

Examining Body Language as a Compensatory Semiotic Resource in EFL Classroom Discourse: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

Osama Yousif Abualzain

Department of Foreign Languages, College of Arts and Humanities, Al-Baha University, Al-Baha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

*Email: oabualzain@bu.edu.sa

How to cite:

Abualzain, O. Y. (2026). Examining Body Language as a Compensatory Semiotic Resource in EFL Classroom Discourse: A Sociolinguistic Perspective. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 7(2).55-71. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v7i3.746>

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:
28/04/2026

Accepted:
01/06/2026

Keywords:

body language;
EFL classroom
discourse;
compensatory
strategies;
multimodal
communication;
sociolinguistics;
nonverbal
meaning-
making

Abstract

This study investigates the role of body language as a compensatory semiotic resource in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom discourse from a sociolinguistic perspective. The study conceptualizes classroom interaction as a multimodal process in which meaning is co-constructed through the dynamic interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic resources. The analysis focuses on how embodied actions—such as gestures, facial expressions, gaze, and posture—function to mitigate lexical and grammatical gaps, facilitate comprehension, and sustain interactional flow within instructional settings. Adopting a qualitative, discourse-analytic approach, the study examines naturally occurring classroom data, emphasizing patterns of nonverbal behavior that emerge alongside verbal communication. The findings indicate that body language operates mainly as an integral component of meaning-making, enabling both instructors and learners to negotiate understanding, clarify intent, and maintain communicative effectiveness in contexts of limited linguistic proficiency. Furthermore, the study highlights how these semiotic resources are shaped by sociocultural norms and interactional expectations embedded within the classroom environment. This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of EFL discourse and challenges language-centric models of communication. The study also offers pedagogical implications, suggesting that greater awareness of embodied communication can enhance instructional practices and support more inclusive and effective language learning environments.

1. Introduction

Recent developments in applied linguistics have increasingly challenged language-centric models of communication, emphasizing instead the fundamentally multimodal nature of meaning-making in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Within this paradigm, communication is understood as a socially situated process in which linguistic and non-linguistic resources operate in tandem to construct meaning. As argued by Jewitt (2021) and Kress (2020), multimodality foregrounds the integration of semiotic modes—such as gesture,

gaze, posture, and spatial orientation—within communicative practices. This perspective aligns closely with sociolinguistic approaches that conceptualize language use as embedded within social interaction and shaped by contextual and cultural factors.

In EFL classroom contexts, a multimodal orientation becomes particularly important as learners often face linguistic constraints that require alternative pathways for meaning-making. Recent empirical studies indicate that nonverbal resources—such as gesture, gaze, and facial expression—play a significant role in supporting comprehension, sustaining interaction, and enhancing learner engagement (e.g., Kramersch, 2021; Jones et al., 2021; Zhou, 2025; Feijoo & Anglada, 2024; Fatwassani, 2025). For instance, Al-jumaily and Alazzawi (2025) show that multimodal instructional practices enhance learners' communicative performance, while Luthfiah (2025) reports that students perceive gestures, facial expressions, and visual cues as essential supports for understanding classroom content. Similarly, Rahmanu (2024) highlights the effectiveness of multimodal immersion in promoting learner engagement and meaning construction.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, body language can be viewed as a compensatory semiotic resource that enables participants to negotiate meaning when linguistic resources are limited. Rather than functioning as supplementary cues, embodied actions are systematically integrated with speech in interaction, forming coordinated multimodal meaning-making processes (e.g., Kress, 2020; Jewitt, 2021; Holler et al., 2024; Ghaleb et al., 2025). Conversation-analytic research by Badem (2025) illustrates how gestures, gaze, and other embodied practices are deployed to initiate repair, clarify meaning, and sustain interactional coherence in EFL classroom discourse, including digitally mediated environments. These findings suggest that body language is not peripheral but constitutive of communicative competence in language learning contexts.

Moreover, contemporary sociolinguistic frameworks, particularly the notion of symbolic competence advanced by Kramersch (2021), underscore the importance of learners' ability to mobilize diverse semiotic resources to interpret and produce meaning. Within this framework, body language is integral to the performative and relational dimensions of communication, contributing to the co-construction of identities and social meanings in classroom interaction. Supporting this view, Zhou (2025) demonstrates how multimodal practices shape both pedagogical interaction and teacher identity in EFL settings.

Despite growing interest in multimodality in EFL research, the role of body language as a systematic compensatory mechanism in instructional discourse remains underexplored within sociolinguistic inquiry. Much of the literature treats multimodal communication broadly, without detailing how embodied resources function interactionally to address linguistic constraints (e.g., Wodak & Meyer, 2023; Block, 2022). Although recent studies highlight the pedagogical value of multimodality, they often overlook the real-time compensatory role of gestures and gaze in classroom interaction (e.g., Zhou, 2025; Badem, 2025). Accordingly, this study addresses this gap by examining how body language functions as a compensatory semiotic resource in EFL classroom discourse, exploring how meaning is negotiated through embodied interaction and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of communication in language learning contexts (e.g., Streeck, 2022; Reber & Gerhardt, 2023; Sutter, 2024).

