

Nato Peradze

MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SIA’S MUSIC VIDEO “ELASTIC HEART”

Abstract

Multimodal analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, which explore texts according to multiple modes of communication, have been widely researched in modern linguistics and cinematography. The article will analyse Sia’s music video “Elastic Heart” based on Halliday’s three metafunctions and Machin’s(2010) work: *Analysing Popular Music: Image, Sounds and Text*.

I have used quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. The metafunctions were employed to analyse the verbal information (also based on Castillo Acosta’s (2018) framework), while the visual components were studied quantitatively utilizing Machin’s approach to the visual data. The article also demonstrates the importance of metaphoric thinking and the influence of multimodal metaphors in decoding the overall meaning of an art piece. The study finds that Sia’s song “Elastic Heart” predominantly employs material and mental processes, and identifies key conceptual metaphors, namely MENTAL ILLNESS IS A BOUNDED SPACE/DEPRESSION IS A BOUNDED SPACE realised simultaneously in two different semiotic modes and highlights the significance of metaphoric interpretation of visual elements in the video.

Keywords: *Multimodal Discourse Analysis, multimodality, metafunctions, music, popular culture*

1. Introduction

Multimodal Discourse Analysis which examines the choice of various communicative modes in a specific context makes it possible to conduct an insightful analysis of various multimodal phenomena. The current study centres around Sia and her music video “Elastic Heart” released on the 7th of January, 2015. The song appears in one of her albums “1000 Forms of Fear”. Since its release, the music video has caused mixed feelings in the audience leading to various misinterpretations. Utilizing the methodology of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this paper aims to:

1. Study the song “Elastic Heart” based on Halliday’s metafunctions;
2. Examine the visual means of communication in the music video “Elastic Heart” and their role in the overall interpretation of the art piece.

The analysis of the data is distributed into two sub-chapters: the first part of the findings discusses the analysis of lyrics, while the second part deals with visual categories. The findings of the paper may be employed in various directions of arts, such as visual art, cognitive linguistics, metaphor theory, linguistics, etc. This emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of the research.

2. Methodology

To conduct the study, I employed the methodology of Castillo Acosta (2018), incorporating Machin (2010) and Halliday’s (1994, 2000) works. For the analysis of lyrics, Halliday’s three types of metafunctions were used. As for visual elements, Machin’s work concerning the means of an analysis of popular music was chosen. Even though all three types of metafunctions are presented in the paper, the main focus falls on ideational and interpersonal metafunctions. These functions, in my opinion, describe the overall meaning of the text most prominently. In addition, through quantitative research, I have identified the number of metafunctions and types of processes to connect them with the overall meaning and aim of the author.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Multimodality

The term "multimodality" is connected to the works of Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (1996). According to them, an inclination of the western world toward different genres of monomodal forms of communication has been altered due to technological advances. The recent media, comics, and various genres of art mainly employ various modes of expression. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) consider multimodality as “common semiotic principles (which) operate in and across different modes, and in which it is therefore quite possible for music to encode action, or images to encode emotion.” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001:2).

According to Adami (2016), multimodality can be defined as the combination of different semiotic modes/forms in texts and communicative acts, such as images, moving images, gestures, written sources, etc. The development of digital technology has also emphasized the fact that

multimodality exists in our everyday communication: messages, Gifs, emojis, and especially internet memes, which combine multiple modes such as visual, aural, and gestural, audio, etc. With the help of technology, it has become possible to conduct a detailed analysis of various audiovisual arts, including music videos and dance, usually performed by studying frames, the rhythm of movements, etc.

Jewitt (2013), in “Multimodal Methods for Researching Digital Technologies,” presents three theoretical assumptions, namely:

- a. Language does not provide a prototypical model of all modes of communication – “Multimodality steps away from the notion that language always plays the central role in interaction, without denying that it often does” (Norris, 2004:3. Cited from Jewitt, 2013: 251)
- b. All modes are shaped through their cultural, social and historical uses. Each mode has its individual and different potential and semiotic source to produce communication.
- c. “People orchestrate meaning through selection and configuration of modes” (Jewitt, 2013: 251), which makes the interaction between different semiotic modes quite significant in meaning-making.

