

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

**Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the
development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives**

Íris Susana Pires Pereira

Research Centre on Education

Institute of Education, University of Minho, Portugal

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0647-2319

Ângela Campos

Agrupamento de Escolas de Professor Óscar Lopes

Portugal

Abstract This paper aims to contribute to the construction of multiliteracies pedagogy. We argue that the analysis of focalisation is an essential dimension in the multiliteracies pedagogy aimed at promoting the development of the critical analysis of multimodal narratives. Our point is sustained by the case study of the focalisation in an animated narrative comprising a hybrid multimodal text offered for students learning about refugees in a public digital platform. We performed a critical analysis of the visual narrative supported by a grammar of focalisation in animated images and a framework for critical analysis of multimodal discourse. The analysis shows that viewers (and characters) are differently positioned throughout the text as uninvolved observers of the detached ‘others’; as emphatic witnesses of the others’ suffering; and as committed social actors who see the refugees as ‘one of us’, which we interpret as conveying different ideological meanings associated with assimilatory or liberating ideologies. We discuss the major implications of our findings concerning the role of focalisation in the enactment of critical analysis of multimodal texts, the interdependence of critical analysis vis-à-vis the other learning processes as well as the need for teachers’ professional development as a pre-requisite to construct the pedagogy of multiliteracies.

Key-words: 2 to 6

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

Multimodality; Visual narrative; Critical literacy; Focalisation; Multiliteracies; Critical analysis of multimodal discourse

Corresponding author:

Íris Susana Pires Pereira

Instituto de Educação /Institute of Education

Universidade do Minho

Campus de Gualtar

4710-057 Braga, PORTUGAL

iris@ie.uminho.pt

Acknowledgement

This work was funded by CIEd – Research Centre on Education, Institute of Education, University of Minho, projects UIDB/01661/2020 and UIDP/01661/2020, through national funds of FCT/MCTES-PT.

Biographical notes:

Íris Susana Pires Pereira, PhD, is an assistant professor at the Institute of Education and a member of the Research Centre on Education (CIED) at the University of Minho, Portugal. Her research focuses on multimodal literacy, the pedagogy of multiliteracies and literacy teachers' learning. She has published in several international journals such as *Changing English. Studies in Culture and Education*, *Pedagogies. An International Journal*, *Language and Education*, *Research Papers in Education*, *Language, Pedagogy and Culture*, *L1* and *Teacher Development*. She has recently co-edited *The Routledge Handbook of Digital Literacies in Early Childhood*. (<https://iris2796.wixsite.com/irispereira>)

Ângela Maria Castro Bragança Campos is a MA high-school teacher at the Agrupamento de Escolas de Professor Óscar Lopes, Portugal. Her Master specialization is on Critical Literacy teaching and her research focuses on Critical Literacy and the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies in Portuguese as L1. Together with Íris Pereira, she has published in *Changing English. Studies in Culture and Education* and recently presented a paper on multimodal analysis at the Annual Meeting of the Portuguese

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

Linguistics Association. She is currently preparing her PhD research project on the development of a critical, multimodal literacy learning.

Introduction

Multiliteracies is generally presented as “an agenda for the future of education, reclaiming educational processes and systems that are in many respects very different from those of the recent past” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, 28). The rise of the information economy, the increasing social diversity and the growth of the digital communication technologies are key societal challenges sustaining the multiliteracies call for pedagogical transformation of the literacy curriculum in order to equally empower all students to face these new social demands (author, 2020; Cope and Kalantzis, 2009; Mills, 2009; The New London Group, 1996).

Being informed by a sociocultural understanding of literacy and a semiotic understanding of communication, the multiliteracies agenda has assumed an expanded object of literacy learning that includes the learning of multimodal meaning making (The New London Group, 1996; Kress, 2010, 2015). A set of core socio constructivist learning processes has also been assumed as defining ‘the different kind of things that learners can do to know’ (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015, p. 17). They comprise *experiencing*, *conceptualizing*, *analysing*, and *applying*, together involving “learning by doing as well as by thinking” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 25). This repertoire of pedagogical moves is assumed to be central in producing “deeper, broader, more trustworthy, more insightful and more useful knowledge” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 249).

In this paper we resume these arguments in order to sustain our major tenet, which reconciles *multimodality* and the learning process of *analysing critically* in digital contexts of communication. *Multimodality* is one of the key meaning-making features in the design of texts brought along by the digitalization of communication (Jewitt, 2005,

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

2008; Kress, 2010; Mills, 2009; Rowsell et al., 2013; Serafini, 2014; Walsh, 2008).

Modes comprise material resources for meaning-making that are “socially shaped and culturally given” (Kress, 2010, p. 79). In digital communication contexts, not only are the written and oral modes of verbal language used to build up representations and communicate meanings, but also static and moving images, colour, sound, music and layout are employed intentionally. This means that beyond merely using the written code, new meaning-making skills are required to make meaning of digital, multimodal texts. *Analysing critically* is assumed as an interrogation of “the interests, motives and ethics that may motivate knowledge claims... an ever vigilant process of reflection about purposes and interests” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 247). While multimodality has also been assumed as a tool in the ideological positioning of meaning makers (van Leeuwen, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2013), thus demanding that learners go beyond the represented meanings by evaluating how these are conveyed through the manipulation of semiotic choices, to the best of our knowledge much needs to be done to develop specific grammars and metalanguage to enact critical analysis of multimodal discourse in educational settings (Mills, 2009). In this paper, we aim to contribute to the construction of such knowledge.

