

REVISITING MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE: A REVIEW OF INTRODUCING MULTIMODALITY (2ND EDITION, 2025)

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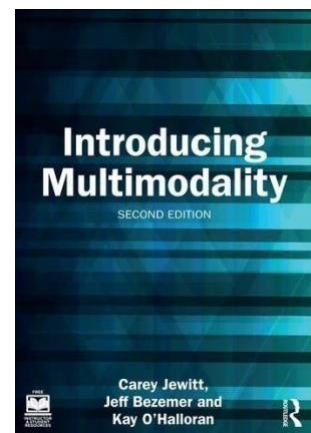
Abstract

*This review critically evaluates how effectively the second edition of *Introducing Multimodality* (2025) addresses earlier critiques while adapting multimodal theory to contemporary communicative conditions. Building on the foundational tri-framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, Social Semiotics, and Conversation Analysis, the new edition introduces structural refinements, expanded discussions of embodied meaning, and significantly updated digital examples, including TikTok, WhatsApp, and virtual reality. These additions enhance clarity and relevance, particularly for graduate-level teaching and applied research. However, the edition continues to face several limitations. Key concepts, such as resemiotisation, transduction, and multimodal (inter)action analysis, remain conceptually dense and insufficiently scaffolded for novice readers. Cultural representation also remains uneven, with primarily Western platforms and communicative norms shaping the analytical examples. Through comparison with canonical works by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and Bateman (2022), this review argues that the second edition offers meaningful pedagogical improvements but limited epistemological innovation. Ultimately, the book successfully strengthens its instructional utility while leaving unresolved questions regarding global inclusivity, theoretical accessibility, and methodological diversity.*

Keywords: *multimodality, discourse analysis, digital communication, cultural representation, pedagogical applications.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, communicative practices have undergone significant transformation, driven by mobile technologies, social media, and the increasing centrality of multimodal expression in everyday interaction. Meaning is now routinely constructed through the interplay of language, image, gesture, sound, spatial design, and embodied action, creating analytical demands that traditional linguistic approaches cannot fully accommodate. *Introducing Multimodality* (2nd edition, 2025) enters this landscape as a timely revision, offering an updated synthesis of multimodal theory and practice for scholars and students across discourse studies, education, and digital communication.



The first edition (2016) was recognized for its clear overview of Systemic Functional Linguistics, Social Semiotics, and Conversation Analysis. Still, reviewers, including Hurley (2018), identified notable limitations: its reliance on Western-centric examples, dense

terminology, and limited pedagogical scaffolding. These critiques form a critical backdrop for evaluating the 2025 edition, which claims to enhance clarity, accessibility, and relevance in response to rapidly evolving communicative environments.

To assess how successfully these aims are met, this review adopts four evaluative criteria: theoretical clarity, cultural representation, accessibility, and classroom applicability. These dimensions reflect both persistent challenges in multimodality pedagogy and broader methodological debates concerning the balance between analytical depth and user-friendly presentation. Situating the book within the broader disciplinary canon further strengthens the assessment. Comparisons with Kress and van Leeuwen's *Multimodal Discourse* (2001) and Bateman's *Text and Image* (2022) provide benchmarks for considering the edition's conceptual rigor and disciplinary contribution.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND STRUCTURAL REFINEMENT

The second edition of *Introducing Multimodality* retains its foundational reliance on Systemic Functional Linguistics, Social Semiotics, and Conversation Analysis, yet reframes these traditions with more explicit conceptual focus and improved pedagogical intent. One notable enhancement appears in the authors' articulation of agency in meaning-making. By emphasizing that "people combine semiotic resources to make meaning" (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2025, p. 3), the revised text shifts attention from modes as autonomous systems to users as situated, intentional actors. This aligns with broader developments in multimodal scholarship, which increasingly conceptualize communication as embodied and context-dependent rather than purely mode-driven. However, this reframing stops short of addressing the ideological and socio-political dimensions of agency emphasized in critical multimodality (Machin & Mayr, 2012), leaving important contemporary debates unexplored.

The expanded acknowledgement of sensory modalities such as touch, taste, and smell similarly reflects the field's ongoing shift toward embodied semiotics. Whereas the first edition focused primarily on visual and linguistic modes, the new edition recognizes that multimodal meaning is distributed across the full sensory spectrum. Yet this expansion remains descriptive mainly. The text identifies what these modalities can signify but offers limited methodological scaffolding for analyzing them. Without more explicit guidance on transcription, annotation, or comparative procedures, readers gain an extended taxonomy but few tools for operationalizing it, a concern consistent with earlier critiques that the first edition offered conceptual breadth but insufficient methodological support (Hurley, 2018).

