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On the Issue of Reading Multimodal Texts

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On the Issue of Reading Multimodal Texts

ABSTRACT

Most of our reading practices have moved from print-based to online texts, which integrate not only linguistic expression but various images, sounds, other meaning making elements, therefore the reader's engagement with the text has changed as well. While reading multimodal texts, the reader has to construct the meaning out of different modes of representation. The complexity of such texts and the way the second language learners read and construct their meaning are important for educators. Thus, the article aims at revealing the readers' viewpoints of reading multimodal texts by evaluating language users' practices of reading print and online texts and determining their own participation and self-expression on social websites. The survey results demonstrated that readers mostly get news from online sources on the Internet, they also listen to the radio, and read the print version of news too. The research results confirmed that the text layout causes changes in reading habits and may raise difficulties in getting the main idea, grasping the meaning of images. While reading multimodal texts, the research participants prefer to stay passive and as social media users they remain not very active as well.

Keywords: *print, online, multimodal texts, reading, lexical density.*

Introduction

It is no longer possible to think of reading as only one's engagement with the printed text. Most of our texts have become a part of a multimodal ensemble of speech, sounds, images and moving elements on the screen, therefore while reading one has to make sense of various modes of meaning representation. As observed by G. Kress (as cited in Boshraadi & Biria, 2014, p. 368), for a postmodern reader to be able to understand and make meaning out of a text one needs not only to be able to read and interpret the traditional print-based texts, but also to be capable “of making meaning out of a variety of texts across traditional and new technologies.” Looking from the perspective of critical discourse analysis G. Bouvier and D.

Machin observe that content of texts disseminated on social media take new forms and move away from longer texts to shorter chunks that are integrated with forms of design, images, and data. Apart from adding more pictures, or changing the colouring of letters, creators of texts can challenge the reader's eyes by simply putting a text in a different order than one may expect. Additional feature of multimodal online texts are hyperlinks enabling a reader to move from one source to another within several seconds, thus turning reading into totally different experience (Bouvier & Machin, 2018, p. 178).

The research carried out by P. Abraham, M. Farías into multimodality and reading proves "how crucial it is to change our approach to reading so that it truly moves beyond the linguistic mode to include visual and other modes of constructing meaning" (Abraham & Farías, 2017, p.67). A similar approach to understanding reading is expressed by F. Serafini who claims that the text does not come to a reader in a ready-made mode, and the reader has to explore all the semiotic potential of the text and establish its relations with the text in order to interpret the meaning (Serafini, 2012, p.158). Besides, it should be noticed that people read texts differently. Some are likely to engage with the written elements of a text first, while others with the visual ones. It depends on readers' interests, preferences, habits, and especially the context or social purpose of reading, an educational task to be performed by the reader as well.

The complexity of multimodal texts and the way the second language learners read and construct their meaning are important for educators. As P. Abraham, M. Farías argue, teachers not only have to incorporate multimodal text reading into second language classrooms, but also to enhance learners' ability to critically evaluate those texts. The researchers encourage teachers to make a full use of the visuals accompanying texts and together with their students interrogate their function and the meaning they contribute to understanding of the multimodal texts (Abraham & Farías, 2017, pp. 60-61). Other scholars (Januarty & Nima, 2018) express a similar view by claiming that teachers themselves have to learn more about the elements of multimodal texts and reflect upon the ways it can influence the teaching learning process.

Thus, it is important for educators to have a broader understanding not only of the complexity, meaning making and critical evaluation of multimodal texts, but also the learners' views of multimodal text reading. This knowledge would be helpful for teachers to plan their curricular, to choose suitable reading strategies in order to enhance their learners critical appraisal of multimodal texts. Therefore, the *aim* of this paper is to identify language users and learners' viewpoints of multimodal text reading. To specify the aim, the following *objectives* have been raised:

1. To establish multimodal features of texts.
2. To find out their viewpoints of multimodal texts by evaluating language users' practices of reading print and online texts, and determining their own participation and self-expression on social websites.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Characteristics of a Multimodal Text

The term *multimodal* is presented in *Dictionary of Media Studies* (2006) with the definition of “using several different channels to access the same information, for example, cinema listings which are available in the press, by phone and on the Internet”. Multimodal texts are those texts having more than one ‘mode’, in this way meaning is shared through a “synchronisation of modes” (Walsh, 2006, p. 24). Modes can be realized in various ways, including written or spoken language, moving or still images, music and sound. Simultaneously, text designs can be arranged in different ways, for instance, it may be produced on electronic screen or on paper. At the same time, M. Anstey & G. Bull (2010) suggest a slightly different interpretation of what multimodal text is. As they argue, a multimodal text is such type of a text that combines two or more semiotic systems from five systems in total. Those systems, according to Anstey's and Bull, are:

1. Linguistic, that comprises the grammar of written or oral language, vocabulary, and generic structure;
2. Audio, including sound effects, volume, rhythm of music, and pitch;
3. Spatial, that consists of direction, position of layout, proximity;
4. Visual, comprising vectors, colour, and viewpoint in moving and still images;
5. Gestural, that includes speed and stillness in body language and facial expressions.

They also provide instances of multimodal texts, that include: a webpage, a picture book, and a live ballet performance. So multimodal texts can have specific vocabulary used, information presented in different font, as moving images on a webpage or various sound effects could be included, while in a ballet the main elements are space, music, and gesture through which the meaning is presented (Anstey & Bull, 2010, p.1). Another author, F. Serafini, argues that multimodal texts communicate meanings through the use of two sign systems; it is visual image and written language (Serafini, 2010, p. 85). Students these days encounter different types of multimodal texts provided in their educational environment that are provided in print and non-print forms. Multimodal texts in a print form include information

books, magazines, newspapers and picture books, while texts in a non-print form encompass videos, films, music and those texts through the electronic screen and combining graphic designs, like the internet, email, or hypertext. Also non-print multimodal texts involve digital media, for example, DVDs or CD-ROMs.

