

THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MULTIMODAL TEXTS ON CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH SYNTAX AND PRAGMATICS

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Abstract: This article investigates the influence of digital multimodal texts on the syntax and pragmatic functions of contemporary English. With the growing presence of computer-mediated communication platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, language use in digital spaces increasingly departs from conventional norms. The study examines how syntactic structures and pragmatic strategies adapt to the multimodal nature of digital texts, combining words, emojis, images, and audio-visual elements. By analyzing a corpus of 500 multimodal texts collected from various social media platforms, this research identifies emerging syntactic patterns such as ellipsis, fragmented clauses, and creative punctuation, alongside pragmatic innovations like the use of emojis and hashtags for speech acts and meaning enhancement. The findings suggest that digital multimodal texts are reshaping contemporary English by simplifying syntactic structures while enriching pragmatic functions. The paper discusses the implications for both the study of modern English and the teaching of syntax and pragmatics in EFL contexts.

Key words: Digital multimodal texts, contemporary English, syntax variation, pragmatics, computer-mediated communication, memes, social media discourse, emojis, online language change

Introduction: In recent years, the widespread use of digital communication platforms has given rise to new forms of language use, known as digital multimodal texts. These texts integrate verbal, visual, and auditory elements to convey meaning in dynamic, interactive, and often informal ways. Memes, tweets, social media captions, GIFs, and emoji-enhanced messages are examples of multimodal texts that dominate online communication. Such texts frequently deviate from traditional grammatical norms while establishing innovative pragmatic conventions. This article explores how these digital forms influence contemporary English syntax, including the increased use of sentence fragmentation, non-standard word orders, and ellipsis, as well as how pragmatic functions such as politeness, irony, and emphasis are realized through multimodal resources. The study aims to contribute to the growing field of digital linguistics by analyzing syntactic and pragmatic shifts in online English and considering the pedagogical implications for English language teaching.

Methodology: The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data collection with qualitative discourse analysis. A corpus of 500 digital multimodal texts was compiled from publicly available sources on Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit. The texts were selected based on their combination of written text with visual or audio-visual elements. The syntactic analysis focused on identifying non-standard structures

such as ellipsis, clause fragmentation, and altered word order. Pragmatic analysis examined the use of emojis, hashtags, GIFs, and memes in realizing speech acts, conveying emotions, and managing politeness strategies. Data were coded using a set of categories adapted from existing studies in computer-mediated communication (CMC) linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis. The findings were quantified to identify patterns and frequencies, while qualitative examples were examined to explore meaning-making strategies in context.

Findings: The analysis revealed a consistent pattern of syntactic simplification in digital multimodal texts. Common features included omission of subjects and auxiliary verbs, fragmented sentences functioning as independent utterances, and creative use of punctuation for emphasis. Pragmatically, emojis and memes emerged as tools for reinforcing or substituting speech acts such as compliments, apologies, and humor. Hashtags were frequently used as implicit commentaries or evaluative markers, while GIFs supported or replaced verbal responses in interactive exchanges. The results suggest that multimodal elements not only compensate for reduced syntactic complexity but also enhance pragmatic richness in digital communication.

Overview: This study situates itself within the broader field of digital linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis. By examining how digital texts reshape syntactic and pragmatic norms in contemporary English, it addresses a significant gap in the literature. While previous research has focused on either syntactic deviations or pragmatic strategies in isolation, this article investigates their interaction within multimodal texts, highlighting how meaning is collaboratively constructed across modes. The findings offer insights into the evolving nature of English in digital spaces and its implications for linguistic theory and pedagogy.

Materials: The primary data consisted of 500 multimodal texts collected from Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, and WhatsApp public groups. Selection criteria included texts containing written language combined with at least one additional modality (e.g. emoji, image, GIF, video caption). Examples ranged from humorous memes and viral tweets to conversational threads and interactive comments. The data represented a mix of native and non-native English speakers to reflect the global nature of digital English use. The study also consulted theoretical works on multimodality, computer-mediated communication, pragmatics, and syntax variation as secondary materials.

