Language Arts in Asia 2

Language Arts in Asia 2:
English and Chinese through Literature, Drama and Popular Culture

Edited by

Christina DeCoursey

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This book is dedicated to Eric, Owen and Elizabeth

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The last two years have seen the conference renamed LAL, and a journal and book series begun. It has been a privilege to work with various colleagues around the world on these projects. I look forward to continuing this work.

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PART I

POPULAR CULTURE IN LANGUAGE ARTS

INTRODUCTION

CHRISTINA DECOURSEY

Over the past quarter-century, Language Arts has undergone constant development. It began as a teaching and learning programme in the United States, focused on the four skills and the delivery of language ability outcomes. It had four content areas: literature, drama, popular culture and media. Visual literacy was folded into Language Arts skills during the 1990s, as it became apparent that multimedia would be a major new element of art and communication. Since that time, Language Arts has embraced new issues connected to language use and language study, including critical and creative thinking, ethics and civics, and cultural sensitivity. In the same time frame, Language Arts has rapidly gone global. This is because its approach of using literature, drama and popular culture texts in the language classroom is intrinsically motivating for language learners. It also provides many classroom opportunities for practicing and naturalising idiomatic language, and assisting teachers in scaffolding elements of the cultural performance necessary to second-language proficiency. A major development for Language Arts over the past decade has been its convergence with tertiary learning objectives and graduate attributes. Tertiary departments and fields worldwide understand the need to produce graduates with competencies in the core mother tongue and second-language communication skills, as well as the related areas of visual literacy, critical thinking, creativity, ethics, civics and cultural sensitivity. The much-advertised demise of the Humanities has been accompanied by a rise in appreciation of Language Arts in terms of delivering skills and proficiency, across a variety of disciplines. Writing and reading fiction are an example of this. Both are now routinely used across a variety of tertiary studies, for example to sensitise healthcare practitioners and clinicians to the human needs and experiences of patients, to assist business students in exploring interpersonal dimensions of the workplace, to introduce non-specialists to scientific ideas, to explore the human impact of science on individuals, societies and ecosystems and

to equip social welfare practitioners with tools to reach and assist people coping with various life challenges.

Multimedia is an area of growth for Language Arts in tertiary contexts. Media tools, including apps, mobile telephony and animation, have become integral to twenty-first century communication. These tend to entail, and even foreground, elements of literature and drama. For example, constructing and pacing narratives, and inventing characters and scenarios have become necessary abilities in graphic design and marketing. The emergence of tertiary area studies, such as the Creative and Cultural Industries and Fine Arts Management, has taken on a new significance, as institutions and educators appreciate the nexus of field-specific subject knowledge with communication and with literary, dramatic and popular culture content. Perhaps most excitingly, Language Arts has become a research paradigm, notable for its diversity of interests, as it engages scholars from various fields to study Language Arts areas and competencies.

This volume builds on research into the major Language Arts areas seen in the first volume, *Language Arts in Asia: Literature and Drama in English, Chinese and Chinese.* It extends that initial analysis of popular culture, literature and drama, by applying them to new issues in the teaching of both English and Chinese. It makes a significant contribution to deepening the research base supporting Language Arts as a teaching and learning paradigm. It offers a variety of chapters focused on Asian contexts, including Hong Kong, mainland China, India, Iran, Malaysia and Japan. It includes chapters addressing Language Arts teaching, not only in teaching English but also teaching Chinese to non-native speakers.

The current volume is divided into three parts. Part 1 focuses on the use of popular culture texts in language teaching. Part 2 contains chapters on using literature and drama in the second-language classroom. Chapters in Part 3 consider the use of Language Arts teaching areas and methods in the teaching of Chinese. Throughout this rich scholarship, areas of theory drawn on include systemic functional linguistics, motivation studies, film studies, multimodality and second-language acquisition. Methods include appraisal analysis, content analysis, corpus studies, case studies and genre-based pedagogies. Chapters explore a broad range of genres and media, in the teaching of English and Chinese. Chapters in Part 1 focus on the use of popular culture to teach second-language competencies. John Bateman's seminal paper addresses the ways in which second-language learners process multimodal combinations of visual and verbal elements, and the visual mechanics of layered and serialised visual formats. Other papers also address this vital new area of research. The chapter by Lan Li

