

# A MULTIMODAL APPROACH TO TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH THROUGH FILMS A case study<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – Audiovisual products, due to their intrinsic multisemiotic nature, in which each mode contributes to meaning making, have widely proven to be ideal material both for research purposes and for teaching. This is especially the case of films, which, despite their fictional character, have often been used in the context of language learning. As the concept of multiliteracies has become pivotal in language teaching, the use of films reflects a multimodal approach that can help students learn to exploit modes beyond verbal language (e.g., visual, gestural, spatial) to both understand and produce texts in the target language more effectively. This becomes particularly important in situated communicative contexts where domain-specific discursive, pragmatic and cultural features can create significant obstacles for language learners. The present paper focuses on a particular type of specialised discourse, i.e. business discourse, and intends to explore the ways in which films can be utilized as resource material in the English for Business and Economics class at the university. Some clips from a film representing this domain and with relevant communication exchanges that portray different business contexts and genres will be analysed both on the verbal and non-verbal level through a multimodal annotation software. This allows for the integration of verbal and non-verbal cues (e.g., gaze direction, hand/arm gestures, etc.) to show how a multimodal approach can actually help students to interpret a message, especially in ESP contexts.

**Keywords:** film; multimodality; ESP; business English; language teaching.

## 1. Introduction

Audiovisual products are intrinsically multisemiotic in nature, since each mode contributes to the meaning-making process (see, *inter alia*, Bateman, Schmidt 2012; Wildfeuer 2013). For this reason, they have widely proven to be ideal material both for research and teaching purposes. This is especially the case of films, which, despite their fictional character, have often been used in the context

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of language learning (see Sherman 2003; Kaiser, Shibahara 2014; Bruti 2015). Indeed, even though film language has been described as “written-to-be-spoken-as-if not-written” (Gregory, Carroll 1978), some recent studies have demonstrated its similarities to spontaneous conversation, especially in terms of authenticity (see Kozloff 2000; Forchini 2012; Bonsignori 2013). Moreover, films are effective tools in teaching contexts because they have been described as “an authentic source material (that is, created for native speakers and not learners of the language)” (Kaiser 2011, p. 233; see also Sherman 2003).

Teaching a foreign language using films entails exposing students to both aural and visual elements at the same time, thus giving them the chance to actually see how language is used in situated contexts, either general or specialised. In this way, they can be aware of the different varieties and accents used, they are able to listen to native speakers, and, most importantly, they can become aware of how meaning is made by the interplay between verbal and non-verbal cues such as arm/hand gestures, posture, gaze direction, head movements, facial expression, as well as intonation. Indeed, all these elements reflect the various semiotic resources that contribute significantly to supporting, integrating, and creating meaning in a given situational context. The meaning-making role of multiple semiotic modes beyond verbal language is a key concept introduced by the pioneering and seminal work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and Lemke (1998), which has become the cornerstone of multimodal discourse analysis (see O’Halloran 2004; Scollon, Levine 2004; Norris 2004). More specifically, a communicative event cannot be investigated solely on the basis of the verbal element, but non-verbal elements should also be integrated into the analysis in a more holistic approach. As the concept of multiliteracies has become pivotal in language teaching (Kalantzis, Cope 2013), the use of films reflects a multimodal approach (Jewitt 2014) that can help students learn to exploit other modes beyond that of verbal language (e.g., visual, gestural, spatial) in order to both understand and produce texts in the target language more effectively (O’Halloran *et al.* 2016). This becomes particularly important in communicative contexts where domain-specific discursive, pragmatic and cultural features can create significant problems for language learners.

Taking inspiration from a recent study which explores how to use clips from films and TV series representing different specialised domains to teach ESP (see Bonsignori 2018), the present paper focuses on a particular type of specialised discourse, i.e. business discourse, and intends to explore the ways in which films can be utilized as resource material in the English for Business and Economics class at the university. Interestingly, this type of audiovisual product has been widely employed to teach various topics relevant to the domain of business and management in general, starting with the work of Champoux (1999), who uses scenes taken from several films to teach organizational behaviour and management theories and concepts. Other examples are Briam

(2010), who shows how films can enhance the teaching of intercultural communication in business contexts; Pandey (2012), where films are used to teach cross-cultural management; and finally, O'Boyle and Sandonà (2014), in whose work they are used to teach business ethics.

This paper presents a case study based on a multimodal analysis of a selection of clips from the film *Margin Call* (2011, J.C. Chandor), which is included in a multimodal corpus of audiovisual texts for ESP settings that is currently under construction. The clips were chosen because they portray relevant communication exchanges in different business contexts and genres. These will be analysed both on the verbal and non-verbal levels, through a multimodal annotation software (see section 2). This makes it possible to integrate verbal and non-verbal cues to show how a multimodal approach can actually help students to interpret a message, particularly in specialised contexts in the business domain. The analysis is then followed by a section including some teaching applications and conclusions.

