

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the American Animated Feature Film (*Pocahontas*) by Walt Disney Production

تحليل خطابي متعدد الوسائط لفيلم الكرتون الأمريكي (بوكاهونتاس) من إنتاج شركة
والت ديزني

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المستخلص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط في أفلام الكرتون الروائية المتحركة. يتم استقراء المحتوى من زاويتين: القواعد الوظيفية المنهجية لهاليداي ونموذج الوسائط المتعددة لكريس وفان ليوين. ففي قراءة الصور: القواعد النحوية للتصميم المرئي (١٩٩٦)، يناقش كريس وفان ليوين قواعد التصميم المرئي التي تفك رموز الأنماط المختلفة للتمثيل، وأنماط التفاعل، وكيف يمكن فك تشفير التجربة بصريًا، وكل ما يساهم في معنى الصورة المرئية من ناحية النصوص وكذلك الصور المتحركة. وضمن هذا الأساس المنطقي للرسوم المتحركة من حيث النوع الاجتماعي والهوية، تتفحص الدراسة الحالية فيلم بوكاهونتاس (١٩٩٥) الذي أنتجته استديوهات والت ديزني ضمن نموذج تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط لاستكشاف كيفية رسم الصور المتحركة على أنماط الاتصال مثل موقف الكاميرا، والوضع، والاتصال، والمسافة، والألوان، وتعبيرات الوجه، والإيماءات في تركيبها مع الكلمات لإضفاء معنى معين. وبالتالي، فإن "تعدد الوسائط" تلفت النظر إلى كيفية تواصل الأشخاص، وخاصة الأطفال، والتفاعل مع بعضهم البعض من خلال الكتابة والتحدث والإيماءات والنظرات والأشكال المرئية. الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط، الهوية، والت ديزني، بوكاهونتاس، القواعد المرئية، الرسوم المتحركة الأمريكية.

Abstract

The current paper attempts to examine the contribution of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to animated feature

films. The content is investigated from two angles: Halliday's Systematic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodality model. In *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996), Kress and van Leeuwen discuss the visual design grammar which decodes the different patterns of representation, patterns of interaction, how experience can be visually decoded, and all that contributes to the meaning of visual texts as well as moving images. Within this rationale, the present study explores Walt Disney's *Pocahontas*. (1995), produced by Walt Disney animation studios in terms of gender and identity within the paradigm of Multimodal Discourse Analysis to interrogate how moving pictures draw on modes of communication such as the *camera attitude, posture, contact, distance, colors, facial expressions, and gestures* in combination with words to make meaning. Thereby, Multimodality looks at how people, especially children, communicate and interact with each other through writing and speaking, gesture, gaze, and visual forms.

Keywords: Multimodality, Gender, Walt Disney, Pocahontas, Visual Grammar, American animation.

1. Introduction

This study attempts to test the multimodal theory proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) as it relates to language, moving images, and social studies. They challenge their readers to think about the many forms of meaning-making that transcend language and intensify semiotic processes. Multimodal Theory (2006) can be found in writings and discussions on communication theory, linguistics, media literacy, visual literacy, anthropological studies, and design studies. Multimodality is the

study of how people communicate and interact with each other, not only through writing (which is one mode) but also through speech, gestures, colors, gaze, and visual forms (many modes). As O'Halloran (2005) observes, linguistic patterns are used to refer to “channels through which symbolic activity occurs” (p. 20). Therefore, the mode is usually defined as a communication channel embodied in writing, posture, images, and even the interactions between them.

2. Aim of the Study

This paper explores how Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of interpreting images can be applied to the analysis of moving pictures, particularly in terms of the interplay between verbal and visual elements and the role of the viewer. The study focuses on a specific American animated film, analyzed from a narratological perspective, with attention paid to the use of language and visual grammar. The film features a female protagonist who undergoes a series of challenges and emerges stronger and more mature as a result. The goal of this research is to understand how the film achieves these objectives. The present paper attempts to investigate the following questions:

- 1- To what extent can the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) be applied to Disney animated feature films?
- 2- How did Disney portray the female role throughout the multimodal analysis and reading images?

3- What are the implications of the use of multimodal tools in the selected films?

4. Theoretical framework

Systemic functional grammar (SFG) or systemic functional linguistics (SFL) was created by Michael Halliday in the 1960s and is considered a type of grammar. It falls under a broader social semiotic approach to the language called systemic linguistics. The term "systemic" refers to the idea that language is a complex network of interconnected systems or rules for constructing meaning. Meanwhile, the term "functional" emphasizes the interest in the practical, contextual uses of language, in contrast to formal grammar, which focuses on aspects like compositional semantics, syntax, and word classes (such as nouns and verbs). (Halliday, M., 1994, P.22).

