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**Introduction to multimodal analysis, Per Ledin, David Machin, second ed, Bloomsbury Academic, London & New York (2020). ISBN 978-1-3500-6914-5**

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*Published in:*  
Journal of Pragmatics

*DOI:*  
[10.1016/j.pragma.2020.08.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.08.013)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2020

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Wildfeuer, J. (2020). Introduction to multimodal analysis, Per Ledin, David Machin, second ed, Bloomsbury Academic, London & New York (2020). ISBN 978-1-3500-6914-5. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 170, 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.08.013>

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# Journal of Pragmatics

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## Book review

**Introduction to multimodal analysis, Per Ledin, David Machin, second ed. Bloomsbury Academic, London & New York (2020). 244 pages, 978-1-3500-6914-5, EUR 26,99.**

Thirteen years after the publication of the first edition of *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis*, Per Ledin and David Machin present an updated and revised version of Machin's acclaimed textbook. With its generally critical stance and its meaningful discussion of the concept of 'visual grammar' (while at the same time applying it for analysis; cf. Björkqvall, 2008), the first edition has been certified to be very accessible for students and broadly equipped with a variety of analytical examples and insightful observations (cf., e.g., Ensslin, 2008; Hussein, 2009).

The latter is similarly true for the second edition, partly because the authors have updated almost all analytical examples and made new references to more recent works in multimodality research. Furthermore, the revision is extended by a new chapter on the theory of multimodality which now makes the idea and concept of multimodal analysis in general more explicit and understandable than in the previous edition; two further chapters on texture and diagrams as well as a helpful image index are added. The textbook does not only offer summarizing textboxes at the end of each chapter, but now also includes student activity tasks that motivate readers to start doing actual analyses. With this, the second edition evolves as a successful upgrade to the list of currently available introductory books on multimodal analysis that offer 'toolkits' with ready-made distinctions to be applied to analytical objects (cf. Bateman et al. 2017: 1).

Similar to the first edition, the authors make clear from the very beginning that their focus lies on visual design and the choices that have been made to construct meanings and to create associations, ideas, and values in and for specific artefacts (see the introduction). Their starting point is that people interested in how these artefacts communicate usually "tend to not have the tools to be able to identify how these work" (3), and consequently, the authors make these tools the topic of the book. Taking "former kinds of semiotics such as that of Roland Barthes" (5) as an apparently usual basis for communication analysis, they explain their partly diverging inspiration by the social semiotic approach to multimodality and its origin in the works of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen as well as in the linguistics of Michael Halliday.

While this focus is now made even more explicit by clear section titles and guiding questions in the introduction and more details in the first chapter, it seems, on the other hand, to prevent the authors both from explaining what multimodality itself is as well as from defining why or how the artefacts they describe are multimodal by nature. Whereas in the first edition, there is at least one page devoted to the term 'multimodality' and its use by Kress and van Leeuwen (Machin, 2007: viii; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 2006), this is no longer the case for the second edition and neither does the new chapter on "What is multimodal analysis?" give further definitory details. Instead, a textbox summarizes "concepts for what is multimodality" (30) without explaining how 'semiotic choice', 'material affordance', or 'communicative rationality', for example, define it or relate to this notion.

The authors claim, however, to present a "theory of visual communication" (13) and this might in fact be a basic problem of both editions and their titles: Even though the authors reasonably explain that they do not want to give a detailed overview of the different fields of multimodality (see p. 7) and with this probably do not want to cover the full variety of multimodal artefacts and performances either, the diversity of examples discussed in the book is limited to specific genres. Whereas the first edition was published when the focus of multimodality research was clearly still on visual communication 'only', this has considerably changed and the breadth and depth of multimodality research and multimodal analysis have widened extremely, now also including an extensive range of dynamic, audio-visual artefacts, live performances, interactive, and even virtual environments, etc. None of these are analyzed nor mentioned in the book and the number of examples of digital media, whose absence in the first edition had already been criticized by Björkqvall (2008), has only been expanded by a discussion of websites and a short addition on technologization in general. The main artefacts discussed remain two-dimensional static visual artefacts such as photographs, diagrams, posters, catalogues or three-dimensional packages and spatial arrangements with a certain texture or configuration. It remains questionable whether a recent introduction to multimodal analysis with the exact same title (and thus explicitly not localizing the focus further to visual analysis) can really forego all these other artefacts and performances and more or less ignore many of the current trends of this still evolving field or discipline.