explores the use of multi-user virtual environments with digital natives as well as digital immigrants, in particular noticing the benefits of embodied learning experiences, as well as positioning materials in-world and managing the learning and assessment processes. Ahmed Bhuiyan and Michelle Draper report on a study that tested the viability of using comic strips to teach grammar to older students in Bangladesh who have fossilised grammar errors. Their recommendations cover the choice of comic strip, the means of structuring comic strips into pedagogical materials, and teaching the modalities of the comic strip as a medium. In her chapter on anime, Carman Ng explores the sophisticated narrative structure, and complex ethical ambiguities presented in this popular Asian medium. Her findings include the use of anime to help second-language learners understand ideological positioning and socio-ethical issues. She offers reading and writing exercises to teach critical visual literacy and cultural sensitivity.

Literature and drama have been foundational to Language Arts, with its focus on reading and writing, and its recent inclusion of ethics, civics and intercultural sensitivity. While observing and taking advantage of research trends in these areas, Language Arts has not yet been well theorised. The current volume contributes substantially to this issue. Where the previous volume sophisticated methodological and theoretical approaches in Language Arts, here we extend that trajectory. Mike Ingham interviewed Hong Kong tertiary students for their responses to the Alan Bennett play, *The History Boys*. Ingham sets students' responses to a range of subversive perspectives articulated in the play, against the meliorist, conventional and conformist use of role play in the Hong Kong second-language classroom. His concluding reflections are well worth reading for their insight into navigating the conundrums of teaching through drama. The chapter by Brian Eaton looks at an exciting new area – literary tourism. He explores the different ways students respond to locations associated with iconic English literary authors, including Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter. Afshin Mohammadi's chapter presents a valuable study of second-language learners' motivation, focused on the use of creative writing in learning English. He compares Iranian learners' attitudes towards creative writing as compared to expository texts. The chapter by Shilpagauri Ganpule presents a study of Indian second-language students' responses to the use of video clips when working on Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Her data explores the impact of costume, music and set on students' enjoyment and understanding of characters and plot.

In Part 3, papers address Language Arts in teaching Chinese. The changing role of English as a global language will significantly reposition

Language Arts as a language teaching paradigm in the next few decades. In the past, as an English language teaching paradigm, Language Arts in second-language contexts tended to be done by native speakers, who taught well-known texts by canonical authors from native-speaker countries. This tended towards teaching second-language students the details of English or American cultural performance. In recent years, the English language has become deterritorialised. It can no longer be said to belong definitively to any single culture or country. Shared among many more second-language, than native, speakers, it exists as a negotiated space, defined by native and non-native users as equals. These changes highlight the role of language teaching and learning in the ongoing processes of globalisation. Post-colonial studies have problematised claims for England or America as a phonological, lexico-grammatical or cultural 'centre' of the English language. At the same time, they have valorised post-colonial and non-native literary and dramatic voices. In the previous volume, the complexities of authenticity were explored, and extensive lists of Asian authors writing in English provided. However, the challenges Language Arts must address go beyond the English language, and the selection of English cultural texts. There is a realisation in language teaching and related scholarly fields, that there is not one single English language to be instilled in language curricula. The English language in its new, transnational phase, must embrace its multiplicity and hybridity. English language teaching pedagogies now recognise many varieties of Englishes, spoken in different parts of the world. English language scholars study World Englishes. It is not surprising, that English language teaching methods are caught up in the politically and culturally contested flows of post-colonial language use and dispersal. In the same way, Language Arts is in process of accommodating the new global realities, embracing non-native writers, teaching local varieties of English, and moving beyond the English language.

At the same time as the native speaker has been displaced, there is a growing realisation that other languages will join English as widely used global languages. As global power shifts away from western powers and towards Asia, scholarly attention has been directed at the teaching of Chinese, now emerging as global language. Language Arts arose decades ago in western universities, as a projection of Liberal Studies. Then an elite tertiary study projected back into primary and secondary curricula, it aimed to develop reading, writing and speaking competencies. It is now in widespread use in Asian education systems, used to teach English language competencies. Hong Kong has adopted Language Arts at all levels of its education system, with mainland universities not far behind.

