Constructing viewer stance in animation narratives: what do student authors need to know?

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Teaching effective 3D authoring in the middle school years: Multimedia grammatical design and multimedia authoring pedagogy.

ARC Linkage Project (2009-2011)
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Context: triadic structure

- Communication **form**: 3D animation
  
  Tool: *Kahootz* software
  

- **Content**: Genre: narrative

- Designing **meaning**
Good writing, in any medium, doesn’t just happen by chance.

To ‘bring meaning into being’, we make many choices (intuitive and conscious) on many levels and across multiple dimensions as we shape the available communication resources to tell the story we wish to tell.
How can we enable our students to produce high quality original multimodal work?

We need to:

- know more about what students need to know about how to create meaning through the multimodal resources available
- develop a metalanguage - a shared language for talking about ... what it is we do’ when we read and create multimodal texts
- so we can enable this knowledge about the semiotic or meaning making resources to be shared.
An AHHAAA moment
We want the people's attention to go onto the sun and the animals are going to be kind of pushing you there. Pointing you there. ... It kind of gets your attention to look too. Kind of pointing, that waaay. (‘Beth’, SJPS09: Interview 1)

Ahaaa!

Manipulating viewer stance or point of view
The purpose of this brief session is to:

• identify the different semiotic options for manipulating audience viewpoint in a 3D animation narrative for the purpose of creating interpersonal relationships.

• discuss early findings regarding what happens when this meta knowledge is explicitly provided to middle years student authors creating their own animation narratives.
Communicating (writing/creating/speaking to express meaning to someone else) is a considered process based on **choice** as we shape the available meaning resources to tell the ‘story’ we wish to tell.

Making choices means knowing what the possible options are.

It is this fundamental concept of ‘choice’ which connects the defining theories framing this research study.
What is the theoretical premise?

functional social semiotic theory offers:

An understanding of language ‘not as a set of rules, but as a “resource” for ‘meaning potential’ (Halliday, 1978: 192).

Halliday’s three metafunctions provides a way of logically organising the meaning making resources used to construct and communicate meaning in ANY communication modes.

Development of a shared metalanguage to describe semiotic resources and their purpose, enables a collective understanding of the design resources used.

systematic semiotic understandings

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Halliday’s system of three simultaneously operating metafunctions to make meaning

**Interpersonal (Interactive) metafunction**

is constructing the nature of relationships between the participants

- the **represented participants** (characters),
- the **interactive participants** (reader/viewer and author),
- the **reader/viewer and the characters**.

**Ideational (Representational) metafunction**


Representing reality: constructing the world, the people and the actions and reactions.

**Compositional (Textual) metafunction**

is the enabling function, where these ideational and interpersonal meanings are organised into the ‘communicative event’.

Choices here are about information flow and the distribution of information value or relative emphasis among elements of the semiotic systems used.

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What next?

Identify the possible **moving image** semiotic design resources available for constructing **interpersonal** relationships through **viewer stance or focalisation**.

Create a productive system framework or ‘classification of resources’ where each semiotic choice identifies 'a “meaning potential” which will be narrowed down and coloured in the given context.' van Leeuwen 1999:10

Investigate what happens when students are explicitly taught the ways in which they can use these semiotic resources to manipulate viewer stance in their animations.

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This work on viewer stance is looking at the semiotic resources of moving image only, through use of the camera tools and character movement in the 3-D space.

These resources offer

• spatial depth

• camera movement: pan, zoom and tilt, user can create crane shots, bird’s eye view, and move with/as character (dolly shot)

• character movement through the virtual space
An example system network

main course

- steak
  - rump
    - T-bone
  - rare
  - medium
  - well done
  - John Dory
  - snapper
  - deep fried
  - pan fried
  - grilled

- fish

- salad
  - French
  - Greek
  - potatoes
    - mashed
    - baked
  - chips
  - courgettes
  - carrots

- vegetables

Key

- A curly bracket indicates simultaneous choices.
- A square bracket indicates an either/or choice.
- A vertical double-headed arrow indicates a 'graded' or sliding scale of choice.
- An angled right arrow situated below an option points to a realisation statement.

MOVING IMAGE FOCALISATION

FOCALISER

This is how the viewer is spatially aligned to see the events. It determines **who** the viewer is positioned to ‘see’ as.

FOCALISED (subject)

This is the subject at the centre of attention in the shot. It is **what** is seen.

FOCALISING

Simultaneous use of moving image semiotic resources to design **how** the relationship between the focaliser and other participants are portrayed.

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FOCALISING

FOCALISER

spectator (unmediated, direct to viewer)

participant (mediated)

along with character

as character

FOCALISED

constant subject

shifting subject

FOCALISING

DISTANCE

SOCIAL DISTANCE

PROXIMITY

CONTACT

ATTITUDE

INVOLVEMENT

POWER

MOVING IMAGE FOCALISATION

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Humpty Dumpty
**MOVING IMAGE FOCALISER**

**spectator** (unmediated, direct to viewer)
- anonymous, external spectator

**participant** (mediated)
- Over shoulder view, viewer positioned closely alongside character to see part of character’s body and what character sees.

**as character**
- Viewer positioned to view action as character.

**inscribed**
- Viewer sees as character
  - **Visual cues**: hands, feet, shadow;
  - **Sound cues**: distance of voice, breathing

**inferred**
- Association *implied* from previous/following shot, in a shot/reverse-shot sequence.
  - Established through editing, matching eye-lines, camera angle, camera movement across two shots.

Developed from Painter, Martin, Unsworth (2012, in press)

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Goldfish
Goldfish, example of student work
In summary

This descriptive framework identifies, names (metalanguage), and organises the key principles required for a structured functional pathway to facilitate effective student multimodal authoring through explicit teaching of the social semiotic design choices available to construct focalisation.

Preliminary findings

Middle years students in these case studies are able to draw on this semiotic knowledge of focalisation in creating their multimodal animations to make considered choices about how they position their viewer at different stages in their 3D animation narratives for the purpose of creating interpersonal relationships.

Explicit access to a functional awareness of semiotic knowledge of focalisation can enable students to produce high quality original multimodal work.

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Bibliography


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*Teaching effective 3D authoring in the middle school years: multimedia grammatical design and multimedia authoring pedagogy* Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project research project ([http://www-personal.une.edu.au/%7Epchandl4/](http://www-personal.une.edu.au/%7Epchandl4/))