which evidently has a bearing on their meaning and pragmatic value.

The methodological basis of the study of multimodal syntactic constructions involves the following methods: continuous sampling, and structural and semantic, descriptive, distributive, system-functional, and sociosemiotic methods. The comparative method, the method of multimodal syntactic analysis and the semantic-stylistic method are also used in the work. The technique that was selected made it possible to conduct a comprehensive study of multimodal syntactic constructions which constituted a symbiotic fusion of verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal resources. It should be noted to begin with that the method of continuous sampling was used, which made it possible to identify the verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal components to be analyzed. Using structural and semantic analysis, it was possible to identify the semantic and structural features of nonverbal and paraverbal units, their functional load, functioning at the syntactic level. Distributive analysis enabled us to investigate the environment of multimodal graphemes, lexemes and syntactic constructions and to formulate possible methods for combining verbal nonverbal and paraverbal units.

It was found that most of these structures are interchangeable and can perform a variety of different syntactic roles and functions. The social semiotics approach involves primarily the processes associated with the expression of meaning in general, and the formulation of meaningful communicative output by individuals in particular; it also focuses on the relationship between modes and their compatibility, and the social needs for which they serve, taking into account the individual producing the sign and the context in which these meanings are realized. The comparative method made it possible to implement comparative steps to identify both common and differing parameters within the syntactic constructs identified in the media. The method of multimodal syntactic analysis identifies the range of resources used to produce multimodal sentences, possible ways to combine verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal means, types of multimodal sentences, and clarifies the meaning of their individual components and all units used in them.

The purpose of this article is to classify the various types of multimodal syntactic constructions by conducting a thorough analysis of the verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal means of which they are composed.

Results and discussions

The material that has been assembled (comprising more than a thousand examples taken from the mass-media communicative space) demonstrates the need for in-depth study of the syntactic possibilities within multimodal constructions. Unlike monomodal syntax, which is based on verbal elements and punctuation marks, multimodal syntax is formed using verbal resources in conjunction with nonverbal and paraverbal components which differ in terms of their structure, form, quantitative composition, appearance, and their communicative and pragmatic value. It is possible for multimodal homogeneous constructions to be composed of either verbal means plus punctuation marks, or solely of non-verbal means which are part of a single system. The latter is demonstrated in Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 25. The contemporary use of pictorial techniques to convey meaning harks back to the patterns used in the distant past, before the appearance of writing. Despite the absence of words, the meaning can be easily understood: the pictures are

simple, and their meaning is clear. Many corporate advertisers (such as the insurance companies that we refer to below) use elements of colour and image stylistics so effectively that readers have no difficulty in perceiving the key message that is being conveyed.

Fig. 1. Monomodal text [Rendall, 2025]
Fig. 2. Monomodal text [Vargas, 2025]

Various sign systems form the basis of heterogeneous syntactic constructions. They can be composed of both verbal and non-verbal means at the same time, or solely of non-verbal means which belong to at least two or more sign systems.

Heterogeneous constructions can be divided into four categories:

• multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal mode (29 %);

• multimodal syntactic constructions based on a non-verbal mode (26 %);

• multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal mode using special effects that can transform the semantic characteristics (17%);

• multimodal syntactic constructions which are based on a number of non-verbal modes (lacking any verbal component) (11%).

It has already been recognized for some time that graphic components of a non-verbal or a paraverbal nature may be involved in the transmission of certain content in the media. Cases have been identified in the mass communication space in which, instead of an entire lexeme (Fig. 3), a significant proportion of which is advertising, an analogue in the form of an illustrative component has been used. It is our intention to present and substantiate our view of this issue in greater detail below.

The graphic means shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 are very familiar and recipients would have no difficulty in making the correct lexical association, but it should be noted that there are a number of cases where a single icon may correspond to more than one verbal element (such as car/auto or house/apartment). On the other hand, there are cases where a single word/verbal unit might correspond to several different symbols, such as the word “vehicle”, covering various forms of transport (Fig. 4).

Although the graphic symbols used in these ads are rudimentary in form, they are fully recognizable, and as such they can effectively replace words, even possessing the advantage that they can fulfil the function of removing barriers connected with illiteracy or limited language competence. However, it must also be acknowledged that there are some cases where it may be difficult for a reader to perceive what a certain symbol represents. In its structure, a verbal lexeme may be considered to consist of a single- or multiple-component homogeneous unit. The same is true in the case of a graphic alternative.

