




<https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-35681>

EDN: YXSKAL

Research article / Научная статья

Towards a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model: The case of Uber-Blog-mediated advertising discourse order of ‘Saudization’

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Abstract

This study proposes a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model (for short, MHM) as a methodology that extends the analytic scope of Ricoeur’s (1973, 1976, 1981) classic hermeneutic theory of text interpretation towards examining multimodal texts. The model has been empirically tested by examining the advertising discourse order of ‘Saudization’ as channelled via the Saudi Uber Blog’s multimodal text. A twofold social semiotic praxis has been theoretically incorporated into the distanciation-appropriation dialectics underlying the interpretation of multimodal texts *in potentia*. First, a multimodal cluster transcription (Baldry & Thibault 2006) has been utilized in enhancing the description of distanciated text sense as a holistic configuration of clusters across different communicative modalities with interacting semiotic modes (*intra-textually*). Second, an interpersonal-meaning analysis of multimodal participants (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a, 2006b, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004) has been employed in enriching the explanation of appropriated text reference (*extra-textually*). The empirical site used for validating the MHM is the Uber-Blog-mediated multimodal text designed by Saudi Arabia-based Uber Company. The multimodal transcription of textual clusters has demonstrated how the text sense thematically revolves around the macro topic of ‘Saudization’ across verbal, visual, and pictorial modalities with material and semiotic modes, viz. linguistic, graphological, anthropic, sartorial, spatial, natural, and technological. The multimodal participant analysis has explained how the referents of (i) a model Saudi Uber driver, (ii) the Saudi Public Transport Authority, (iii) Saudi driver-partners, and (iv) Uber app collectively contribute to the recontextualization of ‘Saudization’ from a governmental discourse to an advertising discourse order realized in the multimodal text under analysis.

Keywords: *advertising, discourse order, multimodal hermeneutics, multimodal cluster transcription, Saudization, social semiotics, Uber Blog*

For citation:

Salama, Amir H.Y. 2023. Towards a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model: The case of Uber-Blog-mediated advertising discourse order of ‘Saudization’. *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 27 (3). 886–914. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-35681>


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На пути к мультимодальной герменевтической модели: «саудизация» рекламного дискурса в Uber-блогах

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Аннотация

В исследовании предлагается мультимодальная герменевтическая модель (МГМ) как методология, расширяющая аналитические возможности классической герменевтической теории интерпретации текста (Ricoeur 1973, 1976, 1981). Модель была эмпирически проверена на материале рекламного дискурса «саудизации», а именно мультимодального текста саудовского блога Uber. Данная социально-семиотическая модель инкорпорируется в диалектику дистанцирования-присвоения, потенциально лежащую в основе интерпретации мультимодальных текстов. Во-первых, для более совершенного описания отдаленного смысла текста как целостной внутритекстуальной конфигурации кластеров в различных коммуникативных модальностях с взаимодействующими семиотическими модусами была использована мультимодальная кластерная транскрипция (Baldry & Thibault 2006). Во-вторых, для более полного объяснения текстовой референции был применен анализ межличностного взаимодействия мультимодальных участников (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a, 2006b, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). Эмпирическим материалом, используемым для проверки МГМ, послужил мультимодальный текст Uber-блога, разработанный базирующейся в Саудовской Аравии компанией Uber. Мультимодальная транскрипция текстовых кластеров продемонстрировала, как смысл текста тематически выстраивается вокруг макротемы «Саудизация» через вербальную, визуальную и изобразительную модальность в ее материальных и семиотических формах, а именно – языковых, графологических, антропных, пространственных, природных и технологических. Мультимодальный анализ участников показал, как в контексте Саудовской Аравии референты – (i) образцовый водитель Uber, (ii) Управления общественного транспорта, (iii) водители-партнеры и (iv) приложение Uber – коллективно способствуют переносу «саудизации» из государственного дискурса в рекламный, который реализуется в мультимодальном тексте.

Ключевые слова: *реклама, дискурсивный порядок, мультимодальная герменевтика, мультимодальная кластерная транскрипция, саудизация, социальная семиотика, Uber Blog*

Для цитирования:

Salama A.H.Y. Towards a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model: The case of Uber-Blog-mediated advertising discourse order of ‘Saudization’. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*. 2023. V. 27. № 4. P. 886–914. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-35681>

1. Introduction

There has always been a scholarly need for a methodology that extends the analytic scope of Ricoeur’s (1973, 1976, 1981) hermeneutic theory of text interpretation towards examining multimodal texts. The present study is an attempt at propounding such a methodology, whereby the term “multimodality” (e.g., Granström et al. 2002, Norris 2004, 2012, Bateman 2008, Kress 2010, O’Halloran

& Smith 2011, Gibbons 2012, Jewitt et al. 2016, Bateman et al. 2017, Salama & Fawzy 2023a, Rasmussen & Van Leeuwen 2024) is utilized in a way that informs Ricoeurian hermeneutics and proposes a novel empirical method of research, that is, a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model (henceforth, MHM). However, I give credence to Deppermann’s compellingly cogent caveat that multimodality amounts to “a label which is already well worn and has become fuzzy by its use in various strands of semiotics, discourse and media analysis” (Deppermann 2013: 2). In order to move methodologically beyond this caveat, I follow the tradition of Bateman et al. (2017) by beginning with laying the foundations of a hermeneutic approach to multimodality. This should be clearer as I proceed further towards presenting Ricoeur’s (1976, 1981) theory of text interpretation, with a particular focus on the distanciation-appropriation dialectic, and then correlating it with a form of multimodal text hermeneutics (see section 2).

Thus, with such a methodological correlation, I may conduce and subscribe to a historical shift from the traditional focus of hermeneutics on language (and its centrality of verbal communication) in “pre-digital technologies” towards an eye-opening focus on “language in interaction with other resources in the digital age where communication involving language, images, and videos is commonplace” (O’Halloran 2015: 391). Indeed, by introducing the MHM method in the digital age, I build on, and further develop, the account of the “selected approaches to text-image relations” provided by Bateman (2014: 151–163). In Bateman’s account, such selected approaches are reported to model multimodal relations on (1) accounts of cohesion; (2) grammar; (3) discourse semantics; (4) accounts of rhetoric; and (5) speech acts, interaction and action. Adding to the foregoing list, I intend the MHM methodology as yet another selected approach that is capable of modelling the multimodal relations featuring in an advertisement (mediated by the official Saudi Uber Blog) on Ricoeur’s distanciation-appropriation model of hermeneutics (see subsection 2.1).

Crucially, in the present study, the MHM methodology is introduced as a theoretical and practical endeavour to bridge a standing gap in the research area of digital-age multimodal hermeneutics. Indeed, despite the presence of relevant and disproportionately scant literature in this research area (e.g., Blom 2020, Boden & Eatough 2014), there remains nonetheless a scholarly lacuna therein. Such a lacuna can be ascribed to the fact that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory has not been hitherto enhanced to the point of accommodating a social-semiotic reading of the hermeneutics of multimodal texts as well as the technologically mediated intersection of their multiple discourses and the interaction order in space and time known as “semiotic aggregates” (Scollon & Scollon 2003: 167). This has increasingly become a methodological challenge, especially in view of the prodigious amounts of Internet-mediated multimodal data (Jewitt et al. 2016, Alexander & Rhodes 2014, Pütz 2020), or more generally, the multimodal Internet (Benson 2017), and genre networks (Pérez-Llantada & Luzón 2023).