One more interpretation of multimodal texts is suggested by D. Barton and C. Lee, who claim that modes, which are also known as semiotic or communicative modes, in general, “refer to systems or resources that people draw upon for meaning making”. By saying that, they mean written language, image, gesture, sound, spoken language, etc. What they also add is that practices of applying different modes to create coherent and meaningful texts are not new, since multimodality has been a crucial strategy of meaning-making during the whole history of written language (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 29).

In understanding how different modes work together while forming texts, it could be discovered that images and texts are being combined in unique ways. According to L. Unsworth (as cited in Serafini, 2010, p. 86), “this shift from a linguistic focus to a multimodal one requires readers to navigate, design, interpret and analyse texts in new and more interactive ways”. As the result of change from the single mode of written language to multimodal texts, readers in today’s world must have new strategies and skills in order to construct a meaning in relation to multimodal texts.

In order to interpret meanings of graphic elements or visual images included in multimodal texts with success, readers have, as Serafini (2010, p. 87) states, to employ two elements: *visual literacy* and *perception*. *Visual literacy* is presented as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in any variety of form that engages the cognitive processing of a visual image” (Chauvin, 2003, as cited in Serafini, 2010, p. 87). It is a combination of psychological theories of perception together with the critical and socio-cultural aspects of social semiotics, visual design, and media studies. This means that before an image is interpreted in social contexts of its production, acceptance and, finally, dissemination, characteristics of the image have to be comprehended, handled and categorized by each individual personally. Moreover, Serafini proposes that in order to interpret the meaning of multimodal texts successfully the reader will need to refer to three interconnected perspectives, which include: perceptual, structural, and ideological. As he continues (Serafini 2010, pp. 88-92), perceptual analytical perspective focuses on “the literal or denotative contents of an image or series of images in a multimodal text, the elements of design, for example borders and front, and other visual and textual elements of these texts.” Meaning or interpretation of multimodal

texts is constructed in relation to the perception of the textual and visual elements existing in these texts. Before readers start interpreting the meaning of a text, they create a list of literal elements of an image or series of images used in a picturebook and apply this list to get the meaning. Structural analytical perspective deals with recognition of different relationships among various grammars or visual structures and with the meanings that are associated to them in an analysed culture. As to be able to read a multimodal text, there is a necessity to develop a metalanguage, or “language that describes language, such as the language of linguistics” according to *Dictionary of Media Studies* (Dictionary of Media Studies, 2006, p. 145). This language is used to notice, consider and interpret visual images. Finally, there is an ideological analytical perspective that follows this pattern of image analysis: in order to understand the design elements and images invented in multimodal texts readers have to consider not only aspects of production and reception, but also take into consideration the aspects of the image and the text itself (Serafini, 2010, p. 98). The analysis of an image consists of: interpretation of images through the recognition of conventions and the codes applied in the production of visual images, and consideration of socio-cultural contexts of production and reception together with examination of the image itself.

Luginbühl asserts that analysis of multimodal texts concentrates less on language online, but on such aspects as colouring, typography, or even bars or colour patches also are significant elements “as far as verbal texts are concerned” (Luginbühl, 2015, p. 17). From the perspective of Serafini, broadening our knowledge by the methods and perspectives related to the interpretation of multimodal texts enhances the reader’s visual and literary experience as well as it challenges the reader to discover personal interpretation of messages presented in multimodal texts or visual images (Serafini, 2010). Reading as such is no longer causing the reader’s interest in analysing verbal material, as he/she expects to learn more about the other modes of representation and communication that are available on the screen. This could be explained by the results of J. Coiro and E. Dobler’ research (as cited in Boshwabadi & Biria, 2014, p. 368) that has shown that despite being necessary for meaning making, reading processes of print-based text is not sufficient to interpret texts complemented by graphic elements, sound effects or visual images. What it makes reading of a multimodal text so appealing to those who are becoming dependent on the Internet, could be noticed by comparing it with the reading process of print-based texts.

1.2. Comparison Between Print-based and Multimodal Texts

Reading print-based texts, according to Walsh, “involves different levels of decoding, responding and comprehending at affective and cognitive levels, critiquing and analysing” (Walsh, 2006, p. 25). The process of reading is not fixed, it is a regular interaction between the reader and the text. As Walsh indicates, the process of interaction is possible to occur within several contexts at the same time: it is the socio-cultural context of text production, the cultural or social context of the individual reader, the genre or purpose of text itself or even the purpose and interest of the reader that have impact. This interaction does not occur without the decoding process that involves the usage of different strategies of pronunciation, vocabulary knowledge, and word recognition, together with the recognition of phonemic, morphemic and graphic patterns (Walsh, 2006, p. 25). A reader, as the researcher Walsh claims, has to identify different discourses used in text, visualise, imagine the meaning carried, and understand what ideologies are presented by the author, as from the words of a text a person will not find answers to all questions (Walsh, 2006, p. 25).. Walsh goes on further arguing that while critical approach to reading is applied in the analysis of print texts, a reader of the multimodal texts, such as information book or a picture book, also needs to interpret the message carried through the text in the words, pictures, graphics and images (Walsh, 2006, p. 26). According to Kress and T. van Leeuwen, “written text is only one part of the message, and no longer the dominant part.” Kress and T. van Leeuwen (1996, 2001, as cited in Walsh, 2006, p. 26). The growing dominance of multimodal texts and digital technology requires different ways of thinking, forming ideas in one’s mind and making meaning out of a text.