The meaning of the term multimodality differs across academic fields. In transportation, multimodality refers to “the use of more than one mode of transportation during a specified time period” (Buehler & Hamre, 2015: 1082). Increasing usage of different means of transportation, such as cycling, public transportation, walking, etc., ultimately results in the rise of multimodality. On the other hand, monomodality means using one mode of transportation in a specific time period (Nobis, 2007). The shifts in multimodality/monomodality are deeply rooted in the socio-economic condition of society.

The multimodal analysis also incorporates context, which is crucial for the formation of meaning, choosing and employing the proper mode of communication.

3.2. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

Multimodal Discourse Analysis demonstrates “how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language.” (Jones, 2021: 1). Thus, as mentioned above, different modes of communication can equally contribute to the meaning-making.

When one mode cannot “specify the speaker’s meaning, other modes are needed to enhance and add more information to make the speaker’s presentation of the meaning much clearer and more detailed.” (Hong, 2012: 320). Multimodal Discourse Analysis, which logically includes different semiotic modes, can be conducted by combining different approaches: the first one is Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar, in which the author introduced linguistic metafunctions. Other semiotic modes, for instance, visual elements, can be interpreted using Machin’s (2010) and Kress & van Leeuwen’s methods with the addition of Castillo Acosta’s work (2018) on MDA.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, three linguistic metafunctions will be taken into consideration. These are the following: The Ideational/ Experiential metafunction is divided into several types of processes, including mental, material, relational, existential, behavioral, and verbal. The interpersonal metafunction is connected to social relations and functions. The textual metafunction is “realized with thematic structure, information structure and cohesion” (Arunsirot, 2013: 163)

3.3. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Multimodal Discourse Analysis demonstrates “how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language.” (Jones, 2021: 1). Thus, as mentioned above, different modes of communication can equally contribute to the meaning-making. When one mode cannot “specify the speaker’s meaning, other modes are needed to enhance and add more information to make the speaker’s presentation of the meaning much clearer and more detailed.” (Hong, 2012: 320). Multimodal Discourse Analysis, which logically includes different semiotic modes, can be conducted by combining different approaches: the first one is Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar, in which the author introduced linguistic metafunctions. Other semiotic modes, for instance, visual elements, can be interpreted using Machin’s (2010) and Kress & van Leeuwen’s methods with the addition of Castillo Acosta’s work (2018) on MDA.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, three linguistic metafunctions will be taken into consideration. These are the following: The Ideational/ Experiential metafunction is divided into several types of processes, including mental, material, relational, existential, behavioral, and verbal. The interpersonal metafunction is connected to social relations and functions. The textual metafunction is “realized with thematic structure, information structure and cohesion” (Arunsirot, 2013: 163).

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Ideational Metafunction

Ideational metafunction demonstrates the speaker’s experience of the real world and consists of three components: processes, participants and circumstances. Table 4.1. demonstrates the types of processes and their amount in the song.

Table 4.1. Ideational Metafunction in “Elastic Heart”.

Types of processes	Examples	Percentage
Material	(1)“You did not break me” (2)“I may snap and I move fast” (3)“I will stay up through the night.” Etc.	45.6%
Mental	(4)“Let’s be clear, I’ll trust no one” (5)“And I might have thought that we were one.” (6)“you won’t see me fall apart” (7)“... we were one wanted to fight...” Etc.	19.2%
Behavioral	-	-
Verbal	-	-
Relational	(8)“...we were one” (9)“I’m like a rubber band...” (10)“I’ve got thick skin and	33.3%

	<i>an elastic heart.”</i> Etc.	
Existential	(11)“ <i>There were so many red flags.</i> ”	1.9%