Similar programmes are found in Australia, Japan, India and Malaysia. Further, Language Arts approaches are beginning to be used for the teaching of Chinese. While traditional teaching methods for Chinese have emphasised drilling, repetitive copying and rote memorisation, these methods are not attractive to second-language students worldwide, whose learning experiences are more student-centred. In recent years, Chinese language teaching and learning has embraced a range of contemporary second-language teaching methods, such as computer-aided language learning, the use of culture in the curriculum, and contemporary classroom management strategies. The profound commitment of Confucian cultures to their language and culture, and the attractive qualities of the culture to Chinese language learners, make Language Arts approaches useful in this context. Further, as mainland tertiary institutions increasingly adopt western general education courses for teaching English, giving Chinese language teachers personal experience with Language Arts areas and methods, it seems likely that methods for teaching Chinese language to non-Chinese speakers will develop steadily in this direction over the next decade. Thus, we can expect the use of literature, drama and popular culture, in company with visual literacy, critical and creative thinking, ethics, civics and cultural sensitivity, to become widespread pedagogic norms in the teaching of many languages across Asia.

These processes are ongoing, worldwide. And so, Language Arts is in a phase of reconceptualising itself as a teaching, learning and research paradigm relevant to the teaching of all languages, rather than just as an English language and culture teaching approach. Chapters in Part 3 of the current volume address the use of Language Arts in teaching Chinese. These chapters break new ground, as very little work addresses the teaching of Chinese through Language Arts. John Wakefield's engaging chapter considers dubbing as a means of supporting second-language acquisition. He notes its flexibility as a teaching tool notable for providing second-language learners authentic and interesting native-speaker models, and its ease of use in the classroom and beyond, and with individuals or small groups. My own contribution reviews the particular challenges involved in teaching Chinese language to speakers of alphabetic mother tongues, and the revival currently underway in using literature to teach various aspects of a second language. Extending the bibliographic work from the previous volume, this chapter includes reference lists of bilingual Chinese and English Chinese classical and contemporary literature and fiction.

I am pleased to announce that the APELA conference was renamed in the past year, and is now called Language Arts and Linguistics (LAL).

This is part of a broader effort to support research into Language Arts, particularly through literature, but also across all the well-established Language Arts areas and skills. I am pleased to be taking a related book series and a scholarly journal into production in the coming year.

Christina DeCoursey

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONSTITUTIVE ROLE OF SEMIOTIC MODES FOR THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

JOHN A. BATEMAN

> False judgements enter art history if we judge from the impression which pictures of different epochs, placed side by side, make on us.…They speak a different language. (Wölfflin, 1929: 228)

Introduction: The multimodal challenge

In most areas where the study of *texts* has traditionally been pursued, calls to include a variety of further communicative practices and artefacts are now common. A shift can be observed towards the exploration of a whole spectrum of media, ranging from film to websites to manga. This expansion of concerns is driven by several factors. The most mundane is that it often looks more attractive when other media are addressed and so, in a context of increasing competition for students, it is understandable that curricula promise a more varied media diet. A deeper reason is the suggestion that this may in any case be more relevant for today's cultures given the growing acceptance of mixed and hybrid media as objects worthy of study. This is supported, on the one hand, by the awareness that notions such as 'narrative' are applicable independently of the medium in which that narrative unfolds (Ryan, 2005) and, on the other, by the rapid advance of the study of the visual and of visual communication in general (Rose, 2012). There is also increasing discussion of possible cognitive commonalities across different means of expression, asking to what extent processing mechanisms are shared (Zacks et al, 2009; Cohn et al, 2012).