## 2. Methodology and data

The film chosen to represent the specialised discourse domain of Business and Economics is *Margin Call*<sup>2</sup> (2011, J.C. Chandor). It describes the day of a group of people working for MBS, a big and respected Wall Street investment bank, at the very beginning of the 2008 financial crisis. The fact that the story is primarily set in the offices of the bank and that the film director deliberately attempted to explain the subject in the simplest way possible through the characters' dialogues, without losing authenticity, made this film perfect for teaching purposes. The film was viewed in its entirety in order to select some scenes which were considered relevant for the teaching of English in a Business and Economics class. Seven clips were created with a maximum length of 4 minutes. These clips mostly show different business situations such as job interviews, meetings, conversations between colleagues, business negotiations, as well as the firing of employees. Apart from specialised vocabulary, in this case the analysis can also focus on the conversation strategies and the speech acts used, based on the situational context but also on register variation according to the participants' role, for instance, in an exchange between employer and employee *vs.* between colleagues (i.e., peer to peer). But, more importantly, the clips were analysed multimodally, that is, taking into account both verbal and non-verbal cues in order to verify how the interplay of different semiotic codes contributes to generating meaning and helps to interpret the message, especially in a specialised context such as business.

<sup>2</sup> For further information on this film: [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1615147/?ref=mv\\_sr\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1615147/?ref=mv_sr_1).

The multimodal analysis was carried out with the annotation software ELAN (Wittenburg *et al.* 2006),<sup>3</sup> with which it is possible to create an ad-hoc multi-tiered framework on the basis of the aims of the study. Table 1 below shows an example of the multi-levelled analytical structure for the present work.

TIERS	CONTROLLED VOCABULARY	
	Abbreviation	Description
<b>Transcription</b>		
<b>Gesture_description</b>	Ff	Forefinger forward
	Pu	Palm up
	OPdhT	Open palm down hitting the table
<b>Gesture_function</b>	indexical	to indicate position
	modal	to express certainty
	parsing	to mark different units within an utterance
	performative	to indicate the kind of speech act
	representational	to represent an object/idea
	social	to emphasize/highlight importance
<b>Gaze</b>	up	up
	back	back
	down	down
	left	left
	right	right
	out	out
<b>Face</b>	frowning	frowning
	smiling	smiling
<b>Head</b>	QN	quick nod
	MSsts	Moving slowly from one side to the other
<b>Prosody</b>	stress	paralinguistic stress
<b>Notes</b>	description of camera angles, audience reaction	

Table 1

Example of the multi-tiered analytical structure created in the ELAN software.

As can be noted, the left-hand column in Table 1 shows the various tiers, while the following column is devoted to the so-called “controlled vocabulary”, namely the labels used to describe certain phenomena, which is divided into two sections, i.e., abbreviation and full description. Each clip was wholly transcribed so that the characters’ speech appears in the Transcription tier. If the clip contained more than one interlocutor, a corresponding number of Transcription tiers were created in the software. This also enables the analyst to notice instances of interruptions, overlapping and so on. When gestures were used by interlocutors, these were annotated and described in the Gesture\_description tier, using labels on the basis of Querol-Julián’s (2011) model, whereas their functions were indicated in the Gesture\_function tier, following Kendon (2004) and Weinberg *et al.*’s (2013) classifications. Other labels referring to information regarding gaze direction, facial expression and head movements were inserted in the corresponding tiers, as well as the

<sup>3</sup> ELAN was developed at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive, Nijmegen, The Netherlands. It is freely available at: <http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/>.

occurrence of prosodic stress on certain words in the Prosody tier. Finally, the Notes tier was used to annotate some information linked specifically to the film genre such as camera angles, since sometimes, when the character is speaking, the camera focuses on another character to show his/her reaction. Therefore, in these cases it is not possible to take into account the speaker's non-verbal cues in the analysis (see Bonsignori 2016).

For reasons of space, only two clips will be analysed in the following sections.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Clip 1

The first clip is less than 4 minutes long (00:03:47) and shows a scene that takes place in Jared Cohen's conference room. Cohen is the Head of Fixed Income Security at MBS and has set up an emergency meeting with just a few other employees and the managers to discuss the sudden financial crisis that the company has suffered and to assess the entity of the damage. In the opening scene, we see Cohen with Sarah Robertson, who is the Chief Risk Management Officer, Ramesh Shah, a number cruncher, and David Horn, a firm lawyer, who are all waiting for Sam Rogers, an Executive, and his team, namely, Will Emerson, the Head of Trading, and two young analysts, one of whom is Peter Sullivan, the person that found out about the serious problems now facing the company. They arrive, enter the room and sit down around the table. It is 2 a.m.