The syntactic construction in Fig. 3 consists of two images, a plus sign and a verbal component – *insurance,* which make up a complete sentence. It confirms our statement that a part of that can be deciphered as the receiver chooses, depending on the amount of background knowledge that he/she already has. A complete sentence in verbal form could be: *[We offer] home and car insurance.* However, that isn’t the only possible wording: it could be developed much more extensively in terms of vocabulary. Fig. 4 has something in common with the previous one, although the images are different. Besides “+” this multimodal syntactic construction includes the mathematical symbol < (“less than”), a dollar sign, some numeric digits, some verbal elements and an asterisk (*). In reality it resembles a mathematical equation. Sentences of this kind exist in the modern English mass media communicative space and require some knowledge to decipher their true meaning.

Fig. 3. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 4. Multimodal syntactic construction [Cameron, 2025]

Some interesting insights can be gained from the analysis of the fifth and the sixth ads (seen in figures 5 and 6) by which the insurance company offers its customers reduced rates for certain types of insurance. The core message is: the more things you insure, the more money you may be able to save. This message is transmitted by means of stylized graphic images which duplicate the meaning of the verbal elements; no meaning would be lost if the images were omitted.

To begin with, there are several non-verbal elements below the verbal sentence "*You are in good hands*". which indicate the general idea of the advertisement. These items demonstrate that people's cars, homes and retirement savings play an important role in their lives, and the order in which the items are shown presumably suggests the priorities that the ad's creator is portraying, reflecting the order that would be in the minds of most people. Understandably, nothing is more precious than human life. Auto insurance is the type of insurance which the largest number of people would have, so not surprisingly, the auto graphic is in the first position. As can be observed, the placement of the verbal items (*auto, home, life,* and *retirement*) corresponds exactly to that of their non-verbal equivalents.

As we have just indicated, the positioning of the elements is not coincidental, since a greater proportion of adults would have car insurance than would have home insurance. Life insurance, which an even smaller population segment would have, occupies the third position. The fourth graphically-represented element is logical in that if people save money by taking advantage of this company's competitive pricing in different insurance categories, those people may be in a better financial position, including up to their retirement. This can be seen as a visualization of the subordinating conjunction in a sentence containing a conditional clause, implying that "You will save money if you take advantage of the services of this insurance company" or "Your future will be safe if you place yourself in good hands (in other words, with our insurance company)". If we examine the graphics closely, we might suggest that the location of the elements could also correspond to the same order of priority that we saw in the sequence of graphic images. It could also reflect the increasing age of potential insurance clients.

Fig. 5. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 6. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]

The advertisement (from the same organization) which is shown in fig. 7 contains an image which is a pictorial English-language encoding of *"good hands,"* created by the company's sales team.

One graphic semiotic item can almost be considered to replace several conventional lexemes. "*It's good to be in good hands"* is a slogan of the company. Its creators evidently considered that this image was very recognizable and didn't need to be duplicated lexically. The non-verbal component showing the hands is designed to emphasize to potential clients that the company offers them safety and protection [Makaruk, 2018]. In fact, the protection is doubly represented, thanks to the brackets which in this case are suggestive of safety and assures people that they will receive reliable services.

Fig.7. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 8. Multimodal syntactic construction [Kumar, 2022]

In Fig. 8 we see a sentence which consists of verbal means, two numbers (7 and 10) and a pictogram. A multimodal lexeme was generated by the combination of a traditional codified graphic symbol N and a pictogram. The shape of the icon corresponds to a mixed unit. In addition, this icon has a very powerful "two-vector semantics" because it replaces the lexeme with "no" and presents a type of icons as the stylized letter 'o'. In this case, there is a specific duplication of the verbal lexeme by a non-verbal component, which performs not only the technical function of substitution but also duplication (repetition of the verbal-non-verbal component). Also, the pictogram that has been discussed has two meanings: it not only indicates the absolute and guaranteed absence of insurance, but also specifically emphasizes the point that this is not a desirable or viable situation. This type of negation serves as a reminder that may hopefully change minds of people who do not have life insurance (seven out of ten as we see).

Within the sentence "7 in 10 adults have NØ life insurance whatsoever" (which is followed by a sentence emphasizing the danger to the families of uninsured parents), the negative word "NO" is replaced by "NØ", which cleverly introduces multimodality in the form of a symbol which resembles the original vowel, but which on its own is capable of representing the concept of negation, and of something being blocked. In a visual manner, it implies a cause-and-effect syntactic relationship with the alarming scenario evoked by the subsequent question.

Multimodal lexemes of this type significantly extend the semantic borders of the sentence and make it multimodal as well. In fact, one non-verbal component which is graphically and semantically vast completely conveys the essence of the message. The multimodal sentence in Fig. 9 contains one component of a non-verbal nature — an umbrella — which is relevant to our investigation. The non-verbal grapheme in the form of an umbrella is a structural element by which a multimodal lexeme is formed, contributing to the creation of a multimodal sentence.