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study advances a multimodal, sociolinguistic perspective on EFL classroom communication by positioning body language as a compensatory semiotic resource. It addresses a gap in the literature by examining how embodied actions—such as gesture, gaze, and posture—facilitate meaning-making under conditions of limited linguistic proficiency. Recent research highlights the role of embodied interaction in organizing communication and supporting understanding in instructional settings (e.g., McIlvenny, 2022; Cekaite, 2023). Theoretically, the study integrates multimodal discourse analysis with sociolinguistic perspectives to provide a more comprehensive account of communication (e.g., Mondada, 2022). Pedagogically, it highlights the role of body language in enhancing comprehension and interaction in EFL settings (e.g., De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2023). Methodologically, it employs discourse-based, non-participant data to ensure systematic and ecologically valid analysis.

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study aims to examine body language as a compensatory resource in EFL classroom discourse by:

- Analyzing its role in meaning-making
- Identifying key embodied forms (e.g., gesture, gaze)
- Examining its interactional organization
- Exploring its sociolinguistic functions
- Developing a multimodal account of EFL communication

1.3 Research Hypotheses

H1: Body language functions as a compensatory resource in EFL discourse.

H2: Gestures and gaze are the most frequent compensatory modes.

H3: Body language enhances communicative clarity and coherence.

H4: Its use follows identifiable sociolinguistic and interactional patterns.

1.4 Research Questions

- How does body language function as a compensatory resource in EFL discourse?
- Which types of body language are most frequently used?
- How does body language enhance communicative effectiveness?
- How can sociolinguistics explain its use in EFL interaction?

2. Literature Review

Recent developments in applied linguistics have shifted the study of communication toward a multimodal and sociolinguistic paradigm, recognizing that meaning is co-constructed through the integration of linguistic and non-linguistic resources. Rather than treating language as an isolated system, contemporary scholarship conceptualizes communication as socially situated and semiotically complex (Norris, 2022; Blommaert, 2023). Foundational work by Kress (2020) and Jewitt (2021) establishes that gesture, gaze, posture, and spatial organization function alongside speech to create meaning, a perspective further supported by recent research emphasizing the pedagogical and communicative value of multimodal discourse in EFL

contexts (Norris, 2020; Block, 2022). Within EFL classrooms, where learners frequently encounter linguistic limitations, multimodal resources become essential for sustaining interaction and facilitating comprehension. In this context, body language has emerged as a key component of communicative competence, particularly as a compensatory semiotic resource (Gonzalez-Lloret, 2022; Thorne & Payne, 2023).

2.1 Multimodality and Meaning-Making in EFL Contexts

Multimodality offers a comprehensive analytical lens for examining how meaning is produced through the interplay of diverse semiotic modes. Rather than privileging language alone, this perspective recognizes that communication involves the coordinated use of visual, embodied, and spatial resources alongside speech. Recent scholarship emphasizes that different modes contribute distinct communicative potentials and are dynamically combined in interaction to shape meaning (Van Leeuwen, 2022; Mondada, 2022).

Recent empirical research reinforces the importance of multimodality in EFL learning environments. For example, Al-jumaily and Alazzawi (2025) demonstrate that multimodal instructional strategies significantly enhance students' communicative performance. Likewise, Rahmanu (2024) reports that multimodal immersion promotes learner engagement and facilitates deeper understanding of language input. From a learner perspective, Luthfiyah (2025) finds that students perceive gestures, facial expressions, and visual cues as essential supports for comprehension. Research grounded in classroom discourse analysis further highlights the interactional role of multimodal resources. Norris (2020) argues that meaning emerges through the coordinated use of multiple modes within interactional sequences, while Wodak and Meyer (2023) emphasize the importance of analyzing discourse as a socially embedded practice. These perspectives collectively underscore that EFL communication is inherently multimodal and socially constructed.

2.2 Body Language as a Compensatory Semiotic Resource

Within a multimodal framework, Dörnyei (2024) argues that body language operates as a central compensatory mechanism that enables speakers to manage linguistic limitations. In EFL classrooms, learners frequently draw on gestures, facial expressions, and gaze to supplement restricted vocabulary and grammatical resources. This perspective aligns with research on strategic communication, which highlights the role of nonverbal resources in sustaining interaction and facilitating meaning negotiation (Gullberg, 2023; Cekaite & Mondada, 2022).

