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TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: RETHINKING THE MULTIMODALITY AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE 21st CENTURY

This text is a review of the OUP Position Paper authored by Donaghy, K. with the assistance of two consultants – Karastathi, S. and Peachey, N. The primary objective of this review is to provide a detailed analysis of the ELT Position Paper, examining its structure, content, and theoretical issues. After a thorough examination of the publication, the reviewer concludes that it is of utmost importance to restructure the primary components of communicative competence in teacher training curriculums worldwide, including those taught at Ukrainian universities. This is because of the emerging views on the multimodality of present-day learning and communication which emphasize the need to reflect topical aspects of new ideas about multimodal communicative competence. Thus, this review highlights the need for a significant shift in the way we approach English language teaching to non-native speakers, particularly in terms of teacher training. It is essential to incorporate modern concepts and theories to ensure that learners of English as a second or foreign language can communicate effectively in the contemporary world.

Keywords: *ELT, multimodality, rethinking communication skills, teacher training, multimodality of learning and communication.*

The paper reviewed: Donaghy, K. (author), Karastathi, S. (consultant), & Peachey, N. (consultant), (2023). *Multimodality in ELT: Communication skills for today's generation*. Oxford University Press. <https://elt.oup.com/feature/global/expert/multimodality>

In the versatile versions of the communicative approach, teaching any foreign or second language as a means of communication has been set as the main goal of any learning cycle, educational program, syllabus or curriculum. The notion of communication has always been of paramount importance to the development of communication teaching and learning strategies of all modern approaches and methods. For the last more than 30 years, starting from the publications of Gunter Kress (2000, 2003, 2010) about the role of multimodality and visual elements in communication (The Grammar of Visual Design), many linguists and applied linguists have paid ever-growing attention to the multimodal features of the communication process (Lim, 2018; Lim, & Tan-Chia, 2022).

In the OUP Position Paper authored by Donaghy, K with the consultancy of Karastathi, S and Peachey, N. (Donaghy et al., 2023) the idea of reconsidering the concept of communication in the real world

has been promoted and the two most significant ways of interpreting the structure and the content of modern communication have been outlined as a summary of the previous research listed in the references. The author values the idea of teaching students to communicate realistically with the world around them: a world full of images and sound, blended with text a multimodal world. Therefore, he supports viewing and representing modes and specifies students' need to learn how to 'read' multimodal texts (viewing) and what is even more important – how to convey meaning themselves through multimodal texts (representing). Hence, he further informs about the appearance of a very significant phenomenon, that is the emergence of the new literacy – the multimodal literacy.

First, the terms of multimodality and multimodal literacy and then the main terms of the new literacy and the ways how they might be incorporated into classroom

practice are dealt with in greater detail. This paper further examines how multimodal literacy can influence the content, the methods and the materials of teaching within any target course as well as the possible implications on how and what we can assess and why we should assess our students on material that is relevant to their lives, to their real-life present and future needs.

The changing nature of communication and literacy is underlined in the first place by the author of the article as it is the foundation to understanding modern communication as a multimodal process and the notions of text, literacy and communicative competence as those of the multimodal text, multimodal literacy and multimodal communicative competence. The most valuable in this article is the exploration of all these new methodological terms as far as their relevance to English language teaching is concerned.

The new, more sophisticated vision of present-day communication, in the author's opinion, is made up of the main 5 modes as means of communicating meaningful messages. These are linguistic, visual, aural, gestural and spatial modes, which in all combinations can witness their powerful multimodal nature, the realizations of which are also vividly exemplified in the article under review: linguistic and visual (reading a graphic novel or an infographic); visual (looking at a painting or a photograph); linguistic, visual and aural (watching and listening to a film or video); linguistic and aural (listening to a podcast or a radio show); linguistic, visual, aural, and spatial (watching and listening to a short film or video and reading subtitles and captions).

Kieran Donaghy (Donaghy et al., 2023) rightly focuses our attention on the following phenomenon: "In the current communication environment, written and spoken texts are being replaced as the principal mode of communication by a combination of text and still and moving images that we view on screens" (p. 7). This viewpoint has helped to formulate the above-mentioned 5 modes of

communication which are equally important in present-day real life and educational communication. The significance of summarizing the main characteristics of each of the five mentioned modes is difficult to underestimate.

Defining the first mode, which is the linguistic mode, Kieran Donaghy (Donaghy et al., 2023) stresses that it focuses on the meaning of written or spoken language in communication and deals with the choice of words, the organization of words into sentences and paragraphs, vocabulary, grammar, and structure.

Kieran Donaghy (Donaghy et al., 2023) further defines the second mode – the visual one as such which focuses on the meaning of what can be seen by the viewer and which includes images, symbols, signs, and videos as well as aspects of visual design such as colour, physical layout (the way the parts of something are arranged), and font type (the style and design of letters) and size.