Fig. 9. Multimodal syntactic construction [Clapp, 2025]

The form of the umbrella handle corresponds to the graph of upper-case “L”, which reinforces the concept of protection, the fundamental principle of insurance. As with the multimodal lexeme (see Fig. 8) that contains a pictogram, this unit corresponds to the semantics of the verbal word in the sense that the umbrella is associated with protection. However, because it is used out of context and not within the structure of a word, it opens up the possibility of other interpretations.

As we have seen, this multimodal sentence is formed by combining regular lexemes and one unusual item which consists of the umbrella grapheme. This non-verbal element gives it its multimodal character. A special effect here is produced by the umbrella, which duplicates the meaning of the lexeme *insure,* which can be understood as protection. In this case we can say that non-verbal means which produce multimodality constitute an important tool that can serve as a bridge for the formation of multimodal syntax.

In this case, the syntax of a metaphor, a simile, or some other stylistic device is suggested, which could be expressed at the verbal level by a comparative construction or comparative subordinate clause such as “Insurance shields us from life’s dangers like an umbrella protects us from rain”, or else by an analogue of the conjunctionless relationship inherent in advertising slogans (as in a sentence such as, “When assuring protection is recognized as care, insurance is as an umbrella for the family”).

Fig. 10 shows us a multimodal sentence which is based on verbal and non-verbal components as well as numerals and some additional signs. This multimodal sentence has something in common with the previous ones (Fig. 3, Fig. 5) but is more loaded with meaning. In terms of multimodal syntax, it conveys a significant amount of meaning. In Fig. 11 there is an interesting and unusual sentence that consists of figures and the mathematical symbols “+” and “=”. The words which would normally form this sentence are absent except NO, being replaced entirely by figures and the mathematical symbols. It implies that this insurance company can cover everything, and the umbrella which a puzzled lady is holding in her hands represents what can be covered in reality. This multimodal sentence is dominated by figures. It also suggests a mathematical equation which at first appears rather odd as it seems to be mathematically incorrect. However, in terms of multimodal syntax (as pointed out in the explanatory comments below) it performs the function of compression, conveying many concepts although using a very small number of symbols. Against the background of the other components, it is distinguishable by its colour and font size. This sentence is not easy to understand at first sight, because the figures have a dichotomous form of semantics which enable them to be read in several different ways.

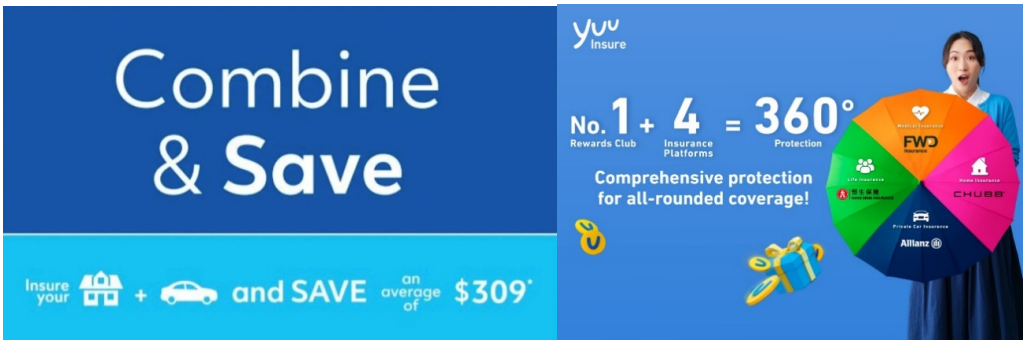

Fig. 10. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 11. Multimodal syntactic construction [Loh, 2025]

The advertisement in Fig. 12 was created by combining verbal components and some additional elements. The non-verbal signs which are placed at strategic points on the circle enable the image as a whole to function as a sentence that demonstrates the cycle of a full year: a flower, a snowflake, the sun and a leaf, that is spring, winter, summer and autumn. The whole sentence could be read, “*Our insurance will protect you all through the year*”. This sentence

is in the category of those containing graphic illustrative components that affect the meaning of the message as a whole. The presence of seasonal elements narrows the range of possible options for interpreting the sentence and conveys the message that the company publishing this advertisement is wishing to present — the importance of year-round protection. It is also confirmed by the verbal part of the message. It shows that these two parts can successfully function separately, but the verbal part helps to make its true meaning more evident.