The table reveals the pervasive use of material processes (45.6%), for instance: (12)“*Let’s be clear, won’t **close** my eyes*”, (13)“*I’m like a rubber band until you **pull** too hard*”, etc. Material processes are employed to characterize feelings, in this case, love and the mental state of a singer: (14)“*Why can I not **conquer** love?*”, (15)“*Another one **bites** the dust*”, (1)“*You did not **break** me, I’m still **fighting** for peace*”. The above-mentioned examples are also realizations of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS WAR introduced by Lakoff and Johnson(1980) in their work “*Metaphors We Live By*”. If we exclude visual information from the music video, the verbal analysis leaves the impression of a confrontation between lovers, their failed relationship and separation, the latter resembling a fight implied by the expressions:“*To bite the dust*”, which according to *dictionary.com* means “*to fall...to suffer a defeat*”; the fourth line of the second stanza (16)“*wanted to fight this war without weapons*” can also be applied to love. (14)“*Why can I not conquer love?*” is derived from the Latin expression “*Omnia vincit amor*”/“*Love conquers all*”. Material processes denoting mental condition are the following: (1)“*You did not **break** me*”. In this case, a person and their psychological state are presented as a breakable object, thus coming to the metaphor MENTAL STATE IS A BREAKABLE OBJECT/ HUMAN IS A BREAKABLE OBJECT.

Relational processes have also been prevalent, especially in the chorus, which explains their higher percentage. They are usually subdivided into two main categories:

- a. Attributive – (17)“*But your blade it might **be** too sharp*”, (10)“*I’ve got thick skin and an elastic heart*”.
- b. Identifying – (9) “*I’m like a rubber band until you pull too hard*”

As for mental process, they were presented accordingly:

- a. cognition: (4)“*Let’s be clear, I’ll **trust** no one*”, (5)“*And I might have **thought** that we were one*”
- b. affection: (16)“*...wanted to fight this war without weapons.*” (18)“*I wanted it, I wanted it bad.*”
- c. Perception: (6)“*But you won’t **see** me fall apart.*”

Existential processes have been identified only once.

4.2. *Interpersonal Metafunction.*

Interpersonal metafunction demonstrates the interaction between speaker/author and audience: “We use language to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relations with them, to influence their behaviour, to express our own viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs.” (Lestari, 2019: 14). It is mostly connected to mood and modality (Ye, 2010). Halliday presents types of exchanges: verbal - when the speaker is demanding (question) or giving information (statement); and non-verbal - which is mostly about providing goods-and-services (offer) and demanding goods-and-services (demand). Statements usually contain declarative clauses, questions - interrogative clauses, commands - imperative clauses.

The analysis of verbal information has shown that the great majority of sentences were statements and employed declarative clauses, only single cases of interrogative and imperative clauses were identified (see table 4.2)

Table 4.2. Interpersonal Metafunction in “Elastic Heart”

Statement (Declarative clause)	(9)“ <i>I'm like a rubber band... ;</i> ” (10)“ <i>I've got thick skin and elastic heart</i> ”
Question (Interrogative clause)	(14)“ <i>Oh, why can I not conquer love?</i> ” (rhetorical question)
Imperative clause	(4)“ <i>Let's be clear I'll trust no one</i> ” (suggestive)

Halliday differentiates two major groups of modality, which are related to the exchanges mentioned above:

1. Modalization – is related to information (validity of information) (Cerban, 2009), which in turn is subdivided into several subgroups: a. probability and usuality (for instance, *may, possibly, sometimes, always*, etc.)