We sustain our argument upon the study of a video used as the main text in one lesson available in an online educational platform. The video is a hybrid of an expository verbal text and a visual narrative about *refugees*, turning it, as well as the whole lesson, into an unexpected potential instantiation of the major tenets sustaining the multiliteracies pedagogic agenda, namely diversity, multimodal digital representation, and critical analysis. For reasons that will be made clear later on, the major question leading our study was the following: *How could the visual narrative become the object of critical analysis*

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

aimed at enhancing learners' meaning making? The results of our inquiry allow us to specifically contend that the analysis of the semiotic options for the construction of focalisation in visual narratives plays a fundamental role in *knowing by critical analysis*, and that the grammar of focalization emerges as an inescapable tool in enacting such analysis.

Next section systematizes the main *Theoretical perspectives* sustaining our study. The *Methods* section describes the research procedures that we followed. The *Findings* present the main results, that we then scrutinize in the *Discuss* and *Conclusions* sections.

Theoretical perspectives

Two major theoretical perspectives sustained our inquiry, namely critical analysis of multimodal discourse (van Leeuwen, 2013) and the grammar of visual narrative's focalisation (O'Brien, 2014). By bringing together both frameworks we identified the grammar of focalisation as an essential tool in developing a critical multimodal analysis.

Critical analysis of multimodal discourse

Critical analysis of multimodal discourse, as assumed in this article, draws on two main strands of studies of applied linguistics with significant impact in the pedagogies of multiliteracies (Djonov and Zhao, 2014; Van Leeuwen, 2013), namely *critical discourse analysis* (CDA) and *multimodality*. CDA grounds on the idea that language invisibly works to convey and legitimize meanings that are associated with dominant social groups and assumed as the norm, while silencing and thus invalidating others (Gee, 1996; Luke & Freebody, 1999). By doing this, language becomes a tool that generates inequalities, injustices and oppression: it crafts and empowers identities that are aligned with dominant

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

meanings while marginalizing ‘other’ meanings and ‘other’ identities, thus carving social inequalities and, indeed, non democratic forms of social diversity. CDA employs critical discourse analysis to unveil such biases and open way to construct empathetic critical literacies targeting praxis, i.e., social agency for social justice and social (re)positioning (Freire & Macedo, 2003; Golden & Pandya, 2019; Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Norman Fairclough’s work (2001 [1989], 2010 [1995]) has played an important contribution to the extension of CDA studies to education, with the specific aim of developing students’ critical consciousness of different effects of ideological representation upon their social positioning (authors, 2014). Van Leeuwen’s (2008) adaptation of linguistic CDA methods to multimodal representations became an important contribution to overcome CDA’s ‘looking only at written and spoken language’ (van Leeuwen, 2013, p.1). Van Leeuwen argues that ‘if images seem to just allude to things and never “say them explicitly”, we need to make these allusions explicit’ (van Leeuwen, 2000, p. 335), thus reclaiming more attention to critical discourse analysis of texts in which other modes besides verbal language are used to represent meanings (Djonov and Zhao, 2014; Kress, 2010).

Our critical analysis of the visual narrative was framed by Van Leeuwen’s (2008) specific assumption that the relations between depicted people and the viewer are a cornerstone in the critical analysis of visual representations. Van Leeuwen identified the social distance, the social relation and the social interaction as three essential meanings when performing critical analysis, claiming that, in all three cases, the relation is symbolic, imaginary and ‘all three must always be there’ (p.141). He further identified the major semiotic choices for visually representing each of these meanings, namely distance, angle and the gaze, respectively, as the objects of the analysis. As assumed by

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

van Leeuwen (2008), critical analysis of multimodal discourse focuses on how different combinations and gradations of these semiotic choices can be interpreted as strategies for visually representing people as ‘others’ by constructing *distanciation*, *disempowerment* and *objectivation*. As van Leeuwen defends, the critical scrutiny of the use of these semiotic choices aims to unveil how visual representations can be used

to show the exclusion, the keeping-at-a-distance of people, or to ourselves exclude and keep at a distance members of our own school class, our community, our own country, etc., as in the case of the school textbooks’ (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 141).

The grammar of visual narrative’s focalisation

The term focalisation was introduced by narratologist Gerald Genette (1980) as a replacement for *perspective* and *point of view*. According to the author, in the context of text analysis the concept of focalisation distinguishes two main narrative categories, mood and voice, avoiding the confusion between the questions *who sees?* and *who speaks?*. The variations in point of view that occur in the course of a narrative can thus be analysed as changes in focalisation (Genette, 1980). Genette’s concept was later developed by Mieke Bal (1999, 2017), who defines focalisation as ‘the relationship between the “vision”, the agent that sees, and that which is seen’ (1999, p. 146), which becomes a component of the content of the narrative as it c’olours the story with subjectivity (Bal, 2017, p. 7). He defines the focaliser as ‘the point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character or outside it’ (1999, p. 146). Bal proposes that narratological analysis can be extended to visual narratology, as the ‘narrativity of films is obvious’ (1999, p. 161):

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

In narrative discourse, focalization is the direct content of the linguistic signifiers.

In visual art, it would then be the direct content of visual signifiers like lines, dots, light and dark, and composition. (1999, p. 162)

Bal emphasizes the technical nature of the term ‘focalisation’, which is particularly relevant for our argument since it ‘will help us keep our attention on the technical side of such a means of manipulation’ (1999, p. 144). In previous work, we focused on verbal focalisation as responsible for the reader’s positioning in *assimilation or liberation ideologies* (Yoon, Simpson, and Haag, 2010; authors, 2014), which we used to add evidence to Stephens (1992) claims for the need that students are explicit taught how to consciously understand focalisation as always ‘presented with a certain interpretation of the elements that are far from being neutral or innocent’ (Bal, 2017, p. 137). In fact, Bal argues that focalisation ‘has an overarching position with respect to the other aspects’ (2017, p. 150) and it is therefore ‘the most important, most penetrating, and subtlest means of manipulation’ (idem).