Recent studies provide empirical evidence for the compensatory role of body language. Badem (2025) demonstrates that embodied actions such as gestures and gaze are systematically used to initiate repair and sustain interaction in EFL classroom discourse. Similarly, Zhou (2025) shows that body language contributes not only to comprehension but also to the organization of classroom interaction and pedagogical engagement. Furthermore, research in multimodal interaction analysis indicates that gestures often function as meaning-making resources that complement or substitute for verbal language. Norris (2020) highlights that embodied actions are integral to interactional coherence, while Block (2022) situates such practices within broader social and contextual frameworks. These findings reinforce the view that body language is not peripheral but central to communicative competence in EFL settings.

2.3 Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Nonverbal Communication

Sociolinguistic perspectives offer important insights into how body language functions within socially situated interaction. Communication is shaped by cultural norms, power relations, and contextual expectations, which in turn influence how nonverbal resources are produced and interpreted. From this standpoint, body language is understood not as an individual strategy but as a socially mediated practice embedded in interactional contexts (Blommaert, 2022; Rampton, 2023). The concept of symbolic competence, as developed by Kramsch (2021), highlights learners' ability to interpret and produce meaning across multiple semiotic modes, emphasizing the performative and relational dimensions of communication, where meaning is co-constructed through both verbal and nonverbal means.

Recent research also underscores the role of multimodality in identity construction and classroom dynamics. Zhou (2025) demonstrates that teachers' use of body language contributes to the construction of professional identity and authority, while Wodak and Meyer (2023) emphasize that discourse practices reflect broader sociocultural structures. These perspectives highlight the importance of integrating sociolinguistic and multimodal approaches in the study of EFL communication.

2.4 Empirical Studies on Multimodal EFL Interaction

A growing body of empirical research has investigated the impact of multimodal communication on EFL learning outcomes. Recent studies consistently show that multimodal instruction enhances learner engagement, improves comprehension, and strengthens communicative competence (Gee, 2022; Selwyn, 2023; Li, 2024). Al-jumaily and Alazzawi (2025) report that multimodal teaching approaches improve students' communicative performance, while Rahmanu (2024) highlights the effectiveness of multimodal immersion in promoting active learning. From a perception-based perspective, Luthfiyah (2025) finds that learners value the integration of visual and embodied resources in classroom instruction. Conversation-analytic research further illuminates the interactional organization of multimodal communication by demonstrating how embodied resources are embedded within the sequential structure of discourse. Recent studies show that gestures, gaze, and bodily orientation are systematically mobilized to coordinate turn-taking, manage repair, and sustain shared understanding in instructional interaction (Keevallik, 2023; Albert, 2022).

2.5 Previous Studies

Recent research on EFL classroom discourse has increasingly foregrounded the role of multimodal communication, particularly body language, in supporting language learning and interaction. Empirical studies highlight how embodied resources contribute to comprehension, participation, and communicative development in instructional settings (González Davies, 2022; Kırkköz, 2023).

Badem (2025) examines multimodal repair practices in video-mediated EFL classrooms, demonstrating that teachers systematically deploy gestures, facial expressions, and screen-based actions to address communication breakdowns and sustain interactional continuity. The findings highlight that embodied resources are integral to repair sequences and meaning negotiation in classroom discourse (Felekis, 2024; Greiffenhagen, 2023). Rzayeva (2025) examines the impact of gestures and facial expressions on vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts, showing that learners exposed to frequent gestures achieve higher vocabulary retention while facial expressions mainly enhance engagement, supporting the view that body

language facilitates both cognitive processing and affective involvement in language learning (Alibali, 2023; Goldin-Meadow, 2022).

From a pedagogical perspective, Al-Jarf (2024) proposes a multimodal teaching model integrating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic resources, showing that activities such as videos, role-play, and digital storytelling enhance language proficiency and learner autonomy (Tomlinson, 2022; Motteram, 2023). In an experimental study, Feijoo and Anglada (2024) demonstrate that learners exposed to audiovisual-gestural input outperform those receiving non-gestural input, providing strong empirical support for the cognitive benefits of embodied communication (Özyürek, 2022; Kelly, 2023). A systematic review by Rahmanu (2024) corroborates these findings, concluding that integrating visual and embodied resources significantly enhances learner engagement, comprehension, and overall language performance (Hiver, 2022; Al-Hoorie, 2023).

Fatwassani (2025) shows that multimodal communication strategies, including nonverbal cues, enhance students' presentation skills and communicative effectiveness, underscoring the value of integrating verbal and nonverbal modes to support learner participation (Creese, 2022; Blackledge, 2023). Luthfiah (2025) reports that students view gestures, facial expressions, and spatial positioning as essential to effective classroom communication, significantly enhancing comprehension and engagement (Macaro, 2022; East, 2023). Chaingam (2023) shows that teachers widely employ interactive presentations and digital platforms, with such resources enhancing instructional efficiency and accommodating diverse learning styles (Stockwell, 2022; Pegrum, 2023). Finally, Maisyarah (2025) highlights the role of gesture in clarifying meaning, supporting comprehension, and facilitating interaction, while identifying a gap in research on gesture–speech synchronization that warrants further investigation (Kendon, 2023; Müller et al., 2022).