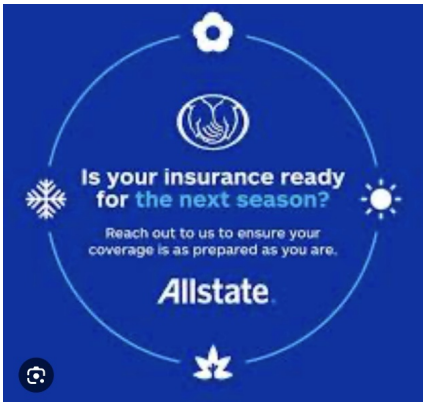

Fig. 12. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]

For our research, we have assembled a corpus of illustrative material which demonstrates the broad range of options that has become available. With specific reference to the numeric lexeme substitution technique, it is understandable that the numbers 2, 4 and 8 are the ones most frequently involved, because 2 can replace the verbalizers ‘too’ or ‘to’ or ‘two’, 4 can replace ‘for’ or ‘four’ and 8 can replace ‘ate’, or a part of a lexeme, such as in “gr8”. These elements are totally interchangeable, so it is not difficult to comprehend these sentences, such as demonstrated in Fig.13, Fig. 14, Fig. 15. We can see that the number and the verbal element form an exact match in this case.

In these figures the numbers ‘2’ and ‘4’ are used, which (as we have noted) are complete substitutes for the lexemes. Although the written form of the numbers is utterly different from that of the prepositions or the numerals, their pronunciation is identical, providing a substitution that successfully implements the functions that it is intended to perform.

Fig. 13. Multimodal syntactic construction [Karan, 2025]
Fig. 14. Multimodal syntactic construction [Olivier, 2024]
Fig. 15. Multimodal syntactic construction [Sharma, 2025]

When we look at patterns such as can be seen in Fig. 13, Fig. 14, Fig. 15, where words are replaced by phonetically equivalent numerals and where font styles or sizes are manipulated in unusual ways, we are reminded how popular this communicative strategy. This is not just a recent phenomenon. When this is considered, it is evident that a great multitude of relevant examples can be found.

The use of additional special effects (such as underlining, strikethrough, and circling) in the sentence is another technique for attracting the attention of the readers, who are often

overwhelmed by the volume of information that bombards them, and cannot always distinguish between items of greater or lesser importance. Multimodal techniques are an integral part of modern graphics. The techniques of using underlining, strikethrough, and circling (Fig. 16–21) were well known in hand-written texts, before the advent of digital typography made them easy to duplicate mechanically. These are unconventional techniques for mass-media discourse and ones which may not be fully accepted by the general public, but, as we can see, they are still used from time to time and cannot be totally excluded.

This is transforming the graphic system of English writing and is modifying the possible ways of presenting information by diversifying them. Among all the techniques that could be considered, the ones under analysis are the most vivid in that they are particularly effective in attracting the attention of readers and leading them to consider the semantic content of the message, and the reasons for presenting it in a certain way. In the case of Fig. 16–17 we can also track the realization of antonymic pairs.

Fig. 16. Multimodal syntactic construction [Vandeven, 2024]
Fig. 17. Multimodal syntactic construction [Edwards, 2023]
Fig. 18. Multimodal syntactic construction [Barnes, 2025]

Fig. 19. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 20. Multimodal syntactic construction [Barnes, 2021]
Fig. 21. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]

The advertisements in Fig. 22 and Fig. 23 belong to the category of “Multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal mode with the use of special effects capable of influencing semantics”. No elements of a non-verbal nature are present there apart from the frame, which resembles a square (Fig. 22). The word combination which implies the imperative mood of the sentence appears first (*Explore this*), outside the frame, followed by the word combination *car insurance*. It suggests that the functional meaning of this non-verbal resource is to draw the recipient’s attention to the part of the sentence which is considered by the producer to be the most important. It is our view that the second section in this case is more important than the first. If the first word combination outside the frame were to be omitted, we would be able to know what is being suggested. “Explore this”, on the other hand, could be followed by a wide variety of different options, such as “scenery”, “place”, or “possibility”. This framing technique is thus one of the ways by which something can be emphasized, but it is not always effective, since separating the components in the sample that is being analysed is apt to make it harder to

grasp, or else it may create ambiguity about the real meaning of the sentence. In Fig. 23 a rather different pattern is used; the square seems to be focusing attention on the syllable SURE, but the meaning intended by the use of the characters "LʃF" remains obscure, in that the lexeme *life* lacks the final grapheme*"e"* and includes the symbol ʃ in a way that is not clarified.