Focalisation is therefore an important dimension for the construction of ideological positionings, and it came up for us as an inescapable analytical dimension in order to perform the critical analysis of the relations between depicted people and the viewer in the visual narrative. As Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2012, p. 18) put it,

Whereas the question of ‘who tells’ can only be relevant for verbal text, that of ‘who sees’ is pertinent for both verbal and visual strands of meaning ... the viewer can be positioned to assume different viewing personas– either that of an outside observer or alternatively of a viewer ‘participating’ fleetingly in that world through a relationship with, or identification as, one of the characters.

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

O'Brien's (2014) grammar of focalisation for moving image was the functional analytical tool we used to perform our critical multimodal analysis. Though not developed with the intention to develop critical analysis of multimodal discourse, O'Brien's grammar is theoretically aligned with van Leeuwen's framework. In effect, O'Brien's model meets, specifies and extends van Leeuwen's (1998) categories framework for critical analysis of the relations between depicted people and the viewer in multimodal discourse.

O'Brien's model is situated in the theoretical field of systemic functional semiotics (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Halliday, 1973, 1978), though also developed with reference to focalisation theory (Genette, 1980; Bal, 1999, 2017). She defines three key components of focalisation process: the focaliser or 'who the viewer is spatially positioned to see as; the focalised defined as the subject or what is seen; and focalising or the act of seeing – the way that the focaliser sees the focalized' (O'Brien, 2014, p. 127). The participants in the process of focalisation are defined as 'internal', the depicted characters or subjects, and as 'external', the reader/viewer and the author (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). O'Brien assumes that the position of the external participant in relation to the characters and events within the visual narrative is orchestrated by the author through focalisation resources. These are choices that can be made to differently align the viewer with the characters, to 'draw the reader/viewer's attention to a character and to highlight the character's experience at a certain point in the narrative' (p.127). She argues that

choices about focalisation or who sees what, when, and how enable the author to create and shape character relationships within a narrative and to manipulate the external viewer's position and affiliation with characters as the story unfolds,

adding colour, richness, and emotional layers to storytelling. (O’Brien, 2014, p. 124)

O’Brien identifies three semiotic systems as mostly relevant for the construction of moving image focalisation, namely, the *focaliser system* (representing *who sees*); the *focalised system* (representing *what is seen*); and the *focalising system* (representing *how it is seen*). The *focaliser* and *focalising* systems were the most relevant for our analysis. The *focaliser system* includes two possibilities –*unmediated* and *mediated focalisation* – through which the viewer can be positioned to see directly, as an external spectator, or internally, either along with character or as a character, respectively. The *focalising system* comprises *distance*, *power*, and *attitude*, the later subdivided into *contact* and *involvement*, as relevant dimensions when constructing the way in which the focalised is seen. These categories are described and illustrated in the analysis, below. The major semiotic options available for both systems are systematized in table 1.

Table 1. Semiotic options available for the *focaliser* and the *focalising systems* (O’Brien, 2014, adapted).

Focalisation systems	Focaliser / who sees?				Focalising / How is it seen?			
	Non-mediated		Mediated		Social distance	Attitude		
	External observer		Aligned with character	As character		Involvement	Contact	Power
Semiotic choices	distance	angle	back/shoulder view	through the character's eyes	frame	plane	gaze (visual contact)	angle
	mid, long, remote	oblique			close up, mid, long/remote	horizontal, frontal/semi-frontal	direct or not	eye level / vertical high / vertical low

Methods

The present study was initially triggered by the conclusions of a former case study focusing on a TED-Ed lesson (author, 2020). TED-Ed is an open-access, international

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

platform that has been promoted by TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) and presented as a non-profit, nonpartisan foundation envisioning educational practice. The platform offers thousands of ‘lessons’ targeting students aged over 13 years old, each of which follows a general learning design triggered by a leading question, involves the meaning making out of multimodal and hyperlinked written texts, offering comprehension tasks and a forum that allows learners to share their new understandings.

The lesson that was looked into is titled *What does it mean to be a refugee?*, a TED-Ed original developed by a team of script editor, director, animation artist, composer, sound designer and two educators, which can be accessed at <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-refugee-benedetta-berti-and-evelien-borgman>. The lesson called our attention because of the unique way in which it illustrates key issues of concern to the multiliteracies pedagogy. To start with, it is about social diversity. In effect, the video that constitutes the main text offered for students’ learning in the lesson is a hybrid of a narrative, represented in the visual mode, showing the perilous development and unfortunate endings of many refugees’ travels, and an expository text, represented in the verbal mode, mostly telling about facts and numbers of such travels around the globe (authors, 2021). Besides, being a narrative, the animated images offer the lives of human beings for our contemplation, therefore constituting a potentially relevant multimodal text for the development of the learners’ empathy, thinking and critical responses about this societal issue (Pace, 2006; authors, 2014). Last but not least, being a mass media product, the video becomes a potential target to critical analysis by inspecting it as a cultural tool for the reinforcement or challenging of dominant world views, perspectives and ideologies, in particular by questioning the positioning that is offered for viewers’ meaning making and the identities that are thereby crafted for viewers (Funk, Kellner, & Share, 2016; Mills, 2009).

