

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Romantic Meaning Construction in *Elemental* (2023) Movie

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ABSTRACT

Background: Modern animated movies no longer serve solely as entertainment, but as complex multimodal texts that construct emotional meaning. The movie *Elemental* (2023) presents a unique romantic story between two opposing elements, fire and water, which represent love, difference, and acceptance. However, most previous studies still use a monomodal approach that focuses only on dialogue, thus failing to reveal the depth of romantic meaning constructed through a combination of various semiotic modes. **Objective:** This study aims to explain how romantic meaning is constructed through the interaction of verbal, visual, audio, and gestural modes in the movie *Elemental* (2023) and to enrich the study of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) in animated movies. **Methods:** This study uses a qualitative descriptive design with a Multimodal Discourse Analysis approach based on Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics framework and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. The data consists of selected scenes that represent the development of the romantic relationship between the characters Ember and Wade. **Results:** The results show that romantic meaning in *Elemental* movie is constructed gradually through the collaboration of four semiotic modes. The visual and audio modes play a dominant role in expressing emotions, while the verbal and gestural modes reinforce the characters' interpersonal closeness and inner conflicts. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that romantic meaning in animated movies is constructed holistically through complementary multimodal interactions. These findings contribute to the development of MDA studies in animated movies and open up opportunities for further research related to audience reception analysis and cross-cultural comparisons.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern animated films, particularly *Elemental* (2023), are increasingly understood as complex multimodal works of art rather than mere entertainment. Recent research on multimodality confirms that animated films construct meaning through the collaboration of interrelated visual, audio, movement, and language elements (Firmansyah & Julia, 2024). This multimodal approach is also reinforced by Yudhanto's (2024) findings, which show that the combination of color, gesture, and visual composition plays a major role in shaping emotional messages in animated media. In addition, Wang and Dou's (2024) study confirms that modern animated films require increasingly sophisticated multimodal grammar, as advances in cinematographic technology play a crucial role in conveying characters' symbolism and emotions. This perspective is particularly relevant to *Elemental*, where the romantic relationship between Ember (Fire) and Wade (Water) is portrayed through a unique

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metaphorical narrative. To communicate this unconventional relationship effectively, the film relies on advanced animation techniques that enable non-verbal expressions, such as gaze, gestures, facial expressions, and color transitions, to convey emotional meaning convincingly. The problem is that most previous studies tend to use a monomodal approach that only highlights one mode of communication, such as dialogue or text, thereby ignoring the true depth of emotional meaning. In fact, the most romantic and touching moments in *Elemental* are conveyed through non-verbal modes such as music, color, camera framing, and body movements. A study by Zachrie et al. (2024) shows that emotions in animated films are often more strongly constructed through color, facial expressions, and visual rhythm than words. Yanti et al. (2022) also emphasize that the visuals and audio in children's animated films function as symbols of meaning that cannot be separated from the understanding of the story. This is supported by Xing (2022), who found that animated film trailers can build emotional intensity solely through music, lighting, and scene setting. Therefore, if the analysis focuses only on dialogue, the representation of Ember and Wade's love cannot be comprehensively understood.

Therefore, this study uses a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach to explain how various semiotic modes work together to construct meaning in films. In analyzing verbal modes such as dialogue, this study refers to Halliday's systemic-functional theory, which views language as a choice of meaning in a social context. The visual mode was analysed using Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design, whereas the audio and gesture modes were analysed using Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal framework. The MDA approach has been proven effective in previous studies, such as the analysis of verbal-visual relationships in TED Talks Hadriyan et al. (2022) and the interpretation of visual meaning in Chinese national propaganda films (Qinfeng & Yulian, 2020). With this theoretical foundation, this study can explore how the interaction between dialogue, visuals, music, and gestures shapes interpersonal and emotional meaning in cinema.

Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of MDA in analyzing media, but the majority still focus on movie posters or social issues such as racial stereotypes, rather than the construction of romantic meaning in full-length animated films. For example, Linh (2021) shows how character positioning and color in romantic comedy posters influence perceptions of relationships. Other multimodal studies, such as those by Yudhanto (2024) and Zachrie et al. (2024), highlight themes of cultural identity and representation rather than romance. Furthermore, studies directly examining *Elemental* (2023) have also been conducted although the focus is different. Devyana and Nugroho (2024) analyse discrimination and its impact in the film. However, these studies still focus on social issues and identity, rather than the construction of romantic meaning. Thus, these studies have not yet explained the more dynamic process of how films such as *Elemental* gradually build romantic relationships from beginning to end.

The research gap arises because there has been no research that specifically analyses the construction of romantic meaning in the animated film *Elemental* using unique semiotic modes such as Fire and Water elements. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on interpersonal discourse that is continuously constructed through the collaboration of four modes: verbal, visual, audio, and gestural mode. The uniqueness of *Elemental* lies in how emotions are expressed through the physical transformation of elements, such as a fading flame or changing water waves, a form of nonverbal communication not found in other films. An approach that comprehensively explores the interaction of these modes contributes new insights to multimodal research.

This research is important because it illustrates how messages about relationships, tolerance, and cultural differences are subtly packaged in romantic narratives using multimodal techniques. In addition to enriching academic studies on MDA in animated media, this study also broadens our understanding of how films can represent emotional experiences through visual and audio technology. Thus, the main objective of this study is to systematically explain how verbal, visual,

audio, and gestural modes work collectively in constructing romantic meaning between Ember and Wade in the film *Elemental* (2023). To achieve the objectives of this study, the research is guided by two main questions. The first question examines which semiotic modes are used to represent romantic meaning in *Elemental* (2023). The second question investigates how these semiotic modes interact to construct romantic meaning throughout *Elemental* (2023).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the semiotic modes used to represent romantic meaning in *Elemental* (2023). This section describes the research design, data sources, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques employed in the study.

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design using a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach. This approach was selected because romantic meaning in animated films is communicated through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes rather than verbal modes alone. MDA allows researchers to examine the interaction between verbal, visual, audio, and gestural modes in shaping interpersonal and emotional meaning.

This study adopts the Social Semiotics framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen, which is conceptually rooted in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). In the context of this study, Halliday's SFL is applied to analyse verbal modes such as dialogue; Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Design Grammar is used to examine visual modes including color, composition, and character representation; and Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal framework is applied to examine audio and gesture modes. Through these theories, this study systematically explores how the four modes interact to construct romantic meaning between the characters Ember and Wade.

Data Sources

The main source of data in this study is the movie *Elemental*, released in 2023 and produced by Disney-Pixar. The object of analysis, or data corpus, consists of the selected scenes that clearly portray the development of romantic meaning between the two main characters, Ember and Wade. These scenes were chosen because they contain rich multimodal interactions involving visual, verbal, audio, and gestural modes. The research analysis units are divided into four main semiotic modes, they are; (1) Movie frame (visual mode), which includes elements such as shots, camera angles, composition, color, and lighting, (2) Dialogue transcript (verbal mode), which consists of the speech of Ember and Wade, (3) Sound recording (audio mode), which includes background music, sound effects, and vocal quality or intonation, (4) Gesture mode, which includes facial expressions and body movements. These units are used to explore how each mode contributes to the construction of romantic meaning in the movie.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques and non-participatory observation of the movie. The data collection technique consisted of several stages, as follows: The first process began with the researcher downloading the movie *Elemental* (2023) through the internet. The researcher then downloaded the subtitles as well from a website called opensubtitles.com. These subtitles became an important reference for transcription, enabling the researcher to understand the context and situation in the text. Next, the researcher watched the

movie intensively and repeatedly to understand the narrative context and character backgrounds. Then, the data was determined by carefully identifying and selecting the most relevant romantic scene. The data was then recorded multimodally. Visual mode data was done by capturing or taking screenshots of each relevant key scene for analysis using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Grammar of Visual Design (GVD) framework. Simultaneously, verbal mode data was done by analyzing the text subtitles using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. Finally, detailed audio and gestural data were made including music, sound effects, vocal intonation, as well as movements and body postures in each scene analysed, which were written descriptively by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework with a focus on answering two research questions (RQ). The analysis of RQ 1 which is a mode identification involved a descriptive stage, in which visual and gestural modes were described using the Grammar of Visual Design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), verbal modes were described using the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework (Halliday), and audio modes were described using Kress & van Leeuwen's Multimodal framework.