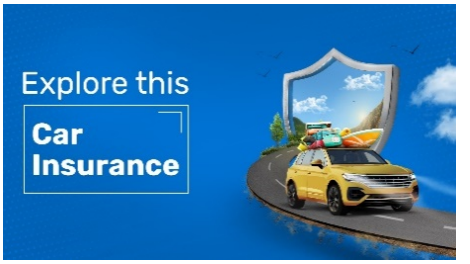

Fig. 22. Multimodal syntactic construction [SBI, 2025]
Fig. 23. Multimodal syntactic construction [Wheeler, 2025]

Fig. 24 contains a syntactic construction which is created by verbal means, figures, nonverbal means, currency signs and an exclamation mark. For this one the strategy of framing is also evident. It is easy to read and comprehensible for recipients. This strategy is considered to be justified and appropriate. Constructions of this type are among the easiest to present and to comprehend because of their pictorial character.

Fig. 24. Multimodal syntactic construction [Buzo, 2025]

In contrast to the previous figures, Fig. 25 appears to leave it up to the reader to supply the beginning or the ending of the sentences. The ways in which they are assembled suggest that it is a logically-presented idea. The full meaning of these sentences is only comprehensible when all the images are viewed together. Apart from that, both the beginning and the ending of the message would have to be supplied by the reader, and the multimodal sentence could be interpreted in an unlimited number of different ways.

Fig. 25. Monomodal sentence [Turner, 2025]

Fig. 26 and 27 are vivid examples of the most complex multimodal syntactic constructions within the corpus of the illustrative material. These sentences include pictograms which are partially deciphered below. Sentences of this type are hard to comprehend as compared with a number of those which have previously been analyzed (Fig. 1–23). The complexity lies in the fact that one must choose the sequence in which the idea will unfold. Moreover, there are many

ways to find the appropriate verbal means for explaining what is meant. In this way we can develop not only a sentence but also a complete text which will represent the whole insurance concept.

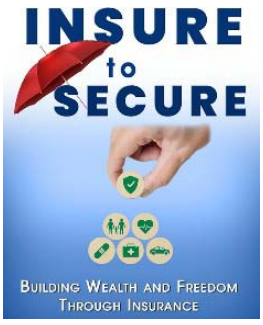

Fig. 26. Allstate Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 27. Multimodal syntactic construction [Pramila, 2023]

It would be appropriate to point out the fact that there are some difficulties in reading them, as has already been mentioned during the analysis of the previous samples, but figure 28 is considered to be the least comprehensible, requiring the readers to have a great deal of background knowledge in order to be able to understand the content properly.

Fig. 28. Multimodal syntactic construction [Hutchinson, 2025]

The images of varying types present in the advertisement make it possible to decipher it; facilitating comprehension. The mathematical symbols are the elements of an equation, and lead to the result as a means of forming a mathematical equation when "=" is also used, which is both a structural element and a way to point out the conclusion directly. It can be considered to be a multimodal sentence which has the outward form of a mathematical equation.

The sentence in Fig. 29 prompts readers to think of what is implied, since it contains no verbal components which are equivalents of the non-verbal ones. The unusual way of presenting the material may prevent the reader from understanding what is encoded in the drawings. The verbal component partially conveys the idea that this is a special way for the company to present its name and to communicate with its clients. In addition to the verbal text, Fig. 30 contains additional lines which do not alter the meaning of the message but are integral structural elements within it.

Fig. 29. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 30. Multimodal syntactic construction [Jansen, 2023]

The next sample, found in Fig. 31, contains the plus sign (+), which replaces the word “plus”. This might be considered to be a means of condensing the material, and at the same time, it may have a ‘decorative’ function, an alternative to its unused verbal component. The multimodal syntactic constructions in Fig. 31 and Fig.32 also deserve our attention since they demonstrate the use of the ampersand with verbal and non-verbal means. This technique is also common in advertising.

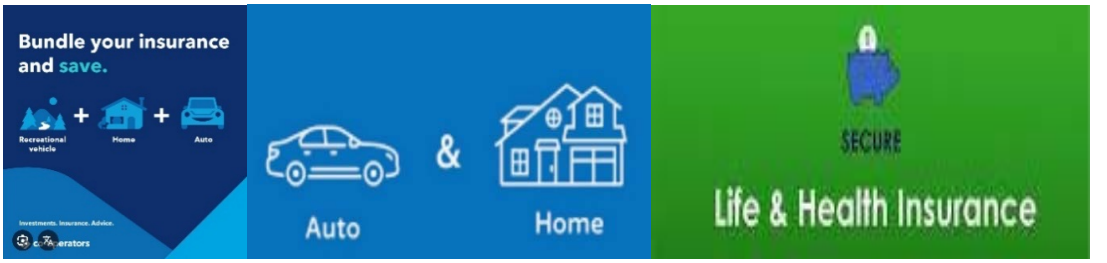

Fig. 31. Multimodal syntactic construction [Hamada, 2025]
Fig. 32. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 33. Multimodal syntactic construction [Chohan, 2022]

