The Significance of Multimodality/Multiliteracies in Iranian EFL Learners' Meaning- Making Process

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to investigate how Iranian EFL learners used their literacy practices and multimodal resources to mediate interpretation and representation of an advertisement text and construct their understanding of it. Fifteen female adolescents at an intermediate level of proficiency read the "مبلمان برلیان" ("Brelian Furniture") advertisement text and re-created their understandings in pictures and sentences. The data was analyzed based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2001) theory of social semiotics. The findings suggest that students situated the meanings of the advertisement texts in specific contexts that reflected their own social and cultural experiences. Furthermore, the students demonstrated that the use of multimodal resources

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had the potential to enhance language and literacy learning in a way that was transformative and was affected by their identities. In addition, the use of multimodal/multiliteracies pedagogy permitted the students to enter into text composition from different paths. Finally, multimodal/multiliteracies pedagogy could foster critical literacy practices by offering EFL students the opportunities to create new identities and challenge discursive practices that marginalize them. The implications of the findings are also discussed.

Introduction

Literacy is currently defined as the ability to read and write the print-based materials. However, this is increasingly becoming inadequate with the advent of digital, multimodal, and hybrid textual forms which were made possible by new media technologies (Gee, 2003). With advancement in multimedia technologies, literacy is no longer just the ability to read and write; it is now viewed as the ability to construct and understand textual forms associated with diverse domains such as the Internet, videogames, visual images, and graphics (Gee, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Similarly, the meaning of *text* has now expanded beyond textbooks to include spoken or written words and the different textual forms associated with posters, photographs, graphics, visual images, computers, CD-ROMs, videotapes or DVDs, videogames, and other digital technologies (Ajayi, 2010). On the other hand, students come to school with different language abilities, different cultural identities, multiple perspectives, and more importantly, various learning strategies. While some are visually oriented, others prefer learning through hands-on activities (Stein, 2004). Many also learn by drawing, composing music, or performing (Stein, 2004).

The New London Group first came together in the mid-1990s to consider the state and future of literacy pedagogy. After a meeting in September 1994, the New London Group published an article-long manifesto (New London Group, 1996) and then a book (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) outlined an agenda for what is called 'pedagogy of multiliteracies'. Through their seminal article

published in 2009, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) revisited the case for a 'pedagogy of multiliteracies' first put by the New London Group. The focus of this article was mainly on describing the dramatically changing social and technological contexts of communication and learning, developing a language with which to talk about representation and communication in educational contexts, and addressing the question of what constitutes appropriate literacy pedagogy for the time. Kalantzis and Cope (2012) expanded their framework in their comprehensive book 'Literacies'.

Based on the New London Group's (1996) arguments on multiliteracies, Kress (2001) and Bezmer and Kress (2008) made a complete break with linguistic theories that were dominant through the twentieth century. The studies utilized a social semiotic multimodal approach to data analysis, which focused on the multiple semiotic modes in the different meaning-making processes. In fact, the aim of the studies was to reveal the principles underlying the design of multimodal combinations.

Multimodality was also a challenging topic for traditional discourse analysts who were familiar with texts. To describe the more complicated discourse, researchers investigated the relationship among various modes, drawing on analysis of images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; O'Halloran, 2004), layout (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), and sound, music and voice (van Leeuwen, 1999). In other words, language was not considered as a unique or even central mode of communication anymore. Now, contemporary communication comprises a wider range of semiotic systems that influence watching as well as reading and writing.

Gee (2003) stated that multiliteracies are more than just "decoding" skills. He argued that "knowing about a social practice always involves recognizing various distinctive ways of acting, interacting, feeling, knowing, valuing and using various objects and technologies that constitute the social practice" (p. 15). That is, literacy practices are closely related to the social groups that contest how a text should be read, understood, interpreted, negotiated, and applied in real-life situations. This implies that in the educational setting, the classroom life of teachers and students, especially the social interaction - for

example, the talk about textbooks - that takes texts as its point of departure, becomes important to literacy practices. Gee (2003), thus, contended that literacy is context specific, text type specific, and social practice specific. In addition, Gee (2003, 2007) explored the intersection of semiotic practices and effective principles of learning imbedded in videos and concluded that the technology powerfully shaped learners' identity because it permitted students to learn in different situational contexts and contexts of culturally meaningful literacy activity.

According to Weedon (2000), the need to situate literacy in learners' context is even more urgent today as they are surrounded by a proliferation of digital and multimodal materials that not only influence their literacy practices, but also shape their cultural identities. Cultural identity refers to learners' backgrounds and distinctive behaviors with which they may be associated and identified. As a result, Luke (2003) called for research which documents students' "new configurations of 'difference' and 'identity' in [their] literate identities, practices, and pathways" (p. 134). He suggested a need for studies that explore learners' identities and subjectivities and how students' cultural models and/or home life contribute to a unique understanding of multimodal practices in the classroom. In fact, cultural models are mental schemata of what counts as acceptable practices in a given community. Because of the pervasive influence of the media in learner's identities, Buckingham (2005) called for studies that explain how students make judgments in relation to new media genres.