Once the modes are identified, RQ 2 which is talking about mode interaction analysis is conducted through the interpretation of the relationships between modes using the lens of the Three Metafunctions of MDA to see how the modes interact to collectively build romantic meaning. This interpretation focuses on: (1) Representational Meaning, looking at how the story events visually and verbally represent the characters' emotions and romantic growth; (2) Interactive Meaning, looking at how gaze, camera distance, intonation, and gesture create intimacy between characters and emotional engagement with the audience; and (3) Compositional Meaning, looking at how modes are arranged (color balance, lighting, sound layering, dialogue placement) to highlight romantic emphasis. The final step is to draw conclusions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data selection and interpretation followed predefined analytical criteria based on the research objectives and Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal framework (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Methodological triangulation was applied by examining the interaction of visual, verbal, audio, and gesture modes in each selected scene, thereby reducing reliance on a single semiotic resource (Denzin, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All four scenes were segmented, transcribed, coded, and analysed using the same analytical procedures to maintain consistency throughout the study. In addition, researcher reflexivity was maintained by grounding all interpretations in observable multimodal evidence and continuously relating the findings to the theoretical framework to minimize subjective bias (Lincoln et al., 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on describing the construction of romantic meaning using the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework of Kress and van Leeuwen and the integration of romance and love with the emotions of the main characters. The verbal, visual, audio, and gesture modes of the characters have been combined and analysed. Moreover, after reviewing and evaluating the overall storyline of the movie, a total of twelve (12) scenes have been identified in which the construction of romance and love can be analysed using the mentioned multimodal framework. These scenes show the audience the development of the main characters' relationships and romance, from their first meeting, the development of emotional closeness, the characters' superficial and deep internal and external struggles, to the eventual acceptance and resolution of the romance. However, this study does not provide a detailed analysis of all twelve scenes. The researchers conducting this study carefully selected four (4) scenes for detailed analysis. The aim is to obtain a variety of scenes that

allow researchers to present a wealth of data to be analysed in this study. These scenes are believed to provide the most accurate picture and representation of the romance described in this study. All of these scenes depict romance and all of them are from the movie *Elemental* (2023).

Scene 1: The beginning of the attraction between Ember and Wade

This scene represents the beginning of the attraction between Ember and Wade when they open up to each other, talking about their childhood experiences, losses, and imperfections. It is this vulnerability that sparks their first romantic connection.

Verbal mode

Wade : "so, what do you do at the shop, if you don't mind me asking?"

Ember : "my dad's retiring and I'll be taking over, someday. When I'm ready"

Wade : "it must be nice knowing what you're gonna do, after my dad passed, I got all...what's the point? now I just go from one job to the next"

Ember : "there's a word in Firish, "Tishok" it means embrace the light while it burns. Cause, it won't always last forever"

Wade : "Tee-shook"

Ember : "or something like that"

Wade : "you okay?"

Ember : "yeah"

Wade : "you sure?"

Ember : "I missed my one chance to see a Vivisteria"

Ideationally, this dialogue reveals an exchange of personal experiences that uncover old wounds, hopes, and fears that shape both characters' emotional needs. On the other hand Ember wants to be understood, while Wade wants to feel connected. This meaning is constructed through mental and relational processes that highlight the expression of difficulties and hidden desires. In lines such as (*"after my dad passed, I got all...what's the point? now I just go from one job to the next"*) and (*"I missed my one chance to see a Vivisteria"*) reveal vulnerability and life experiences that deepen the romantic meaning in their interaction. Interpersonally, the dialogue displays a pattern of empathy. This is shown by how Wade asks gentle questions and responds to Ember's stories with attention and full of his heart. In the other hand, Ember shows her fragile side through stories about her childhood. Thus, the structure of the conversation, with each responding to the other, shows the intimacy that is beginning to form. In addition, Wade also uses clarifying questions such as (*"You okay?"*) and (*"You sure?"*) that reinforce romantic attention. Textually, the dialogue flows from light topics to emotional conversations, creating a rhythm that marks their closeness. Also, the shift from the Ember's store story to the Firish word "*Tishok*" shows a transition from factual information to emotional disclosure, building thematic cohesion around the idea that "opportunities don't always come twice."