The present study is intended to counter the foregoing methodological challenge by proposing a new form of MHM-informed analysis. It is theoretically predicated on integrating an analytic praxis of social semiotics (namely, Baldry & Thibault 2006, Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a, 2006b, Kress 2010, Nørgaard 2019) into Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of interpretation. The data used for empirically testing the validity of the MHM methodology is the Saudi Uber-Blog-mediated multimodal text and its advertising discourse order of 'Saudization' (for a detailed account, see section 3). It should be made clear that our understanding of advertising is founded on Richards and Curran (2002: 74) basic definition: "Advertising is a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future."

The above definition (cf. Goddard 2002, Myers 1999, Cook 1992) serves as a practical conceptualization of advertising activity as being literally inseparable from mediated communication, commercialization, design, persuasion, and action. Speaking of the mediated data suggested for this study analysis, the multimodal interface of blogging and advertising has always been such a fruitful area of empirical research. In his fifth-edition preface to *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture*, Berger (2015) attends to blogging in the arena of advertising industry:

Advertising companies are extremely interested in what bloggers say about new movies, video games, and other products to gain added insights into consumer behavior and are using "loyalty cards" to create brand advocates and mining data about consumer preferences wherever they can find it. (Berger 2015: xv)

Obviously, then, the consumer behaviour – in our case, the Saudis' positive or negative attitude towards signing up to the Uber app and becoming "Saudi driver-partners" – is considered a pivotal concern in advertising.

Thus, despite the availability of monomodal micro-pragmatic and multimodal discourse-analytic research on the sub-/genre of institutionally promotional blogs (see section 1), there seems to be a paucity of research that utilizes the explanatory edge of multimodal hermeneutics in terms of the sub-/genre's polysemiotic advertising communicative modalities and their different modes of expression. Another facet of the problem can be ascribed to the lack of this type of sub-/genre-oriented research on institutional blogs that advertise particular services *through* ideologically recontextualized socio-political practices (for an exhaustive account of "recontextualization," see section 3). This may explain why the present study targets the Saudi Uber Company's blog and its recontextualization of the practice of "Saudization" at different semiotic levels of promoting the company's driving services. In a bid to address the two facets of the problem outlined above, the current study proposes the MHM as a methodology whereby certain theoretical and practical insights may contribute to the solution of such a two-faceted problem.

The HMM methodology operates towards the data analysis at two stages of uncovering the multimodal text sense and reference as corresponding to Ricoeur's dialectic of distanciation and appropriation, respectively (see section 2).

Distanciation, on the one hand, is directed into revealing the overall sense of the text as an object dissociated from the intention of the text producer/rhetor – in our case, the Saudi Uber Company. At this distanciation stage, analytic focus is laid on methodologically transcribing and describing *what the text says* in terms of the multimodal clusters of its objectified whole; the stage takes the form of an initial naïve understanding of the multimodal text under investigation by means of incorporating Baldry and Thibault's (2006) method of multimodal inter-/cluster analysis. Appropriation, on the other hand, comes as the stage complementary to distanciation, and is focused on the text reference to an exterior of active participants (text producer and recipients) and the recontextualization of these participants' *referents* in new (digital) contexts. This stage is methodologically oriented towards integrating participant analysis at both visual and verbal levels of multimodal communication (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a, 2006b, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004).

The present study hypothesizes that *the MHM methodology can enhance the descriptive-explanatory toolkit of Ricoeur's theory of text interpretation as well as its dialectic of distanciation and appropriation*. As indicated above, the social-semiotic praxis of analysing multimodal data is brought to bear on proving this hypothesis on a rather empirical level. This is procedurally feasible by means of utilizing this methodology (MHM) in analysing the blog-mediated recontextualization of 'Saudization' in the advertising discourse of Saudi Uber Blog.

Two research questions need to be addressed for the sake of theorizing and applying the MHM, and thus proving the above-formulated hypothesis:

- (1) How can a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model (MHM) contribute to Ricoeur's theory of text interpretation?
- (2) To what extent is the MHM empirically applicable to multimodal data with recontextualized socio-political practices?

Towards addressing the two questions, the study unfolds in the following structure. Section 1 reviews the literature relevant to the analysis of blog-mediated texts and discourses. Section 2 introduces the MHM as a methodology. Section 3 sketches out the research data and methodological procedure. Section 4 presents an MHM-informed analysis of the multimodal advertising text mediated by Saudi Uber-Company's blog. Section 5 concludes by providing a summary of the main research point and a discussion of the study findings.

2. Review of literature

The review of literature on the genre (and sub-genres) of blogs varies with methods and approaches utilized with different research foci, including verbal micro-pragmatic analysis of corpus data and multimodal discourse analysis of various domains. Let us begin by reviewing the former type of literature on blog-specific corpus pragmatic analysis, then move to the latter type of multimodal

discourse analysis of the same genre. Lutzky and Kehoe (2016) analysed a corpus of blog posts and the comments made thereto; the data scope included the *Birmingham Blog Corpus*, covering the period 2000–2010. The authors studied the “oops” form and its pragmatic functions in terms of the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) of apologies. The study has reached new insights that substantiated the observation that, in the context of dynamic technologies, language is an adaptable phenomenon.

Drawing on the same corpus data of blogs, Lutzky and Gee (2017) investigated the comments on blog posts related to the opening sequences of words in these comments. The study has opened new horizons for examining blog-specific uses of speech acts whereby bloggers were demonstrated to do things with words in a type of digital discourse. Also, Hyland and Zou (2020) showed how the discourse community of researchers reworked their articles as academic blogs; the authors were concerned with analysing the phenomena of metadiscourse-featured frame markers in two corpora of 50 blog posts and 50 journal articles. The study has contributed to understanding how academics’ linguistic choices of frame markers and their metadiscourse features could define various rhetorical contexts and stage recontextualization from research articles to blogs.

Moving to the other type of literature on blogs from a discourse-analytic perspective, Bolander (2012) provided an account of the research on blogs with the observation that the sub-genres of blog remained dominantly personal or diary-typed Internet products (Herring et al. 2004, Blood 2002, Krishnamurthy 2002). However, afterwards, research on institutional blogs began to emerge in a way that widely varied and covered different domains, particularly academia and science (e.g., Iriart et al. 2022, Bondi 2022, Freddi 2020, Zou & Hyland 2019, Kuteeva 2016, Luzón 2018, 2013, 2012). Crucially, the literature relevant to purely institutional blogging with promotional interest seems to be scarcer than that associated with personal, academic, and scientific blogs. One representative study of the former type of research is offered by Tomášková (2017), with a focus on the sub-genre of university-website blogs. The study has methodologically followed multimodal discourse analysis to demonstrate how institutional blogging amounts to being an embedded sub-genre whose interplay of text-image forms/functions is internalized in university websites.

Now, it is time to present the MHM as a methodology for enriching the research area of analysing blog-mediated texts and discourses at both theoretical and practical levels.

3. Towards a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model (MHM)

The coming two subsections comprise what I present here as a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model (MHM). The first subsection elucidates Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory of text interpretation, particularly its distanciation-appropriation dialectic. The second proposes the social semiotic underpinnings of the MHM at two text levels of sense and reference.

