

## Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching

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### ***Introduction to the special issue on multimodality perspectives in second language writing and second language acquisition: Issues in theory, research, and practice***

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#### **Abstract**

This introduction to the special issue “Multimodality perspectives in second language writing and second language acquisition: Issues in theory, research, and practice” situates this collective project in prior multimodal scholarship, and provides an overview of its aims and contents. It starts with a global synthesis of multimodality research in second language acquisition and second language writing, followed by an overview of the aims and contents of the special issue. Subsequently, the focus, relevance, novelty, and intended contribution of the

special issue are further assessed from a dual angle, namely, the advancement it represents with respect to past research, on the one hand, and the way in which the theory and research reported in the special issue are embedded in suggested future research agendas in the domain, on the other.

*Keywords:* digital multimodal composing; digital multimodal feedback; L2 writing and learning; multimodality; second language acquisition

## **1. Introduction**

The special issue “Multimodality perspectives in second language writing and second language acquisition: Issues in theory, research, and practice” is made up of conceptual pieces and empirical studies on multimodality and second language acquisition (SLA) and second language (L2) writing. These contributions advance disciplinary debates by shedding new light on the complexities involved in theorizing, researching, and implementing multimodal writing and multimodal feedback.

This introduction serves the dual aim of situating the special issue (SI) in prior multimodal scholarship and of providing an overview of its aims, structure, and contents. To this end, multimodality research in SLA and L2 writing is synthesized in broad strokes. This is followed by an overview of the aims and contents of the SI. In order to more fully contextualize and analyze the focus of the SI, relevance, novelty, and intended contribution, the next two sections provide a synthetic account of past research on digital multimodal composing (DMC) and digital multimodal feedback (DMF) against which to situate the SI, as well as an analysis of the angles from which DMC is approached in the SI in the context of suggested future research agendas.

## **2. Multimodality in SLA and L2 writing**

With its focus on multimodality in SLA and L2 writing, the SI contributes to current developments and professional debates on the changing landscape of language learning studies resulting from technological advances, expanded learning and writing environments, and enlarged composing modalities. Multimodality is central in these developments as “a new literacy practice in which students draw on digital technologies to create multimodal products integrating texts, images, sound, movement, video, and/or hypertext, which addresses new audiences through new genres” (Li, 2021, p. 81). In its application to L2 writing, it is commonly referred to as “digital multimodal composing” (Kessler, 2024; Li, 2021), which can

result in new and diverse forms of communication, including videos, PowerPoint presentation, digital posters, webpages, and online discussion posts, among others. Readers are referred to Lim and Polio's (2020) empirical study of multimodal tasks across academic fields, to Smith et al.'s (2020) review of multimodal composing with emergent bilinguals, and to the analysis of multimodal L2 writing tasks in Kessler's and Manchón's research syntheses of empirical research in this SI.

The concept of multimodality also includes the feedback provided on students' writing (i.e., digital multimodal feedback, DMF), a central dimension of multimodality research and practice that is also present in two of the theoretical contributions to the SI (Elola & Oskoz; Jiang et al.). In line with the defining features of DMC, DMF involves two or more communication modes (typically, visual, auditory, and/or textual elements), as opposed to the exclusive use of written language in traditional explicit feedback methods, such as error correction, reformulations, or models.