These developments bring with them not only a new constellation of research challenges but also a considerable range of practical difficulties – particularly in education. Where formerly it might have been sufficient to

teach the workings of language for various purposes, educators are now expected to find useful things to say concerning a far broader range of media. This expectation too often neglects the simple fact that understanding how such media combinations work is, itself, a substantial scientific challenge. Without further guidance it is natural to fall back on more generalist, interpretative 'readings' that discuss multimodal artefacts as symptoms of broader socio-cultural phenomena and what is known of the particular objects of analysis from other contexts of discussion. Approaches of this kind are less tied to specific details of form and so can be applied more readily regardless of medium. However, while there is little doubt that such work can produce insightful accounts of its objects of study, its methodology is heavily reliant on well-honed intuitions and the ability to pick out telling examples illustrating the arguments being made. Doing this well is already a considerable challenge when dealing with verbal texts, demanding expert knowledge and experience in both literature and culture. When multimodal artefacts are addressed, the challenge grows and changes. The analysis of sophisticated combinations of semiotic modes is far from straightforward – so much so that traditional techniques inherited from linguistic and literary studies rarely give sufficient guidance concerning how multimodal analysis might effectively proceed. Nor is it always clear just what multimodal analysis should be contributing – is it just film theory, comics analysis, document design, art history and so on dressed in new terms, or has it its own contributions to make?

When such questions are placed in educational contexts, they require communicable answers. And here, practitioners and educators are too often left on their own. Even describing what is occurring in complex multimodal artefacts can be a significant problem raising basic semiotic questions. To move beyond impressionistic responses to multimodal artefacts presented as analyses, therefore, analytic methods must be found that are more responsive to identifiable details of form and ensuing media specificities and which can be reliably applied and communicated. Such methods need to be capable of, on the one hand, helping to manage the multiplicity and complexity inherent to multimodality and, on the other, revealing the meaning-making practices at work *in dialogue with* existing media approaches. Without this, traditional educational aims such as empowering students to articulate fine-grained critical analyses of their objects of study and to understand and engage with the analyses of others will be difficult to foster.

As one step towards achieving a repertoire of such methods, this paper suggests that a critical methodological building block can be founded in a

suitable definition of *semiotic mode*. Despite the apparent centrality of 'modality' evident in the very use of the term 'multimodality', definitions for just what is *meant* by mode still vary. Some suggest that mode is inherently a fuzzy notion: Norris (2004: 11), for example, suggests that modes are "not bounded units", instead "mode is a loose concept of a grouping of signs that have acquired meaning in our historical development." Others relate mode closely to the sensory channels that are employed (Allwood, 2008). Positions such as these do not, however, provide effective methodological guidance for many of the tasks facing the would-be multimodal researcher or teacher since they are comparatively undiscriminating.

The direction taken in the present paper follows more closely that set out by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and developed further in Bateman (2011). This refocuses attention on the semiotic 'backdrop' out of which any means of expression can grow. Saussure, Hjelmslev and others traditionally emphasised notions of *system* by which signs can exist and this can too easily be neglected when talking of individual signs and their classifications, 'groupings' or recombinations. One consequence of this has been to leave a gap in the theoretical space within which practical work on multimodal artefacts proceeds: on the smallest scale, there are signs, on the largest, there are 'semiotic systems'. For effective practical analysis, however, we need intermediate categories that can be made sufficiently fine-grained to be applied as a tool in the analysis of particular multimodal artefacts as required. This paper will pursue the notion of semiotic mode as one such category.

Methodologically, this means that the identification of semiotic modes will be placed in the foreground: we will argue that the very first step to be taken during practical analysis must always be an *explicit* attempt to 'fix' the semiotic modes being mobilised in any specific artefact or performance. As we shall see, approaches still commonly assume that the semiotic modes present are somehow already 'known' or obvious. But this is often not the case at all. Detailed empirical analysis is required to reveal which particular semiotic modes are active and even which semiotic modes exist. Much of this paper will therefore concern itself with demonstrating this for some superficially clear cases that turn out, on closer inspection, to benefit from a more discriminating allocation of semiotic modes.