3.1. Ricoeur's theory of text interpretation: The *distanciation-appropriation dialectic*

Ricoeur (1976) offered a significant distinction between the 'sense' of a text and its 'reference': the reader's critical understanding of text follows the text's movement from 'sense' to 'reference'; that is, "from what it says to what it talks about" (1976: 87–88). But, essentially, for this movement to obtain, Ricoeur put forward two essential concepts in his hermeneutic theory, namely, *distanciation* and *appropriation*. First, to begin with *distanciation*, Ricoeur (1976: 93) conceived of "distanciation" as a process of "atemporalization" whereby there arises a fundamental presupposition for enlarging the horizon of the text as an object. Indeed, Ricoeur (1981: 145) connected *distanciation* with "any objective and objectifying study of a text." It is through the mediating function of this objectified/objective entity (text) that the fusion of two horizons has become possible: the reader's world horizon being fused with the writer's world horizon.

Second, speaking of *appropriation*, Ricoeur (1976: 43) proposed to detach the text from his/her author: "To appropriate is to make 'one's own' what was 'alien'." Indeed, in order for *appropriation* to materialize, text objectification should precede. According to Ricoeur (1981), then, *appropriation* directly relates to *distanciation*, or text objectifications: "appropriation is dialectically linked to the objectification characteristic of the *work*. It is mediated by all the structural objectifications of the text; insofar as *appropriation* does not respond to the author, it responds to the sense" (Ricoeur 1981: 105, italics in original). Thus, *appropriation* can be said to be a reaction to the text sense, which would in turn emerge as a corollary of the text becoming an object *distanciated* from the author.

However, here, emphasis is laid on what Ricoeur (1981: 147) calls "appropriation of meaning": a concept which he argues to be fitting "the actualisation of meaning as addressed to someone." Thus, *appropriation of meaning* creates text reference to the reader as an exterior to the text. This hermeneutic process takes shape with the reader/analyst first decontextualizing the text sense – by means of *distanciation* – and then recontextualizing its objectified referential meaning (referents) in a new situation – by means of *appropriation*. It follows, then, that the shift from *distanciation* to *appropriation* can be reckoned to parallel the shift from sense to reference – or, to echo Ricoeur's early statement, *the movement from what the text says to what it talks about*.

3.2. Multimodal text hermeneutics

3.2.1. Multimodal text sense and reference

Speaking of multimodal texts, one may theoretically posit that the 'object' emerging from different modalities (verbal and visual) be *distanciated* through objectifying such modalities and detaching their design features from the text designer/rhetor. This can be recognized as being concomitant with what Ricoeur describes as the naïve, initial stage of understanding. It is the stage pertinent to the

sense of a multimodal text, or what this text *says* through combining different communicative modalities and the semiotic modes comprising such modalities. At this point, there is a methodological imperative for differentiating the terms ‘modality’ and ‘mode’ as technically employed in the present model. On this point, let us gain insights from Kress’s (2010) understanding of the multimodal message as a realization of the principal semiotic modes that can simultaneously be encoded in one sign, viz. writing, image, and colour. Building on this, one may view semiotic modes as being the material constituents of a modality with a particular message or message-part.

Indeed, the constituent relation between a communicative modality and its modes can be assumed to have two dimensions, material and semiotic. This is precisely what Bateman et al. (2017) argue for in their report on the theoretically agreed-upon accounts of “semiotic modes”:

All accounts of semiotic modes that have been put forward in the literature tend to agree on one point: on the one hand, modes appear to have a material dimension, relating back to the sensory channels that are used to perceive them but, on the other hand, they also exhibit a semiotic dimension, i.e., the material used is given some kind of significance by its users. (Bateman et al. 2017: 113)

Thus, a modality can be said to materialize any message via different semiotic modes. For instance, a pictorial modality of an image may potentially consist of a configuration of anthropic, sartorial, colour, natural, technological, etc. modes; or, alternatively, a verbal modality may well comprise different semiotic modes, linguistic, graphological, spatial, and so forth.

According to the MHM, the initial stage of understanding multimodal texts is guided by the principle of modality-mode association, especially with the integration of Baldry and Thibault’s (2006) multimodal cluster transcription and inter-cluster description. Indeed, as exhibited in Figure 1, Ricoeur’s distanciation-bound stage of naïve understanding can be methodologically enriched via the foregoing integration of cluster transcription. According to Baldry and Thibault (2006: 11), clusters are defined as “groupings of resources that form recognisable textual subunits that carry out specific functions within a specific text.” Further, crucially, the method of cluster transcription attends to identifying inter-cluster relations in one and the same text in terms of the different clusters. It should be noted that each cluster is ideally associated with a communicative modality, e.g., pictorial or verbal, which would, materially and semiotically, consist of different modes, e.g., linguistic, spatial, visual, aural, sartorial, or olfactorial.

As part of the MHM, then, the naïve-understanding stage is presented as a distanciated cluster transcription of what a multimodal text *says* in terms of the textually holistic sense; this holistic sense stems from the way clusters are thematically and/or generically transcribed and linked inside the text across communicative modalities and semiotic modes. As visually schematized in Figure 1, inter-cluster relations are marked via a quadruple system of arrow-based notation.

The same notation system appears in Table 2 as the key to understanding the visual arrows marking inter-cluster relations in the multimodal transcription analysis in Table 1. Further, equally important is the dialectic coalescing distanciation and naïve understanding of the objectified, decontextualized text sense – as demonstrated via the double-head arrow connecting the two elements in Figure 1.

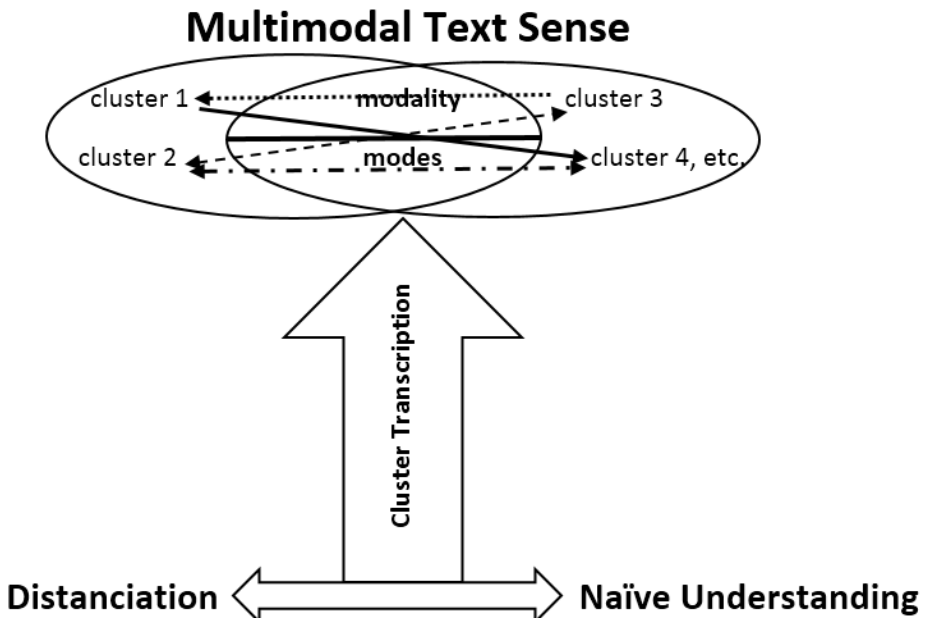


Figure 1. Cluster transcription and distanciation of multimodal text sense

The MHM’s second stage of critically explaining the multimodal text reference is schematized in Figure 2. The stage procedurally begins with a *description* of what Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006a: 362) technically term “represented participants,” e.g., the people, the places and things, mentioned in the verbal message or depicted in the images comprising the text as a whole. This type of (represented) participants is different from – albeit complementary to – the “interactive participants.” The latter type of participants is defined as “the people who communicate with each other” through multimodal texts; or, contextually, the producers and readers/viewers of multimodal texts. As per the MHM, once interactive participants are incorporated in the hermeneutic scope of analysis, the text reference begins to actively surface due to meaning appropriation – or the recontextualization of referential meaning – of the given referents of participants. Only then, at this point of hermeneutic analysis, should critical understanding of the multimodal text follow (see Figure 2).