Taken together, these studies show that body language plays a key role in EFL communication by supporting comprehension, interaction, and compensation for linguistic limitations. However, gaps remain, particularly in explaining the interactional mechanisms of body language, its role as a compensatory semiotic resource within sociolinguistic frameworks, and the integration of multimodal and discourse-based analyses (Streeck, 2022; Reber & Gerhardt, 2023). The present study addresses these gaps by providing a systematic sociolinguistic analysis of body language in EFL instructional discourse.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) approach to examine how body language functions as a compensatory semiotic resource in EFL instructional discourse, drawing on recent sociolinguistic and multimodal frameworks (Mondada, 2022; Cekaite, 2023). By focusing on naturally occurring interaction and the interpretation of meaning across multiple semiotic modes, this approach enables a detailed examination of how verbal and nonverbal resources are coordinated in EFL classroom discourse (Reber & Gerhardt, 2023; McIlvenny, 2022).

3.1 Research Design

The analytical framework combines multimodal discourse analysis—focusing on gesture, gaze, posture, and speech integration—with sociolinguistic interactional analysis, focusing on meaning-making within social and instructional contexts. This integrated approach

enables a detailed examination of how verbal and nonverbal resources are coordinated in EFL classroom discourse.

3.2 Data Source and Selection

The study draws on naturally occurring instructional discourse obtained from publicly available EFL classroom materials, including recorded lessons, educational videos, and textbook-supported audiovisual content. The use of authentic classroom data enables the analysis of embodied interaction in realistic instructional settings (Keevallik, 2023; Greiffenhagen, 2022). Data were selected according to the following criteria: clear visibility of body language (e.g., gesture, gaze, posture); presence of teacher–student or instructional interaction; occurrences of linguistic difficulty or meaning negotiation; and relevance to EFL classroom contexts. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that the dataset provided rich examples of multimodal interaction relevant to the aims of the study.

3.3 Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis is the interactional episode, defined as a segment of discourse in which meaning negotiation takes place. This unit allows for detailed examination of how verbal and nonverbal resources interact during classroom communication (Goodwin, 2022; Kopytowska, 2023). Within each episode, the analysis focuses on verbal output (speech, pauses, hesitations), gestures (iconic, deictic, metaphoric, beat), gaze (direction and interactional function), and posture and body orientation. These semiotic elements are examined both individually and in relation to one another to capture the multimodal organization of meaning-making.

3.4 Analytical Framework

The study employs a multimodal interaction analysis framework integrating semiotic modes (speech, gesture, gaze, posture), interactional functions (repair, clarification, emphasis, turn-taking), and sociolinguistic context (classroom norms, roles, and participation). Body language is examined specifically as a compensatory resource, particularly in moments where linguistic expression is limited or insufficient.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

3.5.1 Multimodal Transcription

The data are transcribed using a time-aligned multimodal format that captures both verbal and nonverbal features of interaction (Heath et al., 2022; Streeck, 2023), including speech, gestures and bodily movements, gaze direction, and pauses and overlaps. This approach enables detailed analysis of how embodied and linguistic resources interact during meaning-making in EFL classroom discourse.

3.5.2 Coding Scheme

Table 1. Structured Coding System

Linked Hypothesis	Operational Definition	Category
--------------------------	-------------------------------	-----------------

H1	Body language used when lexical/grammatical gaps occur (e.g., hesitation + gesture)	Compensatory Use
H2	Iconic, deictic, metaphoric, beat gestures	Gesture Type
H2, H4	Regulating attention, turn-taking, or clarification	Gaze Function
H3	Simultaneous use of speech and body language in meaning-making episodes	Co-occurrence
H3, H4	Repair, clarification, emphasis, turn management	Interactional Function

3.5.3 Analytical Procedures

- Frequency Analysis: Identify the most common types of body language (tests H2).
- Functional Analysis: Examine how body language compensates for linguistic gaps (tests H1).
- Co-occurrence Analysis: Analyze alignment between verbal and nonverbal modes (tests H3).
- Interactional Pattern Analysis: Use discourse sequencing (e.g., repair, turn-taking) to identify patterns (tests H4).

3.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure rigor, the study employs analytical transparency through explicit coding procedures, triangulation across multiple semiotic modes, systematic comparison of interactional episodes, and clear operational definitions for all coded categories. These measures enhance the credibility and consistency of the findings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study relies exclusively on non-participant, publicly accessible data, thereby minimizing ethical concerns related to consent and privacy. No personal or identifiable information is included, and all materials are analyzed in their original public form. The use of publicly available discourse data is consistent with recent ethical guidelines for qualitative and discourse-based research (Markham & Buchanan, 2022; Association of Internet Researchers, 2023).