Fig. 34 includes the brackets, which connect some multimodal features to the sentence. After reading the message carefully, the reader can think of the information placed in the brackets as being secondary, such that it might be possible to read the sentence in two different ways: 1. *Why consumers buy life insurance. 2. Why consumers don’t buy life insurance.* The conjunction *“or”* indicates that there is a choice. Fig. 35 also gives two options to read: *1. What is umbrella insurance? 2. What is liability insurance?* A slightly different technique, with square brackets, is used to supplement the arrow, indicating the step which is desirable (Fig. 36)*: Call me today.* This sentence can also be read by two ways: *1. Small business protection. 2. Business protection.*

The brackets help to draw attention to the words they enclose, and lead the readers to consider the strategy chosen by the authors for presenting the material.

Fig. 34. Multimodal syntactic construction [Hoffmann, 2024]
Fig. 35. Multimodal syntactic construction [Klemme, Licciardello, 2024]
Fig. 36. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]

On the face of it, the texts found in Fig. 37–41 appear to be normal sentences. However, each of them contains one section that distinguishes them from others, involving text colour. As we can see, they were created by using two different text colours but maintaining the same or almost the same font and font size throughout. The differing text colour shows the creator’s intention to highlight the words “*need life insurance*” (Fig. 37), implying that they convey a primary (key) meaning which would not be possible if this method, or some other technique, were no used to create that contrast. Fig. 38 suggests some opposites (*personal* vs *commercial*) by means of colour and in Fig. 39 several separate sentences are presented which can be read separately as well as together.

Fig. 37. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]
Fig. 38. Multimodal syntactic construction [Avery W. Hall, 2024]
Fig. 39. Multimodal syntactic construction [Pilgrim, 2022]

In Fig. 40 we observe the possibility of identifying meaningful content both when reading the words horizontally (*Life Insurance Awareness Month*), and when looking at the the vertical acrostic formed by the initial letters of the four words – *LIAM* – which is the name of the company. In Fig. 41, thanks to the multimodal syntactic construction, we have a demonstration of font play. The most important parts of this sentence are highlighted by different colours. It is definitely interesting in terms of the advertisers' methods as we can analyze them. Colour manipulation is the multimodal technique that produces the distinct readings of the same sentence.

Fig. 40. Multimodal syntactic construction [Darden, 2022]
Fig. 41. Multimodal syntactic construction [Turner, 2025]

Fig. 42 includes a multimodal sentence, since the letters are written with the use of special effects. The content of the sentences is clear. This technique may be disregarded while deciphering the meaning, but in a manner similar to other techniques it demarcates the danger and the conventional marking of the earthquake and draws direct attention toward its content.

Fig. 42. Multimodal syntactic construction [Schuback, 2023]

In Fig. 43, a two-variant reading is provided thanks to the skilful incorporation of the blue and red segments of the shield. Part of the multimodal sentence is displayed against the background of the shield, where the larger unit "*INSTAIn*" can be seen, in contrast to the component "*sure*". This multimodal strategy is likewise designed to convey the assurance that the insurance is highly reputable. The contrasting background colours constitute a strategy of accentuation, which instantly transforms the semantics of the sentence.

Fig. 43. Multimodal syntactic construction [Maji, 2019]

Two more techniques have been identified which make these sentences multimodal in character: the usage of a stylized punctuation mark instead of the usual grapheme *"i"* maintains its true meaning, but at the same time it attracts the eye more quickly by its very novelty, and as such it directs attention to the most important means. It resembles an upside-down grapheme *"i"* (Fig, 44). The one in Fig. 45 is again reminiscent of a mathematical equation, but in this case points to the absence of equivalence (*Umbrella insurance amount is not equal to net worth*).

Fig. 44. Multimodal syntactic construction [Brown, 2025]
Fig. 45. Multimodal syntactic construction [Appel, 2022]

In Fig. 46 we observe the presence of different non-verbal lexemes, and as a result the ensemble forms a multimodal sentence with a richly designed combination of textual and multimodal text. This example is also a demonstration of a multimodal text which is created through the assimilation of objects and processes of objective reality into the images, with a dual duplication of semantics. In a general sense, this example shows that the creation of multimodal sentences is possible without the usage of ordinary graphic means, and these atypical ones significantly broaden their scope.