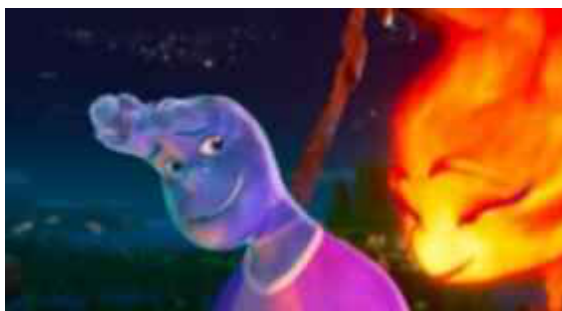
Visual mode

Figure 1. The vast Elemental City

The visual mode in this scene reinforces the romantic meaning through the use of soft lighting, camera composition, and color interaction. The setting in this scene is the vast Elemental City with a narrow balloon space, creating a personal atmosphere that forces them to be in close proximity, striking a balance between adventure and personal intimacy. Additionally, the use of eye-level shots emphasizes the emotional equality between Wade and Ember, while close-ups of Ember's face capture her shy, nervous, and vulnerable expressions as she reveals her past. Lastly, the changing intensity of Ember's fiery colors and the blue light reflecting off Wade's body interact with Ember's orange light to create a symbolic visual harmony. This visual interaction signals two elements meeting halfway, signifying the possibility of a romantic relationship across elemental boundaries.

Audio mode

The audio mode in this scene uses the warm, calm, and sentimental background music creates a soothing emotional atmosphere that supports intimate conversation. Additionally, natural sound effects such as water droplets and small sparks of fire serve as symbols of the meeting of two different worlds, while emphasizing the initial awkwardness that slowly turns into curiosity and closeness. Furthermore, Wade's vocals sound soft, sympathetic, and responsive, showing emotional attention. In contrast with Wade, Ember's initially defensive intonation gradually softens and becomes more emotional after some time, signalling a growing sense of security in the interaction between Ember and Wade.

Gestural mode

Gestural mode in this scene shows the development of a relationship through body language and facial expressions. From Ember herself, she often looks down, plays with her fingers, and averts her gaze, which shows vulnerability and nervousness in the early stages of attraction. In contrast to Ember, Wade displays open gestures such as leaning forward, a relaxed posture, and a slight smile that signifies comfort and a desire to connect with her. Furthermore, in this scene Ember's increasingly steady eye contact and change in facial expression from anxious to calm and finally surprised when Wade understands her emotions about her past story signify a growing sense of trust and emotional connection between the two.

Modes Interaction

The romantic meaning of forming an intimate and empathetic relationship in this scene is constructed through the collaboration of the four modes. Representationally, the Verbal mode presents a story of vulnerability, supported by the Visual mode which shows the contrasting of their elements which is water and fire in a harmonious space. Interactively, Wade's empathy, expressed through interpersonal meaning dialogue, is reinforced by the Gesture mode (soft facial expressions)

and Audio mode (soothing tone of voice), collectively drawing the audience to feel emotional closeness. The use of close-ups (Visual Mode) on the characters' faces when revealing personal secrets is a compositional technique that enhances the interactive function. Multimodal studies confirm that non-verbal elements, such as gestures and facial expressions, are crucial for conveying sincerity and reinforcing the interpersonal role in interactions (Goffman, 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Additionally, the shift to warm lighting (Visual Mode) when they open up is an effective cinematic marker to communicate the shift in the relationship from formal to intimate. And also, the use of lighting in cinema is often analysed as a powerful compositional and interactive marker, effectively directing the audience's perception of the characters' emotions and the narrative atmosphere (Bellantoni, 2015).