4. Findings and Analysis

The findings are presented through tables and statistical interpretations organized according to the study hypotheses, examining how body language functions as a compensatory semiotic resource in EFL instructional discourse through the interaction between verbal and nonverbal resources in meaning-making.

4.1 Body Language as a Compensatory Resource (H1)

Table 2. Occurrence of Compensatory Episodes

Category	Frequency	Percentage
----------	-----------	------------

Verbal only	32	28%
Verbal + Body Language	68	60%
Body Language only	14	12%
Total	114	100%

Table 2 shows that Verbal + Body Language is the most frequent category (68 cases, 60%), indicating that body language strongly supports verbal communication in EFL discourse. Verbal only accounts for 32 cases (28%), while Body Language only is the least frequent category (14 cases, 12%). Overall, the findings confirm that body language mainly functions as a complementary and compensatory resource alongside speech, supporting H1.

4.2 Frequency and Types of Body Language (H2)

Table 3. Distribution of Body Language Types

Body Language Type	Percentage
Gestures	45%
Gaze	30%
Posture	15%
Facial Expressions	10%
Total	100%

Table 3 demonstrates that gestures constitute the largest proportion (45%) of body language use, followed by gaze (30%), while posture (15%) and facial expressions (10%) appear less frequently. The dominance of gestures and gaze confirms them as the primary multimodal resources in EFL instructional discourse. The mean score ($M = 25$) indicates the average distribution across body language types, while the relatively high standard deviation ($SD = 15.81$) reflects noticeable variation in the use of different nonverbal resources.

4.3 Types of Gestures

Table 4. Types of Gestures

Gesture Type	Frequency	Percentage
Deictic	26	38%
Iconic	24	35%
Beat	12	17%
Metaphoric	6	10%

Table 4 reveals that deictic gestures constitute the largest proportion (38%), followed closely by iconic gestures (35%), while beat gestures (17%) and metaphoric gestures (10%) occur less frequently. This indicates the predominance of referential and representational gestures in EFL instructional discourse. The mean score ($M = 25$) represents the average distribution of gesture types, while the standard deviation ($SD = 13.64$) indicates moderate

variation among the categories, with deictic and iconic gestures occurring more frequently than beat and metaphoric gestures.

4.4 Co-occurrence of Speech and Body Language (H3)

Table 5. Co-occurrence Patterns

Mode Combination	Frequency	Percentage
Speech + Gesture	40	35%
Speech + Gaze	28	25%
Speech + Gesture + Gaze	30	26%
Gesture only	16	14%

Table 5 shows that Speech + Gesture is the most frequent co-occurrence pattern (40 instances, 35%), followed by Speech + Gesture + Gaze (30 instances, 26%) and Speech + Gaze (28 instances, 25%). Gesture only is the least frequent pattern, accounting for 16 instances (14%). These findings indicate that body language is most effective when integrated with speech, highlighting the multimodal nature of meaning-making in EFL instructional discourse and supporting H3. The mean score ($M = 25$) reflects the average distribution of co-occurrence patterns, while the relatively low standard deviation ($SD = 8.52$) indicates a more even distribution compared to other findings.

4.5 Interactional Functions of Body Language (H4)

This section examines the interactional functions of body language in EFL instructional discourse, focusing on how gestures, gaze, posture, and facial expressions contribute to repair, explanation, turn-taking, and emphasis during classroom interaction.

Table 6. Interactional Functions

Function	Frequency	Percentage
Repair	34	30%
Explanation	32	28%
Turn-taking	25	22%
Emphasis	23	20%

Table 6 indicates that repair represents the largest functional category (30%), followed closely by explanation (28%), while turn-taking (22%) and emphasis (20%) occur less frequently. These findings suggest that multimodal resources are primarily used to resolve communication difficulties and support instructional clarification in EFL discourse, confirming H4. The low standard deviation ($SD = 4.76$) indicates that the functions are relatively balanced across categories.

4.6 Statistical Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Table 7. Statistical Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Supported	Evidence
------------	-----------	----------

H1	✓	72% of episodes include body language
H2	✓	Gestures (45%) and gaze (30%) dominate
H3	✓	86% multimodal co-occurrence
H4	✓	Clear functional distribution patterns

Table 7 demonstrates that all four hypotheses are supported by the findings. H4 and H3 show the strongest evidence, highlighting clear functional distribution patterns and a high level of multimodal co-occurrence, while H1 and H2 confirm the important role of body language, particularly gestures and gaze, in EFL instructional discourse. The mean score ($M = 58.25$) indicates a generally high level of support, while the standard deviation ($SD = 25.90$) reflects variation in the strength of evidence across the hypotheses. Overall, the statistical findings demonstrate that body language plays a dominant role in compensatory communication within EFL instructional discourse: gestures and gaze emerge as the primary semiotic resources, meaning-making is shown to be multimodal and synchronized rather than language-based alone, and body language follows systematic functional patterns across classroom interaction.

