

Negotiating Multimodality and Academic English Writing for EFL writers: Affordances, Limitations, and Implications

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Abstract

The influence of emerging technologies and social media has altered the traditional notion of literacy practices in our daily life. Rather than heavily relying merely on linguistic mode, meaning is now constructed through a variety of modes and multimodalities. This research aims at exploring the affordances, limitations, and pedagogical implications of multimodality in the meaning making and argument building practices by EFL learners.

Specifically, this study examines how EFL learners applied different modes and modalities in the composing process in a digital storytelling project. It also focuses on how multimodality impacts the value of traditional literacy practices as well as the teaching and learning of academic writing. In total, 61 undergraduate students were recruited from two sections of English Reading courses offered by the principal investigator in 2019 at a medical university in Taiwan. The participants were from 12 medical-related majors and were mostly first-year undergraduate students. They were instructed to transform a text-based project into a 3-5 minute-digital storytelling (DST). The DST project requested the participants to apply a variety of modes and modalities for describing and debunking a health misconception. The primary data included (1) text-based script drafts, (2) digital storytelling video clippings, (3) the participants' composing reflections, and (4) peer review notes on four sample DST projects.

The findings revealed that the DST project helped the participants to build a direct connection between critical reading and writing for academic purposes. Specifically, the DST project offered opportunities for the participants to practice academic literacy skills in a way different from most traditional notions of academic writing, which merely relied on the linguistic mode to construct meaning and to build arguments. On the other hand, the pre-writing/pre-composing stage of the DST project including gathering credible resources and transforming absorbed knowledge into one's own arguments was perceived to be the most challenging task. In addition, the transformation process from text-based scripts into storytelling required the participants to experiment different modes of expression, thus motivating them to display their own voices in the final product. Second, the DST project helps the participants to move from passive receivers of knowledge to become active consumers and creators of knowledge. It is

found that the participants revealed sensitivity to the audience when they mixed verbal and non-verbal modes in the DST project. Finally, it is hoped that the outcome of this research will assist L2 language teachers and learners to tap into the power of digital storytelling and partake in more engaged learning and teaching.

Keywords: academic writing, digital storytelling, EFL learners, multimodal approach to L2 learning