Scene 2: The moment of closeness between Ember and Wade

This scene shows the peak of their initial emotional closeness when Ember and Wade try to touch hands for the first time, despite knowing the risks.

Verbal mode

Ember : "are you kidding? that was amazing! I finally saw Vivisteria!"

Wade : "that was inspiring, you were inspiring"

Ember : "no, Wade we-we can't touch"

Wade : "maybe we can"

Ember : "no"

Wade : "but can't we just prove it?"

Ember : "prove what?"

Wade : "let's see what happens, and if it's a disaster then we'll know this would never worked"

Ember : "but it actually could be a disaster, I could vaporize you, you-you could extinguish me, and then.."

Wade : "let's..let's start small. I'm so lucky."

Ideationally, the conversation highlights the clash between Verbal Processes such as statements of impossibility ("*we can't touch*") and Mental Processes in the form of emotional acknowledgments ("*that was amazing,*" "*you were inspiring*"), which illustrate physical limitations and the risks of relationships between two contrasting elements. Here, Wade represents courage and hope, while Ember shows fear and caution, with the key romantic idea emerging through Wade's invitation ("*let's see what happens, and if it's a disaster then we'll know*") that turns prohibition into an emotional experiment. Interpersonally, Wade uses persuasive propositions such as ("*maybe we can,*" "*can't we just prove it?*") and reassuring expressions to challenge Ember's fears, while Ember speaks nervously but still shows a desire to try and accept Wade's offer. This interaction builds tension between courage and doubt that strengthens their relationship. Textually, cohesion is maintained through repetition of keywords such as ("*disaster,*" "*prove it,*") and a structural pattern that moves from praise into prohibition, then into invitation to try, then into doubt, leading to a joint decision point. Thematic references such as ("*Vivisteria*") link the dialogue to the previous scene and reinforce Wade's reasons

for taking risks, while the repetition of phrases ("we can't") and ("maybe we can") mark the inner conflict that drives the emotional development of their relationship.

Visual mode

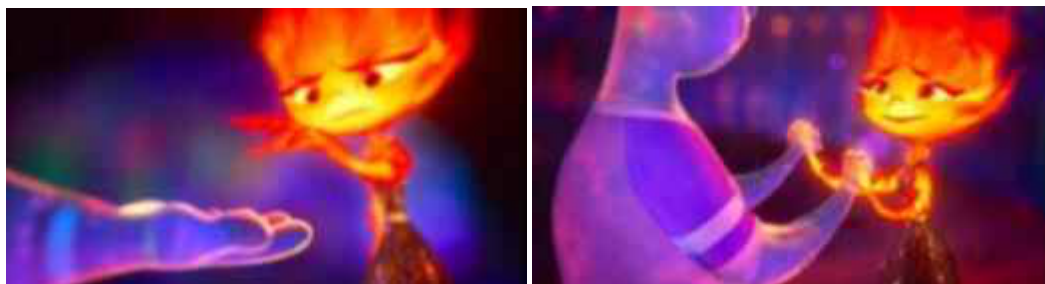


Figure 2. The moment when Ember and Wade's hands first touch

The visual mode in this scene centers on the moment when Ember and Wade's hands first touch, which is the main symbol of romantic intimacy. The composition of the image is tightly focused through close-ups on the hands and faces of both characters, so that the emotional tension and anticipation can be captured intensely. Furthermore, the combination of orange and blue light creates a soft color palette that represents the union of two elements which is fire and water that are naturally considered impossible, reinforced by the visual effect when Ember's fire turns blue and Wade's water ripples upon contact with the fire element. The dramatic lighting enhances the sense of wonder, while challenging the laws of nature in the movie's narrative world.

Audio mode

The audio mode in this scene uses the soft background music which gradually builds to a crescendo just as the touch occurs between two contrasting elements, signalling the emotional peak and risk taken by both characters. After the moment of touch, the music fades to make room for intimate dialogue. Sound effects such as soft hissing, steam, and the sounds of fire and water interacting create a strong physical sensation, while Ember and Wade's breaths, which are slower but heavier, add to the atmosphere of intimacy and emotional tension in the movie scene.