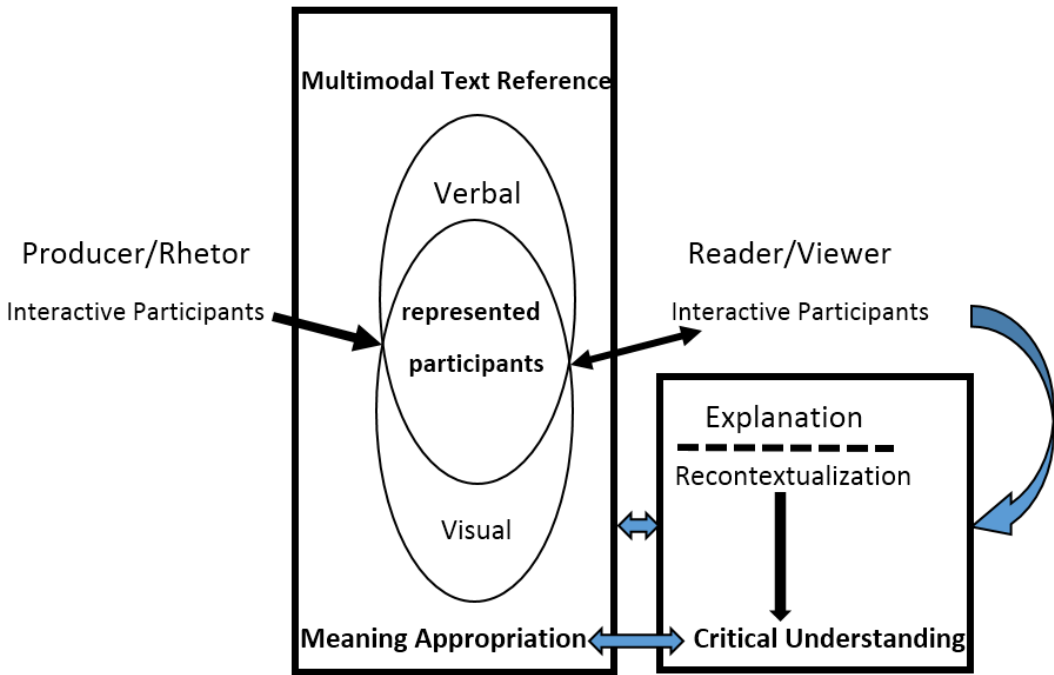


Figure 2. Explanation and meaning appropriation of multimodal text reference

At this juncture of proposing the MHM model and before discussing the model’s second stage, I shall elucidate the terminological sense of “recontextualization” as theoretically used here. Following the same line of thought by Van Leeuwen (2008), I adopt Bernstein’s (1981, 1986) conceptualization of the term “recontextualization” in relation to educational practices; that is, describing how knowledge is produced in the “upper reaches of the educational system” (Bernstein 1986: 5), and then embedded in the “lower reaches” and objectified in a “pedagogical recontextualized field (PRF)” (for a full discussion and illustration of Bernstein’s PRF, see Salama 2022). Thereafter, such a form of embedded, objectified knowledge is “made to serve the contextually defined purpose of a ‘discourse order’” in Foucault’s (1981) sense as “a socially constructed knowledge of some social practice” (Van Leeuwen 2008: 6). The Foucauldian term “orders of discourse” has been introduced and thoroughly developed by Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2003) in the realm of critical discourse analysis (CDA). An order of discourse is a particularly apposite term in explaining the recontextualization process. This is reasonably understandable in view of Fairclough’s crucial threefold development of the term: (i) an order of discourse is defined as “a network of social practices in its language aspect” (Fairclough 2003: 25); (ii) such a discourse order is typically associated with particular institutions (1992: 9, 1995: 12); (iii) this order is functionally oriented towards “the social structuring of semiotic hybridity (interdiscursivity)” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 16). Note that it is in the same spirit of Fairclough’s theoretical development of the term “discourse orders” that

the MHM will analytically consider the discursive practice of advertising in the blog-mediated multimodal text – that is, as being a semiotically hybrid advertising discourse order in the institution of Saudi Uber Company (see section 4).

The MHM's second stage concretizes the meaning appropriation of represented participants, but as related to the extra-textual interactive participants of text producer and reader/viewer. Analytically considered at this stage of appropriation is the potential relations between active participants. It is a critical process that constitutes text reference in the form of *potentially recontextualizable referents* (of relevant participants) in newly emerging digital contexts; such a process is enacted via the explanation stage undertaken by the reader/analyst towards securing critical understanding (Figure 2). Indeed, practically serving the explanation stage is Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006b) perceptive distinction between represented and interactive participants as well as the gamut of analysis they afford for explaining participant relations intra-/extra-textually (see the distinction above and Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006b: 114).

But, although Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006b) argument is restricted to the image and its pictorial modality, there is space for extending the same argument about participant relations to verbal modality. The latter type of modality typically has lexicogrammatical resources for referring either to the addressee 'thou' as an active participant outside the text, or to the addresser 'I/we' as an active participant located extra-textually. This may explain why the term-complex 'Multimodal Text Reference' is employed in Figure 2. Also, in Figure 2, this relational explanation of represented and active participants is visually presented in two forms: (i) the unidirectional relation of a single-headed arrow between the interactive text producer and the represented participants inside the multimodal text; and (ii) the bidirectional relation of a double-head arrow between the intra-textual represented participants themselves and the (critical) reader/viewer/analyst situated extra-textually.

Now, towards establishing the stage of explaining the reference of multimodal text, there needs to be a social-semiotic praxis whereby the participants inside and outside text as well as their relations can be analysed. This is the fulcrum of the coming subsection.

3.2.2. *Hermeneutic multimodal explanation*

Following the well-established approach of social semiotics (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001, 2006a, 2006b, Kress 2010, Nørgaard 2019), I present a hermeneutic multimodal explanation here, then extend the same model to the data analysis (section 4). This explanation is theoretically predicated on Halliday's (1978) social-semiotic view of language. Since text reference is the mainspring of the model's explanation stage, I intend to confine this hermeneutic stage to the multimodal text's interpersonal resources.

It should be made clear, however, that here focus is strictly placed on those interpersonal meaning-making resources that interactively feature the relations

between participants inside and outside the text relative to the transcription/description of sense or the explanation of reference (respectively, Figure 1 and Figure 2). These resources comprise two mode-based categories: (i) the linguistic-mode categories of Mood and Polarity/Modality and (ii) the visual-mode categories of participant's gaze, frame size, and angle (horizontal vs. vertical).

First, apropos the interpersonal linguistic-mode categories of Mood and Polarity/Modality, they are known in Hallidayan linguistics as the grammatical systems of interaction. Mood appertains to the role participants assume for themselves in a communicative exchange. Halliday argues for two kinds of exchange performed by participants: exchange of information and that of “goods-&-services” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 106–140). Nørgaard (2019: 49) gives a brief account of the prototypical speech functions realized by the grammatical system of Mood: (i) giving information through declarative sentences, (ii) demanding information through interrogatives, and (iii) demanding goods-&-services through imperatives. Polarity and Modality, on the other hand, relate to the interpersonal meanings pertaining respectively to the yes-no opposition in propositional content and the “intermediate degrees,” or various kinds of indeterminacy falling in between yes and no such as “‘sometimes’ or ‘maybe’” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 146–147).

