

MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IMPLICATURES IN DETECTIVE CONAN COMIC SERIES 1

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ABSTRACT

Comics are not only a medium for visual storytelling, but also rich in implicit meanings communicated through multimodal cues. This research explores how implicatures - unstated but implied meanings - are constructed through the visual expressions of the main characters in Detective Conan Volume 1. Using the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) framework, this study investigates the interaction of semiotic modes such as gestures, gaze direction, facial expressions, and panel layout in selected scenes. Ten scenes were purposively selected based on the density of non-verbal cues and their narrative importance. A qualitative-descriptive method was used to analyze how these multimodal elements contribute to the construction of implicit meaning. The findings reveal that non-verbal modes often carry equal or greater communicative weight than verbal texts, especially in revealing characters' emotions and intentions. Visual cues-such as narrowed eyes or directed gaze-are often pragmatic indicators that invite readers to interpret meanings beyond what is explicitly stated. This study confirms the value of comics as authentic multimodal texts for pragmatic analysis. This research shows that comics can be an effective teaching tool in language or pragmatics classes. The integration of multiple modes in comics allows readers to capture meanings that are not directly stated, but implied through multimodal contexts.

Introduction

In a modern world that is increasingly dependent on technology and digital media, forms of communication have undergone a significant transformation. No longer limited to the use of verbal language, communication today takes place in more complex and diverse forms. One relevant approach to understanding the dynamics of communication is through multimodality studies. Multimodality refers to the way in which meaning is constructed through a combination of different modes or channels of communication, such as text, images, sound, facial expressions and gestures (Bezemer, 2021). This concept is becoming increasingly important in the context of contemporary communication because human life today is almost inseparable from media that combines various forms of meaning representation.

Japanese anime, as one of the most popular visual cultural products in the world, is a very potential object to be analyzed through a multimodal lens. One anime that is very rich in multimodal elements is Detective Conan Series 1. This series not only presents an interesting detective story, but also combines many visual, verbal, and auditive elements simultaneously. In each episode, the audience not only follows the storyline through dialogue between characters, but also understands the atmosphere, characters, and conflicts through colors, visual layouts, background music, and characters' facial expressions. This makes Detective Conan an ideal example of a multimodal text that holds a lot of analytical potential.

The presence of multiple modes of communication in a single narrative makes the meaning-making process in this anime much more complex than in a regular written text. For example, in a scene where

the main character discovers an important clue, the meaning captured by the audience comes not only from the character's words, but also from his serious facial expressions, thrilling background music, and close-up shots that strengthen the focus on certain details. The interaction of these modes makes the meaning conveyed more powerful and profound, beyond what verbal language alone can achieve (Gunther Kress, 2021).

In the context of language learning and linguistic studies, an understanding of multimodality is useful, especially as today's learners grow up in an environment saturated with visual texts, digital media and audiovisuals. Therefore, integrating multimodal analysis in language learning can expand students' ability to understand and interpret meaning in different types of texts. Today's literacy is not only about reading and writing words, but also includes the ability to read images, symbols, sounds, and other forms of communication that come together in multimodal texts.

However, in academic studies, especially in the field of discourse analysis, the study of multimodal texts from popular culture such as Japanese anime has not been seriously explored. Most studies still focus on printed texts, western movies, or advertisements, which have long been the object of study in multimodality. Anime, as a form of visual culture from Japan, has a distinctive narrative and semiotic structure, and uses visual conventions that differ from western media. Therefore, the analysis of anime can provide new insights that enrich the theory and practice of multimodal discourse analysis.

One of the challenges in analyzing a text like Detective Conan is how to systematically interpret intermodal interactions. In this study, the multimodal analysis approach used requires a robust analytical framework (Gunther Kress, 2021). This theory examines how images, color, perspective, and visual composition shape meaning in visual texts. Furthermore, there is also a theory used to examine how various communication modes work together to convey messages in digital media (Jewitt, 2014). By combining these two theories, a more in-depth and structured analysis of the early episodes of Detective Conan Series 1 is expected to be possible.