Walsh observes that, for instance, in a multimodal text, in comparison with print-based texts, the reader will use different senses, like hearing, tactile, or sight, to respond to other modes in meaning making process (Walsh, 2006, p. 34). Barton and Lee argue, that in print-based materials, for instance, newspapers, advertisements, and magazines, the way the viewers interpret the verbal message is shaped by the design of the visual, or it can be the other way round (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 29-30). For instance, a text that is printed in "bookman old style" is considered to be more formal than a text printed in "Comic sans ms", the use of different colours could also change the way the verbal context is interpreted. In general, how meaning from traditional printing will be taken by the reader could be affected by the layout of different items on a page.

The reading of words and images could be also compared by looking at differences as presented by Walsh:

<i>Reading a print-based text</i>	<i>Reading a picture</i>
The reader has to ‘decode the words’ and get the meaning of a text from the printed material	In order to interpret meaning from images readers have to be able to ‘break the visual codes’, it means to identify where the producer of the image is using shape, angle, colour, position and other means for the construction of meaning
There is an interpersonal exchange noticeable between the narrator and the reader, and it is conveyed through the use of the dialogue and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person narrator	Interaction between the reader and a text is different, due to the usage of images and the ways images communicate with words. Normally, an image just fills the page and is there at once, if readers understand everything or notice all the details remains as questions
The author of fiction may often use intertextual references, either referring to other author’s ideas, searching meanings of words in other context, or looking for different reference, such as looking at mythology	No intertextual meanings are used
All the meaning of a text is communicated through the grammar of the text, or the choice of words and different ways in which words are arranged	Responses of the meaning occurs to the reader by the effects of visual codes, including framing, lines, perspective, colours, in other words it is known as the ‘visual grammar’
The reader, in order to fully appreciate the meaning, has to be reading in different levels, including symbolic, social and interpersonal	The effects that images produce are different from the effects a word produces. Mainly, ‘reading’ a picture requires to apply aesthetic, imaginative, and affective levels of interpretation

Walsh, 2006, p. 26-35.

In general, an essential aspect of reading multimodal texts is the capacity to integrate information from different modes of presentation. Although the process of meaning-making itself may take place in similar ways for printed-based and multimodal texts, the ‘processing’ of modes is different. Readers have to apply distinctive coding system or levels of

interpretation, pay attention to the grammar or to the effects in order to get the meaning when examining the print or multimodal texts.

2. Research Design: instrument and sample of the research

A survey was conducted to evaluate language users' practices of reading printed and online texts, to find out their viewpoints of multimodal text and to investigate their own participation and self-expression in social websites. The research tool was an original *questionnaire* that consisted of *four main* parts containing 15 questions. The questionnaire was created online by using drafts for polls published in www.pollmill.com. *The first part* of the survey contained *demographic questions* to evaluate research participants' profiles. It should be mentioned, however, that there was one limitation observed. Although 103 people in general participated in this survey, the results of 85 interviewees were overviewed as their level of the English language was B2, C1 or C2, as this survey's aim was to discover how native or advanced English language speakers value their participation in the processes of reading, understanding, interpreting and producing multimodal texts. The level of the English language was estimated by the research participants themselves according to Common European Framework for Languages (https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf). *The second part* of the questionnaire included three questions about *reading preferences of language users*, what source they choose to be updated with news, what, online or printed version, they prefer more. A *qualitative research method* was implemented as the survey included an open question to provide reasons why reading either a printed or an online text is more preferable. It should be pointed out that even though language users of B2, C1 or C2 English language level were being scrutinised, their answers were provided in the original without any corrections being made. *The third part* of the questionnaire consisted of 5 questions about *multimodal texts*, for instance, what attracts readers' attention while looking at a multimodal text, if the layout has any impact on interpreting the meaning of a text or no and other issues. In *the last part* of the survey the readers' *social behaviour* was evaluated, looking at how often and by what means they express themselves in social websites. *Quantitative and qualitative research methods* were applied analysing the survey results.

The research instrument, i.e. the questionnaire was based on Barton and Lee's work on technology related with changes in communication and in technological affordances with information being placed from page to screen, the interpretation of verbal messages being formed by visual means, reading and ways of creation of a text in Web 2.0 spaces (Barton &

Lee, 2013). Reference was also made to a research carried out by Z. Mažuolienė and R. Kriaučiūnienė that introduced changes in reading practices of students of the New Generation, factors of distracting the reader's attention while reading online texts, and the insights into the ways specific professional texts should be analysed in order to get the main idea (Mažuolienė & Kriaučiūnienė, 2016). When describing research participants' answers about their interpretation of the given images, a reference was made to Serafini's ideas about the interpretation and description of the meaning of multimodal texts (Serafini, 2010).

In order to discover what language users read more often, how they value multimodal practices and what choices for expressing themselves they make a questionnaire of 15 items was offered in an online mode on social media Facebook platform. This study is limited to the number of participants who were willing to participate in the research. There were 85 participants who managed to fully answer all the survey questions and their answers were considered to be valid for further analysis. Out of 85 research participants 22 were males, and 63 females. The majority of the respondents who took part in the research were students (50), the second group of the interviewees were university graduates (3 years and more after the completion of their studies) (19), and the minority of the respondents (11) were recent graduates and a few (5) who did not have a university degree at all.