The issue of multiliteracies in English classrooms is not an exception; that is, the use of multimodal texts as a practice of multiliteracies is a significant challenge for English teachers as well. According to Albright and Walsh (2010), although multiliteracies and multimodality have been well theorized in recent years, few studies have investigated the practical aspects of developing a curriculum of multiliteracies where students engage in transformed practice through multimodal design. Teachers have difficulty in how to prepare the learners from a wide range of abilities to read at grade level and thus successfully access information from different text types with ease. In the same line, other researchers (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Cooper, Locker, & Brown,

2013; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Davis, 2006; Dyson, 2003; Jewit, 2005) contended that there is a critical disconnect between the theory of multimodality and classroom pedagogy. In fact, the analysis of school literacy curriculum seemed to suggest that it only promoted "a linguistic view of literacy and a linear view of reading" (Jewitt, 2005, p. 330). As a result, Ajayi (2011) stated that the fundamental issue for English literacy teachers seems to be how to make pedagogical choices that integrate English language learners' perspectives, prior learning experiences, and identities.

On the other hand, critical studies of ESL students' literacy practices have shown that learners are not uncritical consumers of cultural models (Dyson & Labbo 2003; Gee 2003; Lemke 2005; McKinney & Norton 2008; Norton 2007; Vasquez 2004). In other words, students have the ability to consciously reflect, contest, critique, affirm or reject messages as they take the position of active meaning-makers. According to Sefton-Green (2006), ESL students are "active agents in the meaning-making process" (p. 282). In the same line, McKinney and Norton (2008) contend that ESL learners draw on their experiences to "take critical perspectives on their own social worlds" (p. 197). As a result, these studies have led to increasing recognition that literacy is an activity socially constructed and located in cultural, ideological, and political power. As a result, Ajayi (2010) stated that the urgent task for researchers is to develop a framework for critical multimodal analysis: how students use the social and cultural contexts to critically interpret multimodal texts such as videos, images, and websites that typically integrate language and other modes for meaning making. A very limited number of studies, such as Jewitt (2008), Janks and Comber (2006), and Lemke (2005) engaged in the exploration of how ESL learners interpret and reconstruct critical analysis of multimodal texts. The studies show that the multimodal nature of contemporary texts goes beyond just using language to communicate as multiliteracies promote alternative ways of critically reading materials.

A brief review of the literature shows that there is the primary and urgent need to bridge the large gap between the theories of multiliteracies and their practices in the context of the classroom. Furthermore, even if there are sporadic studies that have tried to explore the feasibility and practicality aspects

of the multiliteracies pedagogy (Ajayi, 2009, 2010, 2011; Jank, 2010; Jewitt, 2008; Lemke, 2005; Pei-Ling Tan & Mc William, 2009;), they are mainly concerned with general education and children's literacies, or have merely focused on the multimodality aspect of the multiliteracies pedagogy without the implementation of the basic principles underlying multiliteracies pedagogy in the context of the classroom. According to Pei-Ling Tan and Mc William (2009),

> where multiliteracies are understood as garnish to the pedagogical roast of traditional code/print-based alphabetic and academic literacies, they will continue to work on the sidelines of mainstream schooling, and be seen only as either useful extensions or helpful interventions for high-performing and at-risk students respectively". (p. 225)

This is exactly what has happened in most of the studies that have recently intended to investigate the practical aspects of the multiliteracies pedagogy.

Furthermore, according to Stein (2004) "the politics and practices of representation in classrooms become particularly challenging in sites where learners and teachers come from very diverse historical, sociocultural, and linguistic contexts" (p. 96). Such a condition, which has been the basic drive behind most of the studies on multimodality/multiliteracies, is mostly evident in ESL contexts where students are from different nationalities and cultures. As a result, research on multimodality/multiliteracies in English classrooms has mostly concentrated on ESL contexts where students are heterogeneous regarding their cultural backgrounds. However, studies that have investigated the crucial role of multimodal texts and the issue of multiliteracies in English classroom in EFL contexts are quite limited. The important question to ask is whether multimodality/mulitiliteracies has the same impacts and advantages in EFL contexts as it does in ESL classrooms. Therefore, this study explored how, in an EFL classroom setting that attempted to make connections with the students' out-of-the-classroom literacy practices, learners were encouraged to use multimodal resources to interpret an advertisement and construct their understanding of it.