Theoretical and practical reasons explain the emergence of DMC and DMF as both research domains and teaching practice. First, DMC and DMF acknowledge and respond to the increasing multimodal nature of many forms of communication and, as a result, to the expanded notions of L2 communicative competence and of L2 literacy. The latter currently includes multiple literacies (New London Group, 1996), which entail the "capacity to comprehend and convey information via different modes – including those that are linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial in nature" (Lim & Kessler, 2024, p. 184; for a fuller discussion, see Kessler, 2024; Li & Akoto, 2021; Lim & Kessler, 2024; Zhang et al., 2021). Second, DMC as a composing practice in instructed SLA has also been advocated on the basis of the purported connection between multimodal writing and several dimensions of L2 learning and writing. In her pioneering analysis, Belcher (2017) formulated the value of multimodality on account of the "huge semiotic toolkit that multimodal design makes available" to L2 users, which, she argued, "can empower students with an appealing array of learner-centric, autonomy-motivating, voice-enhancing, audience-engaging options" (p. 84). More recently, Yu et al. (2026) discussed additional affordances uncovered in empirical research, including "heightened genre and audience awareness, enhanced semiotic awareness, improved critical thinking skills, facilitated identity construction, and more nuanced emotional expression" (Yu et al., 2026, p. 2). Greater controversy exists, however, as to the potential language learning benefits that may derive from engaging in DMC (Manchón, 2017; Qu, 2017; for critical voices), in and by itself, and as compared to monomodal writing, a debate to which the SI contributes a position paper by one of the critical voices in this domain (Manchón), together with three empirical studies (Akoto & Li; Choi et al.; Martínez-González et al.).

The scholarly interest in multimodal composing has grown exponentially. The wealth of existing individual empirical studies has been comprehensively synthesized

in Kessler's (2024) book-length treatment, Li and Akoto's (2021) review, and Lim and Kessler's (2024) research timeline. Analyses of the burgeoning research in the field have additionally materialized in chapters in books on digital writing and digital literacies (Li, 2021; Oskoz & Elola, 2020), edited volumes (e.g., Shin & Cimasko, 2021), and special sections in flagship journals. The latter include a truly influential "Disciplinary dialogues" piece published in 2017 in *Journal of Second Language Writing* (see Belcher, 2017; Manchón, 2017; Qu, 2017; Yi, 2017; see Manchón's contribution to the SI), together with three more recent "Research timeline" (Lim & Kessler, 2024) and "Thinking allowed" contributions (Jiang & Hafner, 2025; Yu et al., 2026) published in *Language Teaching*. Of special relevance is the steady publication of journal guest-edited issues on multimodality, including (in chronological order) Early et al.'s (2015) "Multimodality: Out from the margins of English language teaching" (*TESOL Quarterly*), Li and Storch's (2017) "Second language writing in the age of computer-mediated communication" (*Journal of Second Language Writing*), Crawford Camiciottoli and Campoy-Cubillo's (2018) "Multimodal perspectives on English language teaching in higher education" (*System*), Yi et al.'s (2020) "Multimodal composing in multilingual learning and teaching contexts" (*Journal of Second Language Writing*), and Lim et al.'s (2025) recent special issue on "Digital multimodal composing in the era of artificial intelligence" in *Computers and Composition*.

### 3. The special issue: Overview

Our project builds on and adds to these previous collaborative initiatives with a collection of critical position papers and new empirical studies intended to advance disciplinary debates by shedding further light on the complexities involved in theorizing, researching, and implementing multimodal writing and multimodal feedback. In contrast to the coverage in the previous journal special issues and book-length treatments listed above, a distinctive feature of the SI is precisely its dual focus on multimodality as pertaining to both writing and feedback.

The SI is divided into two main sections plus a Coda. It first showcases four theoretical papers: two systematic research syntheses of multimodal writing (Kessler's "Digital multimodal composing: A synthesis of theory-research connections and justifications for task selection," and Manchón's "Multimodal composing and L2 learning: Rationales, empirical evidence, and future research agendas"), and two position papers on multimodal feedback (Oskoz and Elola's "Feedback in second language writing: Current issues in research and practice," and Jiang, Lee, and Yu's "Teaming with GenAI for multimodal feedback literacy development: A vision for L2 writing teachers"). These four contributions (all of