3. Empirical Research Data Analysis:

3.1. Evaluation of multimodal texts from the readers' perspective

This section presents the results of the survey of readers viewpoints of printed and online texts, since in the multimodal environment of new technologies the process of reading is totally reshaped. Kress (as cited in Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 2) observes technology-related changes in contemporary life and recognizes four simultaneous change processes, including: communicational changes, where a shift from writing to image, as the dominant way of communication, is noticeable, when image modifies the logic of communicative practices; changes in social power relations, when existing settled hierarchies are being abolished and new ones are being remade; changes in technological affordances, with a transformation in media from verbal information on page to screen; and changing economic structure, when writing is taking up distinctive roles in an economy, in which information plays an important role. Not only is the process of reading being transformed by new technologies, but also the creation of a text has been reformed. Barton and Lee argue that many print-based media channels (including websites) contain multimodal texts that are rather static and are mainly

produced by a single author (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 30). By contrast, in Web 2.0 media users are able to co-create and constantly edit multimodal content with multiple other users at the same time. Web 2.0, according to Barton and Lee, is “web-based applications that allow users to create and publish their own content online” (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 9). The researchers draw attention to the fact that the concurrence of writing spaces in new social media (like Facebook and Twitter) provide users with the opportunities to connect with each other by creating, posting, and sharing of multimodal content, for instance, to share a video from YouTube and post it on Facebook together with a self-generated written description about it (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 30). In spite of all the possibilities that user-generated multimodal resources provide, Barton and Lee argue that “the written word still plays a central role in meaning make on these new sites” (Barton & Lee argue, 2013, p. 30), as even photographs are being discussed by people through written comments. In general, public opinions about communication online are being formed by viewing multimodal content.

As it has been mentioned, the research aimed at finding out what language users’ preferences of reading are. Figure 1 below shows the research participants' answers where they get the news from.

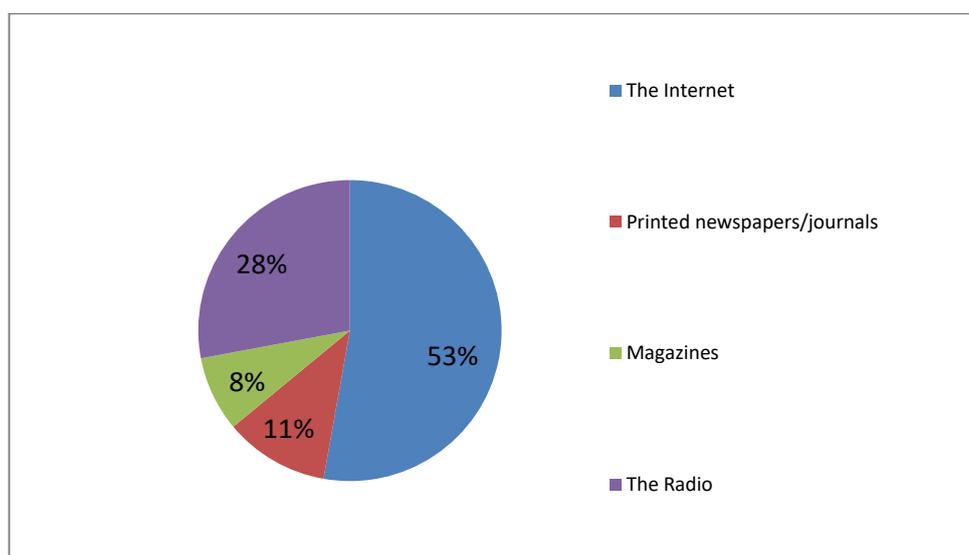


Figure 1. News sources the respondents get information from.

It can be noticed that getting news from the Internet distinctly prevails, since all the respondents (85) have chosen this option. As Mažuolienė and Kriaučiūnienė claim, because of the increasing number of digital texts, students of the New Generation read mainly screen-based texts (Mažuolienė & Kriaučiūnienė claim, 2016, p. 2). This could be presumably applied not only to students, but to everyone using the Internet, since rapid development of information

technology influenced language users' reading preferences. The choice to read news online rather than in printed version could be explained by "the decrease in time in which the text is read" (Mažuolienė & Kriauciūnienė, 2016, p. 2), that is caused by people's tendency to search for key words in the text so as to get the main idea faster. Also, loop-reading manner is becoming more popular, when it is possible to move from one page to another, so in case a person is willing to get more information just after finishing to read some article, he/she can easily google it and find more websites providing news-related articles. It could be presumed that selective reading makes it easier for the reader to manage with the immense amount of information available online. The survey revealed that listening to news on the radio is another popular trend nowadays as nearly a half of the research participants (45) acknowledge that they listen to news when they are driving a car, so in case there is no time to read news, a person can be updated on the current affairs while being on the road.

Although printed material seems to be not such a popular source for news (with 18 people reading news from printed newspapers/journals and 13 people reading magazines respectively), another question about reading preferences has revealed different tendencies. The respondents were asked whether they prefer to read a text online or to read printed material in general. The research results found were similar to I. Darginavičienė and A. Janulienė's observation that even though the popularity of digital texts for the studies is increasing, students prefer studying from printed material more rather than reading information online (Darginavičienė & A. Janulienė, 2015, pp. 252-253). Almost a third of the respondents (31) prefer analysing a printed text instead of scrolling the text and reading quickly and less deeply the material on the screen. The most common reasons of this choice were presented in the next question, including:

- "My eyes get tired after reading online for a while";
- "For me, it is more comfortable to read printed texts because I can easily mark something or take it with me wherever I want to";
- "I prefer reading printed text because my eyes don't get tired as quickly while reading online and sometimes it is better to concentrate while reading printed text".

The analysis of the research results revealed that 30 respondents were undecided about their reading preferences by choosing the option "doesn't matter". For instance, there were some reasons provided when the respondents tend to choose one or another type of reading:

- "Printed text is easier for my eyes while reading and it feels nice to hold a paper book in general, but online text is better when I'm on move or have to search for particular info in the text quickly";

- “It depends. If it’s a book, then reading printed text, but if it’s some sort of article, then definitely online - it’s easier to find similar articles and read more on that issue“;
- “Printed text is better for my eyes but text online is easier to carry with me all the time“.