This study is significant in several ways. First and foremost, the results of the study can be a great contribution to bridge the gap between theories of multiliteracies pedagogy and classroom practice (Ajayi, 2011; Albright & Walsh, 2010). Second, the study can provide an understanding of underlying principles that guide language learners' interpretation of semiotic media in today's changing communicational landscapes, where meaning-making is intensely multimodal (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). Third, such a study will shed light on how non-linguistic visual semiotics provides students with alternative resources for representation and a more representative platform for participation in classrooms. Fourth, the study can contribute to the mediation of traditional linguistic and print-based literacy practices that are used in reading and writing and the innovative multiliteracies pedagogy as new literacies. Fifth, the study is innovative because it used a multiliteracies epistemology and pedagogy to teach reading and writing in the context of institutes. Finally, this work expands traditional literacy teaching and learning beyond an exclusive focus on the written words and adopts other modes of reading and writing.

Analytical Framework

Drawing upon Halliday's (1976) systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) developed a theory of visual 'grammar' to analyze the visually specific ways by which images realize three fundamental types of meaning, i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Ideational meaning refers to what an image represents or 'says' about a given phenomenon. Here, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) make a distinction between narrative, analytical, and classificational visual structures. The second type of meaning, that is interpersonal meaning, considers the way an image addresses its potential viewers or audience. Here, the authors make a distinction between images in which depicted characters appear to be looking directly at us and images lacking this direct gaze. The former category 'demands' interaction, while the latter is an interpersonal 'offer' (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.119). The third type of meaning is concerned with the ways images make textual meaning, or work as compositions. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) describe such visual features as framing to make distinctions between elements, relative size, and uses of color.

Recently, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have applied Halliday's (1976) theory to the analysis of multimodal texts. Central to their theory of *social semiotics* is the notion that multimodality goes hand-in-hand with the notion of multisensory perception. That is, the visual, the written, the auditory, and the haptic (sense of touch) are all interrelated and all contribute to meaning making. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) theorized that multimodal resources of visual communication such as vector, gaze, and composition-page layout, qualities of font, size, and so on-can be constituted into "grammatical systems" to realize specific metafunctions such as ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. They contended that social semiotics provides means of analyzing the presentation of different participants in visual representations and their relations to one another (ideational), the kinds of participant-viewer social relations (interpersonal), and the different compositional configurations that afford the realization of different textual meanings (textual).

Furthermore, in their social semiotic multimodal theory, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) used the term *motivated signs* to explain that an individual's choice of a particular sign to represent a particular meaning is motivated by the interests of the sign maker to deploy the most plausible resources afforded by the society for communication. They posited that the interest of a sign maker is at the center of the social semiotic theory of meaning, though mediated by the cultural, historical, social, psychological, and intellectual environments in which he or she lives. This study employs Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2001) theory of social semiotics to analyze the texts produced by Iranian EFL learners of English language and see how the use of signs can mediate message representation and how the choice of a specific sign for representation is shaped by the identity of the sign maker.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

The main objective of this article was to investigate how Iranian EFL students interpreted an advertisement and how their understanding of it was represented through semiotic practices. The data was analyzed and discussed under the following four research questions:

1. How does the use of signs by Iranian EFL students mediate message representation?
2. How is the choice of a specific sign for representation shaped by the identity of Iranian EFL students as sign makers?
3. How does the integration of verbal texts and visual images change the shape of knowledge and learning practices in the classroom?
4. What kinds of literacy practices and learning strategies do students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) acquire through the use of multimodal texts?

The Furniture Advertisement Text
The furniture advertisement (Figure 1) utilized in this study has very delicately combined language, image, color, space, and typography to create an attractive and impressive atmosphere for its readers.
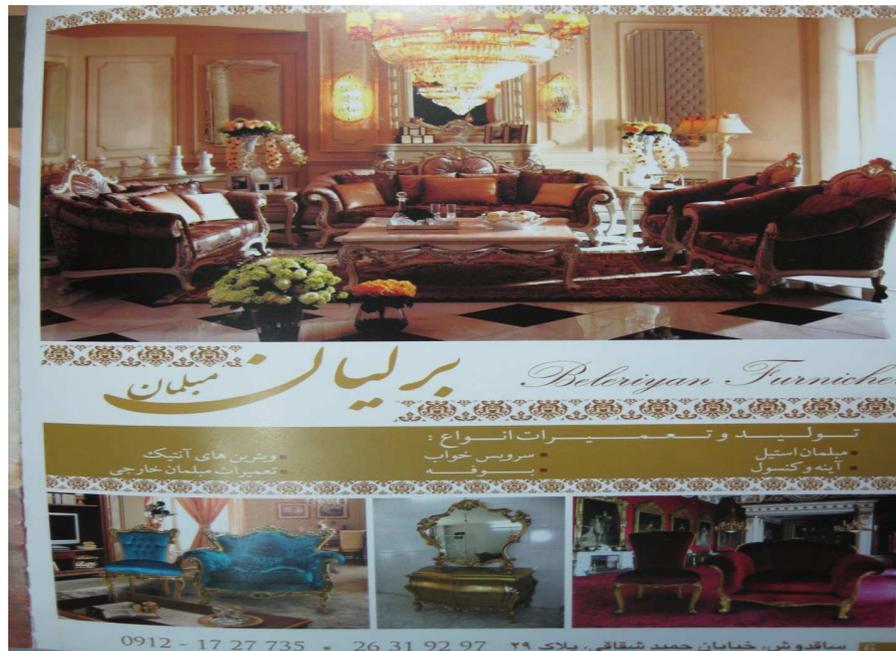
Figure 1: Brelian Furniture Advertisement