This research has three main focuses to be answered through the analysis process, namely: first, what modes appear in the anime narrative; second, how the relationship between modes shapes the meaning of the anime; and third, what is the impact of the anime narrative: first, what modes appear in the anime narratives; second, how the relationship between modes forms a distinctive narrative meaning; and third, what is the impact of the use of multimodality on the development of discourse analysis studies and language learning practices. These three questions form the basis of the whole study and will be answered through a qualitative analysis method of several key scenes selected based on the intensity of the use of multimodal modes. k distinctive narrative meaning; and third, what is the impact of the use of multimodality on the development of discourse analysis studies and language learning practices. These three questions form the basis of the whole study and will be answered through a qualitative analysis method of several key scenes selected based on the intensity of the use of multimodal modes.

The choice of Detective Conan Series 1 as the object of study is based on its consistent narrative structure, complex characters, and recurring use of visual symbols, making it ideal for multimodal analysis. In addition to its wide and enduring popularity, the series also represents how Japanese popular culture conveys messages through visual and auditive media that are rich in meaning. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution by enriching multimodal discourse studies through case studies of non-Western popular texts, as well as having practical value as teaching materials in multimodal text-based language learning. By introducing texts such as anime into the educational context, students can be trained to read and interpret various forms of messages critically. Therefore, Detective Conan is a relevant and potential choice to be analyzed through the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) approach, both in the academic and educational realms.

Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach because it aims to identify and describe the semiotic modes contained in the Detective Conan Series 1 comic. This approach was chosen to describe in depth the various forms of meaning representation that arise through interactions between modes, both verbal and nonverbal, in a multimodal context. The research focus is directed at analyzing multimodal discourse through relevant theories in the field of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA). The object of this research is the first series of Detective Conan comics, especially panels that are considered to contain complex and significant semiotic modes. The researcher selected ten important scenes from the comic that illustrate interactions between characters, narrative development, and the use of striking visual elements, to be used as the main data in the analysis. The panels were purposively selected based on the density of meaning and the completeness of the modes that appear, such as images, text, expressions, and visual symbols.

Data sources were obtained from printed and digital versions of Detective Conan Series 1 comics. Data collection techniques were carried out through the documentation method, namely by identifying, observing, and recording each panel containing multimodal elements. The researcher also applied listening and note-taking techniques, where each mode in the panel, both verbal (text, narration, dialogue) and nonverbal (image, expression, color, layout), was observed repeatedly to understand the function and meaning it carries. In addition, visual analysis is used to explore how visual elements in comics work together to create complex and meaningful messages. Data analysis was conducted in the following stages. First, researchers identified the semiotic modes that appear in the panels, such as text, images, facial expressions, motion effect lines, colors, panel layouts, and typical symbols in comics. Second, each mode is classified based on its communicative function in the narrative context. Third, the interpretation of multimodal meaning is carried out, namely, the meaning formed through the relationship between modes in a contextual and integrative manner. With these steps, it is hoped that the research results can provide a complete picture of how multimodal works in conveying meaning through comic media.

Findings and Discussions

Before getting into the discussion of each expression, it should be emphasized that the meaning in comics is greatly influenced by the facial expressions of characters, especially the main character. In Detective Conan Vol. 1, Shinichi's or Conan's various expressions provide implicit clues about emotions, reactions, and hidden intentions in their dialogue. Automated systems rely heavily on combination features: facial expression + gesture + bubble style. This means that understanding the message in comics relies heavily on visual combinations of visuals, including facial expressions and text presentation style (Guo et al., 2023). Thus, analyzing the main character's expression in a multimodal way can help reveal implicatures that is not always visible in words alone.

1. Data 1

Expression: Mysterious Expressions in Low-Angle View

One of the most interesting expressions in the first volume of Detective Conan comes when Shinichi Kudo is shown through a low-angle shot. This technique creates a visual dominance effect that emphasizes the character's authority in the midst of a tense situation. In the panel, Shinichi is depicted looking down in a dark room, with dim lighting that causes part of his face to be covered in shadow. A calm, lopsided smile appears on his lips, just before he reveals the perpetrator of the crime-even though his words are hanging. The combination of the bowed head gesture, the low lighting, and the multimodal composition from below implies one implicit meaning: she remains calm and in complete control of the situation. This expression not only reinforces the mysterious side of the main character, but also shows the calmness and

confidence of a detective who has “locked in” the perpetrator from the start. Comics and manga have many ways of conveying emotional expression. Facial expressions and exaggerated hand/arm positions to scribbles around body parts referred to as ‘pictorial runes’(Abbott & Forceville, 2011).