Results: The quantitative analysis showed that 72% of sampled texts employed syntactic ellipsis, while 63% featured fragmented or one-word clauses. Pragmatic markers like emojis appeared in 68% of texts, with hashtags functioning as implicit evaluative devices in 54% of cases. GIFs and memes served as substitutes for verbal reactions in 47% of dialogues analyzed. Qualitative analysis revealed that these features often collaborated to produce layered pragmatic meanings, such as irony, emphasis, or humor, compensating for the brevity and syntactic economy of digital communication.

Digital multimodal texts are communication forms that combine two or more modes of meaning — such as written language, images, audio, video, animations, and hyperlinks — within digital platforms. Examples include social media posts, blogs, online advertisements, digital magazines, and interactive websites. These texts rely on multiple semiotic resources

working together to create and convey meaning in ways that traditional, single-mode texts cannot.

In modern communication, digital multimodal texts have become pervasive due to the rapid growth of internet technologies and mobile devices. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) thrive on combining text with visuals, audio, and interactivity. News outlets, educational resources, and advertisements increasingly use videos, infographics, and interactive elements to engage diverse audiences. The integration of multimodal features enhances accessibility, emotional impact, and clarity, allowing information to be tailored to different cultural and linguistic contexts. As a result, multimodal communication shapes how people learn, interact, and share information globally.

In the digital era, multimodal texts refer to communicative products that combine multiple modes such as written language, images, sound, gestures, and spatial design within a single message. These texts are widespread across digital platforms, including websites, social media, video-sharing services, and online learning environments. Digital contexts offer new possibilities for combining modes interactively and dynamically, allowing users not only to consume but also to produce multimodal content. Examples include vlogs, memes, online advertisements, and educational videos. Unlike traditional print-based texts, digital multimodal texts often feature hyperlinks, animations, and audiovisual elements that shape meaning collaboratively. This transformation has redefined communication practices, emphasizing the importance of multimodal literacy in navigating and interpreting complex digital environments.

Multimodal communication involves the integration of two or more semiotic modes — such as linguistic, visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural — within a single communicative act. In digital contexts, this often means combining text, images, video, sound, and interactive elements to enhance meaning. Key features include interactivity, where audiences can engage with and influence content; simultaneity, where multiple modes operate together to create layered meanings; and adaptability, allowing content to be adjusted for various devices and audiences. Additionally, multimodal communication often relies on immediacy and emotional resonance through visual and auditory elements. Its effectiveness lies in the complementary relationship between modes, where each contributes to meaning-making in ways that text alone cannot achieve. As digital communication increasingly adopts multimodal forms, understanding these features becomes essential for effective interaction in contemporary media landscapes.

Contemporary English syntax reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of language in response to technological, cultural, and social changes. The rise of digital communication has introduced new syntactic patterns and constructions that challenge traditional grammatical norms. Innovations in word order, sentence structure, and clause formation are increasingly evident in online texts, particularly in informal contexts such as social media, messaging apps, and blogs. These environments prioritize brevity, immediacy, and personal voice, often resulting in simplified or fragmented syntax. While standard written English maintains conventional structures in formal contexts, digital multimodal texts foster syntactic flexibility, blending features of spoken and written discourse. As a result, contemporary English syntax is

marked by hybridity, where non-standard and innovative forms coexist with traditional structures in evolving digital spaces.

In digital communication, the distinction between standard and non-standard syntactic structures has become increasingly blurred. Standard syntax, governed by established grammatical conventions, remains prevalent in formal writing, academic discourse, and official communication. Conversely, non-standard syntactic forms — such as sentence fragments, ellipsis, unconventional punctuation, and creative word order — are widespread in computer-mediated environments. Users often manipulate syntax for emphasis, humor, or stylistic effect, creating novel constructions that reflect spoken interaction. For example, structures like “so. much. fun.” or “because reasons” subvert standard syntax for expressive or pragmatic purposes. This syntactic innovation is frequently supported by multimodal elements like emojis, GIFs, and hashtags, contributing to meaning beyond the words themselves. The coexistence of both standard and non-standard structures in digital multimodal texts exemplifies the ongoing syntactic diversification of contemporary English.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has transformed pragmatic practices, redefining how speakers manage meaning, politeness, humor, and emotional expression in digital contexts. Unlike face-to-face interaction, CMC lacks physical and paralinguistic cues, prompting users to develop alternative strategies to convey intentions and manage interpersonal relationships. Pragmatic functions such as requesting, suggesting, apologizing, and expressing emotions are often negotiated through textual devices and multimodal resources. The asynchronous and often informal nature of CMC encourages a pragmatic style that is direct, playful, and adaptive, reflecting the immediacy and flexibility of digital environments. Multimodal elements like images, emojis, and hyperlinks enhance pragmatic meanings, enabling users to signal irony, mitigate face-threatening acts, or create solidarity.

