



## RESEARCH PAPER

### The Process of Meaning Creation: A semiotic Analysis of Facebook Posts of English Works!

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## ABSTRACT

Facebook posts are strategically created to achieve commercial objectives, encompassing digital advertising, content promotion, and audience engagement. A specific case in point involves the analysis of posts on the English Works! social media page. The study draws upon Kress and Leeuwen's concept of Multimodality of signs to analyze these visual cues. The findings indicate that each image serves as a sign, conveying insights about the program's essence, updates, events, and activities to the audience. The color palettes used in these images play a pivotal role in establishing the program's agenda and thematic representation. The connotations embedded in the Facebook posts predominantly revolve around themes of learning, unity, celebration, empowerment, success, and recognition. These connotations are intricately tied to the journey of English Works! students. Future researchers could extend the application of semiotics to other forms of visual communication media, such as art photography, banners, and printed advertisements.

**KEYWORDS** English Works!, Facebook Posts, Metafunctions, Semiotic Analysis,

## Introduction

Social networking platforms allow individuals to craft personalized profiles, sharing their identities openly and engaging with other users through both one-on-one connections and broader network associations. (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni, & Pauwels, 2013; Muzaffar, Chohdhry, & Afzal, N2019). Owing to their widespread popularity and the influence of network effects, social media channels like Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn have encountered rapid and substantial expansion in their user communities (Muzaffar, Yaseen. Safdar, 2020; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Lin & Lu, 2011). For instance, Facebook alone boasted over 1.5 billion active monthly users by the conclusion of 2015.

To leverage their surging popularity, diverse organizations and initiatives are progressively adopting social media marketing, which involves utilizing the interactive and networking potentials of social media for promotional purposes (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). An indispensable element of social media marketing is represented by brand pages, which serve as dynamic platforms set up by different programs, entities, and brands on social media, aiming to engage with their audience (Lipsman, Mudd, Rich, & Bruich, 2012). These brand pages enable brands to cultivate an online community and sustain ongoing interactions (Zaglia, 2013). Central to these brand pages are brand posts—fairly frequent, concise, and (largely) unpaid updates generated by brands and disseminated to their followers/audience on a daily basis. Within the realm of communication, Facebook posts emerge as a substantial medium that facilitates diverse brand interpretations and

encounters (Tafesse,2016). The interactive capacity of brand posts, coupled with their support for various media formats (e.g. text, photo, video, and website links), provides promoters with an unparalleled opportunity to broadcast a wide array of messages (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). However, despite these facts, relatively limited knowledge exists regarding the assorted categories of brand posts that page administrators and social media managers share on their Facebook pages. The Facebook page of English Works! Faisalabad showcases a follower count of approximately 5000 individuals, with an impressive engagement rate of 2000 per post. This high level of engagement sets a benchmark across all English Works! social media pages throughout Punjab.

The program EnglishWorks!, supported by the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, strives to enhance the English language proficiency of unemployed or underemployed youth aged 17-25 in Pakistan. This initiative goes beyond language learning, also focusing on bolstering entrepreneurial and technical skills to enhance employability. By achieving these goals, English Works! contributes to the diplomatic objectives of the U.S. Mission in Pakistan, fostering stronger connections between the people of the United States and Pakistan. Moreover, it contributes to human capacity development, leading to a more educated, skilled, and empowered workforce.

Furthermore, the program plays a pivotal role in advancing teaching and learning within the EnglishWorks! network. Through professional development exchanges and on-site training, the program benefits teachers, alumni, and administrators alike. The activities foster cross-cultural dialogues and expose participants to U.S. culture and values, thereby facilitating the exchange of best practices in the realm of English education. Ultimately, the English Works! program culminates in a diverse and empowered community of participants and alumni, each equipped with the capacity to shape their own lives and the trajectory of their nation.