Gestural mode

Gestural mode in this scene shows the dynamics of both courage and doubt through slow motion body movements as their hands approach each other. At a short time, Ember briefly pulls her hand back from Wade's hand, showing fear and inner conflict, before finally she tries to get closer as a form of emotional courage. In contrast, Wade extends his hand with a slow and steady movement, as if creating a safe space for Ember. The intense gaze and facial expressions that combine fear and hope reinforce the romantic meaning of this scene as an inevitable moment of connection.

Modes Interaction

In this scene, romantic meaning act as a miracle that challenges physical and logical boundaries between two elements. This meaning is predominantly constructed by non-verbal modes. Representationally, the visual mode (blue fire and ripples in the water) directly materializes Wade's verbal claim that they "changed each other's chemistry," proving that their touch does not bring disaster. Interactively, the Gesture mode (purposeful hand movements and intense gazes) creates tension that draws the audience into uncertainty. Compositionally, the use of slow motion (Visual) and crescendo (Audio) collaborate to frame the moment of touch as an emotional and narrative turning point. In the multimodal analysis of animated movies, visual and audio effects are important

elements that semiotically represent emotional and physical changes that are impossible in real life (Bateman et al., 2017). Specifically, Audio Mode, such as music reaching its climax, functions as a strong compositional marker to highlight key moments and maximize their emotional resonance (van Leeuwen, 1999).

Scene 3: The emotional conflict between Ember and Wade

This scene depicts the conflict when Wade declares his love in front of Ember's family, while Ember refuses due to pressure from her father.

Verbal mode

Wade : "there are a million reasons why this can't work. a million noes, but there's also one yes. We touched, and when we did something happened to us, something impossible, we changed each other's chemistry."

Ember : "I-I.."

Wade : "Ember..."

Bernie : "silence!"

Wade : "no! take the chance. let your father know who you really are, look I have regrets when my dad died, but because of you I learned to embrace the light while it burns, Tishok! You don't have forever to say what you need to say. I love you Ember Lumen. And I'm pretty sure you love me too"

Ember : "no wade, I don't"

Cinder : "that's not true, I did their reading, Bernie, it's love its true love"

Ember : "no, mom you're wrong, Wade go!"

Wade : "but, Ember"

Ember : "I don't love you, go!"

This dialogue conceptually presents the conflict between two worlds which are Wade's personal love versus Ember's family demands, which is reinforced by the conflict between physical and social barriers ("*a million reasons why this can't work*") and the intimate material reality when they touched each other ("*we touched, and... we changed each other's chemistry*"). Wade presents both logical and emotional arguments about why their relationship is worth fighting for, while Ember rejects it not because of a lack of love, but because of her family pressure. The ideational climax emerges through the conflicting verbal processes between Wade's confession and Ember's forced rejection. Interpersonally, Wade takes an active and courageous position with high-modality speech acts such as ("*I love you, Ember Lumen*"), while Ember uses a defensive register short, tense, and disjointed word that reflects her inner conflict due to family influence. Ember's harsh rejection ("*I don't love you, go!*") and her father's intervention in the dialogue ("*Silence!*") reveal an unequal distribution of power, and her mother's comments further complicate the interpersonal dynamics. Textually, the dialogue creates a sharp contrast between declarations of love and rejection through dramatic repetitions such as ("*a million reasons*") and ("*one yes*"), as well as the phrase ("*a million noes*"), which reinforces the theme of fighting against probability. Cohesion is also maintained through thematic references such

as mentioning the word "Tishok," by Wade, which ties back to the previous scene between Wade and Ember, it also emphasizes Wade's request for Ember to be brave enough to speak honestly.