Digital discourse operates through distinctive pragmatic functions shaped by the multimodal and interactive nature of online communication. Messages are often brief and multifunctional, serving to inform, entertain, critique, or express emotion simultaneously. Digital genres such as tweets, memes, and story updates employ pragmatic strategies like irony, self-deprecation, and humor to engage audiences. Features such as tagging, hyperlinking, and comment threads create layered pragmatic interactions, allowing users to negotiate meaning collaboratively. Pragmatic markers — including discourse particles like “lol,” “idk,” and “tbh” — serve as cues for tone, stance, and relational management, adapting traditional conversational norms to digital spaces.

New pragmatic markers have emerged in CMC to supplement or replace traditional linguistic cues. Emojis, GIFs, and hashtags function as multimodal resources that convey emotion, sarcasm, emphasis, or social alignment. Emojis often serve as affective markers, softening criticism, signaling humor, or clarifying ambiguous messages. GIFs provide dynamic visual commentary, expressing complex reactions or reinforcing discourse functions like agreement and amusement. Hashtags, beyond categorization, function pragmatically to frame statements, indicate stance, or create in-group solidarity. These markers contribute to the economy and expressivity of digital texts, enabling users to navigate the reduced contextual cues of online environments while maintaining interpersonal nuance.

Existing research highlights the impact of digital communication on language variation and change, particularly in syntax and pragmatics. Studies have documented syntactic innovations such as elliptical constructions, run-on sentences, and spoken-like word order in online texts. Scholars like Crystal (2006) and Tagg (2015) emphasize how digital communication blurs boundaries between spoken and written forms, fostering hybrid styles. Pragmatic research has explored how users adapt politeness strategies, manage humor, and express emotions in CMC using textual and multimodal resources. While much attention has focused on individual markers like emojis or abbreviations, fewer studies have examined how these elements interact syntactically and pragmatically within fully multimodal digital texts. This gap is significant given the growing dominance of multimodal communication in daily digital interactions.

Despite considerable research on language in digital contexts, notable gaps remain in understanding how multimodal texts influence both syntax and pragmatics in combination. Existing studies often examine syntactic changes or pragmatic shifts in isolation, overlooking how multimodal resources shape syntactic choices and pragmatic meanings together. Furthermore, much of the current literature focuses on single-platform studies (e.g., Twitter or Instagram) or monomodal texts, neglecting the increasingly interconnected and multimodal nature of contemporary digital discourse. There is limited research on how emerging multimodal markers (emojis, GIFs, hashtags) affect syntactic coherence, clause structure, or pragmatic implicature in complex online texts. Additionally, the role of cultural and sociolinguistic variation in shaping multimodal syntactic-pragmatic practices across global English-speaking communities remains underexplored. Addressing these gaps would deepen our understanding of how digital multimodal texts drive language change, contribute to syntactic innovation, and redefine pragmatic conventions in contemporary English.

Excellent — let's develop a clear, well-structured 600-word theoretical framework section integrating these theories, explaining how they account for syntactic and pragmatic changes in digital multimodal texts. Here's a formal academic-style draft you can use in your article:

The study of how digital multimodal texts influence contemporary English syntax and pragmatics is grounded in several complementary linguistic theories. These frameworks offer insights into the ways communication has evolved in response to digital environments, highlighting how users adapt syntactic structures and pragmatic strategies in computer-mediated and multimodal contexts.