them written by scholars whose work has been particularly influential in the development of thinking in the domain) provide critical analyses that serve to advance key theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical concerns in disciplinary conversations in multimodality studies. Four controlled and classroom-based empirical studies were written by well-known scholars and emerging voices: Martínez-González, Coyle, and Férrez Mora's "The impact of instruction on English as a Foreign Language high school students' articulation of argumentative multimodal PowerPoint presentations," Akoto and Li's "Multimodal composing in French L2 class during short-term study abroad: Willingness to communicate and creative expression," Choi, Liu, and Kim's "Writing quality, vocabulary learning, and reading comprehension in integrated reading-to-write tasks: A comparison of digital multimodal composing and traditional monomodal writing," and Kormos, Brunfaut, and Bánfalvi's "Examining the role of linguistic characteristics of task performance in integrated multimodal viewing-to-write tasks." These empirical investigations are fully embedded in suggested future research agendas (as detailed in a later section), provide new empirical evidence on the affordances of multimodal writing, and expand: (i) the domains under the spotlight (including language learning, teaching, and assessment); (ii) populations and contexts (featuring adolescents and adults learning and performing writing in classroom settings and study-abroad contexts); (iii) the range of first and second language combinations (including English L2 and French L2); and (iv) research approaches, featuring qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs, which is a departure from the primarily qualitative nature of previous research. Whereas this introduction situates the SI in the context of past research, the Coda, also written by a leading figure in the domain, YouJin Kim, synthesizes and discusses the insights reported in the theoretical and empirical papers, and looks into the future with suggestions for needed substantive and methodological developments in multimodality research as applied to L2 learning and L2 writing.

#### **4. The special issue in the context of past multimodality studies**

Table 1 (based on Jiang & Hafner, 2025; Jiang et al., 2024; Kessler, 2024; Li, 2021; Li & Akoto, 2021; Lim et al., 2025; Oskoz & Elola, 2020; Smith et al., 2020; Yi et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2021) is an overview of extant DMC and DMF research thematically organized around theoretical frameworks informing the field, main research directions, and global methodological characteristics. Each of these dimensions will be subsequently accounted for in terms of, first, past research and, second, the contribution the SI makes.

**Table 1** Overview of research on DMC and DMF

| Domains                               | DMC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | DMF                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theoretical frameworks                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translanguaging</li> <li>• Systemic functional linguistics</li> <li>• Sociocultural theories</li> <li>• Cognitive accounts of SLA</li> <li>• Multiliteracy</li> <li>• Multimodality</li> <li>• Social semiotics</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociocultural theories</li> <li>• Multiliteracy</li> <li>• Multimodality</li> <li>• Social semiotics</li> <li>• Cognitive theory of multimedia learning</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Main research directions              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effects on performance</li> <li>• Effects on learners' individual differences and additional learning opportunities</li> <li>• Composing processes and use of semiotic resources</li> <li>• Issues in assessment</li> <li>• Implementation in the classroom and writers' and/or teachers' perceptions of multimodal tasks</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effects on performance</li> <li>• Effects of contextual, feedback- and learner-related factors on DMF reception and effectiveness</li> <li>• Students' perceptions of and engagement with DMF</li> <li>• Classroom implementation and teacher training</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Global methodological characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notable variation in global research approaches / methodologies (with a prevalence of qualitative research), designs, populations (regarding both learners and teachers), instructional contexts, tasks used, and data collection and analysis procedures</li> <li>• Main focus on undergraduate university students in second and foreign language classes and, to a lesser extent, L2 writing courses</li> <li>• Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, the latter reporting implementation of DMC in classrooms over a period of weeks or even months</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predominance of qualitative and mixed-methods research and inter-subjects, cross-sectional designs. Large focus on students' (and teachers') perceptions, preferences, and experiences in action research and classroom-based case studies</li> <li>• Focus on EFL learners at different educational levels (in distance learning and face-to-face classrooms)</li> <li>• Diversity of data collection instruments and feedback recording software and tools</li> </ul> |

#### 4.1. Theoretical frameworks

The theoretical frameworks that have informed DMC research include translanguaging, systemic functional linguistics, sociocultural theories and, especially, cognitive accounts of second language acquisition, multiliteracies theory, multimodality, and social semiotics. Some of these research perspectives have also informed DMF, together with cognitive theories of multimodal learning.