Visual mode

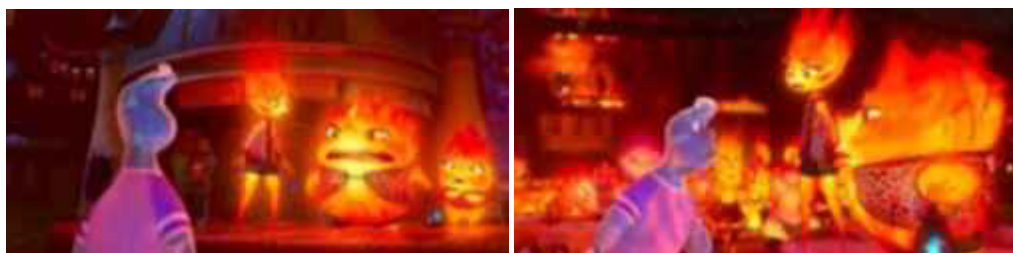


Figure 3. The family dinner scene

The visual mode in this family dinner scene creates a confrontational and tense atmosphere through the composition of the space, lighting, and character positioning. The narrow dining room setting, filled with visual elements of fire, isolates Wade as an outsider, reinforced by the use of long shots that place him in the midst of the Ember family's tension. Moreover, Ember's father's sharp gaze and the placement of characters facing each other create visual tension, while the dim and flickering light of Ember's fire represents the emotional turmoil and stress she is experiencing. However, Wade appears more transparent and unstable, signifying emotional vulnerability that contrasts with the visual authority of Ember's father.

Audio mode

Audio mode in this scene uses fast-paced and intense background music that builds tension from the start of the conversation. Sound effects such as Wade's heavy breathing and the sudden silence of the family when Wade confessed that he and Ember had touched each other create a dramatic contrast, especially after Wade's confession of love to Ember. Additionally, Ember's father's authoritative shout ("Silence!") serves as the emotional climax, while the momentary silence that follows deepens the dramatic impact of the scene. Wade's vocals sound firm and bold, in contrast to Ember's forced, pain-filled tone.

Gestural mode

Gestural mode in this scene emphasizes emotional conflict and power relations through the characters' body language. Wade displays an upright posture, direct gaze, and expressive, forward-leaning hand movements, signifying his courage and steadfastness. In contrast, Ember leans back, avoids eye contact, and displays protective or flinching gestures that reflect her inner conflict between personal desires and family pressure. Ember's father's gesture of raising his hand and pointing serves as a symbol of authority and social control, reinforcing the layers of romantic tension and ideological conflict in this scene.

Modes Interaction

The romantic meaning as an inevitable tragedy due to external pressure in this scene is constructed through contradictions between four modes. Representationally, Wade's verbal honesty is rejected by the visual mode (the oppressive family environment and visual changes in Ember's fire), indicating the danger of the social consequences of the relationship. Interactively, Wade's attempt to achieve a sincere connection through direct gaze to Ember (Gesture Mode) fails due to Ember's verbal rejection, which is triggered by the power represented by her father in Visual Mode. In this case, multimodality analysis often shows how framing and lighting (Visual Mode) can visualize social and

psychological tension, where character placement (Wade's isolation) highlights structural barriers in relationships (O'Halloran, 2011). The emotional conflict experienced by Ember, translated through her withdrawn body language, is also a strong indication of nonverbal communication that contradicts her inner desires (Kress & van Leeuwen, 200; Jewitt, 2016).

Scene 4: The resolution between Ember and Wade

This scene depicts the full resolution when Ember admits her love and loses Wade, making it the climax of the romantic tragedy in the movie.

Verbal mode

Wade : "Ember, I have no regrets. You gave me something people search for their whole lives."

Ember : "but I can't exist in a world without you. I'm sorry I didn't say it before. I love you Wade."