The transcript of Clip 1 has been divided into three parts in order to facilitate its analysis. Generally, as can be noticed in the whole transcript, the situation is tense, so there are a few instances of sarcastic comments (turns 2, 10, 25, 33), and the language is quite informal (see the use of colloquialisms, e.g., *the math checks out* in turn 31, swear words, e.g., *fuck me* in turns 31 and 33, phrasal verbs and vague language, e.g., *put a few things in* in turn 14). Specialised vocabulary and expressions pertaining to the business domain are highlighted in italics, while the presence of gestures is indicated by the underlining of the linguistic items with which they co-occur. What follows is the first part of the transcript.

(1)

1	JARED COHEN to Sam	So, Sam, what do you have for us?
2	SAM ROGERS	It'll be here in a minute. Finding somebody in the copy room at this hour was a little bit of a challenge.
3	JARED COHEN	Okay, let's go right into the introductions. <b><u>This is Sarah Robertson, who you know, Chief Risk Management Officer, Ramesh Shah</u></b> from upstairs. And David Horn, one of <i>the firm's</i> in-house counsel.
4	SAM	Nice to meet you all. <b><u>This is my Head of Trading, Will Emerson, and this is...</u></b>
5	WILL EMERSON	<b><u>Peter Sullivan and Seth Bregman.</u></b> They work in our <i>Risk Department</i> .
6	JARED COHEN	Where's Eric Dale?
7	SAM	He <i>was let go</i> today.
8	JARED COHEN (looking at Sarah)	Who do you have left in your <i>Risk Department</i> ?
9	WILL EMERSON	As of today that would be <u>Peter and our Junior Analyst, Seth.</u>
10	JARED COHEN	Really?
11	COPY ROOM GUY entering (voice)	Will Emerson?
12	WILL EMERSON	Yes, <u>please. Just hand them out.</u>
13	JARED COHEN to Copy room guy	Thank you.
They all start reading the document		

The meeting opens with a series of introductions (turns 3-5), in bold, which are necessary in this context, since MBS is a big company, therefore people working in different departments often do not know each other. However, the managers and executives do know each other, as we can see with Sam Rogers and Jared Cohen, where Cohen addresses Rogers by his first name (turn 1), thereby expressing their familiar relationship. Since introductions represent an important speech act in the opening phase of meetings, Figure 1 shows the multimodal analysis of an introductory sequence, where Sam Rogers introduces his team, starting from Will Emerson (see turn 4 and the Transcription tier), using a gesture, labelled “Ff”, i.e., Forefinger forward, in the Gesture\_description tier, with an indexical function, as indicated in the Gesture\_function tier.