Second, as concerns the interpersonal visual categories of participant's gaze, frame size, and angle, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006a) offer a succinct account of these categories' essential significations in image. According to them, the direct gaze of represented participants both addresses the viewers – and thereby creates a “visual ‘you’” – and constitutes an “image act”; that is, “the producer uses the image to do something to the viewer” (366). The two authors describe image act as a sort of “demand”: “the participant's gaze (and the gesture, if present) demands something from the viewer” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a: 366). Other image participants provide no direct gaze, and thus address viewers indirectly and position them as the subject – and not object – of look. In this case the image is presented by the producer as an “offer”: the image “‘offers’ the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation [...]” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a: 367).

Also, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006a), a componential element of image interactive meanings is frame size as signifying social distance. There is a “choice between close-up, medium shot and long shot,” where such a choice suggests “different relations between represented participants and viewers” (369). Interestingly, then, the image producer creates interpersonal relations of social distance between the represented participants and image viewers. Thus, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006a: 371) argue, it is through these different frame sizes that people can be portrayed “as though they are friends, or as though they are strangers,” mainly through the imaginary relation the image producers create via such frame sizes between represented participants and viewers as interactive

participants. The last interpersonal aspect of image meaning in Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006a) account is "angle." The account here is focused on the two chief types of angle in images, viz. horizontal and vertical; and the social meanings of involvement and power, respectively. The image producer chooses to take the horizontal angle either on an oblique plane of the represented participants or alternatively on a frontal plane of them with two subsequent differences in meaning, detachment and involvement.

Now, in preparation for the data-analysis section, I set out a description of research data and methodological procedure in the coming section.

4. Methodology: Data and procedure

The present section unfolds in two subsections. The first one presents the research data under investigation in terms of their modal features and communication medium as well as the rationale for its selection for analysis, the bearings the data has on Saudization, and the issue of data limitation. The second subsection provides space for the MHM-specific methodological procedure organizing the actual multimodal hermeneutic analysis of the Uber-Blog-mediated text.

4.1. Data: Multimodal text, Saudization, and limitation

The data used for empirically testing the validity of the MHM methodology is the Saudi Uber Blog¹, with the socio-political practice of 'Saudization' cross-modally featured throughout the data's design and compositional layout. Uber Blog, being an online advertising website (officially owned and run by the Saudi Uber Company), has techno-semiotically recontextualized the concept of 'Saudization' for persuading the blog's Saudi viewers/visitors into consuming the Uber Company's advertising discourse order (see the terminological senses of "recontextualization" and "orders of discourse" in subsection 2.2.1).

The current socially constructed knowledge of 'Saudization' consists largely in a program adopted by the Saudi government and directed at "gradually replacing expatriate workers with Saudi employees" (Ramady 2010: 352). But the practice of 'Saudization' itself has increasingly become associated with different types of discourse, namely and prominently, political and economic. The political discourse linked to the practice can be argued to be what Al-Dosary and Rahman (2005: 495-496) describe as the ruling government's political motivation of Saudization, that is, "to eliminate possible unrest from the middle class." According to them, whereas in the past such a middle class used to receive sufficient jobs and benefits from the public sector, recently the Saudi government has not been able to offer the same jobs and benefits mainly due to "budgetary constraints" (Al-Dosary & Rahman 2005: 496). Only here does the economic discourse type of Saudization take a

¹ The link to the blog launched by Saudi Arabia's Uber Company is available online: <https://www.uber.com/en-SA/blog/saudization-en/> (accessed on: 24.10.2023).

concrete shape in certain semiotic practices. These practices are collectively embodied as a fundamental shift in the way the private sector, alongside its resources and infrastructure, operates. Consequently, Saudization began to have a considerable impact on “recruitment and retention in the banking sector in Saudi Arabia from the perspective of branch managers and Human Resources (HR) managers of Saudi banks” (Azhar et al. 2016: 2).

Indeed, the governmental practice of ‘Saudization’, with its concomitant political and economic discourse types, is subject and open to be de-contextualized from the governmental upper reaches and then embedded in the lower reaches of any discourse order. In light of the above account, then, Saudization is assumed to be an advertising discourse order that has been recontextualized in the current Saudi Uber-Blog-mediated text. As demonstrated in the analysis section, this assumption is evidently traceable across the main modalities, verbal and visual, employed by the institutional text producer, Saudi Uber Company.

Crucially, at this juncture, I admit one limitation regarding current research data: only one blog-mediated multimodal text advertising Saudi Uber Company is utilized for the empirical validation of the MHM methodology. That said, my choice of this particular (multimodal) text is reasonably motivated by a number of considerations. Firstly, as demonstrated in the analysis section (section 4), the text, although limited to being one unit of analysis, is reckoned to be modally complex in terms of its verbal-visual semiotic design and layout; secondly, the text is rhetorically rich in its multimodal message, in that it presents the advertising discourse order of Saudization as a “persuasive topical device” (see Salama & Fawzy 2023b); thirdly, the text’s communication medium of institutional blog is interesting insofar as the different voices – individual and collective – are cross-modally co-articulated in such a way as to call for practically applying the hermeneutic principle of horizon fusion (see subsection 2.1). All three above considerations may redeem the demerit of data limitation, especially if an in-depth form of MHM-informed multimodal hermeneutic analysis is up for grabs!

4.2. Procedure

The procedure adopted in the present study towards data analysis hinges on the MHM methodology as theoretically outlined above (section 2). The current procedure operates at two MHM-bound stages of distanciation and appropriation. Let us take each in turn. The first stage of distanciation is descriptive in essence and is enriched by multimodal transcription. It is through this sort of transcription that the blog-mediated text under analysis is presented as an ensemble of modalities in interactive partnerships. Each modality (visual or verbal) is demonstrated to comprise various and diverse semiotic modes (linguistic, spatial, sartorial, etc.). Such an ensemble is displayed and annotated in a tabular format (see Table 1), where the multimodal text sense can readily be described in terms of a form of naïve understanding (see Figure 1).

The second stage of appropriation is essentially critical and is directed towards securing a hermeneutic multimodal explanation. The stage is marked by an analytic shift from *describing* the multimodal text sense towards *explaining* its referential scope of what the text talks about. On a hermeneutic level, at this stage, the critical reader of the text is called upon to tease out an explanation of the recontextualized advertising discourse order of ‘Saudization’ in connection with verbal and visual participants (see Figure 2). Certain interpersonally-oriented verbal and visual analytics is enlisted in the critical understanding of the referents recontextualized in the newly emerging digital context of the blog-mediated text under consideration. At the verbal level of interpersonal meaning, the linguistic-mode categories of Mood and Polarity/Modality are employed as part of Hallidayan functional linguistics (Halliday 1978, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). At the visual level of interpersonal meaning, the categories of participant’s gaze, frame size, and angle (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a, 2006b) are utilized with a view to revealing the pictorial meanings of the represented and interactive participants in the multimodal text as well as explaining the participants’ recontextualized referents as part of the advertising discourse order of ‘Saudization’.

Brought together, the two foregoing procedural stages of distancing and appropriation can be said to methodologically guide and orchestrate the coming section of analysing the target data.