Structural refinement is another significant improvement. The reduction from 232 to 198 pages results from more efficient explanations, clearer sequencing, and tighter transitions rather than content loss. Examples drawn from interface design, algorithmic curation, and data visualization help readers connect multimodal principles to contemporary digital practices (Jewitt et al., 2025, pp. 24–37). This streamlining responds directly to concerns that the first edition felt dense and insufficiently guided.

Nonetheless, some conceptual challenges persist. Core ideas, such as resemiotisation and transduction, are introduced abruptly, and definitions, though clarified, still rely on concise academic phrasing rather than a layered pedagogical explanation. The continued focus on three semiotic traditions also leaves little room for comparison with alternative frameworks such as Peircean semiotics or formal modeling (Bateman, 2022; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), resulting in a coherent but narrowly framed theoretical landscape.

Strengthened internal cohesion is the edition's most successful improvement. Transitions between SFL, Social Semiotics, and CA are more explicit, and the restructured Chapter 6, now organized around four analytical perspectives, provides more precise boundaries and methodological distinctions (Jewitt et al., 2025, p. 89). Yet this streamlining also narrows the book's engagement with interpretive traditions presented in *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis* (Jewitt, 2009, 2019).

DIGITAL INTEGRATION AND APPLIED METHODOLOGIES

One of the most substantial contributions of the second edition lies in its integration of digital communication environments, which reshapes not only its examples but also its methodological orientation. Unlike the first edition, which relied heavily on classroom-based texts, print materials, and face-to-face interaction, the revised volume situates multimodality within digital ecosystems such as TikTok, WhatsApp, Instagram, and virtual reality. This shift is significant, as it acknowledges how contemporary meaning-making is increasingly shaped by algorithmic visibility, participatory remix culture, and platform-specific design conventions (Jewitt et al., 2025, pp. 112–118). The detailed TikTok case study exemplifies this change: by examining gesture, soundtrack layering, gaze direction, on-screen captions, and editing rhythms, the book demonstrates how semiotic resources operate within the platform's architecture. The case is pedagogically compelling, yet the analysis often stops at illustration rather than developing a fuller theorization of digital semiotics.

This limitation becomes evident when considering TikTok's algorithmic features, such as duet chains, recommendation systems, and engagement metrics, which shape the circulation and transformation of multimodal texts. While mentioned, these mechanisms are not analytically unpacked, leaving unaddressed the more profound semiotic consequences of algorithmic curation. Such gaps suggest that although the book updates its examples, it does not consistently extend its theoretical apparatus to interrogate the socio-technical infrastructures underpinning digital discourse.

Another notable enhancement is the incorporation of analytical tools, including spectrograms, gesture-annotation software, layout mapping, and DOTE transcription. These additions reflect a clear move toward systematic, replicable multimodal analysis, particularly for audio-visual data. The adoption of Mondada's (2018) transcription conventions further strengthens methodological rigour by providing structured means of representing gaze, gesture, and embodied alignment. These revisions directly address earlier critiques that the first edition lacked operational guidance (Hurley, 2018). However, the emphasis on procedures sometimes overshadows interpretive depth. Readers receive extensive demonstrations of how to transcribe multimodal material, yet the rationale behind choosing particular tools or how methodological decisions shape meaning interpretation remains underexplored.

A similar tension is present in the treatment of digital messaging platforms. The book acknowledges multimodal features such as emoji repertoires, sticker cultures, screenshotting practices, and voice notes, but its analysis remains largely Western-centric. Although platforms like WeChat are mentioned, the text does not examine culturally specific practices, such as Chinese sticker conventions or regionally distinctive uses of screenshots, which limits the global applicability of its claims (Jewitt et al., 2025, pp. 131–133). As a result, the edition widens its empirical scope without fully engaging with cross-cultural multimodality. This gap is especially apparent given the field's increasing focus on global semiotic diversity.

The effort to connect multimodal analysis with broader research design is one of the edition's more successful revisions. Updates to Table 7.1 and expanded sample research questions enable readers to translate theoretical concepts into project frameworks across various domains, including healthcare, education, and social media. These additions enhance classroom applicability, particularly for graduate-level training. However, the questions still lean toward descriptive rather than critical inquiry, with limited attention to issues such as how multimodal texts construct authority, regulate emotion, or encode ideology.

The appendix's step-by-step transcription exercises represent another pedagogical improvement, offering accessible practice for novice researchers. Yet these exercises occasionally prioritize procedural demonstration over conceptual scaffolding, leaving unclear how transcription connects to analytical depth. This reflects a broader pattern: the edition substantially improves methodological access but does not fully integrate method with theory in ways that deepen critical insight.