The third mode, defined by Kieran Donaghy (Donaghy et al., 2023), is the aural mode and in his understanding, it focuses on the meaning of what can be heard by the listener which includes voice, sound effects, background noise, music, and silence and in which the meaning can be realized through volume, tone, pitch (how high or low a sound is), speed, and rhythm.

The fourth mode, defined by the author, is the gestural mode which focuses on the meaning of communication through movement and includes expressions on the face, hand gestures, body language, and interaction between people (Donaghy, et al., 2023).

The fifth mode has been given, in the article under review, a significant prominence as its definition has much more details than the first four. According to Kieran Donaghy (Donaghy et al., 2023), the spatial mode focuses on the meaning of communication through physical layout and includes position, spacing, the distance between elements in a text, and space between people/objects. He then further explains that writers use the spatial mode of communication in

the physical layout and organization of a text. To exemplify this the author mentions a bi-fold pamphlet as a text printed on paper and folded twice which presents information spatially on four panels.

In the opinion of Kieran Donaghy (Donaghy et al., 2023), when a text contains more than one of the modes it is immediately considered to be multimodal. He further summarizes that multimodal texts can be both paper-based and digital and specifies them as

a) paper-based multimodal texts which include picture books, textbooks, graphic novels, comics, and posters and in which meaning is conveyed to the reader through varying combinations of linguistic (written language), visual (still image) and spatial modes and

b) digital multimodal texts, which include videos, vlogs, slide presentations, video games, and web pages, and in which meaning is conveyed through combinations of linguistic (written and spoken language), visual (still and moving image), aural, gestural, and spatial modes.

On page 9 of the paper, a reader can have a wonderful opportunity to see the multimodal analysis in practice (Donaghy et al., 2023). There one can notice a printed page from a traditional textbook and a meme and you can read a detailed description of how 4 out of 5 main modes of communication operate in the meme with a cat on the blurry background in its profile and in the textbook page with verbal and visual information. Especially educative, to my mind, is the description of how the modes can be transposed from one to another. For instance, in the meme, the text which is usually treated as the characteristics of the linguistic mode gets the features 1) of the visual mode as all the text is presented in the capital letters and 2) of the spatial mode as one coherent text (one sentence or better one utterance) is not presented in one place in the mentioned meme – it is divided into two parts and the first part of the text is located

in the top of the meme and the second part – in the bottom.

The same type of transpositions is observed in the author's description of the printed textbook page: "The visual mode operates [...] in the formatting of the text (such as the use of wide margins) and in the choice of typography (such as the use of italics for labelling the diagrams and the use of bold for glossed vocabulary). The spatial mode can be seen in the text's layout (such as the placement of the illustration in the top half of the page which extends into the margin)" (p.9). The author further describes a web page of the ELT of Oxford University Press (OUP) (n.d.) in terms of the communication modes. The web page (Oxford University Press, n.d.) consists of rubrics or sections such as 'Our catalogue', 'Oxford Teachers' Club', 'Quick links', 'Learning resources', 'Teaching resources', 'Join the Oxford Teachers' Club!' and the head rubric 'The Key to Self-Regulated Learning' which are typical for websites of any well-known publishing house.

The author states that the linguistic mode operates in the printed written text and the visual mode operates in the use of colour, photographs, and illustrations, in the choice of typography such as the use of capital letters in the logo and the use of larger font size and bold font for section headings while the spatial mode can be seen in the text's arrangement of printed written text, photographs, illustrations and the gestural mode can be observed in the main photo in the expression on the girl's face, her body language, and movement (Donaghy et al., 2023). This looks like an ideal exemplification of the communication modes; however, I would add one more idea to the interpretation of the main picture of this website page.

The idea relates to the successful history of the publications of coursebooks for teaching English all over the world, including the coursebook for primary schools, called *The Stepping Stones* (Ashworth, & Clark, 1990). The photo of the

girl jumping from one stone to another with energy and persistence, with very purposeful movements to overcome obstacles not only partially deciphers the heading of the main photo and consequently the main rubric of this website page 'The Key to Self-Regulated Learning' (OUP, n.d.), but also brings back to our memories the successful publications of OUP. So here we can talk not only about the gestural mode but in the first place about the significance of the visual mode altogether.

Finally, on the page of examples, the author describes a YouTube page where at last he takes advantage of all main five modes, including an aural one. According to Kieran Donaghy (Donaghy et al., 2023), there are various communication modes at work in that example: the linguistic mode operates in the printed written text of the logo, video title, description, and captions; the visual mode operates in the use of colour, moving images in the video, still images in the suggested video thumbnails, and in the choice of typography; the spatial mode can be seen in the text's arrangement of the video player, and printed written text description of the video; the gestural mode can be seen in the expression on the presenter's face, his body language, and movement in the video; and the aural mode operates in the voice of the presenter in the video.