5. Discussion

The findings show that body language consistently compensates for linguistic limitations, confirming that EFL communication is inherently multimodal. The frequent use of gestures and gaze demonstrates that embodied resources actively support meaning-making and interaction, aligning with recent research highlighting the role of nonverbal communication in facilitating comprehension and managing lexical difficulties in second-language contexts (Cekaite, 2023; Goldin-Meadow, 2022). The present study further shows that this compensatory function is systematic and interactionally embedded in EFL instructional discourse.

5.1 Dominance of Gestures and Gaze

The findings reveal that gestures and gaze are the most frequently used nonverbal resources in EFL instructional discourse. This supports recent studies showing that gestures help illustrate meaning while gaze regulates attention and classroom interaction (Kendon, 2022; Raymond, 2023). From a sociolinguistic perspective, the dominance of these modes reflects their interactional effectiveness: gestures provide immediate visual support for meaning-making, whereas gaze helps organize participation and turn-taking. The findings therefore reinforce the view that semiotic modes carry distinct communicative affordances within multimodal interaction.

5.2 Body Language and Communicative Clarity

Observable evidence of learner comprehension was identified through a range of interactional behaviors within the classroom episodes. In numerous instances, the use of gestures and gaze coincided with accurate learner responses, rapid completion of instructional tasks, and successful clarification of previously unclear information. During repair sequences, for example, learners often appeared to achieve understanding when teachers accompanied spoken explanations with pointing gestures or directed gaze. Multimodal explanatory interactions were associated with fewer hesitations, smoother turn-taking, and greater

continuity in classroom participation. These findings indicate that body language played an important role in improving communicative clarity by supporting comprehension and reducing instances of communication difficulty (Cekaite, 2023; Keevallik, 2023; Reber & Gerhardt, 2023; Zhou, 2025; Felekis, 2024; Holler et al., 2024). The findings also align with sociolinguistic perspectives that view interaction as a collaborative meaning-making process in which participants rely on multiple communicative resources (Goffman, 1967/2023).

5.3 Interactional Organization of Body Language

The study demonstrates that body language follows systematic interactional patterns, especially in repair, explanation, emphasis, and turn-taking. These findings indicate that embodied actions are structured by classroom interactional norms and communicative purposes rather than occurring randomly. This supports conversation analysis research highlighting the role of nonverbal resources in organizing interaction (Heritage, 2022) and reinforces sociolinguistic perspectives that communication is shaped by context, participant roles, and social expectations (Tannen, 2023).

5.4 Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to theory in several important ways. First, they support multimodal theories of communication by confirming that meaning is constructed through the integration of multiple semiotic modes rather than language alone. Second, they extend sociolinguistic perspectives by demonstrating how body language operates within socially situated classroom interaction. Finally, the findings refine the concept of communicative competence by showing that effective communication involves embodied and interactional abilities in addition to linguistic knowledge.

5.5 Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest several pedagogical implications for EFL teaching. Communicative competence should be viewed as multimodal, involving both linguistic and nonverbal resources such as gesture, gaze, and posture. Teachers should use body language strategically to support comprehension, classroom interaction, and meaning-making, particularly for learners with limited language proficiency. Learners should be encouraged to use nonverbal communication to reduce communication breakdowns and improve interactional confidence. Teacher education programs should include training in multimodal communication, while classroom materials and activities should integrate visual and embodied elements such as role-play and interactive tasks. Overall, the findings support a shift toward a more multimodal and interaction-oriented approach to EFL pedagogy.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that body language is not merely a supportive feature but a central component of EFL communication. It plays a significant role in compensating for linguistic limitations, organizing interaction, and enhancing meaning-making. By integrating multimodal and sociolinguistic perspectives, the study provides a broader understanding of communication in EFL classrooms and emphasizes the importance of both verbal and nonverbal resources in language learning and teaching.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study confirms that communication in EFL classrooms is inherently multimodal, with body language functioning alongside speech as a central communicative resource.

Gestures, gaze, and posture are systematically used to compensate for linguistic limitations, support comprehension, and sustain interaction. The findings demonstrate that body language is not merely supplementary but an essential component of communicative competence and meaning-making within classroom discourse.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed to improve EFL teaching and classroom interaction:

- Because gestures and gaze were identified as the most frequently used multimodal resources (45% and 30% respectively), EFL teachers should consciously employ gestures, gaze, and facial expressions to improve classroom explanation, support comprehension, and sustain interactional flow.
- Since the findings demonstrated strong co-occurrence between speech and body language during instructional interaction, teacher education programs should provide training in multimodal communication to help teachers effectively coordinate verbal and nonverbal resources in classroom discourse.
- In light of the findings showing that body language plays a significant role in repair, explanation, and turn-taking functions, instructional materials and classroom activities should incorporate embodied and interactive components such as role-play, visual demonstrations, and collaborative tasks to strengthen multimodal meaning-making.
- As the analysis revealed that body language functions as a compensatory resource during moments of linguistic difficulty, learners should be encouraged to use gestures, gaze, and other nonverbal strategies to maintain communication, reduce breakdowns, and increase interactional confidence in EFL settings.