In the upper photograph, the designer has depicted a stylish furniture set in a super luxury house with elegant and expensive decorations and commodities visible everywhere. The same technique has been utilized for the other photographs illustrating more furniture sets at the bottom of the page. It seems that the designer has deliberately associated the furniture sets with fashionable and trendy houses in order to define them as belonging to a particular class of the society. Compared to the written language, the photographs have occupied more than 60% of the page space as a signal of salience (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1966). In addition, the framing of each photograph and its separation from the others demand the readers to carefully scrutinize each element and focus on the details provided for each furniture set (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Furthermore, the eye-catching gold, azure, and crimson colors in which the furniture sets are presented in the advertisement can be considered as other

signals of salience which highlight the royal and prestigious features of the furniture as belonging to those users identified with specific social class who possess social and economic power. In fact, this style of presentation emphasizes the indispensability of this product to a high social and economic position. This reference is crucial to the visual narrative of the text and the lure the readers need to identify with and purchase this brand of furniture. Finally, the selection of the name, "برلیان", with a French etymology, which means a polished piece of diamond, adds to the attraction and desirability of the product. The name has been printed in gold color both in Persian and English languages to make it more stylish and alluring to the reader. In a smaller font and in Persian, the advertisement has listed the available services such as the production and repair of different types of steel furniture, mirrors, etc. At the bottom, the advertisement has provided the readers with the related address and telephone numbers of the store.

Method

Participants
The participants were fifteen female adolescent Iranian students (between 11-15 years of age) who were learning English as a foreign language in a Language Institute in Shiraz. They were all at the intermediate level of English proficiency. The students explained that they usually used English when they were in class. When the researcher asked them to mention other sources through which they learned English, they noted that they sometimes watched English programs on the television, listened to music, and read books in English at home.

Data Collection
Data collection was done by only one of the researchers. Data collection took about one week. The class was held two times a week and each session lasted for 1 hour and 45 minutes. The data collected for this study included the students' drawings, their classroom oral explanations of the drawings, and the teacher's questions, explanations, and comments.

This study started in the fifth week of the semester. On the first session, the students' background knowledge was activated by asking them to share with the

class their general experiences of advertisements they watched on TV or read in newspapers. Then, the participants commented on the characteristics of their own furniture in their houses and different brands they had purchased. When the teacher asked for the reason why they purchased a particular brand of furniture, each student started explaining the advantages of her particular brand.

Then**,** a copy of "مبلمان برلیان" ("Brelian Furniture") advertisement was passed out to each group (see Figure 1)**,** while another copy was posted at the front of the class. The researcher led a discussion of the interpretation of the compositional message conveyed to potential buyers through the configuration of color, visual image, typography, and spatial design in Figure 1. The researcher asked the students to examine the role of the picture, the language, and the combination of color and image in the advertisement. The students worked in small groups so that they could share their interpretations and give help to one another. Next, students shared their answers with the class. The teacher and the researcher corrected the students' choice of words and pronunciations and charted their answers on the board.

Afterwards, the students worked in pairs to discuss how advertisements convinced them to buy goods or dissuaded them from purchasing them. The activities helped the students to explore how interpretations of visual images were important in arriving at decisions about whether to purchase a particular brand of Furniture.

Finally, each student was asked to make a drawing to represent her understanding of the advertisement text and write approximately five sentences to explain the drawing. The researcher explained that the students could get help from their group members or other students outside their groups. The purpose of this was to encourage collaboration and interaction. The researcher also walked around the class to clarify the assignment and help students focus on their drawings. On the following session, each student was given about five minutes to present her work to the class. Others participated at the presentation stage by asking questions, making comments, asking for clarifications, and making suggestions.