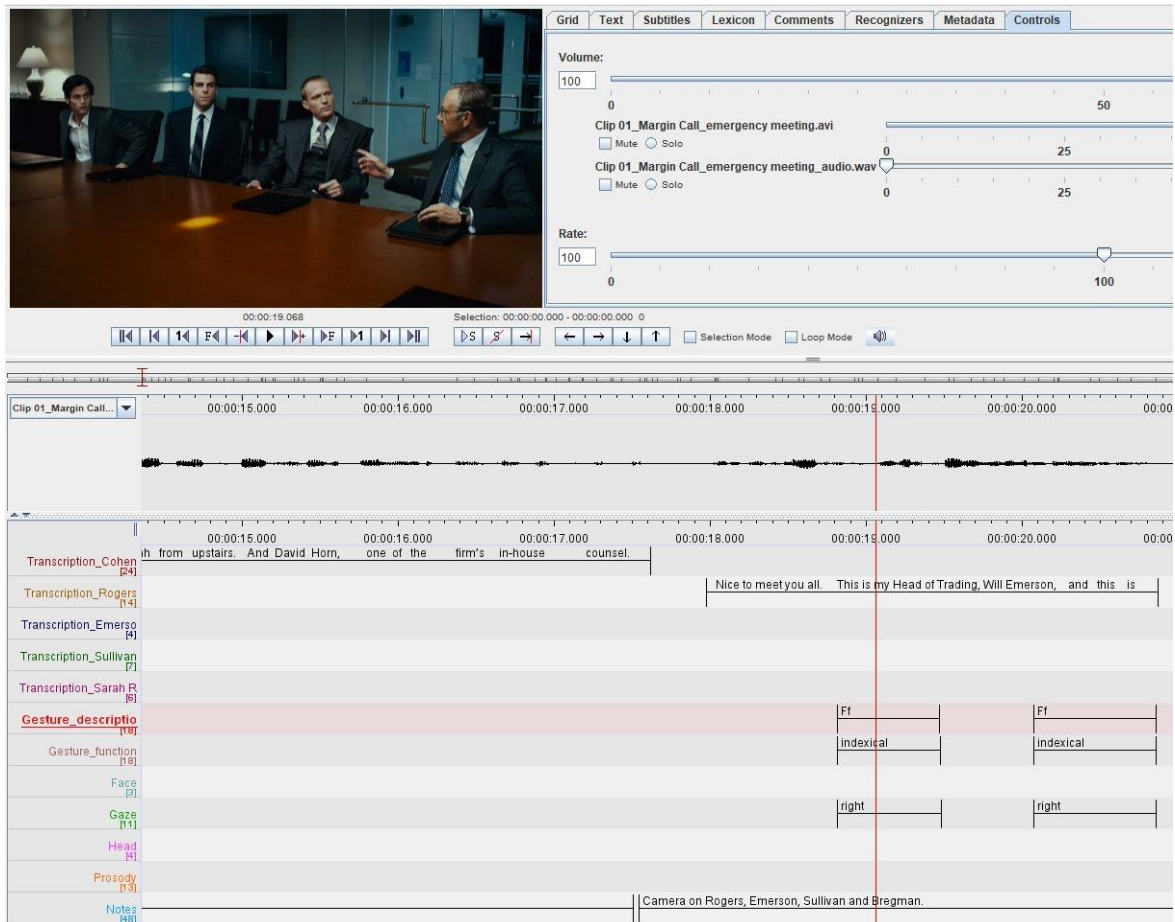


Figure 1

Gesture with an indexical function in an introduction sequence in a meeting (Clip 1).

The second part of the transcript starts with Sam Rogers trying to inform the participants about what has happened so far. Indeed, turn 14 is a good example of speaking about past events, with tense shifts (e.g., *had been working*, *left*), and using reported speech (e.g., *he asked him to take*). This report is then followed by a series of questions posed by Sarah Robertson to Peter Sullivan, the person who discovered the company's problems, in order to ascertain whether he is a reliable source. This is not a proper job interview, since Peter already has the job, but interestingly it looks like one. She asks him about his CV, his education, and then Cohen pops in to ask Peter why, despite his doctorate in engineering, he chose a job in the business sector (turns 19-28). These are the typical questions asked during a standard job interview.

(2)

14	SAM ROGERS	Apparently, Eric had been working on this for some time, but he wasn't able to finish it. This morning, as he left the building, he handed the program to Peter here and asked him to take a look at it. Peter did. He put a few things in that Eric seemed to be missing, <u>and this is</u> what came out.
15	SARAH to Peter	Peter, is this your work?
16	PETER	Mostly Mr. Dale's.
17	SARAH	But is this your draft?
18	PETER	Yes. <u>Again</u> , expanded on the original work by Mr. Dale. But, yes.
19	SARAH	<b>What's your background?</b>
20	PETER	<b>My background?</b>
21	SARAH	<b>Your CV?</b>
22	PETER	<b><u>I've been with the firm</u> for two and a half years, working with Eric that whole time. But I hold a doctorate in engineering, <u>specialty</u> in propulsion, from MIT with a bachelor's from Penn.</b>
23	JARED COHEN to Peter	<b>What is a specialty in propulsion, exactly?</b>
24	PETER	<b>My thesis was a study in the ways that friction ratios affect steering outcomes in aeronautical use under reduced gravity loads.</b>
25	JARED COHEN	<b>So, you're a rocket scientist?</b>
26	PETER	<b>I was. Yeah.</b>
27	JARED COHEN	<b>Interesting. How did you end up here?</b>
28	PETER	<b>It's all just numbers, really. Just changing what you're adding up. And to speak freely, the money here is considerably more attractive.</b>
29	JARED COHEN	What time is it?
30	RAMESH SHAH	2:15.
31	JARED COHEN	Fuck me. Fuck me. And I'm guessing by the fact that you two haven't said anything that the math checks out.
32	SARAH	Look, <u>we'd need some time to go over this</u> . But <u>Mr. Sullivan here</u> seems like he knows what he's doing. So, it would appear we have a problem.
33	JARED COHEN	Oh, thank you for that. What time is it?
34	RAMESH SHAH	2:16.

In the third and final part of the transcript, Sam Rogers replies stiffly and confronts Jared Cohen when he suggests they cover everything up to solve the problem. Sam Rogers is deeply irritated by Cohen's implicit request and speaks using a sarcastic tone. In turn 40, he says something that his interlocutor knows perfectly well, being a professional like him. Nevertheless, he feels the urge to explain the situation very clearly, by using prosodic stress, gestures and a modified idiom (see he uses the verb *hide* instead of *sweep* with *something under the rug*) in order to get a clear picture of the situation.