The special issue showcases the pivotal frameworks in the domain. Thus, in addition to the global analyses provided in Kessler's and Manchón's articles, contributions to the SI feature SLA constructs (Choi et al.), the social semiotic multimodality approach (Akoto & Li; Jiang et al.; Martínez-González et al.; Oskoz & Elola), and multimodality (Kormos et al.).

#### 4.2. Main research directions in empirical research

Empirical research on DMC has investigated five main themes and has done so in studies that have tracked L2 users participating in multimodal projects and tasks or transforming a monomodal product into a multimodal product, together

with studies comparing L2 multimodal and monomodal writing. Part of this research has inspected the effects of DMC on text features and, to a much lesser extent, on language learning (see Manchón, this SI), on the one hand, and effects on learners' individual differences (e.g., identity, motivation, self-confidence) as well as additional learning opportunities (diverse writing-related and academic skills), on the other. Another set of studies has investigated L2 writers' composing processes and the use of what Belcher (2017) referred to as the "huge semiotic toolkit that multimodal design makes available" (p. 84). An additional relevant (although less developed) strand has targeted issues in the assessment of the distinctive features that set multimodal tasks and texts apart from the exclusive use of language in monomodal writing (Cheung, 2023; Elola & Oskoz, 2022; Hafner & Ho, 2020; Jiang et al., 2022). Finally, numerous pedagogically oriented studies have delved into the complexities involved in implementing multimodal writing in real classrooms, coupled with inquiries into writers' and/or teachers' perceptions of the implementation and affordances of multimodal tasks.

Regarding DMF, four major themes emerge from an otherwise limited number of available studies. A considerable part of this research has explored screen-cast feedback to appraise students' perceptions, preferences, and engagement as well as teachers' preparation and classroom implementation issues (e.g., Bakla, 2020; Bush, 2021). Relatedly, some studies have examined the content of screen-cast feedback in terms of its focus on linguistic (or "local") and/or textual (or "global") features such as content and/or organization (e.g., Elola & Oskoz, 2016). Fewer studies (e.g., Cheng & Li, 2020) have investigated the effects of screencast feedback on learners' L2 written output in terms of (one or more) measures of linguistic performance (complexity, accuracy, fluency). Some of this research has examined these effects vis-à-vis the effects of traditional written corrective feedback, while other studies have examined the influence of contextual factors and learner-internal variables on engagement with and/or effects of different types of multimodal feedback, including artificial intelligence (AI)-generated feedback provided by means of ChatGPT (e.g., Zou et al., 2025).

These various research orientations are present in the six contributions in the SI that focus on DMC (two theoretical papers and four empirical studies), which: (i) critically assess past research practices with a view to moving research forward (Kessler); (ii) critically examine rationales for and empirical evidence of the connection between multimodal writing and L2 learning (Manchón); (iii) contribute new empirical research on diverse affordances of multimodal writing (Akoto & Li; Choi et al.; Martínez-González et al.); and (iv) investigate ways of representing multimodal communication in L2 assessment through the design, implementation, and scoring of multimodal test tasks (Kormos et al.).

As regards DMF, two papers: (i) critically examine the methodological affordances of digital tools such as screencast feedback (SCF) or ChatGPT to provide L2 writers with feedback and to explain how different modes of feedback can influence writing outcomes (Oskoz & Elola); and (ii) discuss the multimodal nature and language learning affordances of GenAI feedback, together with how GenAI platforms can support the analysis of learner engagement with feedback in L2 writing (Jiang et al.).

### **4.3. Methodological characteristics**

As shown in Table 1, the extant DMC studies vary in global research approaches/methodologies, designs, populations (regarding both learners and teachers), instructional contexts, tasks used, and data collection and analysis procedures employed. Despite this variation, there is a prevalence of studies on undergraduate university students in English as a second language/English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) classes (see Smith et al., 2020, for a review of research on pre-university populations) and, to a lesser extent, L2 writing courses. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (the latter reporting implementation of DMC in classrooms over a period of weeks or even months) have been conducted. By and large, multimodality research has been qualitative in orientation, with an abundance of case and ethnographic studies (as reviewed in Lim & Kessler, 2024; Smith et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021; see also Kessler's and Manchón's contributions to this SI).