The images under analysis are sourced from the EnglishWorks! Facebook page and will be subjected to examination through the lens of systemic functional grammar, a framework developed by Michael Halliday. This analysis, which draws inspiration from the semiotic aspects of Halliday's model, goes beyond linguistic aspects to comprehend visual grammar. The scrutiny of these visual narratives encompasses a range of semiotic elements, including participant actions, scene composition, event layering, cultural and social connotations, spatial and contextual factors, collective viewpoints, cultural significance, national narratives, emotional expressions, cinematography, and other pertinent contributors. According to Halliday's systemic model, every semiotic resource serves three functions: the Ideational metafunction, the Interpersonal metafunction, and the Textual metafunction.

The term "representation" pertains to the signs and codes embedded within the images, allowing them to attribute meaning to social practices, events, and broader social and ecological circumstances. It's important to note that this perspective implies that meaning isn't inherent in perceived reality; instead, it is constructed through these representations.

The Facebook platform of English Works! is replete with impactful visuals shared to establish a connection with the audience and captivate their interest in student endeavors, occasions, and crucial updates. This strategy is designed to forge meaning for the viewers. The depictions showcased in these images are the result of employing codes and symbols to effectively convey diverse intended messages to the audience. These visuals serve to kindle curiosity among the audience, encouraging them to delve deeper into the realm of English Works! and grasp its objectives. Therefore, a comprehensive

systemic multimodal analysis of the Facebook posts is imperative to investigate into the details of how distinct codes and symbols are attached within its images to construct the envisioned meanings.

### **Literature Review**

One of the most impactful and authentic methods through which brands engage in social media marketing is via their brand pages (Lipsman et al., 2012). Brand pages are interactive platforms established by brands on social media to facilitate customer interaction and brand communication (Tafesse, 2015). These pages serve as hubs where brands can build an active online community, fostering personalized, direct interactions (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Kim, Spiller, & Hettche, 2015).

Brand pages comprise a community of stakeholders, including consumers, brand enthusiasts, influencers, employees, and other individuals who voluntarily subscribe to the brand's updates (Pereira et al., 2014; Zaglia, 2013). Those who like or follow a brand page are exposed not only to the brand's communications but also to fellow consumers' comments, reactions, and fan-generated posts. Brand pages offer diverse tools for interactivity, such as liking, commenting, sharing, and messaging, empowering consumers to express opinions and share personal brand experiences. This real-time engagement fosters a collaborative environment for co-creating meaningful brand interactions (Tafesse, 2016; Zaglia, 2013).

At the core of brand pages are brand posts – frequent, succinct updates authored by brands and shared with customers and fans on a daily basis, accessible through newsfeeds or brand-specific pages (Lipsman et al., 2012). These posts establish an ongoing brand presence on social media, enabling consistent interactions (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Brand posts act as conversation starters, nurturing ongoing dialogues with customers (Gensler et al., 2013). With multimedia capabilities (text, photos, videos, links), brand posts effectively communicate diverse brand meanings and experiences (Tafesse, 2016). They serve various purposes, from building awareness to introducing products, sharing emotional narratives, educating consumers, and encouraging purchases (Kim et al., 2015; Taucharungroj, 2016). Equipped with response options like likes, comments, and shares, brand posts encourage instant interactions, allowing consumers to voice opinions and reactions (Taucharungroj, 2016). In essence, brand posts play a pivotal role, consistently connecting brands with their customers and fans.

Despite their significance, brand posts have rarely undergone systematic analyses. A thorough review of social media literature identifies three approaches for categorizing brand posts. The first approach defines content domains – entertainment, information, and transaction (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). However, this approach proves inadequate for certain message strategies. The second approach focuses on traditional strategies – functional, experiential, emotional, and brand image (Kim et al., 2015; Swani et al., 2014). This approach, however, neglects various valid strategies. The third approach organizes posts based on consumers' perceived schema – social, functional, hedonic, and self-concept categories (Davis et al., 2014; Gummerus et al., 2012; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Unlike the other approaches, this one delves into subjective consumer interpretations, unsuitable for categorizing posts by intended meaning. Existing analyses of brand posts lack a systematic framework. Addressing this, our study presents a formalized analysis, categorizing brand posts into a comprehensive typology.