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

However, the former case study revealed that the lesson was actually far from engaging learners in practices aligned with a multiliteracies pedagogy (author, 2020). The learning tasks offered in the ‘Think’ section of the lesson asked for students to focus on the verbal text alone, the meanings represented by the visual narrative being ‘closed to learners’ inspection, therefore remaining invisible for reflection’ (author, 2020, p.15), in spite of their apparent contribution to the construction of the answer to the question leading the lesson. As the multimodal text was out of the pedagogical focus, no meaning making and learning construction that might result from *analysing* it was completely possible.

Such pedagogical restriction was then attributed to a gap in the new necessary pedagogic knowledge that might have scaffolded the educators involved in the design of the lesson to develop learning situations more closely aligned with multiliteracies pedagogy. In this article we intend to contribute to overcoming this pedagogical gap by identifying and discussing one possible dimension of the enactment of the specific learning process of *analysing critically* this visual narrative. The study was therefore developed with ultimate aim of contributing to the construction of the pedagogy of multiliteracies.

The major question leading the present study was the following: *How could the visual narrative become the object of critical analysis aimed at enhancing learners’ meaning making?* The claims that we will make regarding this question result from assuming the focalisation in the animated visual narrative as our main object of empirical analysis. We performed a critical analysis of focalisation in the visual narrative, which was led by the following subquestions:

1. Which focalisation meanings are constructed?

1.1. How are these meanings constructed?

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

2. How are participants positioned?

2.1. How are the characters positioned?

2.2. How is the viewer ideologically positioned in relation to the depicted characters?

We used O'Brien's (2014) grammar of visual focalisation to perform a multimodal analysis of the construction of focalisation in the animated narrative in order to answer to questions 1. and 1.1; and we then used Van Leeuwen's (2008) approach to perform a critical analysis of visual representation of the ideological position of the social actors involved (viewers and characters) to answer questions 2.

Our analysis of the focalisation in the visual narrative involved the identification of the focalising categories and subcategories of *who sees* and *how it is seen* and the identification of the moving image semiotic resources that construct them, as described in Table 1, above. Our unit of analysis was constituted by an image shot. We performed a multimodal transcription of the thirty-five shots comprising the visual narrative (total 05:42) and used the labels in Table 1 to code the focalisation that was constructed throughout. We coded each shot as *non-mediated* or *mediated focalisation (along with character* or as *character*) in order to analyse the *focaliser system*. We identified the semiotic choices that realized the focaliser system as mediated and non-mediated and we also counted the amount of time taken by each of the options to have a finer grained perception of dominant focaliser choices. We then looked into the *focalising system*, using *social distance* and *attitude (involvement, contact and power)* as our analytical categories. We also identified the semiotic choices that realized these focalising possibilities (cf. Appendix 1). This coding did not include the instances in which the moving images are interrupted by sequences of written words, such as REFUGEES; MIGRANTS and REFUGEES; and VIOLENCE, which are marks of the verbal, expository mode in which a definition and distinction is offered between both concepts (cf. Appendix 1).

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

We then used the result of this coding to shape our critical interpretations (Low & Pandya, 2019) about the nature of relationships or affiliation between the focaliser and the focalised constructed in the visual narrative, as requested by subquestions 2.

Findings

The visual narrative offers a varied set of focalisation meanings constructed by different semiotic resources. Each set of meanings positions the viewer and the characters in very different ideologically imbued meanings. We have interpreted these findings as indicating that the moving images represent different ways to ‘see’ the refugees, and, as a consequence, different, yet meaningful, ways to answer to the question leading the TED-Ed lesson (*‘What does it mean to be a refugee?’*).

The viewer as an uninvolved observer; the refugees as detached others

The non-mediated focalisation, which positions *the viewer as an external observer* of the dramas of the characters, is **dominant** in the visual narrative, comprising 04:18 minutes. We identified 32 image shots (from a total of 35), in which the focalisation is predominantly non-mediated, positioning the viewer to see refugees from a varying combination of mid/long/remote distance combined with oblique angle and involving no direct gaze, constructing a remote and detached relationship between both participants. This construction of the refugees as an ‘object’ of contemplation is not uniformly constructed throughout, however, the viewer actually assuming a varying distance and involvement with what she observes as well as a varying degree of power over what she sees.

In Fig. 1, for example, the viewer is socially distant, non-involved and holding neutral power in relation to the blurred human figures seen ‘as if they are strangers’ (Van

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

Leeuwen, 2008:138) at a remote distance in a horizontal plane. The smallness of the images accentuates the social distance. In Fig. 2. the non-involvement is actually intensified by the oblique angle with which the refugees are presented, constructing a viewer's sideline position with the depicted people without communicating with them. This option determines that 'what you see here is not part of our world, it is their world, something we are not involved with' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 136). In Fig 3. the social distance is amplified, offering a blurred group view. The viewer is positioned in a powerful position looking down at refugees "as below us" (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 141). Refugees now are seen from the vertical high angle and reduced to undistinguishable creatures trapped against a wall, allowing the viewer 'to exert imaginary symbolic power over that person' (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 139). Finally, the social distance and non involvement is also seen, and enhanced, in Fig 4. In this case, there is double focalisation since there is an external viewer whose view is momentarily aligned with a secondary (external) character, which is a vulture, previously vigorously seen and heard in the sky but now observing the refugees at a distance.