5. A multimodal hermeneutic analysis of Uber-Blog-mediated ‘Saudization’ as an advertising discourse order

For the sake of empirically validating the applicability of the Multimodal Hermeneutic Model (MHM), I draw upon the semiotically complex and rhetorically rich text described above (section 3.1). The text is available online as a multimodal advertisement that has been launched by the Saudi Uber Company on its official blog (Uber Blog) on April 30, 2017. In line with the two-stage procedure above (section 3.2), the analysis has a corresponding twofold structure: (i) a multimodal-transcription-aided distancing of significant clusters recognized as relevant objects in the semiotics of text and (ii) a critically-oriented appropriation of the multimodal meanings associated with such objects. Both analytic strands are focused, respectively, on describing and explaining the advertising discourse order of ‘Saudization’ semiotically realized across the text’s different modalities and their respective modes.

5.1. Distancing and transcribing the cluster-specific objectifications of blog-mediated Saudization: A naïve understanding

The text as a whole is displayed in Figure 3. This whole, to follow Ricoeur’s principle of distancing, can be *objectified*. Indeed, according to the MHM methodology, the first step towards objectifying this text is to perceive it as an assemblage of multiple communicative modalities, which are composed of various semiotic modes, e.g. linguistic, spatial, anthropic, sartorial, etc. (see section 2).

Drive

Supporting Saudization and Providing Economic Opportunities

April 30, 2017 / Saudi Arabia

Earn



We are honored to be the first company in the sector to be awarded a certificate by the Saudi Public Transport Authority and are proud to work hand-in-hand with the Saudi government on their focus on "Saudization" as part of the National Transformation Plan.

"More than 65,000 Saudi driver-partners have already signed up to the Uber app."

Share



A year ago, we set a goal to bring 100,000 Saudi driver-partners on the Uber app by the year 2020. Over the past year, and since the Saudi Public Transport Authority passed the ride-sharing regulations, more than 65,000 Saudi driver-partners have already signed up to the Uber app, and we will continue to invite more to use the technology, and benefit from the opportunities digital economies could offer them.



We will continue to work with the Saudi Government to provide safe, reliable and affordable transportation.

For more information on how to become a partner driver, [click here](#).

Figure 3. The 'whole' multimodal text mediated by Saudi Uber Blog

This is conducted through the detailed multimodal cluster transcription presented in Table 1 and the analysis of the text's holistic sense as derived from examining the individual cluster's communicative modalities as well as their respective semiotic modes and the relations holding between and among the clusters themselves.

To initiate the multimodal transcription of the text's structural objectifications, it is essential to reproduce the parts of the whole text appearing in Figure 3 in the form of cluster realizations communicated via modalities that comprise different semiotic modes (see Table 1). Cluster 1 (The Blog's title bar) is communicated through a verbal-visual modality whose modes are complexly structured as linguistic, spatial, colour, and layout. Perhaps this boils down to the fact that such a cluster exhibits self-categorizations of both the text as a genre, or blog, and the Uber Company's logo-specific colour contrast of white and black. That is why this particular cluster is visualized to link to all remaining clusters constituting the multimodal text through the solid arrows radiating to them in Table 1. As exhibited in Table 2, these cluster-linking solid arrows mark generic interrelations. The bar linguistically indicates the medium of blog ("Uber Blog"), its technological affordances ("Explore"), and addressive message ("Sign up"). Crucially, at the level of modes, the bar's colour contrast of black and white reproduces the standard logo colour of Uber Company. Further, the same colour contrast seems to feature the linguistic and the spatial modes in a harmonious configuration: naming the genre and specifying its technological affordances are unified in colour, but ostensibly contrasted in space and colour with the framed addressive message "Sign up." These semiotic modes may be interpreted as attention grabbers within the blog's overall mode of layout, particularly in relation to the advertising-toned message "Earn" in its spatially salient position under the identifying label "Uber Blog."

With cluster 2 (The Uber Company ad's main title), the advertising discourse mediated by the blog begins to communicatively materialize via a purely verbal modality with a tripartite mode structure: linguistic, graphological, and spatial. The interplay of all three semiotic modes is significantly telling in this cluster design. The linguistic message seems to be spatially titular in the layout, simply because of the typographical features it exhibits: the large font size and style as well as the message's top central position on webpage. Content-wise, the message states the two-event macro topic of the whole text: "Supporting Saudization and Providing Economic Opportunities." The second event is a corollary of the first: economic opportunities for Saudis can be provided as a logical consequence of the Saudi Uber Company's support of the Saudization practice. Obviously, being the ad's title, cluster 2 reflects the ad's macro themes of the text: driving and supporting Saudization (as part of the government's economic discourse order of providing jobs and benefits only and strictly to the Saudis).

Table 1. A multimodal cluster transcription of the Saudi Uber-Company text


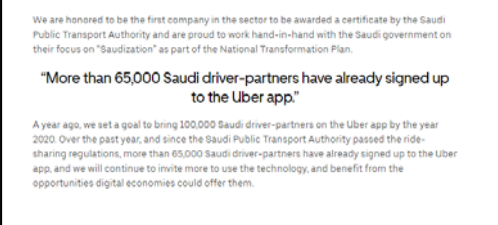



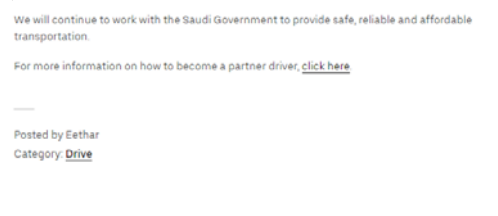
Blog's Top Part	Blog's Bottom Part
<p>Cluster 1. The blog's title bar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicative modality: verbal-visual Semiotic modes: linguistic, spatial, colour and layout 	<p>Cluster 4. The ad's main body text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicative modality: verbal Semiotic modes: linguistic, graphological, spatial
	
<p>Cluster 2. The Uber-Company ad's main title</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicative modality: verbal Semiotic modes: linguistic, graphological, spatial 	<p>Cluster 5. An ethnically diverse image</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicative modality: pictorial Semiotic modes: anthropic, sartorial, technological, spatial
	
<p>Cluster 3. An image of a Saudi partner-driver</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicative modality: pictorial Semiotic modes: anthropic, sartorial, natural, technological, spatial 	<p>Cluster 6. The ad's closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicative modality: verbal Semiotic modes: linguistic, graphological, spatial
	

Table 2. Key to the arrow notation system of visualizing inter-cluster relationships in Table 1

Arrow	Type	Inter-cluster relationships
	single-head/solid	Generic/medium relations
	single-head/dotted	Thematic/topical relations
	double-head/dashed	Communicative-modality relations
	double-head/dotdash	Semiotic-mode relations

Moving to cluster 3, one can observe the pictorial modality of an image presenting a Saudi-dressed participant in a car with its left door open and appearing as a side scene. This modality is semiotically composed of anthropic, sartorial, natural, and technological modes. Whilst the semiotic co-deployment of the anthropic and the sartorial produces the persona image of a Saudi driver, that of the technological and the natural produces the car and the sunray framed by the car itself – as a technological artefact. The double-head dashed arrow radiating from cluster 3 to cluster 5 indicates the identical communicative modality of the two clusters. Both are communicated via the pictorial modality, yet with a crucial difference: whereas the pictorial modality in cluster 3 iconizes individual one-person participancy, collective ethnically diverse participancy is iconically pictorialized in cluster 5. (The issue of modality participant analysis will be addressed in the coming subsection.) Notably, too, the pictorial modalities of clusters 3 and 5 consist of four basic semiotic modes in text, viz. anthropic, sartorial, technological, and spatial. The interplay of these modes creates semiotically unified wholes. That is, persons are featured in identity-marking codes of dress (Saudi-national, foreign, Saudi-military); the same persons are spatialized in juxtaposition with the technological devices of car, flipchart, and architecturally designed lightening.