The paper will focus specifically on visual media for its examples. Essential differences in internal semiotic organisation are particularly evident in this area and have led to the existence of a set of disciplines concerning themselves both with critical analysis and the history of visual

forms that are completely, and occasionally antagonistically, disjoint to approaches to language. In such disciplines it is often assumed that basic organisational properties of the semiotic modes addressed are so different to those of language that approaches drawing on language are, at best, irrelevant. Aspects of this same discussion of the relation between visual studies and language-based studies reverberate in some form or other back through history (cf., e.g., discussions in Mitchell, 1994), taking in philosophical considerations of the differences between pictorial and propositional 'representations' and the competing arguments for and against imagistic, propositional or mixed cognitive or neural mechanisms along the way (cf., e.g., Pylyshyn, 1973; Danto, 1982; Paivio, 1986). Here we will take a specific 'semiotic' slice through the issues at hand, constructing via the notion of semiotic mode a more inclusive account.

Semiotic modes at work

As discussed in visual semiotics, one of the striking properties of visual artefacts is their resistance to decomposition or segmentation into basic units responsible for guiding construction of their meaning (cf. Eco, 1976: 215; Nöth, 1995: 451–452). They appear to lack the 'second' articulation of that double articulation often argued to be an essential design feature of language (Nöth, 1995: 237; Martinet, 1960; Hockett, 1960). On the one hand, lower levels of pictorial abstraction are not arbitrary due to their close link with perception; on the other, the significance or otherwise of any distinctions drawn at those lower levels appears to be driven from the more abstract levels. This makes it necessary to adopt a far more dynamic approach to the demarcation and identification of analytic units – a position which, although not new in itself, is certainly now becoming increasingly prominent within concrete proposals for models of multimodal interpretation (cf., e.g., Bucher, 2011; Boeriis, 2012; Wildfeuer, 2012). Much of the interplay of meanings in multimodality is of this kind: information given in one mode may set up questions to be addressed in another. The units relevant for analysis are then created in the interaction between the modalities and their guidance of the interpretative questions raised for viewers.

A straightforward demonstration of this is offered by Nelson Goodman by means of the following thought-experiment:

> Compare a momentary electrocardiogram with a Hokusai drawing of Mt. Fujiyama. The black wiggly lines on white backgrounds may be exactly the same in the two cases. Yet the one is a diagram and the other a picture. What makes the difference? (Goodman, 1969: 229)

Here Goodman is concerned with critiquing accounts of 'iconicity' that base themselves on 'resemblance'; as we shall discuss further below, resemblance alone is certainly insufficient when discussing artefacts that appear 'iconic' in the traditional Peircian sense. The important methodological step that we must now add into the account, therefore, is the realisation that demarcating some distinctions made in material form as meaningful is *ontologically dependent* on the prior adoption of particular semiotic modes. The prior adoption of a semiotic mode is inescapable: without such an adoption, there are no grounds for articulating potential material patterns for semiotic interpretation and no way of identifying those material patterns that are to be considered significant and those which are not.

This is then what makes the difference between the Hokusai drawing and the electrocardiogram. The semiotic mode taken to apply determines that, in the case of an electrocardiogram or other kind of graph, the precise thickness of the line drawing the graph may not be meaning-bearing. In contrast, in a painting, for example, the precise thickness of lines may well be held to be an intrinsic component of the artist's style and so be attributed with considerable significance. Such differences are clearly not derivable from the physical data alone. If a visual representation identical to a mathematical graph were produced as an artwork, it is no longer the case that the thickness of the lines adopted cannot be meaning-bearing. Since in the artwork they are a decision of the 'artist' rather than a by-product of the representational constraints of the semiotic mode of graphs, they could well have been drawn differently. Actual instances of such distinctions can be found in well-known cases such as Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Can renderings and similar re-appropriations.

This relatively 'free floating' aspect of visual artefacts with respect to the semiotic modes that they invoke is then the crucial point. It is still common to assume that the identification of precisely which semiotic modes are active in an artefact is relatively straightforward. The step of defining the semiotic modes in play is, as a consequence, overlooked or taken to be obvious – the distinctions made in some material form (as well as the material itself) are taken to have already signalled their artefact's intended mode of reception. We will show that this is not the case by considering two paintings, both from the fifteenth century and both extensively discussed in the literatures of multimodality, semiotics and art history. Although these paintings can be considered to be broadly 'representational', and so would, on a first reading, most likely be assumed to be iconic depictions of some states of affairs, we will see that adhering to this assumption complicates and distorts subsequent analysis

considerably. A semiotic mode of naturalistic depiction turns out not to be the most insightful way to approach their analysis within a multimodal perspective.