Fig. 1. Blurred human figures seen at a remote distance



Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

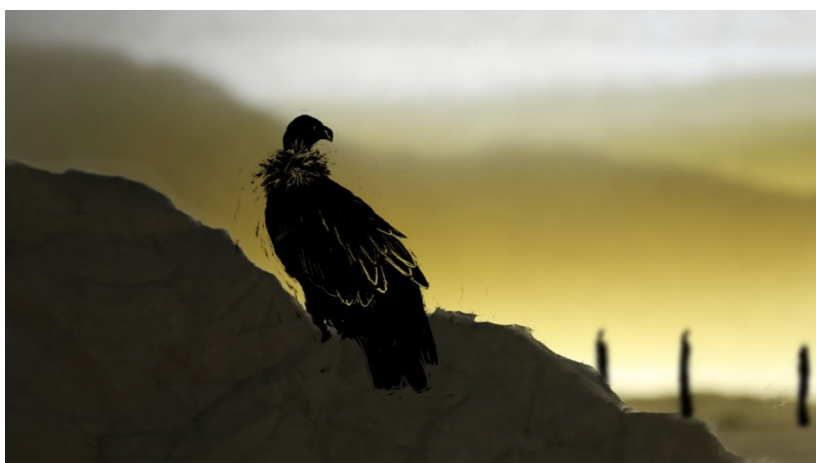
Fig. 2. Non-involvement being intensified by the oblique angle



Fig. 3. A powerful view looking down at refugees



Fig. 4. Vultures observing the refugees



Interestingly, there is only one single shot of non-mediated focalisation in which the focalised is not a refugee. Shot 14 is a detour in the refugee's narrative introducing a migrant's walk, preceded by the written words REFUGEE and MIGRANT and followed by the word VIOLENCE. While the words are not relevant for our analysis, it is indeed relevant to note that the *migrant* is seen by the same focalizing options that keep the viewer socially distant from *refugees*, since the migrant is again seen at a distance in a horizontal plane. The viewer's social positioning as *an uninvolved observer* is therefore reinforced with this shot.

We have interpreted these semiotic combinations as strategies for the construction of distancing, of disempowerment and of objectivation of refugees, that is, for visually representing them as 'others' with a possible imaginary effect of keeping-them-at-a-distance, offering their dramas 'to our gaze as a spectacle for our dispassionate scrutiny' (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 140). We consider that these dominant focalising options legitimise this as the dominant social view, naturalizing 'the alienated others' and evidencing how 'images may be ideologically effective precisely because they do not engage us [viewers] in overt or covert dialogic negotiation' (Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2012, p. 19) with refugees.

The viewer as an emotionally involved witness; the refugees as humans enduring suffering

Although less frequent and interspersed with unmediated focalisation, **the mediated focalisation**, which positions *the viewer as an internal observer* of the dramas of the

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

characters, is also used in this narrative. There are instances in which the viewer ‘sees’ the refugees ‘along with the character’ or else ‘as character’.

In Fig. 5, the viewer is **aligned with** the family, which in the animated narrative is followed by Fig 6., again **aligned with** the main character, now a lonely traveller looking at a long empty space, allowing a symbolic interpretation of helplessness as if no solution for her drama could be found. This alignment with the main character’s perspective is achieved through ‘back view focalisation’, through which the viewer sees the character ‘while also seeing what the character sees from that character’s perspective’ (Unsworth, 2014b, p. 205). Two major meaning differences are introduced by this focalising option, one concerning social distance and the other the attitude that is constructed for the viewer. Through the proximate back view, the viewer is socially closer to the characters, constructing affiliation but without total identification with them.

Fig. 5 The viewer is aligned with the family



Fig. 6. The viewer is aligned with the main character, now alone



Figs 7. and 8. are instances of **mediated focalisation as character**. In such cases, the social distance is reduced by the camera, which is positioned where the character is. In this case, the viewer is ‘positioned to see through the character’s eyes’ (Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2012, p. 21), allowing her to see what the refugee sees, from her shoes, creating ‘an enhanced intimacy’ (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 178) between both. This is enhanced by the semi frontal horizontal plane, which encourages ‘strong viewer affiliation with this character’s vision or situation’ (O’Brien, 2014, p. 135).

Fig. 7. The viewer sees through the character’s eyes

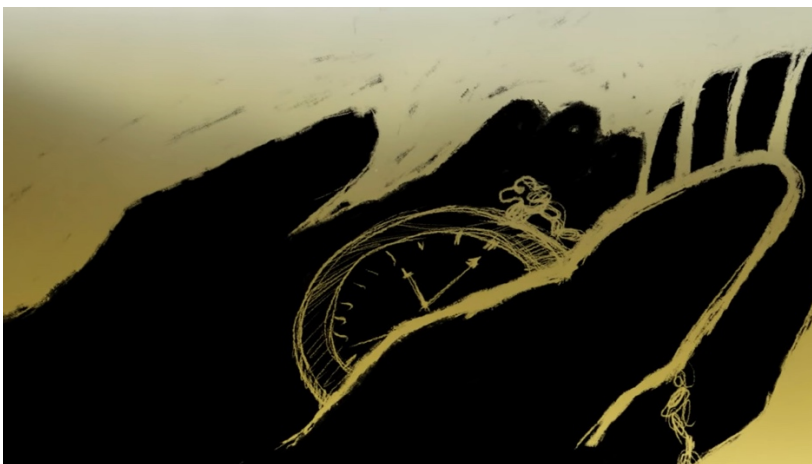


Fig. 8 The viewer still sees through the character’s eyes



Figures 5-8 are the four unique mediated focalisation shots in the whole video, comprising a total of 1:00 minute. We have interpreted these semiotic combinations as strategies for an ‘emotional deconstruction’ of the dominant social view of distancing, of disempowerment and of objectivation. Although scarce, these focalisation options of the depicted characters ‘*shift* the reader engagement from *appreciative* to *emphatic*’ (Unsworth, 2014b, p. 207, original italics), causing a rise in emotional involvement and empathy. In these moments, refugees are not at-a-distance; rather, their dramas are offered to our passionate scrutiny. In these rare moments, there is emotional dialogue, and a humanizing social view of the refugees is represented. A note is here due to the existence of an image shot in which the unmediated focalisation enhances this emotional bonding. This is captured in Fig 9., in which the semifrontal, almost close-up, shot of the main character’ face expression positions the viewer as an external yet closer observer of the character’s suffering, therefore constructing a closer relationship with the depicted character.