Data Analysis
Analyses of the students' drawings and explanations were done in relation to the analytical framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001), paraphrased as follows:

- Individuals use a variety of modes to represent their interests.
- Representation entails that a meaning maker uses or makes a particular sign as a means to express interest at a given moment in time.
- The practice of meaning making and representation is embedded in social contexts in which individuals are historically, culturally, and socially located.
- Different modes provide affordances for meaning-making.
- Each mode of representation is intricately linked with the social, cognitive, cultural, and affective aspects of language learners.

The researcher tried to scan every single drawing for each of the above-mentioned items using the particular drawer's classroom oral explanations of his/her drawing, in addition to the teacher's questions, explanations, and comments. Afterwards, the researcher categorized the drawings into different groups based on the research questions. Finally, from each category, the two most representative drawings were selected to be reported in the following section.

Results and Discussion
The purpose of this study was to investigate how EFL students interpreted an advertisement and how their understanding of it was represented through semiotic practices. The analysis and discussion of the data were carried out under the four research questions identified at the beginning of this paper. To keep the participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used.

How Does the Use of Signs Mediate Message Representation?
Having employed an array of signs, such as text, color, visual image, typography, and gesture, the author of Figure 2, Mina, has conveyed a compositional message in a multimodal fashion.

Figure 2: Expensive Furniture

As Mina explained, the picture depicts herself who is looking at the stylish furniture from the shop window. Mina illustrated the price of the furniture using signals of salience such as color, framing, and foregrounding of the new information (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001). Integrating image and text, Mina signified the word "برليان" (meaning "dimond"), the name of the furniture store, and the high price of the furniture, using yellow color in such a way that they are glittering. When the Mina was asked about the intention behind this action, she said, "I want to show that …ummm … uh like "برليان" that shines and is very very expensive the furniture is very expensive too. I should pay a lot of money to buy it." Mina also depicted the price within a frame (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) to invite the reader to scrutinize the element within that and in this way to emphasize the high and implausible price. Furthermore, the furniture has been drawn on the left of the page to show the background and old information and the price on the right to foreground the new information. In this way, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argue, Mina tried to draw the reader's attention to the high price of the furniture. Combining all these signs with Mina's body language and gesturing, while explaining her drawing, provided her with an empowering multimodal representation to convey her

message as completely as she can. The student seemed to use the furniture advertisement to represent the issues of economy and inflation in her community. In this case, Mina reflected and situated the meaning of the furniture advertisement within her own experiences of life in her country (Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001). In fact, Mina, rather than relying on language, used the spatial configuration and framing in Figure 2, including shape, size, color, text, and gesturing to express her interpretation of the text and also to produce new meanings. This suggests that, according to Ajayi (2008), "adolescents do not uncritically consume messages of advertisements; rather, they interpret and fashion meanings that match their interests and intentions" (p. 590).

Similarly, Salma in Figure 3 made an attempt to represent her message through a variety of signs and modals. She integrated image and text to convey her interpretation of the furniture advertisement.
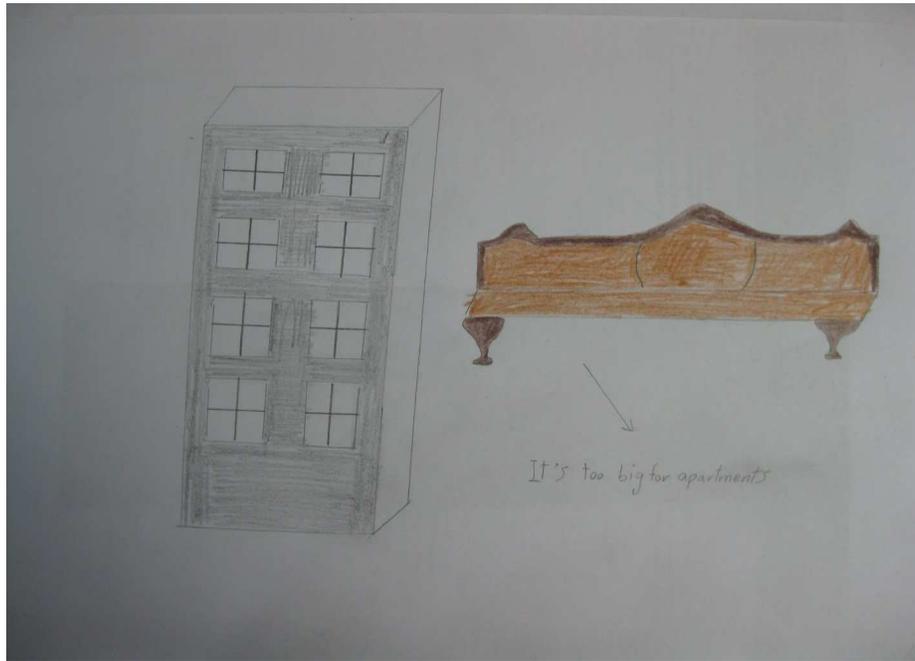
Figure 3: Furniture too Big for Apartments

   The picture illustrates a large piece of furniture on the right and an apartment complex on the left. Salma also used text to mediate between the image of the apartment and the furniture. The text reads "It's too big for apartments". Using size as a sign of salience, Salma explained that the furniture in the advertisement is too big for apartments. She argued "most people live in apartment …and… and…ummm… this furniture is too big." Like Figure 2, Salma situated the meaning of the furniture advertisement within her life experiences in her society, to express the fact that most people in her community live in apartments and do not have big houses for large and luxurious furniture such as that in the advertisement.