At the core of this study is **Multimodality Theory**, developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), which posits that communication is rarely monomodal; instead, meaning is constructed through the interplay of multiple semiotic resources, such as language, images, sound, spatial design, and gesture. In digital contexts, these modes converge dynamically, with written text, emojis, GIFs, videos, and hyperlinks working together to construct layered and contextually rich messages. According to Kress (2010), each mode possesses distinct affordances and limitations in representing meaning, and meaning-making in multimodal texts emerges through the combination and interaction of these modes.

This theory explains the increasing prevalence of non-standard syntactic structures in digital texts. Digital users often adapt syntax to accommodate or complement other semiotic

modes, employing elliptical sentences, fragmented clauses, and conversational structures that mirror spoken discourse. The interplay between modes reduces the communicative burden placed on syntax alone, enabling pragmatic functions to be conveyed visually or gesturally. As multimodal texts rely on the orchestration of various resources, syntactic rules become more flexible, reflecting the demands of brevity, immediacy, and emotional expression in online environments.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory provides a framework for understanding how digital platforms shape linguistic interaction. Early models, such as those proposed by Herring (1996) and Baron (2008), highlighted the distinctive features of CMC, including its asynchronous nature, reduced physical cues, and increased reliance on textual and visual symbols. These characteristics necessitate new pragmatic strategies and foster syntactic experimentation.

CMC theory explains why pragmatic markers like emojis, GIFs, and hashtags emerge to compensate for the lack of prosodic and paralinguistic cues in digital spaces. Additionally, it accounts for the development of new discourse conventions and speech genres within online communities, which prioritize informality, creativity, and multimodal engagement. From a syntactic perspective, CMC platforms encourage brevity and rapid message exchange, leading to the widespread use of simplified, abbreviated, and elliptical sentence structures. The theory supports the idea that these linguistic shifts are a functional response to the constraints and affordances of digital communication technologies.

Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), which outlines the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner, remains central in understanding pragmatic meaning in both spoken and digital discourse. In online contexts, however, the interpretation of implicature is heavily shaped by multimodal resources. Users frequently flout maxims for stylistic, humorous, or ironic effects, with the resulting meaning inferred through a combination of text and non-verbal cues, such as emojis or images.

For example, deliberately violating the maxim of quantity by replying “sure” to a lengthy request, accompanied by a sarcastic GIF, relies on multimodal implicature for interpretation. Gricean theory thus explains how digital interlocutors manage relevance, clarity, and sincerity through creative combinations of text and visual symbols, revealing a shift in pragmatic conventions shaped by multimodal environments. The theory underscores the importance of shared contextual knowledge and cultural conventions in interpreting meaning in contemporary digital texts.

Speech Act Theory, initially developed by Austin (1962) and extended by Searle (1969), examines how utterances perform actions such as requesting, apologizing, or promising. In digital multimodal communication, speech acts are frequently supplemented by visual and interactive elements. A digital apology, for example, may consist of a brief text message, an apologetic emoji, and a humorous GIF, collectively performing the illocutionary act of apologizing and mitigating potential face threats.

Digital environments also enable new forms of speech acts unique to online culture, such as “subtweeting” (indirect criticism) or “liking” as a performative act of approval or acknowledgment. The theory highlights how multimodal resources enhance the force and interpretation of speech acts in the absence of physical co-presence. It emphasizes how

meaning in digital multimodal texts arises not solely from linguistic content but from the coordinated deployment of multimodal cues.

These four theoretical perspectives — Multimodality Theory, CMC Theory, Grice’s Cooperative Principle, and Speech Act Theory — collectively provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the influence of digital multimodal texts on contemporary English syntax and pragmatics. They explain how digital environments foster syntactic flexibility, pragmatic innovation, and multimodal meaning-making practices that redefine traditional linguistic conventions in the 21st century.