The respondents' answers suggest that reading printed texts requires more time, it is a much safer method of reading for eyes and provides a possibility to make notes close to the text, so for the learning process using this method is more beneficial, as learners can also study the material given without being distracted. Despite these reasons, reading the same text online is more convenient when you are on the move. As 24 interviewees maintain the view that this reading method is more easily accessible, it is a cheaper and faster way for staying updated. Although over a third of the respondents (41) provided reasons explaining their choice of preference, nearly the same number of people did not provide any additional comments (44 respondents).

The other objective of the survey was to establish how the respondents value multimodal practices. Firstly, the research participants were provided with two sentences that differed in font size and were asked to choose which of the two looked more formal visually:

- 1) Russia intervened in the US presidential election to help Donald Trump, according to CIA officials who briefed American newspapers last night.
- 2) Russia intervened in the US presidential election to help Donald Trump, according to CIA officials who briefed American newspapers last night.

By this question, Barton and Lee’s theory was checked in practice. As the authors argue, the verbal message in newspapers could be interpreted differently because of the design of the visuals or it can be that verbal context affects how visual representation of a text should be interpreted (Barton & Lee. 2013, pp. 29-30). The respondents’ answers to this question revealed that the theory was proved, since the majority of the respondents (79) chose the second sentence that is printed in “bookman old style“ and is considered to be more formal, while the minority (6 respondents) decided that the first sentence, printed in “Comic sans ms“, should be more formal. In general, as T. Slavin explains “Comic sans” font is “non-threatening and their presentation, sign, or document also is meant to be non-threatening, less formal, and not cold”, whereas “bookman old style” is one of the examples of professional font types

(Slavin, 2015). Blogger C. Brandt notices that “Comic sans” uses “a single-story lower-case *a* and simple lower-case *g* rather than letter-press versions of these letters, in theory allowing early readers to decode text more easily” (Brandt, 2013).

By the next question the readers' recognition of important information in the text by more graphic patterns was overviewed. These included: modifications of font (*italics*, **boldface**) and changes in font size. The respondents were asked what attracted their attention in the sentence below, with a given possibility to choose several answers: "*Donald Trump*, the president-**elect**, meets leaders of the intelligence community for an update regarding allegations of Russian hacking of the US presidential election." The results of the respondents answers are provided in Figure 2 below.

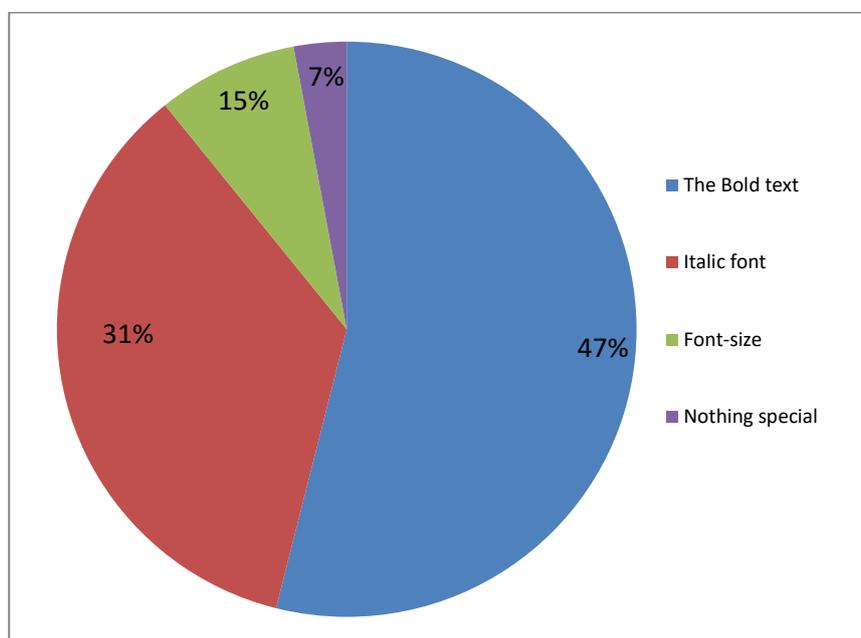


Figure 2. Respondents' recognition of techniques of introducing important details in political articles.

The results of the respondents' answers presented above permit to claim that the most attractive methods for the emphasis of some information reading front-page news seemed to be different font styles- boldface and italics. Bold letters, the option chosen by the majority (55 of the respondents), stand out from a regular text and are usually applied to highlighted keywords that are important to the text content. As it is explained by L. Trask in his Guide to Punctuation online, boldface letters are “used to provide very strong emphasis, as an alternative to italics” (Trask, 1997). Another way to introduce important details is by the use of letters in italics font that was chosen by 36 respondents. Slanted letters, according to Trask, are used for representing contrast or emphasis and do not have much effect on changes in text colours. Font-

size was the least popular means for a text to seem attractive to be analysed (chosen by 8 respondents).

Not only it is important to analyze what details of multimodal text attract the reader's attention, but also to determine whether those details help to understand the text better or otherwise it diverts people's attention away from getting the main idea. The respondents were provided with a question to see whether they find themselves distracted by additional elements in the text, like hyperlinks, video clips or links to similar articles appearing close to the text, or not. The respondents' answers to this question are provided in Figure 3 below.