How Is the Choice of a Specific Sign for Representation Shaped by the Identity of the Sign Maker?
As Ajayi (2008) argues, advertisements could also be considered as powerful means of identity formation for youths because the discursive practices of such texts affect their actions in social semiosis and help them to achieve individuality. In the following two figures, Sara's and Bahar's identities are reflected in their interpretations of the "مبلمان برلیان" ("Brelian Furniture") advertisement.

Figure 4: Two Families

Figure 4 is a very good example of the way Sara's identity has shaped a variety of signs, such as text, color, visual image, typography, and gesture to convey a compositional message in a multimodal style. The figure depicts two different families regarding their social status and the relationship among family members. As Sara explained, the first family lived a very simple life as it is inferred from the simple furniture and the typical TV set that they have in

their living room. However, the picture shows that although they are economically from a middle class or even a lower class of the society, they lead a happy life together. The way the parents have put their hands around each other and their children shows the pure affection they have among themselves. All of them are smiling while watching a TV program. On the other hand, the second picture illustrates a lonely and unhappy man – as the man himself is saying "I'm bored!" in a luxury house with stylish furniture and a brandy TV set (an LCD, as is depicted through the text). Sara explained that the man was the father of the family, but the family members were not around him. In fact, although the family was in a very good economic status, they did not enjoy a close and intimate relationship with each other. It seems that other members of the family are busy doing their own affairs.

When Sara was asked about the message of her drawing, she stated "money cannot always give happiness to people. Expensive furniture cannot make us happy." This sentence reveals Sara's identity which is in favor of simplicity. In fact, the furniture advertisement caused Sara to take on the identity of a member of a happy family and represent it in her multimodal text; i.e. the choice of specific signs, including color and the layout of the text along with the written language are all shaped by the identity of the sign maker.

Sara has creatively conveyed her message through colors utilized in both settings (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). A closer look into the drawings reveals the bright colors of red, blue, and green used in the first image. The most interesting fact for the researcher was Sara's explanation about the color of the furniture. She said "good furniture is not blue or red like in advertisement. … ummm but it is green and … uh … green brings happiness in life. I draw my furniture green." Furthermore, Sara has depicted the gloomy and sad atmosphere of the second setting through gray color in the background. Sara said, "gray shows sadness." In addition, the way characters are drawn in frontal view in such a way that they look directly at us can be related to Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) description of images that 'demand' interaction and engagement from us. In fact, the direct gaze has an impact on the way we come to engage with the content. Sara also put the texts in curved-line frames which according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) invite us to carefully scrutinize the

elements. Finally, it is observed that Sara has placed the unhappy family at the bottom of the page as a sign of salience to foreground the message of the picture (Kress, 1997); that is, expensive furniture cannot bring happiness.

Figure 5: Luxurious Birthday Party

Figure 5 is another example of the way signs of representation are shaped by the identity of the sign maker. The figure illustrates Bahar and her friends in her luxurious birthday party held in her big house. The most outstanding sign is the eye-catching colors used in different elements of the picture. First of all, as Bahar herself explained, the red color of the furniture signifies the elegance and royalty feature of the setting. She added that the gold color used in the furniture and the large lusters hanging from above emphasized the luxurious house which she dreamed of. In addition, the way Bahar depicted herself in a fancy dress on the right side of the image as a means of foregrounding and emphasizing the new information reveals her identity as someone who is

interested in a luxurious life style. Bahar's identity was revealed even more when she explained that her friends were so impressed by the party that one of them is saying "Wow!" showing her surprise and excitement. Drawing her friends in smaller size compared to herself and placing the friends on the left side of the image as old and less important information can verify the fact that Bahar is in favor of showing off herself, her beauty, her house, and generally her financial status as the result of the social class she belongs to. When she was asked about the reason of her interest in money and high social status, she answered that people respect one who has more money. As Gee (2004) argues, it seems that multimodal literacy has the potential to help English learners create new worlds, take on different identities, and challenge the taken-for-granted views about their worlds.