2. Data 2

Expression : Confrontational Expression when Revealing the Perpetrator

The second expression shows the moment of confrontation when the main character accuses the perpetrator. The dialog bubble is boldly outlined and angled, creating the impression of a loud and direct voice. The text has multiple exclamation points instead of just one, indicating that this is no ordinary speech, but a stressful shout. The facial visuals are also supportive: the eyebrows are sharply drawn, the eyes focused on the other person, showing firmness. The index finger points straight at the perpetrator, a stern and accusatory gesture. The mouth is wide open, as if shouting, reinforcing that this is an intense moment when the truth is finally revealed in front of everyone. An accomplished comics artist can combine the components of facial expressions conveying the basic emotions to produce complex expressions, many of which are supposedly distinct and recognizable enough to be named (Stamenković et al., 2018).

3. Data 3

Expression: Calm Expression when Giving a Rational Explanation

The third expression depicts a calm atmosphere, where the main character is explaining without excessive emotion. His eyes are closed, showing a calm demeanor and focus on the words rather than the facial expression. His eyebrows are drawn normally, not swooping down like before-this gives the impression that he is not angry or surprised. The head position is slightly lowered, with the mouth open in a neutral shape, as if she is speaking slowly. The text in the dialog bubble is written flat, ending with dots that give the impression of pause or contemplation. All these elements create the atmosphere of a slow, careful and calm explanation, like someone who wants to be heard without shouting. Filmic multimodal ensembles integrate gaze, gesture, and posture to express subtle cognitive and affective states (Feng & O'Halloran, 2013).

4. Data 4

Expression: Expressions of Prouddness for Detective's Achievements

The fourth expression shows a moment of pride from the main character, Sineci. Her eyes are bright, her eyebrows are raised high, and her cheerful smile is evident-all of these form the image of someone very confident. She raises her thumb and points to herself, a typical gesture to show “this is the real me!” In the dialog bubble, the text “THE GREAT ONE” is written in all capital letters, adding to the impression of enthusiasm and confidence. Mentioning his own name in this context also emphasizes his pride after successfully solving the case. This expression depicts happiness and a sense of accomplishment, with a carefree and energetic style. Narrative emphasis in graphic novels is often achieved via enlarged text, bold fonts, and affirming gestures (Hammond, 2009).

5. Data 5

Expression: Comic Expressions of Shock from Physical Violence

The fifth expression shows Shinichi's spontaneous reaction to being hit by a hard object. His eyes are wide open with a blank look, signaling the effect of shock or momentary confusion.

His gaping mouth further emphasizes his sudden unpreparedness and pain. Some of her hair is drawn standing on end, suggesting an intense shock. Around her head, there is a star symbol—a typical visual element in manga used to depict physical pain or hard impact. This expression builds a hilarious and dramatic impression, providing an entertaining slapstick moment in the middle of the story. As explained in previous research, symbols such as stars, exclamation marks, and pointed lines are canonical manga morphology to depict sudden impact or pain (Cohn & Ehly, 2016). Even previous research reveals that, as far as certain types of comics are concerned, the right kind of (primary) emotions are enhanced by the use of ‘pictorial runes’ (Stamenković et al., 2018).

6. Data 6

Expression: Awkward Expressions due to Social Pressure

The sixth expression depicts a moment when Shinichi is under pressure and feels afraid. His eyes are wide, showing both surprise and alertness. On his face, there were droplets of sweat indicating nervousness that peaked. His smile looked clumsy, as if forced to look calm even though he was actually panicking. Shinichi's speech in dialog balloons is described as wavy and ends with dots, creating the impression of doubt, anxiety, and not knowing what to answer. The tension increased when his interlocutor banged a fist against the wall deliberately, creating physical intimidation that made Shinichi seem emotionally pressed. This explains that multimodal features such as drop-shading around the eyebrows and irregular speech bubbles signify heightened anxiety in the subjects' discourse (Zahra et al., 2025). In addition, it also emphasizes the importance of visual details, such as facial expressions in comics, intensity of facial expressions, labeling, and composition (Stamenković et al., 2018).