To further define the semantic structure of the concept of multimodality, the author of the article under review (Donaghy et al., 2023) refers to the 1990s and to the New London Group (Cazden, et al., 1996) of academics which defined multimodality as a textual phenomenon in which two or more modes of communication interacted in the same text to create meaning and which introduced to the world the term *multiliteracies* or *multiple literacies* by arguing against the focus only being on language in literacy. The author of the article then pays attention to the claims of the Group about the need to expand the notion of literacy beyond language learning and

beyond 'alphabetic literacy', and about dealing with a 'pedagogy of multiliteracies' which would involve learning how to interpret and create multimodal texts (Donaghy et al., 2023).

As it is noted in the article, in contemporary communication, we are much more likely to encounter multimodal texts that combine alphabetic text, images, and other modes than texts that only focus on written language. At the same time, it is stressed there that each mode has its specific limitations and possibilities, related to the mode's meaning-making potential. The variety of affordances of each mode adds to our understanding of multimodality especially if we come to realize how each mode contributes to the overall meaning of a multimodal text. The concept of multimodality has been coined due to the changing nature of contemporary communication, its increasing digitalization, and the various ways in which meaning is made across different modes. The growing focus on multimodality in multimodal texts is a significant sign of our changing communication and learning and teaching environment.

In connection with the growth of steady popularity of the notions of multimodality and multimodal texts in English language teaching, there is a natural increase in the attention of teachers and researchers to the concepts of multimodal literacy and multimodal communicative competence. Kieran Donaghy (Donaghy et al., 2023) defines multimodal literacy as the ability to comprehend multimodal texts and to respond to them as well as to compose multimodal texts which means, in his opinion, that the term multimodal literacy brings viewing and representing together in a single concept. He further gives the extended definitions for viewing as a receptive skill linked together with listening and reading and for representing as a productive skill in one row with speaking and writing and thus, we can better understand the prerequisites for changing the structure and content of multimodal communicative

competence as the universal learning goal for every language teacher and learner.

It is noteworthy to mention here that the author of the article under review further describes what can be included in viewing and representing (Donaghy et al., 2023). By summarizing the research he states that viewing refers to the active process of comprehending and responding to multimodal texts and at the basic level, it involves learners noticing the different modes of communication used in the multimodal text with responding to it emotionally while at the higher level, the process of viewing involves learners analyzing and interpreting the multimodal text and responding to it critically. Representing for him is when learners communicate information and ideas through the creation of multimodal texts and, in general, it is about learners creating multimodal texts, such as the creative production of a variety of artefacts. The author differentiates between print media artefacts which include posters, collages, comic strips, and storyboards and digital composition artefacts which, in turn, embrace videos, slide presentations, infographics, and memes. Very important is the idea of the author about multimodal composing as the activity which is central to the development of multimodal literacy, as it not only provides learners with opportunities to represent their learning but also allows them to learn through making.

Such categorization of modes of communication gives prominence to many aspects of language teaching and becomes the foundation of educational change:

1) change in materials: the question of possible transformation of the perception of printed learning and teaching materials such as, for instance, course books from a static type of material to a dynamic one, from printed to those with digital references and resources;

2) change in roles of teachers: they should be organizers and facilitators of multimodal learning surroundings;

3) change in roles of students: they should by all means gain the understanding that they are responsible for designing their learning curricula and syllabuses in which multimodal communication is of primary importance in online experience and mainly in their real-life endeavours;

4) change in implications for assessment (the choice of texts for the written and aural reception and production is no longer an ultimate requirement, the texts and tasks to them should always include visual and spatial as well as aural and gestural perspectives.

On the Content page of this position paper, we see that the emphasis is given to the issues of integrating viewing and representing into classroom practice and to the exploration of implications of multimodal literacy on the way we teach and on what we teach as well as the implications for course materials, curricula, professional development and assessment. In the appendices key multimodal terms, essential teaching frameworks for developing viewing skills and an important rubric for assessing viewing are provided. In the References, the listed publications deal with the issues of multimodality, multimodal literacy/multiliteracies, visual literacy, multimodal analysis, multimodal text production in English language learning and with the role of image, film, filmmaking, screen, television programs, video, text, media, digital storytelling in the language classroom as well as with the language curricula, text-based syllabus design, a common framework of references for intercultural digital literacies.