Past research on DMF has relied predominantly on mixed-methods approaches. Quantitative components correspond to inter-subject, pretest/posttest, cross-sectional and, to a lesser extent, longitudinal designs. Qualitative studies have explored students' perceptions, preferences, and experiences, particularly through action research and classroom-based case studies. Participants in these studies are primarily EFL learners across various educational levels (including secondary, undergraduate, and graduate students) in both distance/online learning and traditional face-to-face instructional settings. Diverse data collection methods (e.g., questionnaires, surveys, and interviews) have been triangulated with students' written texts, feedback videos, and other feedback-related artifacts. Studies vary in length and differ in the technological tools and platforms used for feedback delivery (such as email, LMS, and cloud-based systems).

As noted earlier, the four empirical contributions in the SI expand past research as regards the contexts and populations, L2s investigated, and research approaches and designs. Thus, the populations studied include college-level students (Akoto & Li; Choi et al.; Kormos et al.), and secondary school students (Martínez-González et al.) learning and writing in English (Choi et al.; Kormos et al.;

Martínez-González et al.) and French (Akoto & Li). In contrast to the preponderance of qualitative studies in the domain, the studies in the SI employ quantitative (Choi et al.; Kormos et al.), qualitative (Akoto & Li), and mixed-methods (Martínez-González et al.) approaches. These research orientations are worthy attempts to move the field forward given the collective call (e.g., Jiang & Hafner, 2025; Smith et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021) to conduct new quantitative studies to provide confirming and new evidence of the theoretically predicted and thus far attested affordances of DMC and of DMF.

**Table 2** Future multimodality research agendas: Research tasks

|        | Research tasks for future research agendas                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|        | Affordances: Multimodal writing and language learning and writing and digital literacy development | Assessment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Teacher practices and teacher preparation/education                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Source | Zhang et al. (2021)                                                                                | ► Use cross-sectional design to experimentally examine language learning affordances of DMC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | ► Develop suitable holistic and/or analytical rubrics to evaluate DMC task performance                                                                         | ► Relevance of investigating what constitutes effective pedagogies of DMC                                                                                                                                   |
|        | Lim and Kessler (2022)                                                                             | ► Conduct cross-sectional and/or longitudinal studies to investigate the effects of multimodal composition on different features of L2 acquisition<br>► Compare effects of traditional writing and DMC on written texts completed individually and collaboratively<br>► Compare effects of traditional writing and DMC on (individual and collaborative) writing processes from diverse theoretical perspectives<br>► Conduct a needs analysis of the types of multimodal writing required of L2 learners across diverse contexts<br>► Conduct a survey to gain insight into L2 users' current out-of-school practices and engagement with DMC for learning | ► Relevance of conducting research on how different types of multimodal writing genres are assessed by instructors/across disciplines or discourse communities |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|        | Kessler (2024)                                                                                     | ► Frame research on DMC and learning in specific theories of SLA, education, or general human learning/development<br>► Investigate effects of DMC on learning longitudinally<br>► Expand the learning dimensions of DMC as well as contexts of acquisition and target languages investigated<br>► Investigate the effects of diverse DMC tasks on L2 learning outcomes and individual differences                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | ► Investigate and experiment with the use of product-based and process-based assessment for grading various DMC tasks and activities                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|        | Jiang and Hafner (2025)                                                                            | ► Investigate effects of DMC on L2 writing development<br>► Investigate effects of DMC on the learning and development of critical digital literacies through classroom-based interventions<br>► Explore dimensions of DMC task design and effects on learning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | ► Develop and assess innovative methods to assess DMC processes and products and underlying multimodal communicative competence                                | ► Explore L2 teachers' expertise in developing multimodal L2 competence and relevant pedagogical content knowledge by engaging with DMC<br>► Investigate L2 teachers' feedback practices in relation to DMC |
|        |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