7. Data 7

Expression : Expression of Hope for the Future

The seventh expression shows the hopeful side of the main character. Shinichi is depicted looking up, with his hands behind his head - a gesture that usually signifies comfort or relaxed reverie. His eyes are sparkling, his eyebrows are raised, and his mouth is open cheerfully, all of which show excitement and enthusiasm. The line in the panel mentions “the world's greatest detective”, which emphasizes that he is expressing his greatest dream. Despite his great expectations, this expression is displayed calmly and confidently. There is no suspense, only the sincerity of a teenager dreaming of a bright future depicted with Gestures and eye gaze encounters in manga visual narratives that have been proven to express affective orientations such as hopes and aspirations (Dunst et al., 2018).

8. Data 8

Expression : Expressions of Enthusiasm for the Detective World

The eighth expression shows Shinichi's enthusiasm when talking about something he loves—being a detective. The dialog bubble is cloud-shaped and ends with a row of exclamation marks in each sentence, indicating that what he says comes out very enthusiastically and continuously, without pause. The sentences also appear three times in succession, reinforcing the impression that she is completely immersed in the story. The lines around her body point to the main character, emphasizing that she is the center of attention. Her facial expression is bright: eyes closed happily, mouth smiling so wide that her teeth are visible. All these visual elements work together to show the immense joy and passion he feels when talking about the world of

detectives. Repetition of exclamation phrases in speech bubbles, especially with non-standard shapes, intensifies emotional vivacity in comic dialogue (Saifudin et al., 2024). Emotions as such are presumably universal, but this is not necessarily the case for their expression in comics and manga (Abbott & Forceville, 2011).

9. Data 9

Expression: Nervous Expressions when Persuading the Opponent

In this expression, Shinichi is smiling broadly but awkwardly. His eyes are closed, and around his face appear a few small drops of sweat typical symbol in manga to show nervousness or uneasiness. The dialogue he speaks ends with dots, indicating hesitation or caution in speaking. The shape of his bubble is also wavy and irregular, depicting an unstable and cautious tone of voice. All these expressions imply that Shinichi is trying hard to persuade someone angry or sulking, trying to find the right words without making the situation worse. The look on his face and the symbols around him reinforced that he was feeling all wrong, but still wanted to improve the situation. Speech bubble deformation and micro-gestures (e.g., sweat drops) convey the speaker's uncertainty and self-doubt (Hu & Luo, 2016).

10. Data 10

Expression: Expressions of Panic and Pain from Poison

In this scene, the main character-Shinichi-is depicted lying on the grass. His body is unsteady, his eyes are perfectly rounded as if he is enduring a tremendous shock, and sweat is pouring down his face and body. His mouth was open, but no sound came out, as he could only speak silently-weak, confused, and in pain. There is no dialogue in the form of bubbles coming out of the mouth, only the faint narration of the heart. All these elements together show that Shinichi is in an extreme state: his body is in pain, his mind is in panic, and his emotions are overwhelmed with confusion after having just swallowed poison. This expression reflects a major turning point in his life-the unexpected transition from a teenage detective to a child's body, which began with trauma, fear, and a total loss of control. Non-facial information helps express emotions in manga, supporting the theory of emotions in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Abbott & Forceville, 2011).

To clarify the results of the analysis, below is a summary table of multimodal expressions and their implied meanings.

Table 1. Finding and Analysis of The Character's Expressions, Features, and Implied Meanings in Selected Scenes

No	Expression of Character	Dominant Multimodal Features	Implied Meanings
1	Mysterious Expressions (Low-Angle)	Low camera angle, dim lighting, calm smile	Shinichi remains calm and in full control; the mysterious aura reflects his confidence as a detective.
2	Confrontational expression	Sharp bubble, many exclamation points, pointing finger	The character demonstrates courage and decisiveness in revealing the truth.
3	Calm & logical expression	Neutral expression, closed eyes, flat text	The character wants to be heard calmly, not being carried away by emotions,