(3)

35	JARED COHEN (stands up)  to Sam	Fuck me. Fuck me.  Sam, <i>how long under normal operations would it take your people to clear that from our books?</i>
36	SAM	What? All of it?
37	JARED COHEN	Yes.
38	SAM	I don't know. Weeks.
39	JARED COHEN	Weeks?
40	SAM	Yeah. Weeks. But you certainly know that <i>our business is selling and buying?</i> It doesn't work for very long without both components. We suddenly stop buying for a day or two, <b>that's not something you can hide under the rug. That gets out. And when it does, <u>this whole thing comes to an end, and right quick.</u></b>
41	JARED COHEN	I understand.
42	SAM	Do you?
43	JARED COHEN	Yes. How many <i>traders</i> do we have left between your floor and Peterson's?
44	SAM  To Will	I don't know,  what's...
45	WILL	60.
46	RAMESH SHAH	Jared, as <u>I look at this more closely</u> , it is these <i>VAR numbers</i> that are setting this thing off--.
47	JARED COHEN to all (leaves)	Excuse me.

More specifically, Figures 2 and 3 show the multimodal analysis of the explanatory sequence in turn 40. In Figure 2, Sam Rogers' sarcastic utterance *But you certainly know that our business is selling and buying* is accompanied by the gesture visible in the still image and labelled in the Gesture\_description tier "PsdmStS", i.e., Palms down moving from side to side, thus performing a representational function. Moreover, the key words *selling and buying* all bear prosodic stress, see Prosody tier, to highlight that both components are needed.

Finally, in Figure 3, the Gesture\_description tier shows that three different types of gestures are used to iconically represent the metaphor Sam Rogers uses to clarify his point. The still image portrays the last gesture labelled "PsmD", i.e., Palms moving down. All three gestures perform a representational function and, again, key words are stressed.

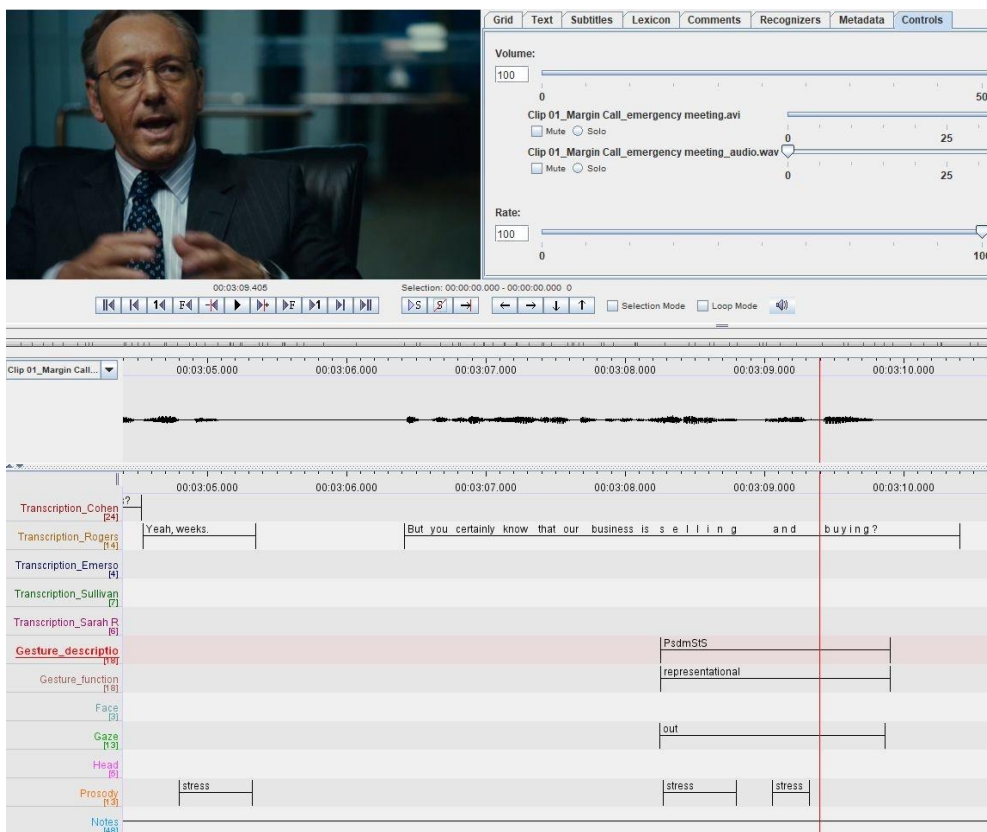


Figure 2  
 Gesture with a representational function  
 in an explanatory sequence in a meeting (Clip 1).