Example 1: *La Primavera*

The first painting is *La Primavera* (*Allegory of Spring*) painted (originally untitled) by Sandro Botticelli sometime between 1477 and 1482 and reproduced for ease of discussion in Figure 1. This painting has been given an extensive semiotic analysis by Michael O'Toole (O'Toole, 2011 [1994]) and we build on this analysis so as to illustrate the benefits of setting out a more explicit orientation to the semiotic modes being mobilised. While not disagreeing with much of the final *content* of O'Toole's analysis, which is itself, as he notes, also largely consonant with established positions taken in art history, we will rearrange some of the particular distinctions he proposes in order to bring the operation of semiotic modes into clearer relief and to show more explicitly the *process* of interpretation from a semiotic perspective.

Figure 1: *La Primavera*, Sandro Botticelli, ca. 1480

O'Toole's overarching goal is to open up art to semiotic treatment within a broadly systemic-functional approach, a linguistically inspired perspective now finding increasing application in multimodal analysis (cf. van Leeuwen, 1985; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006 [1996], 2001; O'Toole, 1990, 2011 [1994]). For each type of artwork he considers, O'Toole

accordingly defines a general matrix of semiotic distinctions that draw on principles from systemic-functional linguistics and which are intended to operate as guides for interpretation. These establish for each object of analysis a scaffold that leads would-be interpreters to ask certain questions of a work and its aesthetic and thematic organisation. O'Toole intends this as a method for allowing spectators to talk about how an artwork has affected them, relating that experience to broader discussions of the work's history, content and aesthetic form, thereby bringing semiotically informed discussion into dialogue with questions of art history and the sociocultural background necessary for understanding any given work. This is without doubt a valuable line to follow but it does not yet separate sufficiently the respective contributions of any individual artwork being analysed and the semiotic processes that must be brought to bear for interpretation. This is important because without this foundation, the support provided for analysis is limited. There remain significant 'leaps' that the would-be analysts must make on their own. This is then less than ideal since, particularly in educational contexts, the background knowledge necessary for making such leaps may well be absent.

Of the several dimensions from systemic-functional theory that O'Toole's semiotic matrices employ we will focus on just one of these here, that defining structural analytic units. These units are set out on a 'rank scale' analogously to treatments well-known from grammar within systemic-functional theories of language. The rank scale for a stratum within a semiotic system defines the units available; each ranking unit is composed of elements taken from the rank below. For current purposes, we consider O'Toole's discussion of painting, beginning with the kinds of analytic units and methodology to which O'Toole appeals. Here we will see quite precisely the consequences of de-emphasising the prior 'fixing' of applicable semiotic modes, which O'Toole also evidently takes to be unproblematic.

The rank scale O'Toole proposes for paintings consists of four elements: 'work', 'episode', 'figure' and 'member' – thus a work is made up of episodes, episodes of figures and figures of members. Some variation in the deployment of these elements is also accommodated since portraits and landscapes do not necessarily involve episodes; episodes are a particular feature of narrative. The precise status of the potential segmentations suggested by this rank scale bears closer scrutiny, however, since two (onto-) logically distinct processes are conflated. Semiotically, we see the implicit construction of a semiotic mode of naturalistic depiction. O'Toole presents this without explicit discussion as more or less 'obvious'. What makes the mode 'naturalistic', however, is its

(conventionalised) congruence with processes of visual perception which would *also* tend to segment the visual field in this way. Apart from trying to disrupt or subvert the perceptual system as found in works of the 1960's Op Art movement, the 'artist' can do very little about how the perceptual system functions. The access the system provides to visual representations is robustly oriented to naturalistic interpretations since this is the evolutionary purpose of the system. In contrast to this, the semiotic modes that can be developed with respect to visual material are limitless and are by no means restricted to congruence. O'Toole's adoption of the naturalistic reading within his semiotic matrix of semiotic interpretation therefore confounds perceptual properties arising from the *medium* of painting with just one of the very many semiotic modes that that medium may act as support for.[1]