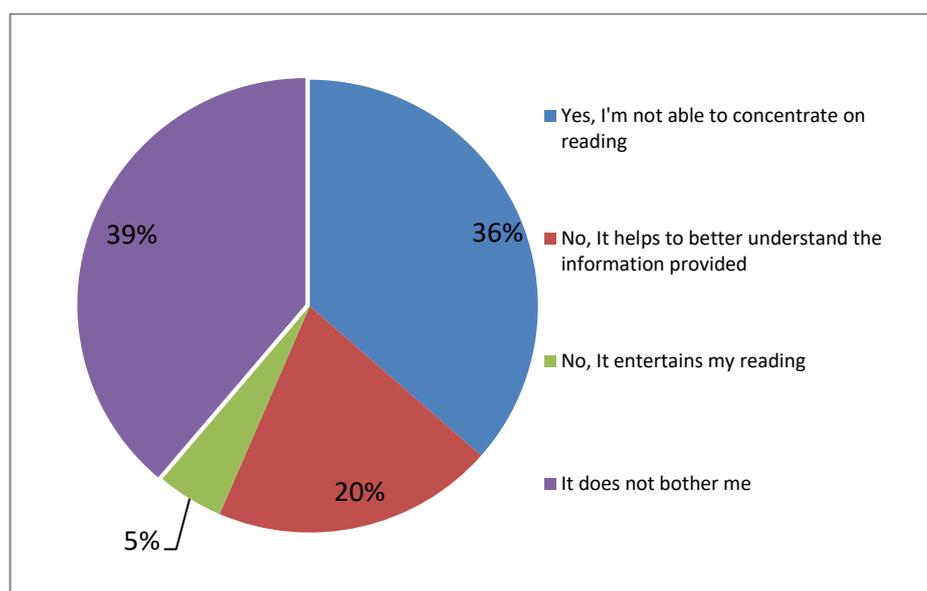


Figure 3. The respondents' answers to the question if they find themselves distracted by additional details and hyperlinks while reading

This question was directed towards analysing online versions of texts. In general, as Mažuolienė and Kriaučiūnienė noticed, “readers spend more time searching and browsing than actually reading deeply and with the necessary attention” (Mažuolienė & Kriaučiūnienė, 2016, p. 2). This is caused by a wide-ranging network of articles and other topics that are offered to read while reading something online (S. Birkerts, 1996, as cited in Mažuolienė & Kriaučiūnienė, 2016, p. 2). Almost a third of the research participants (31 respondents) replied that additional information added to the main text distracts their attention and they cannot concentrate to finish reading the first source. Nearly the same number (33 of the respondents) claimed quite the opposite - additional details to the text do not bother them. 17 respondents see additional details as being helpful to better understand the information provided and the minority (4 respondents) find hyperlinks entertaining their reading.

The respondents' viewpoints of a better realization of a text was also analysed from the perspective of the text layout. The research participants were asked whether the way in which information is arranged on a page could affect how they interpret the main idea of a text or not. Figure 4 below demonstrates the respondents' answers.

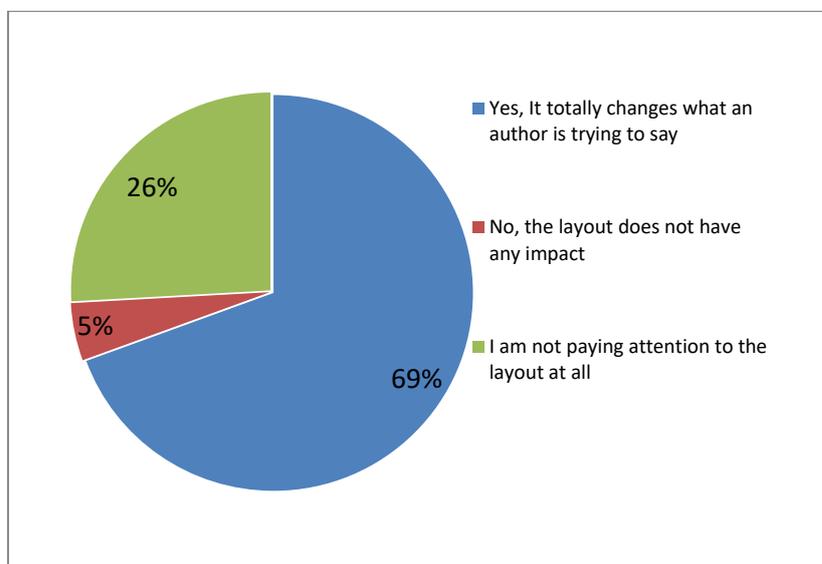


Figure 4. The respondents' views on the effect of the layout of texts on the reading process.

From the data presented in Figure 4 above it seems obvious that for the majority of the respondents (59) text layout creates difficulties to get the idea the author is trying to convey by the text but here another issue could be also raised. It is about the starting point of reading. As Barton and Lee observe about online versions of texts (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 30), "although the layout of different writing spaces is often predetermined by the site designer (online writer), when reading through a web page, different viewers can have different starting points." For instance, in a video-sharing website Youtube someone might choose firstly to watch a video, while at the same time other users might be willing to read comments first before watching the video. The same practice could be applied while reading an article online, as for one reader a text may be more important, but for another may be looking for comments' section first as to read others' opinion about the issue discussed in the text would be a priority. Following these different and at the same time individual reading paths, readers may interpret the meaning of the text differently. There is also another group of the respondents (22) who do not pay attention to the presentation of ideas and they simply read the given information. Very few respondents (4) think that the layout of the text does not have any impact on how they perceive the material while reading.

To successfully interact with and make sense of pictures included in multimodal texts, G. Aiello believes that “it is necessary to account not only for their cultural norms, but also for their perceptual qualities” (G. Aiello, 2006, pp. 89-90, as cited in Serafini, 2010, p. 86). How background of an image changes its interpretation is demonstrated by the respondents’ answers to the next question. The respondents were provided with the picture of the president Donald Trump, taken from an article explaining the issue in greater details, and were asked to choose from 3 opinions of the interpretation of a picture below or write their own answer explaining the main idea that an author is trying to convey.



Figure 5. “Donald Trump attained a perfect score on a test designed to detect cognitive impairment”, The Sunday Times, January 18 2018.