## Material and Methods

### Data Collection

Three images in this research have been collected only from the official Facebook page of English Works!

The research follows a qualitative approach, centered on The Systemic Multimodal analysis of images as conceptualized by Kress and van Leeuwen. The investigation is rooted in Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) interpretation of "metafunction," a concept derived from Halliday's systemic functional grammar. They have extended this concept to images, proposing three metafunctions within Visual Grammar (VG): ideational, interpersonal, and intertextual metafunctions. In the context of visual systems, the ideational metafunction arranges how "represented participants" are interconnected to portray our surrounding world (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The interpersonal metafunction oversees the interaction between depicted participants, viewers, and the textual metafunction unifies the image, assembling its components into a cohesive whole.

This study aims to dissect three specific images, strategically chosen to unveil the intentions driving participant classification, the analytical process, symbolic representation, viewer-participant interaction, and the role of Representational Processes (RP). Elements such as gaze, intimacy, social distance, RP's engagement, camera angles, power dynamics, conveyed values, prominence, framing, frame lines, and other relevant factors will be scrutinized. The primary focal point of this research revolves around uncovering the nuanced dynamics of representation politics within the images, facilitated by the lens of systemic multimodal analysis as proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen.



Figure 1 Opening Ceremony 26 Oct, 2021

### Description

The image originates from English Works! Facebook page and captures an event organized by English Works!. In the image, students are seen performing a Tablo on stage, which is adorned with lights, English Works! banners for the opening ceremony, and red, blue, and white balloons reflecting the program's theme colors. The male and female students perform together, equipped with various props displaying logos representing 21st-century learning tools such as social media apps, quiz websites, and vocabulary-building games. Male students are attired in formal black and white clothing, while female students wear black gowns. The frame is framed with flags – the Pakistani flag on the right and the US flag on the left, as everyone on stage gazes toward the audience.

## Ideational Metafunction

The visual narrative structure of the image illustrates a group of students performing on stage while holding props. Several Representational Processes (RPs) are evident, depicting students engaged in the "Action" process of walking on stage and holding props to captivate the audience during their Tablo. The stage serves as the "Goal," adorned with play cards featuring logos symbolizing technology. The students' intention is to highlight the significance of tech tools and apps in the learning process. The vector is established through the students' gaze and movements toward the audience. The eye lines of the students further direct attention in the same direction. This perspective links the audience to the performers, establishing a sense of location as the live audience observes the performance.

## Interpersonal Metafunction

In the semiotic process of the image, two participant types are discernible. The actors in the image – the RPs and the image producers – interact with the viewers or IPs. The image acts as a "Demand" for the viewers. The vector emerges from the gaze of the students directed toward the audience, indicating their connection with the IPs. The students, as RPs, present themselves for scrutiny by the IPs. They embody optimism, progress, and excitement. The image employs a "Wide shot" frame size, encompassing all performing students and their surroundings. RPs are captured at a "Far Social Distance" from the IPs, suggesting a limited level of intimacy between the two groups. The image adopts a "Medium Frontal angle," signifying a straightforward approach. This corresponds to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), where different angles convey varying levels of familiarity and connection between RPs and IPs. The vertical plane features an eye-level shot, indicating equal power relations between RPs and IPs.

## Textual Metafunction

The "Given" in the image presents a student holding the US flag on the left side. This student is presented as something familiar, given that English Works! is sponsored by the US Consulate. The "New" aspect is portrayed by the student on the right side holding the Pakistani flag, symbolizing a new journey of Pakistani students toward success and skill exploration through the program. The "Ideal" element is the decorative ceiling in the upper portion, suggesting that hard work can help achieve ideal goals. The golden vertical rays of the stage represent glamour, generosity, and compassion, aligning with English Works!' central themes. The image-producer invites the audience to glimpse the journey toward achievements. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)