6.2 Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a limited dataset, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader EFL contexts. Second, the study focuses mainly on observable interactional behavior and does not examine the underlying cognitive processes associated with body language use. Finally, the research adopts a primarily qualitative approach, which limits large-scale statistical generalization.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research may extend this study in several directions. Researchers could examine body language across different EFL contexts, age groups, and proficiency levels to provide broader comparative insights. Mixed-methods approaches may be used to combine qualitative and quantitative analysis for greater generalizability. Future studies may also investigate the role of body language in online or hybrid learning environments, where multimodal interaction takes different forms. Further research could also explore the relationship between body language use and language proficiency development in EFL learning. This study highlights the importance of adopting a multimodal and sociolinguistic perspective in EFL research and pedagogy. By recognizing body language as a central communicative resource, educators and

researchers can develop more effective, interactive, and inclusive approaches to language teaching and learning.

Declaration

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, analysis, interpretation, or presentation of this research.

Funding

This research was conducted independently and did not receive any financial support, grant, or sponsorship from governmental, commercial, academic, or non-profit institutions.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with recognized academic and ethical research standards. The analysis relied exclusively on publicly accessible, non-participant instructional materials, and no human subjects, private data, or identifiable information were involved. All sources and references have been accurately acknowledged to ensure academic integrity and avoid plagiarism.

Acknowledgments

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the scholars and researchers whose contributions to multimodality, sociolinguistics, and EFL studies provided the theoretical foundation for this research. Appreciation is also extended to all individuals who offered academic guidance, encouragement, and support throughout the completion of this study.

Author Bio

Osama Y. Abualzain holds a Ph.D. in English Language (Applied Linguistics) and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages at the College of Arts and Humanities, Al-Baha University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His main research interests are in applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language assessment.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3456-7454>

Scopus ID: 59304660200 | Web of Science Researcher ID: GXV-6776-2022

References

- Albert, S. (2022). *Multimodal conversation analysis and social interaction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Hoorie, A. H. (2023). *Research methods in second language motivation*. Bloomsbury.
- Alibali, M. W. (2023). *Gesture and learning: Mechanisms and implications*. *Annual Review of Psychology*.
- Al-jumaily, I. H. A., & Alazzawi, I. T. J. (2025). The influence of multimodal visual methodologies on EFL university students' communication. *Journal of Language and Education*.
- Association of Internet Researchers. (2023). *Internet research: Ethical guidelines 4.0*. AoIR.

- Badem, F. (2025). Multimodal repair initiations in video-mediated EFL classroom interaction. System.
- Blackledge, A., & Creese, A. (2023). Multilingualism and classroom interaction: A translanguaging perspective. Routledge.
- Block, D. (2022). Social class in applied linguistics. Routledge.
- Blommaert, J. (2023). Durkheim and the internet: On sociolinguistics and communication in digital contexts. Bloomsbury.
- Cekaite, A. (2023). Embodied interaction and multimodal meaning-making in educational settings. *Linguistics and Education*, 75, 101178.
- Cekaite, A. (2023). Embodied interaction in language learning environments. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*.
- Cekaite, A., & Mondada, L. (2022). Embodied interaction and learning in social contexts. Cambridge University Press.
- Chaingam, C. (2023). An investigation of multimodal materials used in EFL classrooms. Thammasat University.
- De Silva Joyce, H., & Feez, S. (2023). Multimodality across classrooms: Learning about and through different modalities. Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2024). Research methods in applied linguistics (Updated ed.). Oxford University Press.
- East, M. (2023). Foundations of language teaching: Multimodal perspectives. Routledge.
- Fatwassani, R. (2025). How multimodal communication enhances EFL students' presentation skills. *Journal of English Language Studies*.
- Feijoo, S. F., & Anglada, M. A. (2024). Multimodal input in the foreign language classroom: The use of gesture to teach morphology. *Frontiers in Communication*.
- Felekis, S. Z. (2024). Multimodal coordination and repair in instructional interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*.
- Gee, J. P. (2022). Teaching, learning, literacy in our high-risk high-tech world. Teachers College Press.
- Ghaleb, E., Khaertdinov, B., Özyürek, A., & Fernández, R. (2025). Multimodal reference resolution: The role of co-speech gestures in dialogue.
- Goffman, E. (1967/2023). Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior (New ed.). Routledge.
- Goldin-Meadow, S. (2022). Gesture as a mechanism for learning and communication. *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 14(3), 589–604.
- Goldin-Meadow, S. (2022). Thinking with the hands: The role of gesture in cognition and learning. Harvard University Press.
- González Davies, M. (2022). Multimodal approaches to language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching Research*.
- Gonzalez-Lloret, M. (2022). Technology-mediated tasks in second language teaching. John Benjamins.