## 5. Major themes in the SI in the context of suggested future research agendas

Several publications have put forward a comprehensive future program of research on DMC and DMF, as synthesized in Table 2. A distinctive feature of the current SI is that the theoretical and empirical contributions are fully embedded in these future research agendas, to which they make important theoretical and empirical contributions (including key concerns in research methodology) by critically reflecting on (in the theoretical papers) and taking up some of the specific research tasks suggested

(in the empirical contributions) in key domains (listed in Table 2), namely, multimodality and language learning, assessment of multimodal tasks, and teacher practices and preparation/education, as detailed in the sections that follow.

## **5.1. Affordances of DMC**

The first column in Table 2 corresponds to “Affordances: Multimodal writing and language learning and writing and digital literacy development.” In what follows, we detail how the contributions to the SI relate to the future research agendas in this domain.

### **5.1.1. Theoretical contributions in the SI**

Two of the theoretical contributions in the SI provide critical discussions of the affordances of DMC. In “Digital multimodal composing: A synthesis of theory-research connections and justifications for task selection,” Kessler contributes a methodologically oriented systematic review of research on the effects of DMC on L2 learning processes and outcomes. Kessler identifies two recurring limitations in this body of work, namely, unclear connections between theory and research designs, on the one hand, and insufficient justifications of the specific DMC task or activity used, on the other. His thorough and critical analysis leads Kessler to put forward recommendations for future research methodology approaches in the domain, crucially including overcoming the rather atheoretical nature of past research and, as a result, explicitly establishing and justifying the connection between theory and methods. In his own words, “the theory must be purposefully selected, transparently discussed, and meaningfully operationalized” (Kessler, 2026, p. 19).

Theoretical rationales for and empirical evidence of the affordances of DMC in terms of L2 learning are the central concern in Manchón’s position paper “Multimodal composing and L2 learning through writing: Rationales, empirical evidence, and future research agendas.” Manchón contributes to the ongoing debates on the language learning potential of DMC with: (i) a critical examination of the connection between DMC and L2 learning through the lens of cognitively oriented theoretical positions on L2 writing as a site for language learning; (ii) a systematic research synthesis of theoretical frameworks, aims, methods, and findings of the empirical evidence to date; and (iii) a proposal for needed substantive and methodological advancements in future research agendas on DMC as a site of L2 learning, some of which are reflected in the empirical studies in this SI (most notably, Akoto & Li; Choi et al.). Among the future research avenues outlined by Manchón,

of special relevance is the need to advance research beyond effects on performance and instead find “valid ways of comparing the impact of monomodal and multimodal writing conditions on the expansion and consolidation of L2 knowledge, which is almost uncharted territory to date” (Manchón, this SI).

### **5.1.2. Empirical contributions in the SI**

The four empirical papers in the SI undertake some of the proposed research tasks on the affordances of DMC listed in Table 2, with special attention paid to affordances in terms of language learning, precisely a strand in which further research is warranted given that, as Kessler (2024) rightly notes, “investigations of outcomes and evidence of learning are the least robust” (p. 45) as compared to other strands of multimodal research. The research tasks in Table 2 embraced in the empirical contributions to the SI address the global call to design theoretically grounded, controlled (Akoto & Li; Choi et al.) and classroom-based (Martínez-González et al.) studies that experimentally examine, cross-sectionally (Choi et al.; Martínez-González et al.) and longitudinally (Akoto & Li), the effects of multimodal composition on language development (Choi et al.), writing development (Akoto & Li; Martínez-González et al.), critical digital literacies (Akoto & Li; Martínez-González et al.), different features of L2 acquisition including comparisons with traditional monomodal writing (Choi et al.), and additional targets and skill areas (Akoto & Li; Choi et al.; Martínez-González et al.).