Returning to the particular case of *La Primavera*, O'Toole's approach decomposes the contributions made to the painting's interpretation as follows. Along the structural dimension given by the rank scale, the painting exhibits several figures (human-like figures in this case) made up of several members (arms, weapons, clothing, etc.), and so on. Distinct 'functions' are then set out to describe the combinations such elements may take on at each level of structure. This is again, by and large, similar to descriptions of language and grammatical clauses: clauses are composed of elements of various scales taking up various functions, such as Actor, Subject and so on; this makes it natural for O'Toole to talk here of a 'grammar of painting' as capturing the expressive options available to an artist. Precisely this similarity to grammar makes the approach 'user-friendly' from the perspective of those coming from linguistics because they encounter a familiar frame of reference for analytically decomposing an object of study. Analyses may, as a consequence, come to look very similar for the linguistic and visual contributions – despite the fact that a very different kind of meaning-making is involved.

O'Toole's interpretation of the painting then operates by 'shuttling' between the individual structural units and the work as a whole in order to fill in the questions raised by his semiotic matrix. The result of this process is a collection of functionally labelled configurations of structural units largely compatible with what is known from art historians concerning the work and the intentions behind its creation. O'Toole presents this as if it follows from his guided interpretation, but actually this cannot be the case – somewhere in the middle of the process an unremarked shift in semiotic modes occurs. This shift is not made explicit, and so constitutes a gap where interpretation can founder. Let us follow this through in detail.

At the very beginning of his discussion, O'Toole includes one of the standard interpretations of the 'story' depicted in the painting, which is also one of the traditional modes of access to artworks of this kind. The human or human-like figures present perceptually in *La Primavera* are standardly identified as follows: in the centre is Venus and, above her, Cupid; on the left, there are the three 'Graces' – Love, Chastity and Beauty – and, extreme left, Mercury; on the right we find Zephyr descending from the trees to Floris (left) and Chloris (right). When we know this, any additional knowledge that we might have concerning Greek and Roman mythology naturally adds a host of further interpretative clues – we will see some of what these characters are up to below. However, for our current purpose of considering multimodality and its semiotic foundation, this potential level of further interpretation is less interesting. When we pursue this path, the depicted elements become little more than *illustrations* of known stories: the stories define certain attributes that can be expected of the figures present and this then mutually conditions the perceived adequacy of the illustrations offered, filling in narrative contexts. The considerable aesthetic value given to the work also clearly lies elsewhere since this is largely unaffected by such background knowledge and it would be possible to have the same 'story' told in a manner totally devoid of aesthetic impact.

Moreover, even if correct and important for an art historical understanding, from the perspective of semiotic interpretation, this view of the painting as illustrating a story has omitted most of the explanatory work that is necessary. The multimodal analysis as presented only exists 'after the facts', i.e., *a posteriori*, when all sources of evidence have been considered. This is a reoccurring problem in multimodal analysis: results are presented from a position that 'already' seems to know the answer. Baldry and Thibault (2006: 31), for example, similarly talk of the need to play structural units off against one another, so that in the final analysis information from various sources has influenced the outcome. However, in practice, what this all too often comes down to is that analysts know the results that they wish to bring out and negotiate the resources they have defined in their analytic frameworks accordingly. The analyses then naturally combine distinct kinds of information drawing on very different kinds of evidence. Some of that evidence is 'present' in the image, but a host of other information can only be read into the material given background knowledge about what an artefact is 'meant' to represent. This does not then distinguish the contribution of a multimodal analysis from other 'hermeneutics' of interpretation familiar from literary and cultural studies or from art history itself.