Throughout the paper, we can notice that several ideas appear repeatedly. In the first place, it is the idea enclosed in the statement about contemporary communication as increasingly multimodal. It is of paramount importance to emphasize the multimodality of modern communication as it will lead to a better understanding of the language learners' needs as effective communicators. It becomes very obvious now that it is

necessary to help learners develop their multimodal communicative competence as they need to understand how images and other modes in multimodal texts interact with spoken and written language and in this respect, the author of the article under review lists several typical communicative situations and the ways how teachers and their learners could deal with them:

- the majority of texts learners are accessing outside the classroom are multimodal and they should be given opportunities to critically view – analyze and interpret – these types of texts in the classroom;

- as most of these multimodal texts – YouTube videos, websites, blogs, social media sites – are a combination of print text, image, and other modes, learners can be helped to explore how these different modes interact to create a communicative act;

- learners should also be given opportunities to communicate information and ideas through multimodal composition as the development of multimodal literacy prepares learners to be effective communicators.

There is another very important idea which finds its prominence in the article. This is the idea of accessibility and inclusive teaching practices. As the author rightly states, many learners struggle with written texts because of their additional needs in reading or writing skills, or due to sensory deficits; therefore, using multimodal texts in classes and encouraging learners to create their multimodal texts is, in his fair opinion, a fundamental part of inclusive teaching practices. It is difficult to deny the author's statement that multimodality can make information more accessible by widening traditional ways of understanding, creating and sharing information, and creating new knowledge. Developing learners' multimodal literacy, no doubt, makes information more accessible and some tasks, in the author's opinion, are much easier to do especially for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. Hence

effective practice might involve integrated video, interactive whiteboard materials, and apps for vocabulary learning used or audio versions of texts taken advantage of to allow learners to listen as they read a text.

One more remarkable idea of the paper is the statement that the growing focus on multimodality and multimodal literacy in language education is a sign of the changing communication environment. Effective communication today requires learners to be able to comprehend, respond to, and compose multimodal texts in diverse forms. So, the conclusion of the author is inevitable – it is necessary to rethink what is meant by communicative competence in language education.

The final idea and practical piece of information mentioned in the article under review is the fact that in response to changes in the contemporary communication environment, many education systems around the world have changed their literacy curricula to include multimodal literacy. The author gives an example of Singapore, in which the 2020 language syllabus integrates the skills of viewing and representing with listening, reading, speaking, and writing so that it includes meaning-making across different modes of communication in multimodal texts.

As a concluding statement in this review, there will be a very important statement of the author about the new literacy. He is sure that it is vital if students are to learn English in a way that is relevant to the way they live and how they interact with others. It is vital, indeed, to all the students but it is most vital and most relevant to student teachers all over the world and especially to those with English as a second or as a foreign language like in Ukrainian universities where pre-service teachers are doing their best to become teachers professionally and at the same to improve their multimodal communicative competence as learners.

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НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ: ПЕРЕОСМИСЛЕННЯ МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНОСТІ ТА ВМІНЬ СПІЛКУВАННЯ У ХХІ СТОЛІТТІ

У межах комунікативного підходу до навчання англійської мови як іноземної уміння спілкування традиційно виокремлювались як головна мета будь-якого навчального циклу, освітньої програми чи навчального плану. Поняття комунікації завжди було надзвичайно важливим для вироблення стратегій викладання та навчання усіх сучасних підходів і методів навчання іноземних мов. Протягом останніх 30 років, починаючи з публікацій про роль мультимодальності (Кресс, 2000, 2003, 2010) і візуальних елементів у комунікації (*The Grammar of Visual design*), багато лінгвістів і прикладних лінгвістів звертали увагу на мультимодальні особливості комунікаційного процесу (Лім, 2018; Лім та Тан-Чіа, 2022). Ця стаття є оглядом публікації Донагі К. за сприяння двох консультантів – Карастаті, С. та Пічі, Н – видавництва Оксфордського університету. Основна мета цього огляду – надати детальний аналіз публікації, зокрема розглянути її структуру, зміст та теоретичні постулати авторів. Після ретельного вивчення публікації зроблено висновок про надзвичайно важливість переосмислення структури комунікативної компетентності для підготовки вчителів у всьому світі, у тому числі в українських університетах. Це нагальна потреба пояснюється мультимодальністю сучасного навчання та спілкування, які підкреслюють необхідність відображення актуальних аспектів нових уявлень про мультимодальну комунікативну компетентність. Таким чином, цей огляд підкреслює необхідність суттєвих змін у підходах до викладання англійської мови для тих, для кого вона не є рідною, особливо з точки зору підготовки вчителів. Важливо включати сучасні концепції та теорії, щоб гарантувати, що ті, хто вивчають англійську мову як іноземну, можуть ефективно спілкуватися в сучасному мультимодальному світі.

Ключові слова: навчання англійської мови як іноземної, уміння спілкування, підготовка вчителя, мультимодальність навчання та спілкування, переосмислення структури комунікативної компетентності.

BIO

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