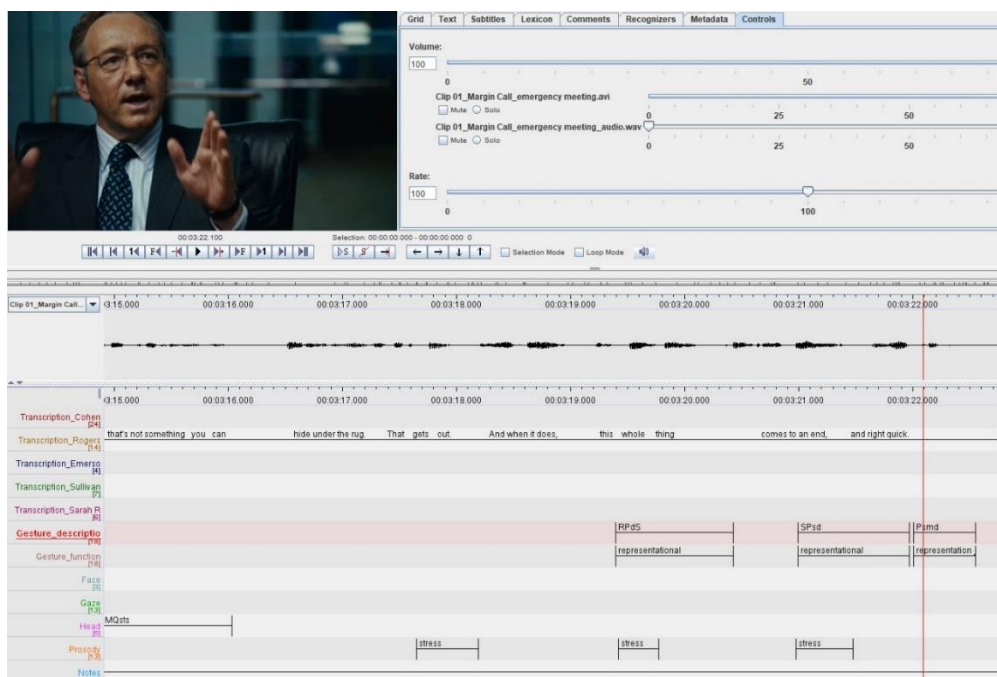


Figure 3  
 Gesture with a representational function accompanying a metaphor (Clip 1).

Table 2 below summarises the gestures used by the various participants in the meeting and their main functions. As can be noted, out of a total of 18 gestures, six, that is, one third, accompanied the introduction sequence. Moreover, gestures mainly performed indexical and representational functions, thus suggesting that the main communicative function expressed in this context was one of explanation and clarification, with gestures helping visualise important concepts and identify a specific person (see as in introductions).

N	Transcript	Gesture - abbrev	Gesture - detailed description	Gesture - function
1	This is Sarah Robertson, who you know....	Ff	Forefinger forward	indexical
2	Chief Risk management Officer.	Ff	Forefinger forward	indexical
3	This is my Head of trading...	Ff	Forefinger forward	indexical
4	And this is...	Ff	Forefinger forward	indexical
5	Peter Sullivan, ...	Pu	Palm up	indexical
6	Peter and our junior analyst, Seth	Pu	Palm up	indexical
7	Just hand them out.	FP	forefinger pointing out	performative
8	[PAUSE] and this is what came out!	OPdhT	Open palm down hitting the table	social
9	Again, ... expanded on the original work by Mr. Dale.	FTemC	finger and thumb extended moving in circle	representational
10	I've been with the firm...	OPu	opening palm up	performative
11	Specialty in propulsion...	OPu	opening palm up	performative
12	We'd need some time to go over this	PDmc	palm down moving in circle	representational
13	But Mr. Sullivan here seems to know what's he's doing.	Pupi	palm up pointing the interlocutor	indexical
14	... would it take your people to <b>clear that</b> from our books?	FTemfb	forefinger and thumb extended moving back and forth	representational
15	Our business is <b>selling and buying</b> ?	PsdmStS	palms down moving from side to side	representational
16	This <b>whole</b> thing	RPdS	raising palm down and separating	representational
17	Comes to an <b>end</b>	SPsd	separating palms down	representational
18	And right quick	PsmD	palms moving down	representational

Table 2  
Summary of gestures in Clip 1.

### 3.2. Clip 2

The second clip selected for this study is the same length as Clip 1, and shows a meeting with board members. More specifically, due to the situation of emergency brought up by the previous restricted meeting shown in Clip 1, a new emergency meeting has just been set up and a lot of important people are waiting for their boss, John Tuld, in the CEO's executive boardroom. The clip starts with John Tuld entering the room, greeting a few people, and then sitting down at the head of the table and starting to ask questions in order to

understand the huge problems his company is in. Although there are several people attending the meeting, the dialogic exchange is between John Tuld, Jared Cohen, Head of Fixed Income Securities, and Peter Sullivan, analyst and associate. What follows is the first part of the transcript of Clip 2, which has been divided into two parts. The occurrence of gestures is indicated by underlining the verbal items with which they co-occur.