2. Modulation – is connected to goods-and-services (Cerban, 2009: 4), it is “associated with the willingness of a speaker in offer and the responsibility on the hearer or reader in command...” (Zhai & Liu, 2018: 113), and consists of two subcategories: inclination, which involves the speaker’s readiness and will to do something (would, determined, anxious to, etc.); obligation – which includes commands, responsibilities, etc. (should, required, wanted, supposed, etc.) (Zhai & Liu, 2018)

Table 4.3. Modality in “Elastic Heart”

High	Median	Low
	(3)“ <i>I will stay up through the night.</i> ” (4)“ <i>...I’ll trust no one.</i> ” (6)“ <i>you won’t see me fall apart</i> ” (19)“ <i>I’ll walk through fire to save my life</i> ”	(2)“ <i>I may snap and I move fast.</i> ” (5)“ <i>And I might have thought that we were one.</i> ” (14)“ <i>...why can I not conquer love?</i> ” (17)“ <i>(Your blade) it might be too sharp.</i> ” (20)“ <i>I can survive.</i> ” (21)“ <i>I’m doing everything I can</i> ”

The author predominantly employs modal verbs of low and median values. The table shows the prevalence of modal verbs denoting inclination ((4)“*I’ll trust no one.*”(This particular example can also belong to the usuality subtype) (19)“*I’ll walk through fire to save my life*”) and probability ((2)“*I may snap and I move fast*”, etc.). There were no cases of modal verbs and expressions of a high value.

4.3. Textual Metafunction

The main components of textual metafunction are theme and rheme. A linguistic theme is the first component of a sentence, expression etc. and can coincide with the subject, which is usually followed by a rheme. The study showed that 52% of themes were marked textual ((6)“*but you won’t see me fall apart*”. (22)“*Cos I’ve got an elastic heart.*”. (23)“*Then another one bites the*

dust.”) and marked interpersonal ((4)“*Let’s be clear, I’ll trust no one.*”), 48% of themes were unmarked and interpersonal (SVO).

We have also identified cases of ellipsis: (5)“*I might thought that we were one (who) wanted to fight this war without weapons*”, (12)“*Let’s be clear (I) won’t close my eyes.*”. As for reference, the verbal information contained the only endophoric type of references (subtype – anaphoric), such as: (16)“*Wanted to fight **this** war..*” (18)“*...I wanted **it** bad*” (17)“*But your blade **it** might be too sharp.*” These references are endophoric due to the fact that they refer to something mentioned in the text previously .

4.4. Visual-semiotic Analysis of the Music Video “Elastic Heart”

For visual-semiotic analysis of the music video we have utilized the methods of Castillo Acosta (2018) and Machin (2010), which involve the usage of the most relevant, salient features of frames among which are pose, distance, colours, gaze, objects, etc.

4.4.1. Pose

Similarly to the verbal information, the music video also demonstrates two characters: a middle-aged man (portrayed by Shia Labeouf) and a little girl (portrayed by Maddie Ziegler), who, facing each other, are standing on the opposite sides of a giant cage. Based on the intensity of their facial expressions and posture (in addition to the song), one may think that the initial interpretation – in particular, the fight between lovers and LOVE IS WAR metaphor is retained in the visual medium. The monochronic colour palette, different shades of nude and grey, the inexistence of objects and confined space draw the attention of the viewer to the narrative and development of action within the cage.

According to Machin (2010), in terms of pose the bellow mentioned questions can be taken into consideration:

- “*To what extent do artists take up space or not?*”
- “*Do they perform for the viewer or are they self-contained?*”
- “*Is there an emphasis on relaxation or intensity?* “
- “*Are they depicted as being intimate, standing in close proximity, or is there some indication of distance?* “(Machin, 2010: 39)

As we have mentioned above, the narrative centers around two characters who are about to attack each other. Thus, there is an emphasis on intensity. The existence of the viewer is not acknowledged, which means that the characters are self-contained. With the help of camera movement and frame adjustment, we observe their actions both from outside and inside the cage, which leaves the impression of the partial involvement of viewers within the narrative. Choreography can also be regarded as combinations of different poses: the fight between characters, conflicts within their relationship and finally, resolving a quarrel is all demonstrated by dance, which again enhances the feelings of intensity.