			and conveying things carefully and rationally.
4	Proud of success	Wide smile, thumbs up, capital letters	Strong self-confidence and pride, Sense of personal accomplishment, Joy and enthusiasm after solving the case.
5	Hilarious shock from violence	Empty eyes, hair standing up, star symbol	This expression conveys sudden pain, confusion, and elements of dramatic humor typical of the manga genre.
6	Awkwardness from social pressure	Sweat, wavy bubble, forced smile	The character is under intense emotional pressure, attempts to appear calm while panicking, and feels intimidated and unsure how to respond.
7	Future hopes	Upward gaze, hands behind head	The character is envisioning a hopeful future. He has big dreams, but they are conveyed in a sincere and optimistic manner, reflecting a strong yet not arrogant self-confidence and ambition.
8	Enthusiasm about becoming a detective	Cloud bubble, bright expression, many exclamation points	The character is very passionate and deeply involved in her topics. He is full of joy and excitement.
9	Nervousness about convincing people	Awkward smile, sweat, unstable bubble	Shinichi is feeling uneasy and unsure, trying to calm the situation. He wants to persuade carefully without triggering more conflict.
10	Panic & pain	Bulging eyes, sweat, no bubble	Shinichi experiences extreme physical and emotional stress as well as demonstrating traumatic transformation and loss of control.

The table above shows that visual expressions are often the main clue in expressing implicature, even though they are not said verbally.

The findings of this analysis show that Detective Conan Vol. 1 consistently utilizes a combination of facial expressions, body gestures, and the shape and style of dialogue bubbles to convey implicature—that is, implied meanings that are not explicitly spoken in words. Various complex emotions such as pride, nervousness, shock, and confusion are shown through a combination of visual

elements that reinforce each other. In this context, character expressions not only support the narrative, but are often the main center of interpretation, especially when dialogue is deliberately reduced or even omitted. Previous research states that automated systems rely heavily on combinatorial features: facial expressions + gestures + bubble styles, suggesting that multimodal analysis is essential in uncovering messages in visual texts such as manga (Guo et al., 2023).

While these findings provide a fairly rich picture of the use of expressions in Detective Conan Vol. 1, this study has some limitations. Firstly, the data analyzed only covers one early volume, so the representation of character expressions does not include the development of emotions that may appear in later volumes. Secondly, the interpretation of facial expressions and other visual elements is highly influenced by the cultural context and the reader's knowledge of Japanese manga conventions, which may differ from the interpretation of readers from other cultures. In addition, not all expressions can be interpreted with certainty without considering the verbal narrative or the overall context of the story. These limitations are important notes for future research to expand the scope of data and deepen cross-cultural analysis in understanding manga visual narratives.

Furthermore, this analysis confirms that Japanese comics like Detective Conan have a distinctive expressive system that cannot always be understood by simply translating the verbal text. Elements such as sweat droplets, facial shadows, the shape of speech bubbles, and the direction of the eyes convey a deep social and psychological context. This explains that emotions may be universal, but this is not always the case for their expression in comics and manga. This means that an understanding of visual culture and genre conventions is crucial. Thus, a multimodal approach not only enriches meaning, but also reveals the workings of the visual narrative hidden behind the main character's expressions (Abbott & Forceville, 2011).

Conclusions

This study aims to analyze ten multimodal expressions of the main characters in Detective Conan Volume 1 using the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) approach, in order to reveal the implicature arising from visual expressions in the narrative context. The findings show that non-verbal elements such as facial expressions, gaze direction, and body position are able to convey deeper meanings than verbal utterances. In many scenes, the strongest implicature emerges from characters' silence or subtle changes in expression that are not conveyed through words.

The findings confirm that in visual media such as comics, communication is not only linguistic, but also multimodal. The main contribution of this research is to expand understanding in the fields of pragmatics and discourse studies, especially in looking at how implied meanings are shaped by visual elements. In terms of practice, these results open up great potential for making comics as teaching materials in language learning, both in the context of teaching pragmatics and developing visual reading skills of texts.

This study has limitations on the scope of the data, which only includes one volume and one main character. Interpretation of expressions can also be subjective as it depends on the context of the image and the reader's understanding. Therefore, further research could expand the scope of characters, volumes, and even media types. The MMDA approach has the potential to be applied to anime, webtoons, or digital content such as TikTok, which are full of multimodal expression elements.

Finally, this study emphasizes that understanding communication in modern media is not enough just from words. Expressions, body language, and visual context play an important role in shaping meaning. Just as Conan's character often reveals more through his gaze or smile, we as language learners also need to hone our sensitivity to how meaning is conveyed, not just what is conveyed.

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