Cluster 4 (The ad's main body text) is purely verbal in communicative modality; this is quite compatible with the rhetorical structure of the ad itself as a genre, wherein the linguistic semiotic mode typically enables the interactive meaning associated with the message. Further to the linguistic mode, graphological and spatial modes contribute semiotically to the overall design of cluster 4. There seems to be a *prima facie* spatial configuration of a tripartite composition of beginning, middle and end, with the middle made graphologically salient on account of the bold font and “double quotes”. The last cluster, cluster 6, bears the closure function of the ad and comes into the semiotic being of a verbal modality whose modes are identical to those comprising clusters 2 and 4. This aspect of mode compatibility is visually marked with the double-head dotdash arrows linking the three clusters in Table 1. Notice, also, in conformity with the arrow notation presented in Table 2, other significant inter-cluster relations are marked in Table 1. For example, the relations of communicative modality are linked by the double-head dashed arrows such that (1) the verbal-modality clusters are related (namely, clusters 2, 4, and 6) and (2) the pictorial-modality clusters are connected (clusters 3 and 5). Thus, the arrow-specific notation system (suggested in Table 2) serves to re-group modally homogenous clusters in a way that reveals the modality-and-mode-relevant sense.

Additionally, following the same notation system, generically and thematically relevant clusters are visually connected through the single-head types of arrow: (1) the solid arrows indicate how cluster 1 signifies the genre and medium of communication insofar as the present text is concerned and (2) the dotted arrows thematically link relevant clusters in text. Point 2 merits some elaboration here.

Thematically relevant clusters reflect the cross-modal continuity of the macro topic of text. More specifically, as shown in Table 1, cluster 4 develops and details the macro topic of ‘Saudization’ and its micro topic of ‘economic opportunities’ as linguistically featured in cluster 2 – perhaps a trace of the advertising economic discourse order of ‘Saudization’. Also, the same macro topic (‘Saudization’) in cluster 2 is pictorially iconized and indexed in the images appearing in clusters 3 and 5 at both individual and collective levels, respectively.

Now, it is time to shift analytic focus to the critical-understanding stage whereby the actual referents associated with the macro topic (‘Saudization’) and its relevant micro topics can be specified *extra-textually*. This is precisely what the coming subsection seeks to offer.

5.2. Appropriating the multimodal meaning of ‘Saudization’: A critical understanding

At this stage of analysis, there is a shift of analytic focus from the present multimodal text sense to its reference, or *from what the text says to what it talks about*. In order to explain the present text reference, the critical reader needs to explain the appropriation of this sense of ‘Saudization’ as a recontextualized discourse order in relation to the referents of verbal and visual participants.

Thus, let us define the interactive participants in the multimodal text at stake. In Figure 4, the presence of the contrastively white-coloured label “Uber Blog” on the left-hand side of the black bar indexes a technological medium that is utilized by the world-known Uber Company as a blog designer. Also, the designer marks in a contrasting white colour the blog status via the invitation-encoding sign “Sign up” on the right-hand side of the same black bar. But, notably, this blog is spatially bound to the locale of “Saudi Arabia” as verbally positioned immediately below the blog’s main title. As regards the blog’s main title, it evinces the central theme of the blog designer: “Supporting Saudization and Providing Economic Opportunities.” This constructs a reference to the text-target interactive participants, that is, Saudis and the Saudi Government. Thus, both participants are the referential objects of Uber Company’s observation.



Figure 4. The interactive participant of Uber Company and the theme of ‘Saudization’

The image in Figure 5 presents the viewers with a model Saudi Uber driver-partner. The participant in the image is not gazing at the viewers, and thus the blog designer creates the represented participant as an offer, being the object of viewers' look. However, the participant's gaze is not devoid of action; it can be said that the human participant's smiling face reflects his happy, expansive mood, which purports to be an act of invitation: inviting Saudi viewers to share the represented participant the same experience of *becoming* an 'Uber driver-partner'. This kind of invitation is reinforced even more naturally through the sunray depicted in juxtaposition to the participant's smiling face. It can act as a natural sign of hopefulness and bright career in the context of current visual proposition. In terms of the image's frame size, the designer seems to have consciously chosen the close-up as a pictorial index of an intimate relation with the target interactive participants visiting the blog and viewing the image. Moreover, the frontal angle keeps the viewers involved with the visually represented participant of the Saudi Uber driver-partner.



Figure 5. Appropriating the referent of a model Saudi Uber driver-partner

Another significant pictorial modality of the text under analysis is the image appearing in Figure 6, which has featured earlier above in Table 1 as cluster 3 in the overall multimodal transcription of text sense. But this time the analysis targets the explanation of the referents associated with the represented participants appearing in visual design. Here, a seemingly heterogeneous set of represented participants are visualized in particular design features that establish certain referents exterior to the text – *extra-textually*. Based on the verbal modality input, one can see through a relation among three sets of represented participants in the image. The first set comprises two participants representing Uber Company; the

second includes two governmental participants representing the Saudi Public Transport Authority; and the third makes up seven Saudi citizens, who seem to be associated with the Saudi Uber Company, and thus viewed in institutional partnership with the two participants representing the company.



Figure 6. Appropriating the institutional referents of Uber Company and the Saudi Government

Applying the same interpersonal resources of visual analysis to the three sets all together, one can witness the represented participants' direct gaze – barring one military participant – at the viewers (interactive participants). This renders the current image demanding in socio-semiotic function; that is, the text producer intended the image to be a demand: demanding something from potential viewership. Obviously, the Saudi non-military participants in the image are dispersed all through the visual scene amidst the other two sets' members. This may signal the imposing thematic presence of 'Saudization' practice. But, crucially, the Uber Company appropriates all the institutionally depicted participants here in a way that conduces to the recontextualization of this thematic practice of 'Saudization' towards advertising the company itself via a government-supported discourse order.

The same recontextualizing discourse order has been further enhanced by the advertising company's utility of other image interpersonal resources in Figure 6, namely, frame and angle. Let us begin with angle, and then move to the more significant resource of frame size and its distance effect. First, the Uber Company blogger elects to take the frontal angle of the represented participants in a way that encodes a message of involvement with the viewers: "what you see here is part of our world." Thus, the current angle-spaced involvement aids the blog designer in

appropriating the referents of viewing Saudis, and contextualizing them as consumers of the company's advertisement in the present digital context of blogging.

Second, frame-wise, the represented participants in the image are depicted in long shot, which signifies the process of setting the whole scene by placing the participants in the verbal context given in Figure 7 – as part of the same digital context. All institutional participants are linguistically encoded here in such a way that the “we” is the opening interactive participant cued in text; the inclusive pronoun denotes the institutional collective identity of Uber Company. Such an interactive participant is textually associated with the Saudi-Public-Transport-Authority participant – exterior to the Company, yet textually pertaining to it – whose official governmental status has promotionally contributed to the legitimation of the company: the latter participant being awarded a certificate by the former, again as part of the advertising discourse order verbally signalled in the phrasing “their [the Saudi government's] focus on ‘Saudization’”. Further, the remaining verbal co-text of the image centres on the human participant “Saudi driver-partners” and the technological participant “Uber app.”²

We are honored to be the first company in the sector to be awarded a certificate by the Saudi Public Transport Authority and are proud to work hand-in-hand with the Saudi government on their focus on “Saudization” as part of the National Transformation Plan.