CULTURAL REPRESENTATION AND THEORETICAL ACCESSIBILITY

Although the second edition of *Introducing Multimodality* demonstrates notable improvements in structure and methodological clarity, its treatment of cultural representation remains uneven, revealing a recurring tension between the book's global aspirations and its predominantly Western analytical lens. This limitation echoes Hurley's (2018) critique of the first edition, which relied heavily on Anglo-European examples and provided little engagement with non-Western communicative traditions. The revised edition attempts to diversify its empirical base by referencing platforms such as WeChat alongside WhatsApp and briefly noting translanguaging practices. However, these remarks function more as surface indicators of international relevance than as substantive engagements with culturally situated multimodal norms. The text frequently names global platforms without probing how semiotic expectations, interactional rhythms, affective cues, or gesture repertoires differ across regions, resulting in only partial recognition of global communicative diversity.

This selective representation is most visible in the discussion of digital communication. While TikTok and Instagram receive detailed attention, their usage patterns are framed primarily through Euro-American conventions. Although WeChat appears as a global platform, the book overlooks culturally specific phenomena, such as Chinese sticker cultures, sequential screenshotting practices, or distinctive uses of voice notes, patterns well-documented in Asian digital ethnography but absent here. Similarly, multimodal norms across Southeast Asia, Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East remain largely unexamined, despite their central role in shaping global digital ecosystems. Consequently, the edition reproduces a familiar pattern in multimodal scholarship: gestures toward global inclusivity paired with theoretical grounding that remains anchored in Western semiotics (Jewitt, 2019; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). This imbalance limits the text's applicability in cross-cultural teaching contexts and raises questions about the universality of its analytical frameworks.

Beyond geographic range, the criteria underlying the book's notion of "cultural representation" remain implicit. The text acknowledges global platforms and hints at communicative diversity but does not articulate a conceptual model for evaluating cultural variation in multimodal terms. The authors highlight embodied modes but stop short of examining how embodiment is culturally mediated, how gaze conventions vary, how gesture meanings shift in diasporic contexts, or how affect is shaped by hierarchy, collectivist norms, or religious identity, without providing more precise criteria for what constitutes meaningful

cultural engagement. Representational inclusivity risks being reduced to tokenism. This limitation is particularly evident in light of the rise of global semiotics and decolonial perspectives, which call for closer attention to power, ideology, and cultural specificity in multimodal representation.

Accessibility issues also persist despite visible improvements. The expanded glossary, additional diagrams, and cleaner subheadings address concerns raised by Hurley (2018) about abrupt conceptual introductions. Yet, many key terms, such as transduction, resemiotisation, semiotic provenance, and multimodal orchestration, remain conceptually dense and insufficiently scaffolded for readers unfamiliar with semiotics. Definitions are concise yet abstract, offering labels without providing detailed explanations. The sequential organization often prioritizes terminological exposure over conceptual integration, leaving readers with a fragmented understanding of how concepts relate to one another or how they should be operationalized in analysis.

This challenge is compounded by theoretical selectivity. By focusing exclusively on SFL, Social Semiotics, and CA, the edition maintains coherence but omits alternative frameworks such as Peircean semiotics, multimodal ethnomethodology, mediated discourse analysis, or critical multimodality (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Bateman, 2022). Without even brief comparative remarks, newcomers may mistakenly assume that the presented frameworks constitute the entire theoretical landscape of the field.

Stylistically, the revised edition flows more smoothly, with improved transitions and fewer repetitive sentence openings. However, the prose occasionally returns to declarative exposition, and dense academic vocabulary may still hinder novices. Thus, while improvements are evident, they remain incremental.

COMPARATIVE EVALUATION AND FIELD CONTRIBUTIONS

Evaluating the second edition of *Introducing Multimodality* alongside major works in the field clarifies both what the revision achieves and what it leaves unresolved. When compared with foundational texts such as Kress and van Leeuwen's *Multimodal Discourse* (2001), Bateman's *Text and Image* (2022), and *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis* (Jewitt, 2009, 2019), the new edition's distinctive contribution emerges most clearly in its pedagogical consolidation rather than in conceptual innovation. This orientation reflects a deliberate choice: the book does not attempt to redefine multimodal theory. Instead, it refines, organizes, and articulates foundational principles in an accessible manner for readers entering the field.

In contrast to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), whose work provides a systematic grammar of visual design grounded in social semiotics, *Introducing Multimodality* adopts a broader, integrative scope. Instead of focusing on a single modal domain, it surveys three major traditions, SFL, Social Semiotics, and Conversation Analysis, offering a conceptual map for readers seeking to understand how these approaches converge around central analytical concerns. This breadth strengthens the volume's pedagogical value, especially for students needing orientation before engaging with more specialized literature. However, this advantage comes with an inevitable trade-off: the depth and precision found in Kress and van Leeuwen's account of visual meaning, including concepts such as information value or salience, are not matched in *Introducing Multimodality*, which often summarizes rather than interrogates theoretical constructs.