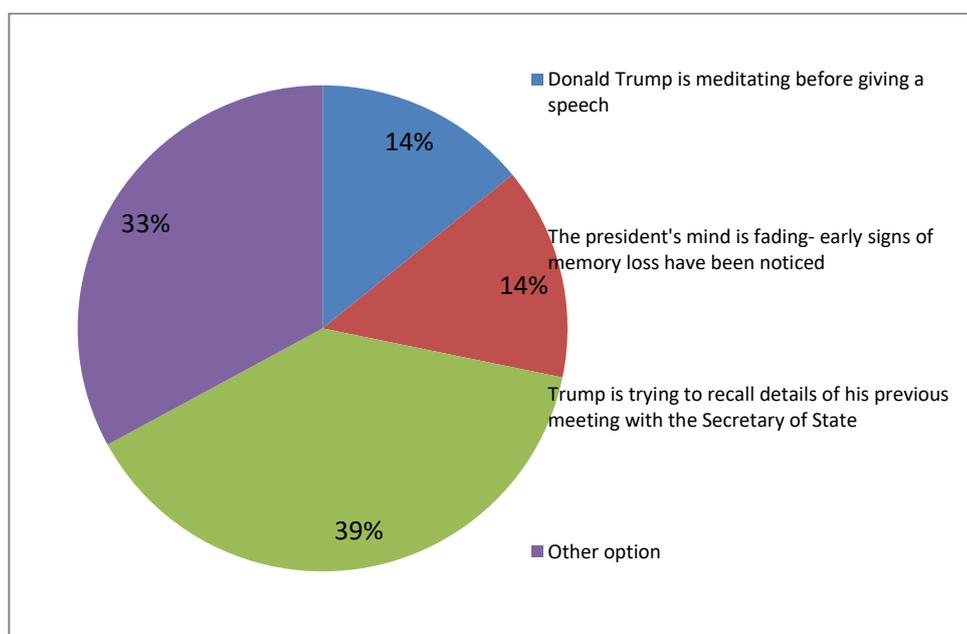


Figure 6. The respondents views on getting the main idea of the picture.

The picture above is taken from the article describing Donald Trump’s cognitive test results. As it is introduced in the article online (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/are-donald->

trumps-test-results-fake-news-xxzgm6zxf), although president of the United States passed the test designed to detect cognitive impairments and to reveal early signs of memory loss, a group of U.S. psychiatrists feels unsure about the president's mental health. This answer was chosen by the minority of the research participants (12 respondents) and was the least popular answer together with another idea that in this picture Donald Trump is meditating before his speech that was selected by another 12 respondents. In this picture the meaning is being conducted by facial expression of the president looking a bit worried but at the same time being away from the outside environment to focus his mind in silence with his eyes closed, also by his fingers' position, as he touches his temples. It could be agreed that his fingers' position caused the most popular answer among the respondents that it was Donald Trump's intentions to recall details of his previous meeting with the colleague from the U.S. state government (chosen by over the third of interviewees (33). Moreover, 28 research participants expressed their own answer about this picture. These answers included, for instance: <Trump is trying to pick up a conversation from across the street. To no avail unfortunately>; <playing tricks with cameramen and electors, pretending how hard he is thinking/working>; <Donald Trump is scratching itchy skin>; <Donald Trump is rubbing his face>; <President is enjoying his presence>. As it can be seen from individual answers, Donald Trump's finger position plays an important role forming the main idea of this picture. This time an assumption could be made that the readers decide to count visual details more rather than analysing social context of the picture in order to understand it.

The last group of questions was related with readers' behaviour in social networks. To see how the research participants express themselves while reading a multimodal text, they were asked if they only read a text or if they take part in writing comments. The majority of the respondents (72) found themselves to be passive readers who simply do some reading and close it afterwards with no further comment. Contrary to the expectations that a multimodal text acts as an alternative for language users to become more socially active and be able to participate in the news' creation process, only 8 acknowledged to leave a comment after some reading, or engage in a discussion, or share the same article in their social media account together with a self-generated description about it. The answers to the next question presented in Figure 7 below show how often the respondents read and/or write comments.