The description of an analysis as the analyst presents it may well try to capture something of the reasoning process that has been passed through while weighing these diverse sources of evidence, but the process itself rarely achieves the status of having become an explicit part of the model. Although many researchers, O'Toole included, note at this point that what is actually required is more a treatment of *semiosis*, i.e., the *process* of semiotic interpretation, there is rarely movement beyond impressionistic description. O'Toole's own characterisation of this analytic process in terms of 'shuttling' "between our images of each unit and of the picture as a whole" (O'Toole, 2011 [1994]: 15), although suggestive, remains insufficient. The shuttling relies on the skilled and well-informed interpretative acts of the analyst and is not accounted for or further elucidated by the model. As a consequence, if the analyst does *not* happen to already know the answer, then he or she is placed in an awkward position. This is of particular concern when we consider how multimodal analysis of such complex artefacts is to be communicated to others. It also leaves open a substantial point of criticism from the perspective of art history since it becomes unclear what is being added that is not already covered, and covered in rather more detail, by traditional art historical discourses of description and evaluation. Traditional analysis appears to be being redone simply within a set of, non-obvious and theoretically loaded, new terms, while still crucially relying on just that knowledge that art history offers (cf., for a very similar line of critique, Machin, 2014: 223).

A description of semiosis as 'shuttling between elements' also invokes yet again the fundamental disagreement concerning analytic units holding between approaches to visual artefacts that draw on linguistic semiotics and those anchored more in art history and in approaches to the visual. One cannot 'shuttle' between units as O'Toole suggests because the units are not there: they must first be *created by active semiosis*: somehow the very act of 'shuttling' must bring into existence the units among which the shuttling is taking place. A considerable tension between this kind of patterning and the notion of rank scale that O'Toole employs is then established: the representationally-motivated elements making up the rank scale in O'Toole's analysis cannot be derived semiotically in a straightforward manner from the painting even though the analysis makes use of the units picked out as if those units were self-evident. The analysis thus underestimates the effects of the very different operation of visual semiotic systems when compared with linguistic semiotics and operates by conducting visual and linguistic analyses in similar terms.[2] What must be provided is a more explicit account of the operations of this semiosis so that the interpretative acts of the analyst can, on the one hand, receive

more support and, on the other, be made more transparent for communication to others.

Returning, then, to our central theme of the importance of an appropriate selection of semiotic modes, let us now approach the interpretation of this artwork again, but this time without prejudging the question of the semiotic modes that might apply. As suggested above, the fact that we directly perceive a natural scene with various figures in various spatial relationships and performing certain actions is not yet sufficient to tell us what is being done with this material semiotically.[3] And, in fact, there is much in the depiction itself that works *against* the simple assumption that a naturalistic semiotic mode is the best one to employ. For example, there is no doubt perceptually that the figure on the extreme right (Zephyr, O'Toole tells us) is physically interacting with the second figure from the right (Chloris). This is *visually manifest* and would be recognised by anyone with visual access to the image: iconic representations of figures, of respective gaze, and of motion/force vectors render this inescapable. What, however, is the third figure from the right doing?

Here O'Toole draws on commentaries on the story behind the events depicted and tells us that this figure is, in fact, a 'product' of Zephyr's attentions on Chloris. O'Toole includes this information at all levels: his first summary of the work, intended as an unsemiotically-informed account drawing on knowledge of mythology, describes this small scene as a "drama involving Zephyr and Flora" with Hora/Chloris between them (O'Toole, 2011 [1994]: 9). His more technical description resulting from the shuttling between the units given in the semiotic matrix then recodes and recapitulates this informal segmentation thus:

> *Agents*, *Patients* and *Goals* are the roles of the participants in actions. Thus, Zephyr is an Agent of the force of spring, Chloris is the Patient submitting to this force, and Flora is the Goal produced by it. (O'Toole, 2011 [1994]: 21)

But there is simply no way that such an analysis can be produced on the basis of the visual evidence given *unless one first rejects the assumption that a naturalistic pictorial semiotic mode is being used*: the picture just does not 'show' the events that O'Toole describes with his functionally-labelled elements. Given a characterisation of the painting in terms of the naturalistic mode of representation inherent in O'Toole's semiotic matrix, any such interpretation can therefore only be considered surprising. There is no methodological step that could lead to it apart from a generic, unconstrained hermeneutic question of 'what could that mean?' that is