Unfortunately, as a consequence of the additions made to the analytical examples, much of the critical perspective that has been praised in the first version gets lost in this revision. In fact, the highly appreciated and often recommended final chapter of the 2007 version in which Machin critically examines Kress and van Leeuwen's theoretical concept of visual grammar has completely given way to the analytical additions. From a theoretically oriented perspective on multimodality, the authors' very own justification that "critical reflection on this model was only really beginning at the time of writing [the first version] and it remains the base reference for many teachers and researchers, particularly in linguistics" (xi) does not give reasonable justice to this rather large revision. While the analytical additions surely enrich the book with more hands-on analyses and examples of everyday life and thus make the book a really practical introduction, the theoretical density and critical reflection mostly disappear and the book loses much of its sophisticated discussion practice and its enrichment of disciplinary conversations on multimodality (cf. Hussein, 2009).

It then also appears that some of the smaller revisions in the individual chapters further facilitate this turn away from providing a profound theoretical competence: Most of the actually few direct references to Kress and van Leeuwen's work have been omitted and the book does no longer devote as much attention to its original basis. It remains unclear whether the mentioned critical reflection of this work has further influenced the author(s) for this revision and whether Machin's "indebtedness" (cf. Hussein, 2009: 295) has therefore decreased. It is in any case regrettable that readers of the second version are no longer (if only indirectly) taught the important way of critically reading original sources.

One further important observation to be made is the fact that the authors now seemingly try to avoid the term 'semiotic mode' in their discussions and analyses. While the first version features a section on "the essential requirements of a semiotic mode" (without actually defining this concept further; Machin, 2007: pp. 65–67), the new edition rather describes color as well as typography and texture as semiotic resources (see, e.g., chapter 4, pp. 88–96). Neither 'mode', 'resource' nor 'semiotic system' (which is used in both editions) are defined or summarized (not even in the generally helpful textboxes) nor referenced; nor is there any argumentation why the terminology has changed so drastically. For an introduction to multimodal analysis for which 'semiotic mode' is one of, if not the most important theoretical concept, which is experiencing a very uneven debate until today, this is in fact worrying – even more so with regard to the authors' self-proclaimed aim to "reflect on developments in theory" (xii). Further critical voices on other introductions to multimodality, including our own (Bateman et al. 2017), support this concern (cf., e.g., Forceville, 2020).<sup>1</sup>

The context of multimodality and multimodal analysis has in fact experienced diverse discussions and examinations of their objects of analyses from various theoretical as well as empirical perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds. The notion of 'semiotic mode' is not the only concept that is by far not uniformly defined and for which controversial voices are raised. Notions such as 'affordance' or 'materiality', for which there are similar ongoing debates, are introduced in passing and not discussed in detail. With regard to the authors' repeated claim to take a critical perspective, it is therefore disappointing that none of these many ongoing discussions in the broad context of multimodality (cf., e.g., Cohn, 2018; Wildfeuer et al., 2019; Bateman et al., 2020) are mentioned.

Fair enough and notwithstanding, the authors remain more than loyal to their "basic toolkit approach" (xi). With the clear focus on hands-on analyses and the inventories they provide for the analytical examination of the examples, they admittedly improve the accessibility of the presented approach for students and practitioners – after all, the book is intended to be "an inspiration to explore". While not fully achieving their goal of taking "a stance on all kinds of multimodal communication" (xii), the authors still enlarge both the set of examples as well as the set of tools that are available for understanding how multimodal communication works. For learners in search of a first handout with a handy set of terms, the textbook is therefore a light, practical introduction that – together with a profound theoretical enlargement on the basis of other works – comprises a first springboard to delve into the deeper context of multimodality.

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<sup>1</sup> We ourselves have been criticized by Charles Forceville for refusing or being unable to define 'mode' (see Forceville, 2020: 159) and our reply to this critique includes a more detailed definition (in addition to the one provided in the textbook) as well as the standpoint that we "consider a clear position on what a semiotic mode is (and is not) a precondition for any multimodal research and education concerning multimodality" (Bateman et al., 2020: 317).

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