According to him, language has three distinct configurations, each serving a unique function or "metafunction" in the creation of meaning. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) utilize the terms function and metafunction to indicate various aspects of language. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the concept of metafunction implies that the presence of functionality is a fundamental aspect of the structure of human language. These metafunctions are Interpersonal, Ideational, and Textual. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) proposed three metafunctions of images, namely Representational, Interactive, and Compositional, which are comparable to Halliday's three metafunctions of language (Interpersonal, Ideational, and Textual). They argue that visual

design, along with other semiotic modes, adopts Halliday's principles and integrates them into their theoretical framework of semiotic analysis, thereby fulfilling these three metafunctions.

4.1 The Representational Meaning

This aspect comes from Halliday's ideational metafunction, which aims to explain the relationships between ourselves and the world around us. Instead of referring to "things," the term "participant" is used. Kress and van Leeuwen have identified two types of participants in every act of communication: depicted participants and interactive participants. Depicted participants are the entities that are being represented in the speech, writing, or image while interactive participants refer to those who are involved in the act of communication. This dimension includes two types of processes: **Conceptual** and **Narrative**. Conceptual processes are stationary and represent actors based on their structure, meaning, or class. On the other hand, narrative processes are dynamic and convey evolving actions, events, changes, and spatial arrangements. Kress and van Leeuwen categorize participants in their framework into two types: interactive participants and represented participants. Interactive participants comprise both the audience (readers and viewers) and creators (artists or photographers). Represented participants are the locations, people, and objects that are portrayed in texts and images. (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.59).

4.1.1 Conceptual Processes

In Jewitt and Oyama's (2004) view, conceptual processes do not involve movement and are portrayed without direction. They

represent individuals in terms that are more universally applicable and permanent with a certain degree of stability, whether it be in their social status, meaning, or configuration. Additionally, these processes are focused on depicting concepts in visual form, allowing for the classification, identification, and definition of participants using diagrams, scientific graphs, and hierarchical structures. According to Jewitt and Oyama (2004, P.143), these processes visually categorize, define, or analyze people, places, or things within an image.

4.1.2 Narrative Processes

Contrary to the Conceptual process, A vector is a diagonal line that represents a dynamic relationship between elements in an image. This line serves as a connection between participants in fluid relationships within the depicted interactions. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that vectors are often produced by moving limbs, bodies, or tools when individuals are portrayed as acting toward each other. These vectors can also be created by the direction of an object's gaze, which is known as an **Action process**.

4.1.2.1 Action Processes

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that individuals involved in this type of practice engage in a form of bodily movement. The processes of action can be classified as either transactional or non-transactional, depending on the number of participants.

4.1.1.2 Reaction Processes

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, P.67), the portrayal of facial expressions plays a significant role in shaping the responses of depicted participants in reactional processes. They also note that reactional processes can be categorized as either transactional or non-transactional, similar to action processes. In transactional reactional processes, both the phenomenon and the reactor are involved, while in non-transactional ones, only the reactor is involved.

4. 2 Interactive Metafunction

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the interaction between the image's viewer and the participants depicts the second dimension. It is based on Halliday's (1978) interpersonal metafunction. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) describe the resources of visual communication that are employed to uphold the relationship between the image's creator and viewer in this metafunction. There are three primary methods through which interactive meanings are established. The initial method involves the **Contact system**, the second involves the **Social Distance system**, and the final method involves the **Attitude system**.

4. 2.1 Contact

This could mean that the people in the image are either looking at the viewer and creating a connection with them or not. When the viewer is asked to do something in response to what they see, it's called a "**demand**" action. In their article "The Participant's Gaze" from 2006, Kress and van Leeuwen ask the audience to

engage in a make-believe relationship with the people in the picture that can vary depending on the participants' expressions or gestures. In pictures where the participants aren't facing the camera directly, these relationships can be established through things like smiling, pouting, or pointing at the viewer. Alternatively, "**offer**" actions allow the observer to switch places with the object and become the subject of the gaze. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, P.119) call these types of images "offer" images because they present the people in the picture as objects to be examined and observed, almost like samples in a display case.

4.2.2 Social Distance

The second aspect relates to the various associations that can be implied by the distance between the participant and the viewer. The images can be classified into three groups based on their proximity: close-up, mid-shot, and long shot. This means that creators of images or scenes have the liberty to position the participants in their work either near or far from the audience. Consequently, the connection that the viewers form with the individuals depicted in the work can vary depending on the chosen distance.