Fig. 9 Semifrontal close up main character’s face expressing suffering



The viewer as a committed participant; the refugees as one of us

In the coda of the narrative, in which only a sequence of six close-up shots of six different male and female refugees is presented for 24 seconds, the focalisation again becomes **non mediated**, although showing a very significant difference. The intimate proximity that the viewer gets from the characters through the close up shots, constructing an emotional involvement for the viewer, is constant here. Besides, there is also a frontal, horizontal plane, built through an eye-level angle with the viewer, now constructing social equity and identification among participants (cf. Fig 10). In this way, refugees are depicted as individualized in closely framed eye-level shots, shown as if they are ‘one of us’ (van Leeuwen, 2008) as saying ‘what you see here is part of our world, something we are involved in’ (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 136). On top of this, the characters directly gaze at the viewer, acknowledging her presence explicitly and addressing her with a ‘visual you’ (Kress van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 117), conveying an appeal or a demand for the viewer’s commitment.

Fig. 10 Frontal close up shot



In these moments, refugees are fully identified and put face to face with viewers, powerfully deconstructing the wall between ‘us /them’ (Dijk, 2006). Through these focalisation options, the emotional dialogue now becomes rational and agentic, demanding for reflection, ethical discernment and social engagement with these people’s dramas. The viewer’s position is now expanded from *emphatic* to *socially committed actor*. Altogether, we have interpreted these final focalising options as representing a yet again deconstruction of the dominant social view of distance, of disempowerment and of objectivation, in this case imbued with a political ideology aligned with the principles of social justice and inclusion.

Discussion

Having addressed the questions leading the analysis of the visual narrative, we now turn to the major question that has motivated the study: *How could the visual narrative become the object of critical analysis aimed at enhancing learners’ meaning making?* The findings suggest that the semiotic options for the construction of the systems of focalisation come up as a relevant object of *critical analysis* in this visual narrative.

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

The analysis reveals the interpretative possibilities that are opened up to the viewer by performing a critical analysis of visual narrative focalisation. In particular, it gives strong evidence of significant ideological meanings constructed by the two major focalisation options for viewers about themselves as well as about refugees. The unmediated focalisation is the dominant option throughout the video and, regardless of different gradations of social distance and emotional involvement with the focalised- characters, the viewer is mainly positioned as a distant and detached external observer of the represented social reality. Shifts to a mediated focalisation ‘along with’ and ‘as characters’, far less used, construct closer relationships and enhance the viewer’s emphatic dialogue. Other significant visual meanings were further identified within unmediated focalisation, in this case constructed through choices for close-up shots with direct gaze demanding a commitment from the viewer to participate in this social reality, therefore broadening her understanding of the represented characters ‘as a focus for interpretive issues concerning difference, conformity, acceptance, and interpersonal outreach” (Unsworth, 2014b, p. 207).

We have interpreted these semiotic choices as constructing different viewer’s positioning towards the represented characters, with significant ideological meanings. While viewers are socially distant and non-involved with refugees most part of the time, the visual narrative also offers the viewer the possibility for closer positionings with what she sees. Besides, while refugees are mainly represented as *others that we observe*, apart from ‘us’, they are also positioned *as persons like us that observe us too*. These different positionings correspond to assuming different ideologies, either assimilatory and conformist to social status quo or liberating, responsive and democratic (authors, 2014; Stephens, 1992), with a potential impact in viewers’ / learners’ learning about refugees. By performing the critical analysis of the focalising options in the visual narrative, it is

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

possible to uncover alternative ways to *'envision' the refugees*, and, as a consequence, different yet meaningful answers to the question leading the TED-Ed lesson (*'What does it mean to be a refugee?'*). As such,

exercises such as these nurture students' inquiry and empathy and prepare them to live in a mediated and networked world, one where the veracity of every message should be questioned, or at least contextualized and acknowledged as having a specific perspective. (Funk et al., 2016, p. 19)

However important these meanings are to prepare learners to diverse settings, they are only made explicit through critical analysis. We therefore consider that the critical analysis of the focalization in visual narratives as illustrated in our study has a potential important role to play in the construction of the pedagogy of multiliteracies. As we see it, its full enactment implies at least two major caveats.

The first is that other dimensions of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, namely *experience, conceptualization, and applying*, need to be interrelated with critical analysis of multimodal discourse.

In fact, while it is clear for us that the simple *experience* of viewing cannot assure that the (uninformed) viewer constructs critical meanings as described above (Unsworth, 2014a; Thomas, 2014), *analysing critically per se* cannot help learners achieve the best learning possible. For critical meaning making to be successful, specific and explicit *conceptualising* processes are needed that assure that learners understand the constructed nature of visual focalisation and that they know the critical analytical tool and associated metalanguage. We agree with Unsworth (2014b, p. 203) when he claims that 'explicit meta-semiotic understanding can help students understand the ideological 'constructedness' of multimodal texts 'and hence become a resource for critical comprehension and for enhancing students' own multimodal digital narrative authoring'

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

(cf. Thomas 2014). This animated narrative in fact offers itself as an excellent text for such learning, being indeed an exemplary multimodal ‘interrogative text’ (Stephens, 1992), offering viewers the experience of multiple alternative perspectives (Kidd and Castano, 2013; authors, 2014).