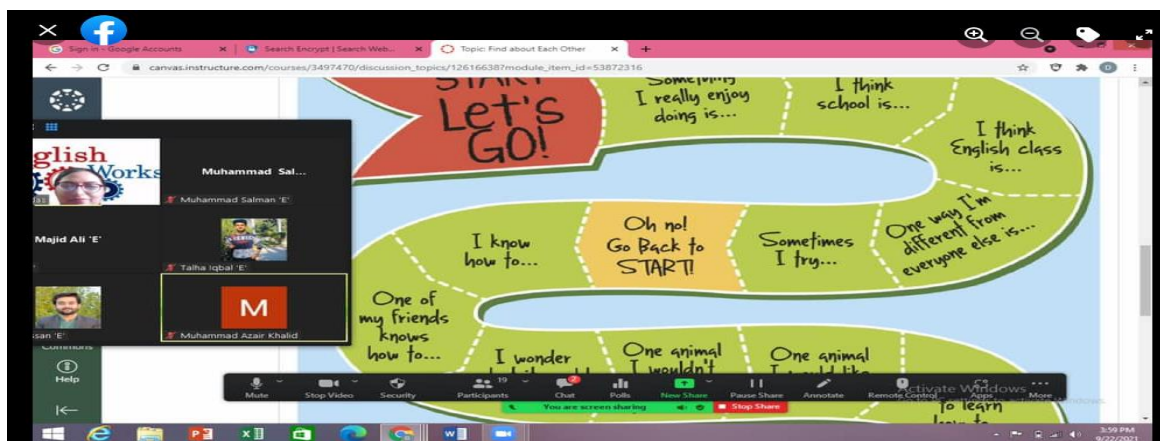


Figure 2 Virtual Class, 26, Sep, 2021

## **Description**

This image is sourced from the English Works! Facebook page and portrays an online class conducted via the Zoom app. The screenshot depicts English Works! students engaged in an interactive game called the "Road Map Quiz." The objective of the game is to facilitate familiarity among peers. The game route starts at the top, takes a zig-zag pattern, and concludes at the bottom of the screen. The road is adorned with distinct questions demarcated by white dotted lines. A zoom box with participants' display pictures is located on the left side of the image's center, while the Zoom app's control panel and laptop controls are visible at the bottom. The color scheme showcases a dark grey interface for Zoom against a backdrop of green and red visuals for the game.

## **Ideational Metafunction**

The image possesses a mixed representational structure, combining elements of both partial static and partial narrative. It is partially static due to the students displaying profile pictures rather than live cameras, which makes it challenging to confirm their participation in the activity. Concurrently, the narrative aspect stems from the teacher's live presence, captured in the act of smiling, suggesting her engagement in explaining the game. Among multiple Representational Processes (RPs), only one is actively involved in the "Action" process of smiling and addressing the camera. The introduction game serves as the "Goal," encompassing a variety of questions for students, divided by white dotted lines. The students' intention is to "Aim at" playing the game to better acquaint themselves with their peers. The vector is realized through the teacher's gaze directed towards the camera.

## **Interpersonal Metafunction**

The image serves as a "Demand" for viewers. The vector emerges from the teacher's gaze directed at the audience through the camera, reflecting their connection with the viewers or IPs. The RPs, in this case, the students, present themselves as subjects for inspection, even though their live participation is not visible due to virtual settings. These students symbolize optimism, direction, progress, and enthusiasm. The "Wide shot" frame size captures the entire Zoom class engaged in the game. RPs are placed at a "Far Social Distance" from the IPs, suggesting a limited level of intimacy between the two groups. The "Medium Frontal angle" implies a direct approach, indicating the attachment of RPs to the IPs' world. On the vertical plane, the image is captured at eye level, signifying an equitable power relationship between RPs and IPs.

## **Textual Metafunction**

The "Given" aspect of the image pertains to the student holding the USA flag on the left side. This student is introduced as a familiar element, given that English Works! is sponsored by the US Consulate, US Department of States. The "New" element is embodied by the student on the right, holding the Pakistani flag, symbolizing Pakistani students' new journey towards success and skill exploration through the program. The "Ideal" component is represented by the decorative ceiling at the upper side, conveying the notion that hard work can lead to achieving goals. The golden vertical rays on the stage signify glamour, generosity, and compassion, mirroring the core themes of English Works! The image-producer provides a glimpse of students' journey towards achievements.