How Does the Integration of Verbal Texts and Visual Images Change the Shape of Knowledge and Learning Practices in the Classroom?
The combination of different modes in the next two figures provided Sahar and Saba with different points of entry into composing the texts. In fact, the multimodal structure of the frames provided multidirectional paths for the students to compose their texts using different types of resources including text, color, typography, and visual elements. In Figure 6, Sahar used the opposition between the given and the new information to structure the relationship between the verbal text and the visual image. The girl was depicted as the given and the verbal text as the new information.

Figure 6: Female Seller

Sahar explained that she used the verbal text to provide a link between the image of the girl and the furniture. But more important, Sahar explained to the class that she entered her composition of the text from a different path. She explained that she first drew the girl and later wrote the verbal text.

When the teacher asked Sahar why she drew a female rather than a male figure as the seller of the furniture, she explained that pretty girls were generally used for selling products. She added, "a beautiful girl can sell furniture better… she attracts more customers". Sahar said that she wanted to do business and earn a lot of money in future. As Ajayi (2011) argues, the student seemed to understand that the choice of effective modes was a critical factor in creating specific aesthetic and ideological impacts in the broader society. Furthermore, the student's choice of a female seller to present her interpretation of the text reflected a general practice of the advertisement industry in the broader society (Ajayi, 2011).

Saba also approached the composition differently and stated that she first composed the verbal text and finally drew the furniture. She wished that she could buy the beautiful piece of furniture, however, the high price was the most important obstacle in her way. When the researcher asked Saba whether she had any solution for the problem, she said that she would work hard and earn a lot of money to buy the furniture someday. The multiple paths the students took to compose their texts showed the crucial role of multimodal/multiliteracies in EFL classrooms.
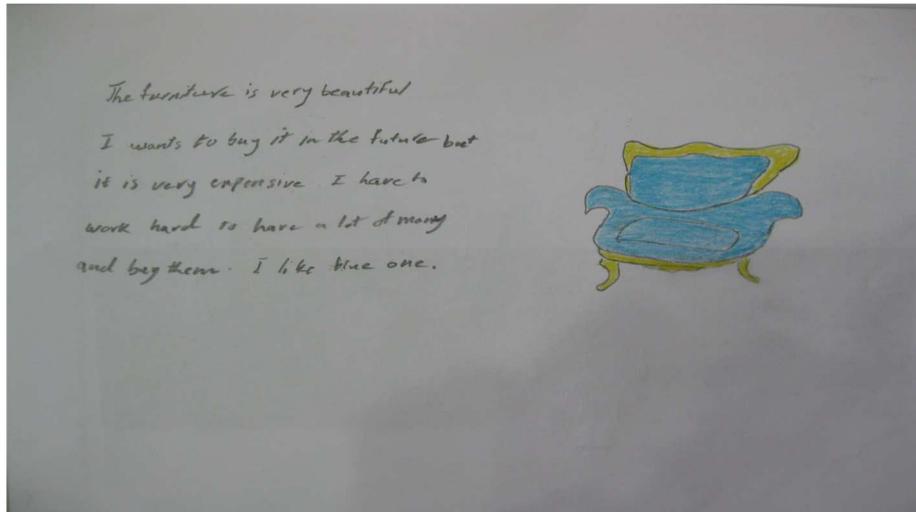

Figure 7: Blue Furniture

In Figures 6 and 7, the students had a choice of starting points for message composition - they could draw first and write later or vice versa. Equally important, they could choose different ways to combine language, drawings, and layout for representation. In this way, the shape of learning and knowledge construction is fundamentally different in a multimodal/multiliteracies classroom than in classrooms using traditional literacy practices that rely on sequential language.

What Kinds of Literacy Practices and Learning Strategies Do Students Acquire Through the Use of Multimodal Resources?

Mahtab's drawing and comments suggested that the use of advertisement texts in literacy teaching and learning could stimulate critical literacy practice that links the classroom to the broader society. Figure 8 is a good example in this respect. Through her drawing, Mahtab critiqued advertisers' tendencies to deceive people to sell their products. She has drawn a piece of furniture which has become out of use after one year. When Mahtab was asked to explain her drawing, she said that the advertisement industry used different strategies "to make people buy their furniture and … they can make a lot of money… but the furniture does not have high quality."
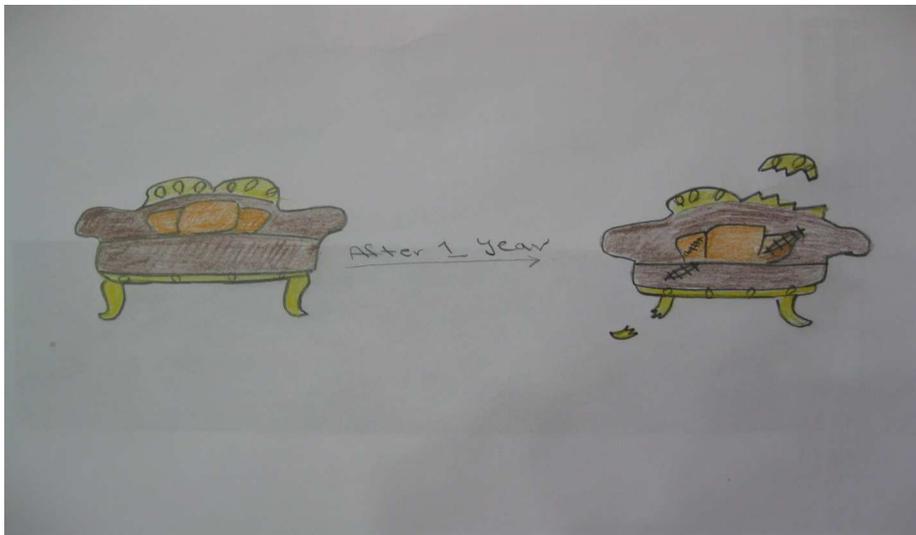
Figure 8: Low Quality Furniture