Furthermore, the critical analysis of this visual narrative would benefit from the consideration of the life experiences of refugees, something that would be especially relevant when refugees are among the learners/viewers, which would certainly enhance the construction of truly responsive critical literacies, as advocated by Golden & Pandya (2019, p. 216):

The enactment of a social justice pedagogy requires what has been termed responsiveness (Moje and Hinchman 2004). Responsiveness involves an understanding of and merging with the desires of the person or people being positioned discourse, text, media, or spatial arrangements (...) such responsiveness should be at the core of critical literacy and praxis.

Essential would be that learners as critical analysts *apply* what they have learned to construct, enact social justice. As put by Funk et al. (2016), it is not enough learn the codes of representation with a critical perspective; it is also fundamental create to learn.

The second caveat concerns teachers. The assumption of teachers as conscious “designers of knowledge-making environments, builders of learning scaffolds, managers of student learning and researchers of learner performance” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 71) is a central tenet of the multiliteracies approach. However, the educators who have designed this lesson appear to be working in a totally novel context of meaning-making but using insufficient specific conceptualization: they were blind to the meanings that we have unveiled through the critical analysis of the visual narrative; In fact, no visual

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

meanings are the focus of learners' attention, no such meanings are the target of the learning tasks. Learners *experience* the narrative but their attention is never directed to analyse it critically, to make meanings with it and to learn from it. We take this as a sign that it is essential that teachers become acquainted with the *critical analysis of visual narrative focalisation* (in fact, with the full set of tenets of the pedagogy of multiliteracies). Such knowledge should be facilitated to them so that they can turn multimodal texts as those exemplified by our visual narrative into objects of learning, therefore overcoming pedagogical gaps as that we have identified in the lesson that initially stirred our inquiry.

Conclusions

The main aim of our paper is to contribute to the construction of the pedagogy of multiliteracies. We specifically contend that the analysis of the semiotic options for the construction of focalisation in visual narratives plays a fundamental part in the learning process of *knowing by critical analysis* in the pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, 2012). The grammar of visual narrative focalization comes up as an important tool and metalanguage in developing critical analysis of multimodal narratives, with the potential to enrich meaning making, literacy practices and learning from visual narrative texts.

Limitations of space have impeded us from presenting a complete analysis of relevant meaning options in the construction of the relationship between viewer and characters. For example, there is an evident transformation in the way that refugees are

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

depicted in the visual narrative, varying from minimalist, generic to almost naturalistic representations. This is important to understand how *pathos* (Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2014) varies from appreciative, to empathetic and personalising. Equally *colour* is very relevant in constructing the modality (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) or ‘bonding effect’ (Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2014, p. 35) between the viewer and what she sees.

We have furthermore opted for not presenting an analysis of the video as a multimodal ensemble (Kress, 2010). As we explained before, we have focused on the visual narrative because of its invisibility in the pedagogical work offered for students’ inspection in the original TED-Ed lesson. However, an intermodal analysis is needed to understand the video’s full meaning. This would allow, for example, to broaden the reading comprehension tasks offered in ‘Think’ section of the lesson to the intermodal meanings constructed with the affordances of both visual and linguistic semiotic resources (Callow, 2020). Students would be able to understand, for example, how the predominantly objective and factual meanings conveyed in the verbal mode are significantly amplified and enriched by visual affordances, and, particularly, by the visual focalisation process. The visual focalisation analysis suggested here interacts with verbal text analysis in order to answer questions such as *How does the visual image depicted through the character’s perspective about her social /human reality (Fig. 10) adds meanings to the verbal text? And how do these intermodal meanings help us answer the question ‘What does it mean to be a refugee?’*. By applying the knowledge that they might construct from analysing the video, students would then be able, for example, to critically rewrite the verbal text or, else, recompose the video itself with a more informed and

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

contentious (Freire and Macedo, 2003) perspective on refugees, which would further enhance the enacted pedagogy.

References

Author (2020)

Authors (2014)

Authors (2021)

Bal, M. (2017). *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Fourth edition. University of Toronto Press. Buffalo: London.

Bal, M. (1999). *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Second Edition. University of Toronto Press. Buffalo: London.

Callow, J. (2013). The shape of text to come: how image and text work. Newtown, NSW, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA).

Callow, J. (2020). Visual and verbal intersections *in picture books - multimodal assessment for middle years students*, *Language and Education*, 34 (2), 115-13.

Cope, B. and Kalantzis, M. (Eds). (2015). *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies. Learning by Design*. Palgrave Macmillan: UK.

Cope, B. and Kalantzis, M. (2012). *New Learning. Elements of a science of education. Second edition. Australia*: Cambridge University Press.

Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (2009). New literacies, new learning. *Pedagogies*, 4 (3), 164-195.

Djonov, E. and Sumin, Z. (2014). From Multimodal to Critical Multimodal Studies through Popular Discourse. In Emilia Djonov and Sumin Zhao (Eds.) *Critical Multimodal Studies of Popular Discourse*. (1-14). New York: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2001 (1989)). *Language and Power* (2nd ed.). London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2010 (1995)). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.) Harlow: Longman.

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1999). Further notes on the four resources model. Reading Online. Retrieved February 12, 2006, from <http://www.readingonline.org/research/lukefreebody.html>

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (2003). Rethinking literacy: A dialogue. In A. Darder, M. Baldano, & R. Torres (Eds), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 354-364). New York: Routledge.