(4)

1	JOHN TULD to all	[Please, sit down. Welcome, everyone. I must apologize for dragging you all here at such an uncommon hour. But from what I've been told, this matter needs to be dealt with urgently.] So urgently, in fact, it probably should have been addressed weeks ago. But that is spilt milk under the bridge. So, why doesn't somebody tell me what they think is going on here?
2	JARED COHEN	Mr. Tuld, <u>as I mentioned earlier</u> , if you compare the figure at the top of page 13...
3	JOHN TULD	Jared, it's a little early for all that. <u>Just speak to me</u> in plain English.
4	JARED COHEN	Okay.
5	JOHN TULD	In fact, I'd like to speak to the guy <u>who put this</u> together. Mr. Sullivan, is it? Does he speak English?
6	JARED COHEN	Sir?
7	JOHN TULD	I'd like to speak with the analyst who seems to have stumbled across this mess.
8	JARED COHEN	<u>Certainly. That would be Peter Sullivan. Right here.</u>
9	JOHN TULD	Oh, Mr. Sullivan, you're here! Good morning! <i>Maybe you could tell me what you think is going on here.</i> And <u>please, speak as you might to a young child or a golden retriever</u> . It wasn't brains that got me here. I can assure you of that.

This sequence is exemplary as, in the first place, it shows some key features regarding the structure of a meeting – i.e., an aspect that is often taught in the Business and Economics class – namely, how to open a meeting, with a greeting, followed by an apology and the reason/topic of the emergency meeting itself (turn 1); the role of chair, here played by the boss, John Tuld, who has to manage the discussion, avoiding overlapping and interruptions; and some strategies used to pass the floor (turn 8), here accompanied by a gesture performing an indexical function, as shown in Figure 4.

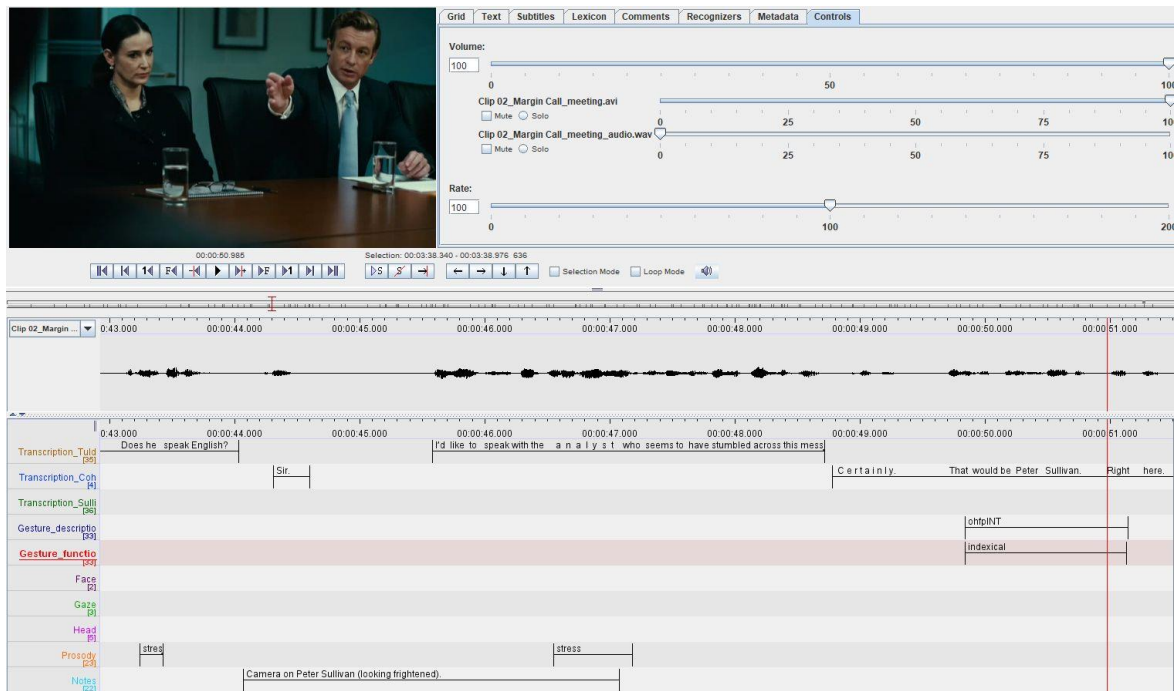


Figure 4  
Gesture performing an indexical function to pass the floor in a meeting (Clip 2).

The second part of the clip (and transcript) is explanatory, as Peter Sullivan is asked to explain what the problem is.