A similar contrast arises when the book is compared with Bateman's *Text and Image* (2022). Bateman's work represents one of the most technically rigorous efforts to formalize multimodal meaning through computational and geometric modeling. Its analytical demands require substantial prior training. In comparison, *Introducing Multimodality* does not pursue formal precision; instead, it serves as a conceptual bridge, preparing readers for more advanced scholarship. This gateway function is valuable for pedagogical purposes, yet it also highlights the book's limitations: its revisions refine presentation rather than propose new analytical constructs or expand theoretical horizons.

Comparison with *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis* (Jewitt, 2009, 2019) further clarifies the edition's position within the field. The handbook surveys a wide range of frameworks, from mediated discourse analysis to affective multimodality and corpus-based approaches, reflecting the field's expanding theoretical diversity. Against this backdrop, *Introducing Multimodality* fills a narrower niche as a structured introductory guide. Yet the 2025 edition engages only minimally with more recent theoretical developments highlighted in the 2019 handbook, including research on affect, ethics, race, and materiality. This omission reinforces the impression that the volume, while more transparent and more usable than before, remains slightly behind the theoretical frontier of global multimodal research.

Pedagogically, however, the second edition marks significant progress. Its reorganized chapters, streamlined explanations, updated digital examples, and expanded glossary address earlier critiques of abstraction and fragmentation (Hurley, 2018). The improved alignment between theory and method, particularly in the revised Chapter 7, makes it more suitable for graduate teaching, teacher training, and introductory research courses. This reflects a broader disciplinary shift toward more teachable and data-oriented approaches that prioritize interpretive literacy over purely theoretical abstraction.

Despite these strengths, the edition's epistemological contribution remains modest. It neither advances new frameworks nor substantially extends existing theory. Moreover, its global scope remains limited. Although the examples are more contemporary than those in the first edition, they remain predominantly Western-centric, with insufficient engagement with semiotic traditions outside Euro-American contexts. This narrowness risks reinforcing a constrained conception of multimodality that does not fully reflect the diversity of global communicative practices.

CONCLUSION

The second Edition of *Introducing Multimodality* represents a careful and purposeful refinement of a foundational text within multimodal discourse studies. Many of the structural and stylistic improvements directly address earlier critiques, particularly concerns about conceptual density, fragmented organization, and limited methodological guidance (Hurley, 2018). Through clarified transitions, reorganized chapters, expanded glossaries, and updated examples drawn from digital platforms such as TikTok and WhatsApp, the authors enhance the book's pedagogical coherence and situate multimodal theory more firmly within contemporary communication environments. These revisions strengthen its function as an introductory resource, particularly for graduate students and emerging researchers seeking a clear yet theoretically informed entry point into multimodal analysis.

At the same time, the edition's advancements are more pedagogical than epistemological. The book continues to rely primarily on Western communicative norms, even when global platforms such as WeChat are mentioned. Although this marks an improvement from the

first edition, the engagement with non-Western semiotic practices remains limited and primarily illustrative. As a result, the text does not fully reflect the increasingly global and culturally diverse terrain of multimodal research (Jewitt, 2019). Similarly, key theoretical constructs, including resemiotization, transduction, and multimodal (inter)action, are presented with greater clarity but still require substantial prior knowledge, suggesting that accessibility has improved but remains unresolved.

The expanded methodological components, particularly those in Chapter 7, constitute the edition's most tangible contribution. By incorporating transcription tools, gesture-annotation conventions, and clearer research design templates, the authors provide practical scaffolding that was largely absent in the first edition. These features make the book especially valuable in instructional contexts where students are expected to move from conceptual understanding to analytical application. Nonetheless, the methodological emphasis occasionally overshadows deeper interpretive discussion, indicating that future editions might better integrate theory and practice to support more critical forms of multimodal inquiry.

Future research should examine how platform architectures shape multimodal practices across cultures, develop accessible methods for analyzing embodied modalities, and engage more fully with critical and decolonial perspectives. Strengthening theoretical tools for understanding algorithmic mediation will also help ensure that multimodal analysis remains globally relevant and technologically responsive.

In summary, the second edition offers a more coherent, contemporary, and pedagogically practical introduction to multimodality. Its revisions improve clarity and usability without significantly altering the conceptual core of the text. While it does not substantially expand the theoretical horizons of multimodal scholarship, it succeeds in consolidating essential frameworks and aligning them with current communicative realities. In this sense, the book continues to serve as a foundational resource, providing a stable platform for more culturally expansive, critically informed, and theoretically innovative research to build upon in the years ahead.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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