Wade : "I really do love it when your light does that"

Ember : "Wade is gone, he saved me"

This dialogue ideationally builds meaning around sacrifice, loss, and acceptance through a combination of Existential Processes such as (*"I have no regrets"*) and (*"I can't exist in a world without you"*), as well as crucial Verbal Processes when Ember finally expresses the love she has been holding back (*"I love you Wade"*). Wade expresses his gratitude for Ember's love and reaffirms that there are no regrets in their relationship, while Ember conveys emotional honesty that marks recovery and redemption after a long journey of conflict between them. Interpersonally, this conversation shows a climax of affection, this is shown by how Wade speaks in a resigned but loving register, providing emotional assurance, while Ember uses an emotional and regretful register, showing the inner equality that has finally been achieved. Wade's words, such as (*"I really do love it when your light does that"*), become a form of total acceptance of Ember's essence as well as a gentle farewell. Textually, Ember's confession of love serves as an emotional climax and narrative resolution, moving from regret into confession, then into loss, with phrases such as (*"Wade is gone, he saved me"*) serving as a cohesive link that summarizes the resolution of the conflict from the previous scene. The words *"I love you"* appear at the most emotional point, reinforcing the position of this dialogue as the romantic climax of the story.

Visual mode



Figure 4. The farewell scene

The visual mode in this farewell scene emphasizes loss and sacrifice through lighting effects, composition, and the transformation of the characters' bodies. Wade is depicted slowly evaporating and disappearing, while Ember's fire dims as a visual representation of absence and emotional

destruction. The dark and damp furnace setting reinforces the tragic mood, contrasting with the soft yellow-orange lighting that gives a warm yet painful impression. Moreover, the use of close-ups and extreme close-ups on Ember's crying face maximizes the audience's empathy and highlights the emotional peak of her loss.

Audio mode

Audio mode in this scene uses lament-like orchestral music with a dramatic build-up accompanies their confessions and farewells, emphasizing each word with heavy emotional weight. Sound effects such as the slow fading of steam hissing, Ember's gasping breaths, broken cries, and Wade's weakening voice deepen the tragic-romantic atmosphere. The total silence after Wade disappears serves as a marker of emotional climax, giving the audience space to fully feel the impact of the loss.

Gestural mode

Gestural mode in this scene shows the intensity of sacrifice and final love through powerful body language. Ember reaches for Wade desperately, marking a final attempt at union before the inevitable parting. While Wade's gentle touch on Ember's face before he vanishes shows final acceptance and affection. Wade's resigned posture as he disappears, as well as Ember's collapsed and bent body after the loss, accompanied by a tear-filled expression, represent emotional devastation as well as the deepest honesty of love.

Modes Interaction

The romantic meaning of eternal love that transcends physical existence in this scene is constructed through the synergy of tragic modes. Representationally, Wade's evaporation (Visual Mode) literally visualizes the Ideational meaning of sacrifice, proving unconditional love. Interactively, extreme close-up visuals and soft Vocal Quality draw the audience into their suffering. Compositionally, the sudden silence (Audio) and visual appearance of death (evaporation) frame Ember's Verbal confession, transforming tragedy into romantic resolution. Multimodal analysis often highlights how animated films utilize unique visual elements, such as physical changes in elements, to represent profound psychological and emotional changes (Bateman et al., 2017). Additionally, the use of sudden silence followed by music (audio mode) compositionally creates an intense climactic moment, which is a cinematic technique to mark the most important moments of confession and sacrifice (van Leeuwen, 1999).

CONCLUSION

This study aims to describe and analyse the construction of romantic meaning in the movie *Elemental* (2023) using a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach. The results show that the construction of romantic meaning in this film does not originate only from a single mode, but is a combination of four integrated modes, namely verbal, visual, audio, and gesture. The core results of the study show that the film *Elemental* depicts romantic meaning as a layered emotional journey that shows empathy, acceptance of diversity, and emotional closeness developed by the main characters. The film features a total of twelve scenes that contribute to this construction of romantic meaning, and four key scenes were selected for detailed representation. This shows that animated movies are prime examples of how a composition of diverse modes can be used to convey romantic meaning symbolically and implicitly. Further research is recommended to expand the scope of this study by comparing the construction of romantic meaning in cross-cultural animated feature movies or by introducing audience reception studies as a way to understand how such multimodal meanings are perceived by the intended audience. This will enable the field of movies to refine multimodal studies.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researchers declare that there are no conflicts of interest in the implementation and writing of this study.

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