4.2.3 Attitude

The final stage of interactive meanings concerns the objective or subjective expression of attitude. According to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) discussion, the system of attitude involves decisions based on how the players are depicted (vertically and horizontally). The horizontal angle is determined by the relationship between the frontal planes of the individuals depicted and the

frontal plane of the picture generator. This angle can convey whether the viewer and the photographer are connected to the individuals being represented. A frontal angle indicates involvement while an oblique angle suggests detachment. On the other hand, the vertical angle may relate to power dynamics. For instance, a low-angle shot depicts the portrayed participant as being in control of the connection while a high-angle shot makes the viewer appear stronger. Eye-level angles represent equality where the observer and the participant are on the same level, and no power difference is evident. (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

4.3 Compositional Meaning

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the compositional metafunction explains the overall arrangement of artwork. This means that it illustrates how the different elements of images, both representational and interactive, are combined to create a cohesive piece of art. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) introduce three interrelated composition systems that connect the interactive and representational meanings of images. These systems consider the importance of information value, salience, and framing. They are multimodal semiotic concepts that can be used to create visuals consisting of both text and images, not just limited to pictures. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) claim that the three compositional principles can also be used for moving images as long as the use of motion contributes to a dynamic composition.

4.3.1 Information Value

Jewitt and Oyama (2004) suggest that the placement of compositional elements determines their information value within a composition. The function of an element within the entire composition depends on where it is positioned, such as in the middle, margin, top, or bottom. Van Leeuwen (2005) explains that information value assigns different values to specific regions of the semiotic space. He also notes that all of these characteristics can be incorporated into multimodal texts, including movies and television.

4.3.2 Saliency

According to van Leeuwen's (2005) research, various factors impact saliency. These factors comprise high tonal contrasts, particularly along the borders of black and white, which have elevated saliency. Additionally, color contrasts, such as the difference between vivid and muted colors, or between red and blue, also have an effect. Other factors include relative size, level of focus, degree of detail and texture, and regions of high tonal contrast (p.198).

4.3.3 Framing

van Leeuwen (2005) claims that there are multiple methods for achieving framing. Separation can be achieved through the use of frame lines, white space between elements, graphic framing techniques, and color discontinuities. Conversely, a lack of disconnection mechanisms, similarity in color or visual shape, and the presence of vectors can all contribute to creating a connection. Furthermore, van Leeuwen notes that framing's ability to

communicate meaning is influenced by the context. For instance, in animation, framing is crucial for "blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality" (p.14).

5. Data Collection

This research deals with the American animated feature film presented by Walt Disney production, *Pocahontas* (1995), which represents the new American women in modern society who are mostly strong and independent. A synopsis of the film is presented below.

Pocahontas is a 1995 American animated musical comedy romance–drama film released by Walt Disney Animation Studios. It's the first Disney animated feature film inspired by a real historical figure, Pocahontas, a Native American woman. The movie portrays a fictionalized version of her encounter with John Smith, an Englishman, and the group of settlers that came with the Virginia Company to America in 1607. The film depicts the Englishmen's search for gold, their interactions with the Native Americans, and the conflict that arises between them.

The film also introduces several characters, including Captain John Smith, Governor Ratcliffe, Pocahontas, and her friend Nakoma. Smith saves the life of an inexperienced young settler named Thomas, befriends him, and plays the role of his older brother. Meanwhile, Pocahontas seeks advice from a talking tree spirit named Granny Willow, who advises her to listen to her heart.

As the settlers landed in what would become Virginia and dug for gold on Ratcliffe's orders, John Smith explores the territory and

discovers that the new world was a place of adventure. All the while, he is pursued by the curious Pocahontas. When Pocahontas returns to the village, she finds warriors from neighboring tribes arriving to help the Powhatans fight the settlers. Back at the British fort, Ratcliffe declares they will eliminate all the natives, thinking they hid the gold for themselves.

In the end, John and Pocahontas kiss, and Kokum attacks John out of jealousy, leading to a series of events that ultimately result in John's capture and the threat of war between the settlers and the natives. Pocahontas intervenes and convinces Powhatan to choose peace instead of war, and Ratcliffe is captured and sent back to England for punishment. John survives but has to return to England for treatment. Pocahontas promises John that she will always be in his heart as she watches the ship depart.