4.4.2. Gaze

Machin (2010) states that gaze is an essential part of the pose, which fulfils two of Halliday's roles: 'offer' and 'demand'. If the viewer is addressed by the gaze of the artist, it may serve two functions:

1. The viewer is acknowledged;
2. "It produces an image act meaning that the image is used to do something to the viewer" (Machin, 2010: 40), which in Halliday's "Functional Grammar" is known as "demanding".

If the existence of the viewer is not acknowledged, Kress and Leuween (1996) refer to it as an "offer image", thus, the visual information is presented for "scrutiny and consideration" (Machin, 2010: 40). In the specific music video, the gaze is usually exchanged between the man and the girl, the viewer is just an outsider who constantly watches over the two figures as they dance and should infer from their actions, poses and other visual aspects.

4.4.3. Objects

Metaphoric associations serve as one of the most productive and significant ways of interpreting visual elements. Sia's "Elastic Heart" employs a minimalistic style of presenting the information. Apart from the two characters, attention can be drawn to a cage, which is the single inanimate object in the music video. It serves to confine the dance of the characters and despite the big gaps between the bars, which clearly tell the viewers that they are given free will, they're still unable to escape from it. In this case, the viewer is forced to interpret facts metaphorically: Why are not the man and the little girl leaving the cage?

In the specific context, the cage can be interpreted differently: MIND AS A CAGE – the man represents the grown / adult side of a person, while the girl is the inner child, conflict and temporary peace between the two sides are conflicts happening within the mind of every person. Towards the end of the narrative, we observe how they manage to make up, the girl is determined to help the man obtain his freedom, and help him to escape. However, despite her attempts, the man still cannot / does not leave the cage (taking into consideration the fact that he is able to do it). Coming from this visual information, the torment of characters can also be explained with these conceptual metaphors: DEPRESSION/ MENTAL ILLNESS IS A CAGE and DEPRESSION / MENTAL ILLNESS IS A BOUNDED SPACE.

Thus, the verbal information given in the lyrics, which initially could be interpreted as the pain derived from the parting of lovers and conflict between them, with a combination of visual elements alters the overall meaning of the art piece, which is the following:

1. The music video and the song represent metaphorically two conflicting sides of a person;
2. It also demonstrates psychological illnesses and torments happening in the mind, which is supported by the prevalent use of mental (as well as material) processes in the verbal information;
3. The song can be about self-acceptance and self-love;
4. Obtaining inner freedom and inner peace is a battle.

Thus, it can be concluded that multimodal analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis should involve simultaneous analysis of various modes of communication, as well as metaphoric thinking.

4.4.5. Colors

The intense activity of the characters is juxtaposed with the cool colours of the frames. The background is not clearly defined, which adds to the feelings of vagueness. Machin (2010) points out that the aim of colour saturation is to create emotional temperature. This means, that the visual piece having higher colour saturation can be associated with the intensity of feelings, while faint colours are predominantly neutral or lack energy. In this specific case, powerful motions and feelings evoked by the dance of characters are opposed by the neutral/ cold colour palette, which in turn can be regarded as one of the ways of meaning-making. The viewer mainly concentrates on what is happening inside the cage, rather than in the background.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that simultaneous analysis of visual and verbal semiotic modes provides completely different interpretations and meanings of any piece. The verbal analysis of the song revealed that without visual information, the given song could be about ex-lovers, the tension between them, and overcoming psychological and mental obstacles caused by separation. This is indicated by the frequent use of the mental and material processes to characterize the given state. However, the visual source enables us to reinterpret the meaning of the music video. Visual elements, such as colours, objects, pose, gaze, movement, gestures, etc. have become an additional source for grasping the essence of the piece. In certain situations, these elements force viewers and listeners to generate cognitive metaphors, which is observable in the case of the correlation between cage and mind. Thus, multimodal analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis take into consideration not only physical features, such as colour saturation but metaphoric thinking as well.