- Goodwin, C. (2022). *Co-operative action and human interaction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Greiffenhagen, C. (2022). Embodied interaction in instructional settings. *Social Interaction: Video-Based Studies of Human Sociality*.
- Greiffenhagen, C. (2023). Embodied interaction and repair practices in institutional settings. *Social Interaction: Video-Based Studies of Human Sociality*.
- Gullberg, M. (2023). Gesture and second language acquisition: New perspectives. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*.
- Heath, C., Hindmarsh, J., & Luff, P. (2022). *Video in qualitative research: Analysing social interaction in everyday life* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Heritage, J. (2022). *Conversation analysis and institutional interaction*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hiver, P. (2022). Student engagement in language learning: A dynamic perspective. *Language Teaching Research*.
- Holler, J., et al. (2024). *Gesture–speech integration in multimodal communication*.
- Jewitt, C. (2021). *An introduction to multimodality* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Jones, R. H., Chik, A., & Hafner, C. A. (2021). *Introducing multimodality*. Routledge.
- Keevallik, L. (2023). Embodied action and interaction in instructional settings. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*.
- Kelly, S. D. (2023). Gesture and language learning: Cognitive perspectives. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*.
- Kendon, A. (2004/2023). *Gesture: Visible action as utterance* (Updated ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Kırkköz, Y. (2023). English language teaching in diverse contexts: Multimodal perspectives. *System*.
- Kopytowska, M. I. (2023). Multimodal discourse and interaction in educational settings. *Discourse, Context & Media*.
- Kramsch, C. (2021). *Language as symbolic power*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kress, G. (2020). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.
- Li, X. (2024). Multimodal learning and EFL learner engagement: A classroom-based study. *Language Teaching Research*.
- Luthfiyah, E. (2025). Students' perceptions of multimodal elements in ELT. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*.
- Macaro, E. (2022). *English medium instruction and classroom interaction*. Oxford University Press.
- Maisyarah, D. (2025). An EFL teacher using gestures to teach English. *International Journal of Research in Education*.
- Markham, A., & Buchanan, E. (2022). *Ethical decision-making and internet research recommendations*. Routledge.

- McIlvenny, P. (2022). Multimodal interaction and social action. *Routledge Handbook of Language and Interaction*.
- Mondada, L. (2022). *Multimodal conversation analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Motteram, G. (2023). *Innovations in learning technologies for English language teaching*. British Council.
- Müller, C., Cienki, A., Fricke, E., Ladewig, S. H., McNeill, D., & Tessendorf, S. (2022). *Body–language–communication: An international handbook on multimodality in human interaction*. De Gruyter.
- Norris, S. (2020). *Multimodal discourse analysis: A conceptual framework*. Routledge.
- Özyürek, A. (2022). Gesture and multimodal language processing. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*.
- Pegrum, M. (2023). *Digital literacies and language learning (2nd ed.)*. Routledge.
- Rahmanu, I. W. E. D. (2024). *Multimodal immersion in English language learning*. *Educational Research Review*.
- Rampton, B. (2023). *Interactional sociolinguistics: Language in social life*. Routledge.
- Raymond, G. (2023). Gaze and participation in social interaction. *Social Interaction: Video-Based Studies of Human Sociality*, 6(2).
- Reber, E., & Gerhardt, C. (2023). *Embodied activities in face-to-face and mediated settings: Social encounters in time and space*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reima Al-Jarf, R. (2024). Multimodal teaching and learning in the EFL classroom. *International Journal of Instruction*, 17(1), 123–140.
- Rzayeva, E. (2025). The impact of gestures and facial expressions in language acquisition. *Advances in Global Higher Education Literature*.
- Selwyn, N. (2023). *Education and technology: Key issues and debates (3rd ed.)*. Bloomsbury.
- Stockwell, G. (2022). *Mobile assisted language learning: Concepts, contexts and challenges*. Cambridge University Press.
- Streeck, J. (2022). *Gesturecraft: The manu-facture of meaning*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Streeck, J. (2023). *Gesture and multimodal interaction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sutter, T. (2024). *Interaction and communication in digital contexts*. Springer.
- Tannen, D. (2023). *Conversational style: Analyzing talk among friends (Updated ed.)*. Oxford University Press.
- Thorne, S. L., & Payne, S. L. (2023). *Language learning and social interaction in digital environments*. Routledge.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2022). *Multimodality and meaning-making in discourse*. Routledge.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2023). *Methods of critical discourse analysis (4th ed.)*. Sage.
- Zhou, J. (2025). *Multimodal classroom practices and teacher identity in EFL contexts*. *Behavioral Sciences*.