“More than 65,000 Saudi driver-partners have already signed up to the Uber app.”

A year ago, we set a goal to bring 100,000 Saudi driver-partners on the Uber app by the year 2020. Over the past year, and since the Saudi Public Transport Authority passed the ride-sharing regulations, more than 65,000 Saudi driver-partners have already signed up to the Uber app, and we will continue to invite more to use the technology, and benefit from the opportunities digital economies could offer them.

Figure 7. The verbal co-text of the image depicting the institutional participants of Uber Company and the Saudi Government

Notably, too, throughout the verbal co-text in Figure 7 contextualizing the image in Figure 6, there exist linguistic patterns of Mood and Modality. For analytic purposes, I opt to discuss both Mood and Polarity first, then move to Modality. As concerns the interpersonal systems of Mood and Polarity, the dominant pattern

² The technological participant “Uber app” as well as the institutional participants of “Uber Company” and “the Saudi Government” are considered here to have the same *actorial* status in text as that of any human/individual participant, e.g., “Saudi driver-partners.” This assumption derives theoretical validity from Latour's (1996: 369) Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), which does not limit itself to human individual actors, but extends the words “actor/actant” to non-human or non-individual entities.

adopted by Uber Company (as text producer) is the declarative Mood and positive Polarity, which jointly give rise to affirmative statements with an interpersonal meaning of trust *bonding* advertiser and advertisees. Virtually all *intra-textual* sentences, here, are of the same discursive nature, or *semiotically structured* in the same vein. This semiotic structuring affords Uber Company the discursive role of an institutionally self-assertive advertiser with confidence in the quality goods-&-services offered to the advertised Saudis exterior to the text.

By way of illustration, the most important and typographically highlighted affirmative statement in the text reads: “More than 65,000 Saudi driver-partners have already signed up to the Uber app.” Here, affirmatively, Uber Company announces a statistically substantiated fact about an estimated number of the human participants of Saudi driver-partners as having already signed up to Uber app. At this point, Modality expressions barely appear in text except for inclination: “[...] and we will continue to invite more to use the technology, and benefit from the opportunities digital economies could offer them.” According to Halliday, this sort of inclination meaning is encoded in a modulated proposal with the speech function of offer. Thus, with this in mind, Uber Company advertises a determined and serious offer of employment for Saudis to sign up to the Uber app and *become* ‘partner-drivers’.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to propound the Multimodal Hermeneutic Model (MHM) as a methodology for undertaking a multimodal hermeneutic analysis of semiotically complex data. It is through the theorization and application of such a methodology that the two research questions posed in the Introduction have been addressed: 1) how can a Multimodal Hermeneutic Model (MHM) contribute to Ricoeur’s theory of text interpretation? 2) to what extent is the MHM empirically applicable to multimodal data with recontextualized socio-political practices?

Towards addressing the above questions, the MHM has integrated a two-faceted social semiotic praxis into Ricoeur’s (1973, 1976, 1981) theory of text interpretation. First, Baldry and Thibault’s (2006) multimodal cluster analysis has been adopted to enhance Ricoeur’s method of distancing the text sense as a holistic configuration of text parts (*intra-textually*). Second, a multimodal participant and interpersonal analysis has been utilized at both visual (mainly, Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a, 2006b) and verbal (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004) levels of explaining Ricoeur’s text reference (*extra-textually*). Regarding the second integrated facet, the interplay of verbal and visual participants, alongside the interpersonal meanings underlying their verbal co-text, is anchored in both Halliday’s social semiotic view of text modalities and the developments advanced by social semioticians with their focus on the visual grammar of text (prominently, Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006a 2006b). Indeed, the two dimensions of participant analysis, verbal and visual, have been co-deployed towards uncovering the referential meanings (referents) associated with the multimodal text exterior.

As argued above, Ricoeur's theorization of the distanciation-appropriation dialectic is the bedrock for the MHM, but with some multimodality-added modifications. Distanciation, a process describing the structural objectifications of text sense, is confined to extrapolating a naïve understanding of the text as an object detached from authorial intentions. Here, one important finding of the current study emerges: Ricoeur's hermeneutic stage of text-sense description of objectifications need be fruitfully extended in its analytic scope. This has been methodologically feasible by means of utilizing multimodal inter-/cluster transcription (Baldry & Thibault 2006).

The case study employed in the data analysis above has empirically provided for this finding; the analysis has demonstrated how the detailed multimodal cluster transcription of the Saudi Uber Blog-mediated text – as exhibited in Table 1 – enabled and facilitated the investigation of clusters in their communicative modalities (linguistic and otherwise). This has in turn elucidated Ricoeur's notion of structural objectifications inside text as a single configuration of its multimodal holistic sense. The descriptive analysis of the six clusters has revealed how the practice of 'Saudization' is a macro topic around which these clusters revolve through the interplay of visual, verbal, and pictorial modalities as well as the different semiotic modes comprising such modalities. Equally important has been the inter-cluster descriptive accounts provided in substantiation of the macro-topicality of 'Saudization'; this descriptive aspect was formally operationalized via the arrow-based notation system displayed in Table 2, and visually marked between and among the relevant clusters at different levels of genre and medium, themes, communicative modalities, and semiotic modes in Table 1.

The other significant MHM-specific finding in the present study appertains to Ricoeur's notion of "appropriation" as a process of explaining text reference – or what the text talks about, rather than what it says. The finding consists in revisiting this notion ("appropriation") as a recontextualization of participant-bound referents, which was demonstrated to secure a critical understanding of the text in relation to its producer and recipients. This finding was realized at the explanation stage which has been methodologically buttressed by a social semiotic analysis of two types of participant across both pictorial and verbal modalities: (i) represented participants as appearing in images and text parts and (ii) interactive participants as producers and recipients of such images and text parts. The MHM has been concerned with explaining the relations holding between such participants across the two modalities. Principally, as stated earlier, Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006a, 2006b) approach has been utilized for its interpersonal resources at the visual level of analysis, namely, gaze, frame, and angle. Additionally, Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) interpersonal resources have been tapped at the linguistic level of analysis, specifically, Mood and Polarity/Modality.

Empirically, it has now become clear that the textual site for data analysis in the current study has been selected with an analytic interest in the socio-political phenomenon of what is presently known as 'Saudization' – being a recontextualized advertising discourse order utilized for promotional purposes of Saudi Uber

Company. With this in mind, I opted for an advertising multimodal text mediated by the Saudi Uber Blog's verbal and pictorial modalities (and their componential semiotic modes); these modalities are structured and composed with design features and a layout rhetorically oriented towards 'billing' Saudis to become and act as Uber driver-partners. In line with the HMH, the second stage of explaining text reference has extended the analytic focus beyond the multimodal text towards revealing the subtle relations between the participants, represented and interactive. Ultimately, the chief interactive participant of Uber Company as a text producer has actively appropriated decontextualized referents and then recontextualized them in the company's advertising discourse order, both politically and economically.

Acknowledgments

This study is supported via funding from Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University project number (PSAU/2023/R/1445).

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Article history:

Received: 15 August 2023

Accepted: 15 November 2023

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