Funk, S., Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2016). Critical media literacy and transformative Pedagogy. In M. N. Yildiz & J. Keengwe (Eds.). *Handbook of research on Media Literacy in the digital age* (pp. 1-30) Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, IGI Global.

Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social Linguistics and Literacies. Ideology in Discourse*. 2nd ed. London: Taylor and Francis.

Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. New York: Cornell University Press

Golden, N. A., & Pandya, J. Z. (2019) Understanding identity and positioning for responsive critical literacies. *Language and Education*, 33:3, 211-225.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic*. London: Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994 (1985)). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Arnold.

Jewitt, C. (2008). Multimodality and Literacy in School Classrooms. *Review of Research in Education*, 32, 241-267. Retrieved September 11, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20185117>

Jewitt, C. (Ed.). (2009). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. Oxon: Routledge.

Kalantzis, M. & Cope, B. (2012). *New Learning. Elements of a science of education*. Second edition. Australia: Cambridge University Press.

Kidd, D. C., & Castano, E. (2013). Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind. *Science*, 342 (6156), 377-380

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images. The grammar of visual design*. Second edition. Oxon: Routledge.

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality. A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London, New York: Routledge.

Kress, G. (2015). Semiotic Work: Applied Linguistics & a Social Semiotic Account of Multimodality. *AILA Review*, 28, 49-71.

Low, D. & Pandya, J. (2019). Issues of Validity, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity in Multimodal Literacy Research and Analysis. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*. Vol.15 Issue 1 (pp.1-22).

Mills, K. A. (2009) Multiliteracies: interrogating competing discourses. *Language and Education*, 23:2, 103-116,

New London Group. (1996). *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures*. Harvard Educational Review, 66, 60–92.

O'Brien, A. (2014). Using focalisation to manipulate audience viewpoint in 3-D animation narratives: what do student authors need to know? Unsworth, L. and Thomas, A. (eds) *English teaching and new literacies pedagogy. Interpreting and authoring digital multimodal narratives*. (pp. 123-150). New York: Peter Lang.

Pace, B. G. (2006). Between response and interpretation: Ideological becoming and literary events in critical readings of literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49 (7), 548-549.

Painter, C., Martin, J.R., & Unsworth, L.(2014). *Reading visual narratives: Image analysis of children's picture books*. London: Equinox.

Painter, C., Martin, J.R., & Unsworth, L. (2012). *Reading visual narratives: Image analysis of children's picture books*. London: Equinox.

Painter, C., & Martin, J.R (2011). Intermodal complementarity: Modelling affordances across image and verbiage in children's picture books. In F.Yan (Ed.), *Studies in functional linguistics and discourse analysis* 3 (pp.132-158). Beijing: Higher Education Press.

- Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â.** (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)
- Painter, C. (2007). Children's picture book narratives: Reading sequences of images. In A. McCabe, M. O'Donnell, & R. Whittaker (Eds.), *Advances in language and education* (pp. 40-59). London: Continuum.
- Rowse, J., Kress, G., Pahl, K. and Street, B. (2013). The Social Practice of Multimodal Reading: A New Literacy Studies–Multimodal Perspective on Reading, in Alvermann, D. E., Unrau, N. J., and Ruddel, R. B. (eds) *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*. 6th ed. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, pp. 1182–1207.
- Serafini, F. (2014). *Reading the Visual. An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Stephens, J. (1992). *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. London: Longman
- Thomas, A. (2014). Using Contemporary Picture Books to Explore the Concept of Intermodal Complementarity. In Unsworth, L. and Thomas, A. (eds) *English teaching and new literacies pedagogy. Interpreting and authoring digital multimodal narratives*. (pp.23-38). New York: Peter Lang.
- Unsworth, L. (2006) Towards a metalanguage for multiliteracies education: Describing the meaning-making resources for language-image interaction. *English Language: Practice and critique*, 5 (1), 99 55-76.
- Unsworth, L. (2014a). The Image / Language Interface in Picture Books as Animated Films. Unsworth, L. and Thomas, A. (Eds.) *English teaching and new literacies pedagogy. Interpreting and authoring digital multimodal narratives*. (pp.105-121). New York: Peter Lang
- Unsworth, L. (2014b). Point of view in Picture Books and Animated Film Adaptations: Informing Critical Multimodal Comprehension and Composition Pedagogy. Djonov, E. and Sumin, Z. (eds) *Critical Multimodal Studies of Popular Discourse*. (202-216). New York: Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). *Ideological Discourse Analysis*. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11(2). (pp.115-140). Routledge.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2005). Moving English. The visual language of film. In S. Goodman and D. Gradol (Eds.), *Redesigning English: New texts, new identities* (pp. 82-103). London: Open University.

Pereira, Í. S. P. & Campos, Â. (2023). Constructing the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The role of focalisation in the development of critical analysis of multimodal narratives. *Language & Education*. 37 (1), 105- 122. (unedited final version)

Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). Critical Discourse Analysis. In K.Brown (Ed.), *Elsevier encyclopedia of language and linguistics 2nd ed., Vol. 13* (pp. 290-294). Oxford: Elsevier.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical analysis*. London: Oxford University Press.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2013). Critical analysis of multimodal discourse. In C. Chapelle (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 1 – 5). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Walsh, M. (2008). Worlds have collided and modes have merged: Classroom evidence of changed literacy practices. *Literacy*, 42 (2), 101–108.

Yoon, B., A. Simpson, and C. Haag. (2010). Assimilation Ideology: Critically Examining Underlying Messages in Multicultural Literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42 (2): 109-118.