References:

- Adami, E. (2016). Multimodality. Chapter to appear in *Oxford Handbook of Language and Society*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4818.0565>
- Arunsirot, S. (2013). An Analysis of Textual Metafunction in Thai EFL Students' Writing. *Novitas Royal (Research on Youth and Language)*. 7(2). 160-174.
- Brady, C. K. (2015). *Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Female K-pop Music Videos*. Master Dissertation. The University of Birmingham.
- Buehler, R. & Hamre, A. (2019). The multimodal majority? Driving, walking, cycling, and public transportation use among American adults. *Transportation*. 42(6). 1081-1101.
- Castillo Acosta, M.F. (2018). A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Childish Gambino's Music Video "This is America". *Open Journal for Studies in Linguistics*. 1(2). 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojsl.0102.04057a>
- Cerban, M. (2009). The Interpersonal Metafunction of Clauses: Polarity and Modality. *Proceedings of the International Conference Challenges in Language, Literature and Arts at the Beginning of the 21st Century*. Vol.1
- Chan, S. (2013). Using videos and multimodal discourse analysis to study how students learn a trade. *International Journal of Training Research*. 11 (1). 69-78.
- Forceville, C. (2007). Multimodal Metaphor in ten Dutch Tv commercials. *Public Journal of Semiotics*. 1. 19-51.
- Hong, Li. (2012). Application of the Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory to the Teaching of College English Listening and Speaking. *IERI Procedia*. 2. 319-324
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Revised by Matthiessen, C. M.I.M. London and New York: Routledge. Third edition.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (2000). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Revised by Matthiessen, C. Great Britain: Hodder Arnold.
- Heinen, E. Mattioli, G. (2019). Does a high level of multimodality mean less car use? An exploration of multimodality trends in England. *Transportation*. 46(4). 1093-1126.
- Jewitt, C. (2008). *Technology, Literacy, Learning: Multimodal Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Jewitt, C. (2013). Multimodal methods for researching digital technologies. In *The SAGE Handbook of Digital Technology Research*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282229.n18>

- Jones, H. (2021). Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0813.pub2>
- Kress, G. R. & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. New York: Routledge.
- Kress, G. R., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: the modes and media of contemporary communication*. Arnold.
- Lakoff, G & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Lestari, K. (2019). *Mood Analysis on Muniba Mazari's Speech*. BA Thesis.
- Machin, D. (2010). *Analyzing popular music: Image, sound and text*. London: Sage publications
- Nobis, C. (2007). Multimodality: facets and causes of sustainable nobility behavior. *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board*. 2007(2010). 35-44
- Urios – Aparisi, E. (2009). Interaction of multimodal metaphor and metonymy in TV commercials: Four case studies. *Multimodal Metaphor*. 95-117.
- Yang, M. (2020, December 17). Multimodality, Knowledge to go: The History of Multimodality. Retrieved from [:https://blogs.fasos.maastrichtuniversity.nl/digitalcultures-MA/students/myang20/2020/12/17/multimodality-knowledge-to-go-the-history-of-multimodality/](https://blogs.fasos.maastrichtuniversity.nl/digitalcultures-MA/students/myang20/2020/12/17/multimodality-knowledge-to-go-the-history-of-multimodality/)
- Ye, R. (2010). The Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis of Barack Obama's Victory Speech. *English Language Teaching*. 3 (2). 146 – 151
- Zhai, R. & Liu, J. (2018). The Study on the Interpersonal Meanings of Modality in Micro-blogging English News Discourse by the case of "Donald Trump's Muslim Entry Ban." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*. 9(2). 110 – 118.

Dictionary entry:

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bite--the--dust>

Music Video:

Sia(2015). Elastic Heart [Video]. Youtube.

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=elastic+heart

Author's email: natoperadze@yahoo.com

Author's Biographical Data

Nato Peradze is a PhD student at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Humanities. She teaches English at the Department of English Philology (the courses include Text Analysis (BA program) and Theory of Metaphor (MA)). She is interested in cognitive linguistics, particularly, Conceptual Metaphor Theory and is currently researching monomodal and multimodal metaphors in film industry.