Great — let’s clearly explain these syntactic features of contemporary English in digital texts in a structured, academic tone. Here’s a clarification of each point, forming a cohesive section you could use for your article:

Digital multimodal communication has fostered significant changes in English syntax, driven by the demands of brevity, immediacy, and expressivity. As language adapts to the affordances of computer-mediated environments, users frequently depart from standard syntactic conventions, employing creative and economical structures to convey meaning effectively. The following features characterize contemporary English syntax in digital texts:

A common syntactic change in digital discourse is the omission of sentence elements, particularly subjects, verbs, or objects. This practice mirrors informal spoken conversation and reflects a need for speed and brevity in digital exchanges. For example, messages like *“Coming now”*, *“Busy later”*, or *“Can’t talk”* omit the subject pronoun or auxiliary verbs while maintaining comprehensibility within context. This elliptical construction relies on shared situational knowledge between interlocutors, where omitted elements are easily inferred. Such structures are especially prevalent in text messaging, social media comments, and instant messaging platforms.

Ellipsis — the deliberate omission of redundant or predictable words — is widely used in digital texts to produce concise, informal statements. It often results in **sentence fragments** that function pragmatically as complete communicative acts. Examples include *“Sure thing”*, *“No way”*, *“Maybe tomorrow”*, or *“On my way”*. While these fragments would be considered incomplete in formal written English, in digital environments they convey meaning efficiently, especially when supported by contextual clues or accompanying multimodal elements like emojis or images. Fragmentation contributes to a conversational, informal style that blurs the line between written and spoken modes.

Another notable feature is **parataxis**, where clauses or phrases are placed side by side without coordinating conjunctions. This technique creates a rapid, punchy rhythm and adds rhetorical emphasis to digital discourse. Sentences such as *“Love. Hate. Repeat.”* or *“Work. Sleep. Repeat.”* omit conjunctions like “and” or “then,” producing a staccato effect that enhances emotional or dramatic impact. Paratactic structures are common in social media captions, advertising slogans, and memes, where brevity and emphasis are paramount. The simplicity of parataxis aligns well with the fast-paced, attention-driven nature of online communication.

Digital texts frequently feature non-standard word order to foreground key information or create stylistic effects. Writers manipulate syntax by placing adjectives, adverbs, or phrases in unusual positions to highlight emotions or attitudes. For instance, constructions like

“Amazing it was” or “This. Is. Everything.” prioritize emphasis over grammatical regularity. This flexibility reflects spoken emphasis patterns and allows users to creatively structure sentences for expressive impact. Non-standard word order often works in tandem with punctuation and visual cues to strengthen communicative intention. Digital communication has also transformed the use of punctuation and capitalization as syntactic devices. Writers repurpose periods, exclamation marks, and uppercase letters to control rhythm, tone, and emotional intensity. A widely recognized example is “WHAT. A. DAY.”, where periods inserted after each word create a dramatic, emphatic pacing. Similarly, all-caps text conveys shouting, excitement, or urgency. Unconventional punctuation functions as a paralinguistic marker, compensating for the absence of vocal tone and facial expressions. In digital multimodal texts, these devices work alongside images, emojis, and GIFs to enrich meaning and nuance. Together, these syntactic features illustrate how contemporary English in digital contexts prioritizes informality, immediacy, and expressive economy. Digital multimodal environments encourage language users to adapt and innovate syntactic structures, often blending spoken and written conventions to meet the communicative demands of online interaction.

Conclusion: Digital multimodal texts are actively shaping the syntax and pragmatics of contemporary English. The findings demonstrate a clear trend toward syntactic economy—through ellipsis, fragmentation, and non-standard structures—paired with pragmatic enrichment via multimodal resources. This dual process reflects the communicative priorities of digital discourse: immediacy, emotional expressiveness, and interactive engagement. The study contributes to understanding the linguistic dynamics of online communication and underscores the need to address digital language forms within language teaching and linguistic theory.

Recommendations: Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Linguistics curricula incorporate digital discourse analysis to reflect current language use.
2. EFL/ESL teaching materials include examples of multimodal texts to enhance pragmatic awareness and syntactic flexibility.
3. Future research should explore cross-cultural pragmatic norms in multimodal texts and the long-term impact of digital discourse on formal written English.
4. Development of corpus tools for multimodal data is encouraged to support systematic studies of language change in digital environments.

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