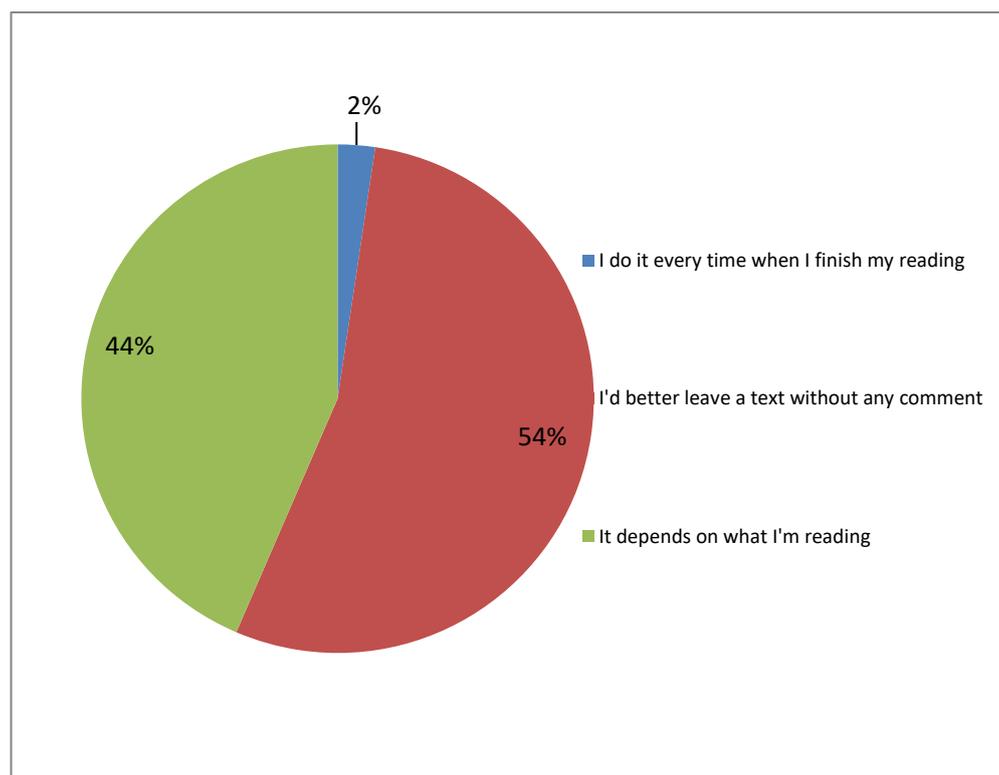


Figure 7. The respondents' views on writing and/or reading comments of while reading a text online.

According to Barton & Lee, Web 2.0 spaces share one more important feature, that is commenting systems. It could be found, for example, on *Youtube*, where people interact with each other by leaving comments with one's personal opinion after each other's uploaded content. As the authors agree (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 10), "Commenting is an important act of positioning oneself and others." From the data presented in Figure 7 it seems evident that more than half of the research participants (46 respondents) find themselves to be passive readers not interested in sharing their opinion after reading online. However, over the third (37 respondents) believe that their attitude towards participation in the commentary changes depending on the topic of an article. Usually the research participants are willing to join in the discussion about the topic they care about to know more details from different perspectives. Very few of them (2 respondents) take part in the discussion every time when they finish reading some online articles.

After analysing whether language users are socially active or passive readers and how often they engage in discussions online, the last question was given to see what means are used by the respondents to express themselves in social media.

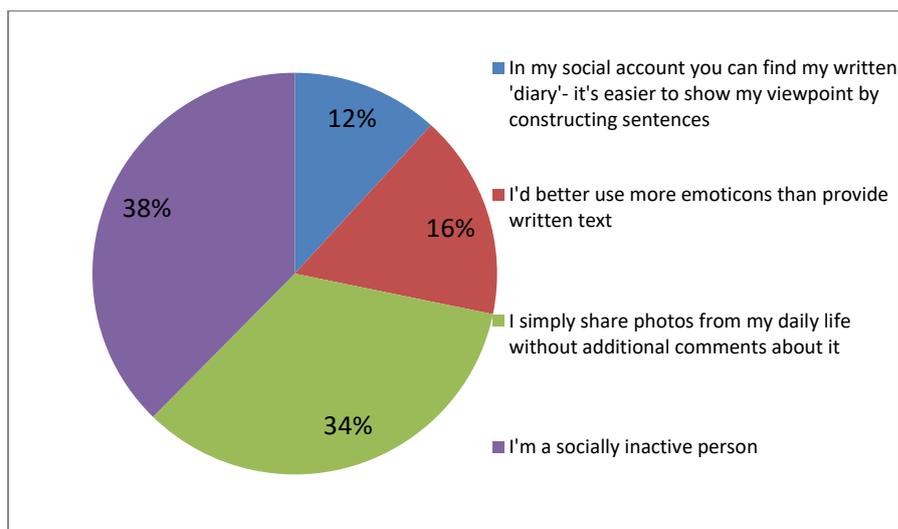


Figure 8. The way the respondents express themselves in their social media accounts.

On the whole, the empirical research data presented in Figure 8 demonstrate that the respondents are quite active but in different ways: they read a text online without leaving any comment showing their opinion about it, neither they are interested to make themselves public by sharing moments from their daily life with others. Although there are 32 respondents who are more passive in social media, this number is close to one group of social media users whose social behaviour is determined by their photos (29 respondents). However, this sharing of pictures goes without verbal information about it, as they prefer modern methods of instantaneous communication. Another example of momentary communication online includes the usage of emoticons chosen by 14 respondents that are becoming more popular not only among youngsters, but also among older people too, as they find it to be an attractive way of showing their feelings. The least popular answer was provided by 10 people who chose to express themselves online by writing posts.

Conclusions

A questionnaire of 15 items was offered to 85 people to discover the tendencies of language users' reading habits, their evaluation of multimodal practices and how they express themselves online. The analysis of the empirical research into reading preferences revealed that language users mostly get news from the online sources on the Internet as it is faster, easier, also because of Web information being presented in a more attractive way, and in different forms, such as videos or photographs. Apart from the Internet, listening to news on the radio is also one of the predominant choices. Although printed material seems to be a less popular source for news, but, in general, a nearly a third of the respondents prefer reading printed texts

(31). Reading a printed text is safer for eyes, a reader can also make notes close to a text; whereas online reading is more convenient while travelling. Answers to the questions about multimodal texts have shown that the design of visuals may change the way verbal material is interpreted; also verbal texts have an impact on the readers' evaluation of visuals. To get the reader's attention different font styles are the most effective, especially letters written in a **bold** style. Apart from the visual side, multimodal texts are known for additional links included in the text. For the third of the respondents (33 people) they do not have any influence on their reading. Since this part of questions overviews the realization of the text from multimodal perspective, it has been confirmed that the text layout causes changes in reading habits and difficulties in getting the main idea, to grasp the meaning of images, there is a necessity to pay attention not only to the presentation of objects, but also to the socio-cultural context of the image. The last group of questions about social behaviour revealed that the respondents of this survey are more socially inactive people who determine themselves as passive readers since they simply read a text online without leaving any comment showing their opinion about it, neither they are interested to make themselves public by sharing moments from their daily life with others. If social media users are willing to be active, the best way for showing themselves is to share photos but without verbal information about it, as these days modern methods of instantaneous communication are becoming more popular.

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