Figure 3 English Works! Faisalabad is inviting you to be the part of 'Virtual Thanksgiving Evening'.

### Description

This image originates from the EnglishWorks! Facebook page, featuring an event poster. The poster advertises a forthcoming event titled "Please Join us for a Thanks Giving Evening EnglishWorks! Faisalabad." The theme of the event is "Pumpkin," and it is scheduled for November 25, 2021, from 3 PM to 5 PM. The background is adorned with pumpkin and corn visuals, with the color scheme primarily utilizing brown and orange hues. The backdrop features a wooden wall-like texture illuminated by yellow and golden lights, further enhancing the visual.

### Ideational Metafunction

The image's visual representation structure is "conceptual," with a focus on the event description accompanied by pumpkin images but without any actors. The image establishes a connection between represented participants and interactive participants through a part-whole structure, resulting in an analytical process. This analytical process involves two participant types: the carrier (whole), represented by the event description on the right side of the frame, and the possessive attributes (parts), encompassing the background vegetables, lighting, and the cover invitation lines. A strong contrast between light and dark pervades the image, enhancing its impact. The event description is sharply focused, marked by high contrast between brightness and shadow, which creates a division between the image's margins and center, yielding a light-dark effect.

### Interpersonal Metafunction

The poster is designed to openly invite students, extending the event's reach to a wider audience for virtual celebration. This expansion enables more students to partake in the festivities and experience the genuine spirit of Thanks Giving. Given that Thanksgiving emphasizes sharing and abundance, the event encourages the tradition of sharing with those in need and involving children in charitable contributions. This cultivates gratitude for one's blessings and imparts the significance of aiding others. The image assumes a subjective perspective, encouraging viewers to adopt a subjective attitude toward the virtual event celebration. The image adopts a "frontal angle" on a horizontal plane,

indicating the strong involvement of RPs with IPs, reinforcing the notion that this event is part of their world. On the vertical plane, the image is captured at a "mid shot," suggesting an equal power relationship between RPs and IPs.

### **Textual Metafunction**

The event description assumes a central position within the frame, serving as the core repository of information in the image. The description is intentionally separated from the pumpkin images to avoid any overlap, ensuring a clear and sizable pictorial representation for viewers. The "New" in the image pertains to the golden and other colored lights on the right side of the frame, while the "Given" aspect encompasses the background placement of pumpkins and corns. The invitation description employs bold white uppercase letters to instantly capture viewers' attention and arouse their interest in learning more about the event. The image achieves maximum salience as the event description with all pertinent information occupies the foreground. The invitation is sharply focused, marked by high contrast between brightness and shadow, which divides the image's left and right sides, culminating in a light-dark effect.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study investigates the strategic creation of Facebook posts with the aim of achieving commercial objectives, focusing particularly on the English Works! social media page. Through the utilization of a qualitative content analysis methodology, and drawing upon Kress and Leuwen's Theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, this research seeks to uncover the semiotic signs that are embedded within the images shared on the English Works! Facebook page. The outcomes of the analysis reveal that each individual image serves as a distinct sign, effectively communicating insights about the program's core identity, updates, events, and various activities to its target audience. Furthermore, the color palettes employed in these images play a pivotal role in shaping the program's overarching themes and messaging.

The study highlights the prevalence of symbols as the dominant category of signs, outweighing both icons and indexes in terms of usage frequency. Notably, the connotations infused within the Facebook posts predominantly revolve around key themes such as learning, unity, celebration, empowerment, success, and recognition. These connotations are intricately interwoven with the journey undertaken by EnglishWorks! students, thereby presenting a narrative of growth and achievement. This research holds significant value as it contributes to the realm of semiotics, offering a comprehensive understanding of how visual cues are strategically harnessed to construct meaning and effectively convey messages within the context of Facebook posts. The application of the systemic multimodal analysis approach proves to be an indispensable tool for unraveling the complex dynamics that underlie the processes of representation and communication through visual media.



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