Fig. 46. Multimodal syntactic construction [Kumar, 2023]

At this point, it is our intention to show how the samples that have been presented above can be fitted into the comprehensive system of classification which we have devised for multimodal syntactic constructions. It is possible to divide them into two types: multimodal homogeneous (17%) and multimodal heterogeneous (83%). The first type includes those that consist of verbal

components and punctuation or non-verbal components belonging to a single sign system. The second type includes those formed by the combination of different sign systems. They may be formed by verbal and nonverbal means, or else exclusively nonverbal ones, formed by various nonverbal modes.

Heterogeneous structures are grouped into four groups depending on the use verbal and nonverbal modes and additional special effects. Three groups are based on verbal modes and one more is based on solely non-verbal modes with the use of additional special effects. The fourth group is based on a few non-verbal modes (with no verbal components) [Makaruk, 2018]. We will now take a more detailed look at each of them.

The first group, called "***Multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal mode"*** includes seven types (29%):

- verbal means and images (Fig. 5, Fig. 9);
- verbal means and numbers (Fig. 13, Fig. 14);
- verbal means and mathematical symbols (Fig. 33, Fig. 45);
- verbal means, images, and pictograms (Fig. 27);
- verbal means, images and decorations (Fig. 46);
- verbal means, pictograms, and numbers (Fig. 8);
- verbal means, numbers, and font variations (Fig. 15);
- verbal means, pictograms, numbers, mathematical symbols, images and other non-verbal modes (Fig. 24);
- verbal means, pictograms, numbers, and other non-verbal modes (Fig. 26);
- verbal means, punctuation marks, font and colour variations (Fig. 44).

The second group, "***Multimodal syntactic constructions based on a non-verbal mode,"*** takes in the following four types (26%):

- images, verbal means and mathematical symbols (Fig. 3);
- images, verbal means, mathematical symbols, numbers and other non-verbal modes (Fig. 4, Fig. 10);
- images, verbal means and other non-verbal modes (Fig. 6, Fig. 43);
- numbers, verbal means, mathematical symbols and other non-verbal modes (Fig. 11).

The third group, **"*Multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal mode with the use of special effects capable of influencing semantics",*** comprises the following types (17%):

- verbal means and strikethrough or highlighting (Fig. 16, Fig. 17);
- verbal means and underlining (Fig. 18, Fig. 21);
- verbal means and hyphens (Fig. 30);
- verbal means (font variations) or verbal means (font variations) and highlighting (Fig. 37, Fig. 38, Fig. 39);
- verbal means (font variations) and special graphic effects (Fig. 7, Fig. 42);
- verbal means (font variations) (Fig. 40, Fig. 41);
- verbal means and framing (Fig. 22, Fig. 23);
- verbal means, underlining, circling and arrows (Fig. 19);
- verbal means, circling and arrows (Fig. 20);
- verbal means and other non-verbal modes (brackets) (Fig. 34, Fig. 35, Fig. 36).

The fourth group, **"*Multimodal syntactic constructions based on a few non-verbal modes (without verbal components)***", includes four types (11%):

- images and punctuation marks (Fig. 28 and Fig. 29);
- images and mathematical symbols (Fig. 31, Fig. 32);
- image and other graphic means (Fig. 12) (Makaruk, 2018).

Conclusions

The study presented in this paper provides confirmation of the important place which multimodal syntax has as an essential and integral part of multimodal linguistics, and these practical examples have enabled us to construct a theoretical framework in relation to this area of syntax. Various examples make it possible for us to derive the conclusion that some multimodal syntactic constructions can be difficult to decipher, or can be interpreted in multiple ways.

To sum up the structuring as we perceive it now, we can state that multimodal syntactic constructions have been divided into the following types: multimodal homogeneous and multimodal heterogeneous. To the former belong those consisting of verbal constituents and punctuation marks or non-verbal constituents which belong to the same sign system. The latter includes those created by the combination of different sign systems. They may be formed by verbal and non-verbal means, or by exclusively non-verbal means formed by combining various non-verbal modes. As we have noted above, heterogeneous constructions are divided into four groups: multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal mode; multimodal syntactic constructions based on a non-verbal mode (or modes); multimodal syntactic constructions based on a verbal mode with the use of special effects capable of influencing semantics and multimodal syntactic constructions based on multiple non-verbal modes (with no verbal components).

In their form, these constructions correspond to each other almost perfectly, since their elements reflect the structure of the conventional alphabet, making it possible to apply the reading rules that are familiar for everyone. In a global sense, our research results seem to point to the following definition of a multimodal sentence or a multimodal syntactic construction, as a combination of at least two signs (modes) which belong to different systems, thus forming a meaningful construction. Among the features which can be distinguished in these constructions are readability, case appropriateness, and multifunctionality, which make it polysemantic. We recognize the fact that our definitions with respect to this area are likely to undergo various alterations and additions during the process of our continuing research.