In “The impact of instruction on English as a foreign language high school students’ articulation of argumentative multimodal PowerPoint presentations,” Martínez-González, Coyle, and Férrez-Mora (2026) report a classroom-based study examining the effects of a film-based multiliteracies pedagogy (MP) on high school EFL students’ multimodal argumentative writing. Following a pedagogical intervention, the focal participants demonstrated improved structural, ideational, and linguistic multimodal argumentation skills as well as an emerging awareness of the meaning-making affordances of different modal resources. The authors interpret these findings from the dual perspective of learning-to-write and writing-to-learn and conclude that the reported film-based multiliteracies instruction provides evidence of the affordances of multimodal composing for the development of genre and content knowledge, on the one hand, and L2 development, on the other. The study contributes to language learning and teaching research by offering empirical evidence that multimodal argumentation provides a valuable context in which L2 development and knowledge construction converge within the EFL classroom.

Along the lines of Martínez-González et al.’s research, Akoto and Li’s (2026) innovative study “Multimodal composing in French L2 class during short-term

study abroad: Willingness to communicate and creative expression” responds to the call to advance research agendas. Specifically, their study can be linked to Kessler’s (2024) suggested research tasks of examining the impact of DMC in L2s other than English across diverse learning contexts (the study focused on L2 French in a study-abroad context) and longitudinally (the study lasted four weeks). The study also attends Kessler’s (2024) call to expand research on DMC’s effects to include additional targets and skill areas, together with Jiang and Hafner’s (2025) call to investigate the effects of DMC on critical digital literacies. Their longitudinal qualitative case study examined how Instagram-based digital storytelling about host families shaped five American intermediate French L2 learners’ willingness to communicate (WTC) and how visual, audio, and textual modes supported learners’ creative expression and enhanced their WTC in a study-abroad context over a period of four weeks in France. The participants created weekly multimodal narratives via Instagram titled “Ma famille aixoise et moi” that integrated written reflections, photographs, audio recordings, and cultural artifacts shared by their host families. The novel contribution of the study additionally stems from having addressed a gap in DMC studies through the examination of the conditions under which DMC supports learners’ WTC and language learning. Importantly, the authors emphasize the crucial role of students’ engagement in the multimodal tasks in bringing about learning outcomes.

The potential multilevel affordances of DMC are further explored in Choi, Liu, and Kim’s (2026) quantitative study “Writing quality, vocabulary learning, and reading comprehension in integrated reading-to-write tasks: A comparison of digital multimodal composing and traditional monomodal writing.” As specified in the title, the paper responds to Lim and Kessler’s (2022) call (see Table 2) to compare the effects of traditional writing and DMC in terms of L2 development (operationalized in the study in terms of vocabulary learning), writing development (written performance in terms of content, organization, and language use) and additional skill areas (reading in their study). Their pretest/post-test study investigated the impact of writing modalities (DMC vs. traditional monomodal writing) in integrated reading-to-write tasks (an argumentative monomodal essay versus a DMC video-making task) on diverse L2 learning outcomes, namely, writing performance (in terms of content, organization, and language use), vocabulary acquisition, and reading comprehension. The study’s findings reveal no significant difference between traditional writing and DMC with learners of similar L2 proficiency; however, DMC was found to provide additional language learning effects associated with productive vocabulary use even in the absence of vocabulary instruction.

## 5.2. Assessment

Some of the future research tasks listed in Table 2 are related to assessment issues (see second column), a dimension of DMC where research is rather limited. The empirical contribution to the SI by Kormos, Brunfaut, and Bánfalvi (2026), “Multimodal viewing-to-write test tasks: English L2 learners’ processing and performance,” addresses this gap in research. Specifically, the study is closely linked to Zhang et al.’s (2021) call to develop rubrics for the assessment of DMC outputs, as well as Kessler’s (2024) invitation to investigate and experiment with the use of product-based and process-based assessment of DMC. The study explored ways of representing multimodal communication and designed two types of viewing-to-write test tasks: viewing-to-describe tasks and viewing-to-compare-and-contrast tasks. Test tasks were administered to 134 English L2 learners with intermediate to advanced L2 proficiency levels, and their performance was assessed with a purpose-developed rating scale. Task completion processes were further investigated through post-task interviews. This pioneering study provides compelling evidence for the way in which diverse DMC tasks can elicit, evaluate, and test multimodal integrated language use and are practical for testing and developing such abilities in learners at intermediate and advanced levels.