Furthermore, many of the students pointed to the shared strategies (Gee, 2003) used for the study as crucial for their interpretations of the advertisement. In fact, the students considered the shared knowledge and practices associated with the use of multimodal sequence of social activities surrounding the reading

of the text, such as the author's explanation, comments, models, and examples and the students' discussions, practices, and sharing, as effective in helping them to learn. As Ajayi (2008) argued, the students showed that the use of multimodal resources had the potential to enhance language and literacy learning in a way that was transformative and affected their identities.

Implications

The most significant implication of the present study for teaching is the necessity for the integration of multimodal texts with English literacy materials as a contribution to the new form of literacy and multimedia readers in EFL classrooms. In fact, teachers need to challenge the use of approved textbooks as the sole method of teaching English literacy. That is, as Gee (2004) argues, teachers should be able to supplement reading materials with texts from different genres such as graphics, posters, photographs, billboards, and teen magazines.

Furthermore, publishers should include texts from various genres in their textbooks because of their "multimodal articulation of multiple and integrated discourses" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 36) that influence discursive practices among adolescents. The fact is that in multimodal texts, knowledge is not made available only in English; rather, it is made available to EFL/ESL students in multidimensional ways, that is, through the combination and integration of language, images, graphics, and layouts. These materials from different text types have the potential to excite, motivate, and engage all learners because they create opportunities not only to explore and interpret texts using multimodal resources but also to relate textual experiences to their own social-cultural experiences and perspectives (Ajayi, 2011).

Ajayi (2008) argues that all teachers-irrespective of the subjects they teach-need to think multimodally when they want to choose texts for their students. It is important that teachers link their teaching materials to the life experiences, social interests, and applications of multimodal texts as contemporary and important text types in English language learners' lives (Ajayi, 2008). In this way, teachers can associate their classroom practices with how adolescents define themselves.

Moreover, since multimodal texts are a powerful means for teaching critical thinking, teachers can motivate students to analyze, interpret, and critique political advertisements and be engaged in the examination of complex texts composed of language, colors, pictures, and graphics to understand the ideologies behind the advertisements by relating them to the politics of the broader society. This will encourage students to interpret materials based on their experiences and perspectives and reject single interpretations of such texts.

Finally, According to New London Group (1996), multimodal/multiliteracies pedagogy is an emerging approach which continues to unfold. As a result, EFL and content area teachers may need additional training in multimodal/multiliteracies pedagogy. This group argues that researchers should consider the development of an analytical "tool kit" or metalanguage for multimodal pedagogy. New London Group believes that this is very important, as what students learn about multimodal texts and metalanguage is intertwined with their learning strategies. This will lead to a need to identify and develop multimodal theoretical frameworks, general principles, and practical guidelines for teachers and students to analyze semiotic features of different text types and to relate the unique affordances and commonalities to the specific contexts of their classrooms (New London Group, 1996).

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore the semiotic elements that Iranian EFL students employed to interpret advertisement texts and how they used visual representations to convey their understandings. The results revealed that the students situated meanings of the advertisement texts in specific contexts that reflected their own social and cultural experiences. The findings also indicated that the students experienced the advertisement in this study in new ways and produced new meanings which reflected their personal interests as shaped by their life histories. Furthermore, it was found that the use of multimodal resources had the potential to foster language and literacy learning in a way that was transformative and was affected by the students' identities. In addition, the use of multimodal/multiliteracies pedagogy allowed the students

to enter into text composition from different paths. Finally, and more importantly, this study demonstrated that multimodal/multiliteracies pedagogy could enhance critical literacy practices by offering EFL students opportunities to create new identities and challenge discursive practices that ignore them.

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