The Representational Metafunction Analysis

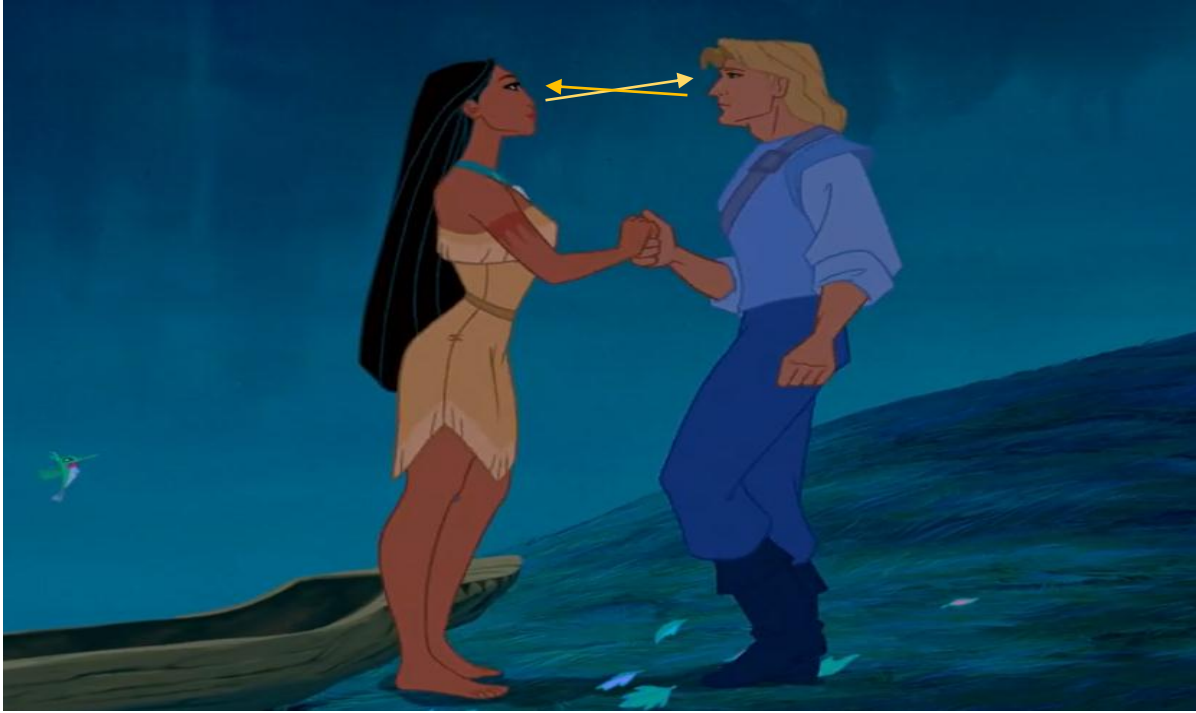


Figure (1): Pocahontas (1995)

At the beginning of the scene, Pocahontas is shown observing John Smith from a distance, and she starts to sing a song about how she wonders what he is like. This is an example of a transactional process, as Pocahontas is initiating communication with John Smith, even though he is not yet aware of it. Her song serves as a kind of prelude to their eventual meeting, and it conveys her curiosity and interest in this stranger.

When Pocahontas and John Smith finally met, they engage in a primarily transactional conversation. John Smith introduces himself and asks Pocahontas about her name and her people. Pocahontas responds by telling him that her name means "little mischief" and that she is a member of the Powhatan tribe. This exchange of

information is an example of a transactional process, as they are sharing information with each other.

This scene represents a narrative scene, due to the existence of two vectors. The first vector departs from Pocahontas's eyes to John Smith's eyes. Thus, Pocahontas is the Reacter in a transactional reactional process in which John Smith is the phenomenon to grab her attention. The second vector is formed by John Smith's eyes that are directed to Pocahontas's eyes. So, Pocahontas plays the role of the Actor in a transactional action process, because in a transactional action process as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state, the figures have an Actor and a Goal and here in the scene, Pocahontas is the Actor and John Smith is the Goal to grab her attention by holding her hand.

However, there are also some examples of reactional processes in this scene. For instance, when Pocahontas tells John Smith that her people are called the Powhatans, he responds by saying that he has never heard of them before. This shows that he is reacting to her statement and trying to learn more about her culture.

In conclusion, the scene in Pocahontas where the protagonist meets John Smith can be analyzed using the representational metafunction of language, with a focus on the transactional and reactional processes that occur during their conversation.

Facial Expressions

As previously stated, facial expressions can convey significant messages to those who observe them, indicating emotions such as surprise, anxiety, happiness, sadness, dissatisfaction, joy, fear, and

disgust. Various facial expressions are demonstrated in different scenes from Pocahontas (1995) in Figure (2).