## 5.3. Teacher practices and teacher preparation/education

Together with assessment, another important dimension of pedagogical practice is providing feedback on multimodal writing. As can be seen in Table 2, future research tasks relate to teacher practices and teacher preparation/education: Jiang and Hafner (2025) invite the field to explore “the dimensions of L2 teachers’ expertise in developing multimodal L2 competence and relevant pedagogical content knowledge by engaging with DMC” (p. 7), as well as explore “L2 teachers’ feedback practices with respect to DMC by examining whether and how they engage with multimodal communicative competence in addition to providing linguistic feedback” (p. 8).

Two position papers in the SI provide insightful reflections that can serve as foundations for the proposed future research agendas. In “Feedback in second language writing: Issues in research and practice,” Oskoz and Elola (2026), two authoritative voices in the domain, reconceptualize feedback in L2 writing by integrating theoretical and pedagogical perspectives that address monomodal, multimodal, and AI-mediated composing. They examine how generative AI is transforming feedback practices, learner engagement, and instructors’ roles in increasingly digital learning environments. Drawing on cognitive and sociocultural theories,

their paper illustrates how AI-generated feedback can support noticing, reduce cognitive load, scaffold revision, and promote self-regulated learning through graduated assistance. These ideas are illustrated through two instructional examples: a traditional written composition and the creation of an infographic. While the first highlights the role of AI in supporting linguistic accuracy and organization, the second applies D'Angelo's (2018) visual metadiscourse framework to show how feedback can address the integration of textual and visual resources in multimodal texts. Overall, Oskoz and Elola's reconceptualization of feedback acknowledges that no single theory can fully account for feedback in multimodal and AI-enabled environments and that, instead, complementary theoretical perspectives are needed, including cognitive, sociocultural, and multimodal theories and frameworks. The authors argue for a broader understanding of feedback that encompasses meaning-making, multimodal design, and ethical AI use to better support contemporary L2 writing and learning.

Complementing the reflections in Oskoz and Elola's paper, three authoritative voices in L2 writing studies and multimodality, Jiang, Lee, and Yu (2026), add a welcome and timely piece to the whole puzzle, namely, the integration of GenAI into DMF, in "Teaming with GenAI for multimodal feedback literacy development: A vision for L2 writing teachers." Their position paper adopts a uniquely pedagogical orientation, capitalizing on the development of teacher multimodal feedback literacy. The authors propose three ways in which L2 writing teachers can collaborate with generative AI to enhance students' multimodal feedback literacy: (i) broadening feedback beyond written language to include multiple semiotic modes; (ii) focusing feedback on the effective use of multimodal resources rather than language alone; and (iii) providing process-oriented, data-informed feedback based on learners' composing behaviors. Although these approaches require teachers to adopt new practices, they highlight the potential of teacher-AI collaboration to support more innovative and future-oriented feedback. They suggest a reconceptualization of multimodal feedback literacy and advocate the use of multiple AI tools in the provision of feedback.

## 6. Conclusion

The above discussion evidences the contribution the SI makes to theorizing, researching, and teaching multimodality in SLA and L2 writing. It: (i) contributes theoretical insights and new empirical evidence to current conversations on the affordances of DMC (crucially including whether DMC has an impact on L2 learning); (ii) features a collection of theoretical reflections and empirical investigations fully framed in suggested future research agendas in the domain; (iii) sheds

novel light on and opens paths for the exploration of two critical components of pedagogical practice: assessment and feedback provision; and, finally, (iv) signals worthy theoretically, empirically, and pedagogically relevant future research avenues in the study of multimodality as applied to SLA and L2 writing.

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