Our overview of the whole field can be summed up in the following terms: the corpus of source material which we used demonstrates that the complete range of non-verbal elements are available for use in the creation of multimodal syntactic constructions. On the basis of numerous examples, it is possible to state unequivocally that a multimodal syntactic construction is one which is formed using a variety of techniques and devices, combined in a multiplicity of different ways, the selected strategy in each case being appropriate for a definite purpose. The particular patterns which have been described above were drawn from a much larger selection of examples, and they enable us to conclude that even though non-verbal and paraverbal means differ from verbal ones in certain respects, their similarities are even more significant in terms of how they are both used to transform thoughts into written messages which convey meaning.

The most intriguing aspect of our observations connected with the examples above is that when monomodal sentences are compared with multimodal ones, the latter often possess greater force semantically. This conclusion is based on examples which show how the images of physical objects can change in terms of their primary designation, enabling them to perform the functions of graphemes, lexemes or even complete sentences, with a multimodal character. These processes make written communication much livelier, provide some aesthetic effects, and demonstrate how various concrete items can have multiple functions. Traditional font characteristics, even though they are so widely used and accepted, can come to be less dominant with respect to the transmission of certain impressions than their multimodal counterparts. The examples which we examined also suggest the possibility of positive or negative emotional colouring, adding to their appeal to the mind, their capacity to evoke a rapid reaction, and the likelihood of them being retained in the memory for a longer time.

Adherence to Ethical Standards

The study used materials published on the official websites of insurance companies and available open access. The use of official websites and official Facebook profiles of insurance companies as a research material is acceptable and complies with the principles and rules of publication ethics of The Publishing Ethics Resource Kit (PERK) and does not contradict the principles of academic integrity established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Using data gathered from Instagram adhered to ethical research standards, the ethical guidelines for digital research from the British Sociological Association, and standards of Social Data Science Lab.

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MULTIMODAL SYNTACTIC CONSTRUCTIONS: A STRIKING FEATURE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN MODERN ENGLISH

Larysa L. Makaruk, Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (Ukraine)
e-mail: laryssa_makaruk@ukr.net
DOI: https://doi.org/10.32342/3041-217X-2025-1-29-16

Key words: *multimodal syntactic constructions, verbal, non-verbal, paraverbal.*

This article is devoted to the study of multimodal syntactic constructions that are characteristic of modern English-language advertising, and more specifically, by certain insurance companies.

The purpose of the study is to classify the various types of multimodal syntactic constructions by conducting a thorough analysis of the verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal means of which they are composed; to distinguish multiple groups based on their dominant constituents; to outline their semantic load and pragmatic potential; to formulate a definition that delineates the concept of 'multimodal syntactic construction'; and to test the method of multimodal syntactic analysis as an innovative tool for studying the illustrative material.

The use of the continuous sampling *method* made it possible to identify verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal components to be analysed. Structural and semantic analysis were used to identify the semantic and structural features of verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal units, their functional load and their functioning at the syntactic level. A distributional analysis made it possible to trace the environment of the components of multimodal syntactic constructions and to formulate possible methods of combining the means being analysed. The socio-semiotic approach was utilized to identify the implicit and implicit load to identify the true meanings.

The social semiotic approach was aimed at identifying the implicit and explicit load to identify the true meanings. The comparative method was useful for distinguishing types of multimodal syntactic constructions based on common features. The method of multimodal syntactic analysis made it possible to identify possible ways of combining verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal means into semantically capacious and communicatively complete constructions, and, on this basis, to distinguish several groups and subgroups.

We have chosen to classify all syntactic constructions either as monomodal or multimodal, the latter being structured into two groups: homogeneous (17%) and heterogeneous (83%). Those in the heterogeneous category may be further subdivided into four groups on the basis of the dominant component: multimodal syntactic constructions based on the verbal mode; multimodal syntactic constructions based on the non-verbal mode; multimodal syntactic constructions based on the verbal mode with the use of special effects that can influence the semantics; multimodal syntactic constructions based on several non-verbal modes (without verbal components but with the use of signs belonging to at least two semiotic systems).

Within the first group, which makes up 29% of the whole corpus of heterogeneous constructions, ten types of constructions have been distinguished, which include from two to six types of components of different semiotic systems. The second group of multimodal syntactic constructions (26%) mentioned above includes four subtypes, the construction of which is ranked from three to five components. The third group (17%) consists of ten types produced by two or four components. The fourth is the least frequent (11%). These structures are formed by one or two types of components.

Based on the corpus of illustrative material, it has been established that multimodal syntactic constructions should be understood as symbiotic enclaves formed by combining units of different structure and content, shape and size, which belong to at least two different semiotic systems.