Furious	
Sad	
Happy	

Shocked



Roaring



Surprised



Suffering pain



Amused



The Interactive Metafunctions Analysis



Figure (3): Pocahontas (1995)

Beginning with the animated feature film, *Pocahontas* 1995, we can portray that Pocahontas is a central figure in the film's themes of cultural differences, respect for nature, and the importance of understanding and empathy. Her character is a symbol of the connection between nature and spirituality, and her journey throughout the film highlights the importance of embracing diversity and finding common ground.

This shot presents an example of the Figure in the gaze system, as Pocahontas, the represented participant, is not looking directly at the viewer. Pocahontas is gazing at herself intently in this shot, contemplating and examining her identity throughout the reflection of the river. Pocahontas's facial expression shows with her gestures and her eye gaze reveals her identity as she looks at the water, seeing

her mother's necklace that her father gave to her. She sees her mother's face reflected in the river alongside her own. This moment is symbolic of Pocahontas connecting with her mother's spirit and feeling a sense of guidance and comfort from her.

So, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that the recipient of an image is the "subject" observing the content, while the depicted subject is the "object" being impartially inspected by the viewer (P.119).

When viewed horizontally, Pocahontas appears to be facing forward and not looking directly at the viewer. However, when viewed vertically, Pocahontas is depicted as above the viewer, highlighting her dominance and authority.

In terms of social distance, Pocahontas is captured by a very close shot which creates a sense of intimacy between her and the viewer. This also enables the viewer to observe Pocahontas's facial features and expressions in great detail, providing insight into her strong character. Halls' (1966) theory of distance zones categorizes Pocahontas's depiction as "personal," meaning that if she were in reality, we would be close enough to touch her based on her portrayal in the film.

The Compositional Metafunctions Analysis

As mentioned earlier, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize three interconnected methods of creating a composition that links the informative and interactive aspects of Figures together. These methods are information value, salience, and framing.



Figure (4): Pocahontas (1995)

By positioning Chief Powhatan at the center of attention and presenting the tribe as the margins, he becomes the primary focus of information. This places the man in a prominent position and draws everyone's attention toward him. So as for the information value, the arrangement of characters in this particular scene follows the Center-Margin structure, where the main character, Chief Powhatan, is positioned in the center while the other participants, in this case, the tribe, are placed around him to provide a further visual representation. Referring to the framing devices, the man is strongly framed, and the facial expressions are similar between Chief Powhatan and his tribe. The Powhatan tribe's clothing is mainly brown, tan, and other earthy tones. These colors reflect the natural materials used in their clothing and emphasize their connection to the earth. The use of these colors also suggests simplicity and

authenticity to their way of life. The surrounding landscape is also portrayed in earthy tones, with greens and browns representing the forested land around the tribe's village. This coloring emphasizes the tribe's harmony with nature and their dependence on the natural world for survival. Additionally, the Powhatan tribe's body paint is often depicted in red and yellow tones. These colors represent the warmth of the sun and the heat of the fire, symbolizing the tribe's strength and power. The use of these bold colors also suggests a deep pride in their cultural traditions and a desire to preserve their way of life.

5. Conclusion

The primary focus of this research is to analyze the animated movie, *Pocahontas* (1995), created by Walt Disney, through the lens of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The study aims to explore how various modes of communication, such as camera angle, body language, colors, facial expressions, gestures, and words, are utilized in the film to construct meaning around gender and identity. Additionally, the study examines how different semiotic resources, including representational, interactive, and compositional elements, contribute to the depiction of the female protagonist in the film.

The research has analyzed the effect of SFG tools on visual and interactive elements, that can be used to depict women in animated films. Furthermore, the leading role in the film is held by a female character. To express the meaning clearly and effectively, various tools, such as vectors, camera angles, and framing techniques are utilized as a part of the overall visual language of the film. These

tools play a crucial role in conveying information and emphasizing certain aspects of the portrayal of women.

First, the film's representational metafunction is analyzed by looking at the different types of processes, which are determined by the presence or absence of actions or vectors. This analysis is useful for revealing how the female protagonist is portrayed in the animated feature film, as well as the types of relationships established between her and other characters.

Second, the using of interactive metafunctions analysis to examine the relationship between gaze, social distance, and attitude in a specific animated feature film. This type of analysis helps to demonstrate how the film constructs meaning through interaction and how female characters who are not princesses are depicted. Additionally, the analysis uncovers the fictitious social connections between the characters and the audience.

Third, an analysis is conducted using compositional metafunction to examine the relationship between information value, salience, and framing devices. This type of analysis helps to illustrate how the representational and interactive modes work together to create a meaningful narrative. In particular, it demonstrates how the different characters and elements in the narrative are interconnected.

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Appendix