10	PETER	Well... Oh uh... <u>sir, as you may or may not know</u> , I work here for Mr. Rogers as an associate in the Risk Assessment and Management Office <u>at MBS</u> .
11	JOHN TULD	Please. <u>Just relax</u> . <u>Stand up</u> . Tell us in a clear voice. <i>What is the nature of the problem?</i>
12	PETER	Okay. Uh... Well, <u>as you probably know</u> , over the last 36 to 40 months the firm has begun packaging new MBS products that <u>combine</u> several different tranches of rating classifications <u>in one tradable security</u> . This has been enormously profitable, <u>as I imagine you noticed</u> .
13	JOHN TULD	I have.
14	PETER	<b>Well</b> , the firm is <u>currently doing a considerable</u> amount of this business every day. Now the <u>problem</u> , which is, <b>I guess</b> , why we are here tonight, is that it takes us, the firm, about a month to layer these products correctly, thereby posing a challenge from a Risk Management standpoint.
15	JOHN TULD	And, Mr. Sullivan, <i>that challenge is?</i>
16	PETER	<b>Well</b> , <u>we have to hold</u> these assets on our books longer than we might ideally like to.
17	JOHN TULD	Yes.
18	PETER	But the key factor here is these are essentially just mortgages. So <u>that has allowed us to push the leverage considerably</u> beyond what you might be willing or allowed to do <u>in any other circumstance</u> , <u>thereby</u> pushing the risk profile without raising any red flags.
19	JOHN TULD	Now... Thank you, Mr. Sullivan. <u>Sit down</u> . What I'm guessing your report here says, <u>and give me some rope here</u> , what I'm guessing it says is that considering the, shall we say, bumpy road we've been on the last week or so, that the figures your brilliant co-workers up the line ahead of you have come up with don't make much sense anymore, considering what's taking place today.

20	PETER	Actually, not what's taking place today, but what's already taken place over the last two weeks.
21	JOHN TULD	So, you're saying this has already happened?
22	PETER	<b>Sort of.</b>
23	JOHN TULD	Sort of. And, Mr. Sullivan, what does your model say that <u>that means</u> for us here.
24	PETER	<b>Well</b> , that's where it becomes a projection. But... uhm...
25	JOHN TULD	You're speaking <u>with me</u> , Mr. Sullivan.
26	PETER	<b>Well</b> , sir, if those assets decrease by just 25% and remain on our books, that loss would <u>be greater</u> than the current market <u>capitalization of this entire</u> company.

Generally, the discussion is articulated in a sequence of questions, mostly asked by John Tuld, and responses. Various types of questions can be found in this extract (highlighted in italics), ranging from indirect (turn 9) and direct questions (turn 11) to an assertion turned into a question through a final rising intonation (turn 15). Moreover, the variations in register are also significant, especially in the way they reflect the characters' roles. More specifically, John Tuld, the boss, tends to use quite an informal register, e.g., the use of the mixed idiom in turn 1, *spilt milk under the bridge*, a blend between 'it's no use crying over spilt milk' and 'water under the bridge', and of the idiom in turn 19 *give me some rope here*; colloquial terms and expressions such as *drag* (turn 1) or *stumble across this mess* (turn 7); metaphors such as *bumpy road we've been on* (turn 19), which in some way clashes with his important role in the company. However, at the same time, his casual style highlights his aggressiveness,<sup>4</sup> which is also expressed through ironic and sarcastic comments (e.g., *Does he speak English?* in turn 5), and a request for clarity and simplicity, also through self-deprecation (e.g., *And please, speak as you might to a young child or a golden retriever. It wasn't brains that got me here* in turn 9). He also addresses his subordinate Cohen by his first name, *Jared* (turn 3), while Cohen calls him *Mr Tuld* (turn 2) or *Sir* (turn 6), thus acknowledging his higher status. In the same way, both Cohen and Sullivan, who both are Tuld's employees, even though at different levels, use mitigation strategies in the form of hedges (highlighted in bold) when they are asked to give explanations by their boss, in the attempt to not sound arrogant, e.g., *as you may or may not know* (turn 10). Sullivan performs the difficult task of explaining the problems the firm is having by using simple but specialised vocabulary, and several pauses and gestures. Indeed, one of his crucial turns in the transcript (turn 18) is almost entirely accompanied by the use of gestures, which happen to be an extremely valuable tool in the meaning-making process. An example is the use of the gesture labelled as "oHmls", standing for 'open hand moving to one side', which is performed while uttering the word *push*,

<sup>4</sup> John Tuld also speaks with a British accent, which contributes to strengthening his mean demeanor, as happens with villains in animated films. Indeed, giving a British accent to villains is a convention in American cinema, which has led to stereotypically associate it with meanness.

thus iconically representing the meaning of the verb itself and helping not only Mr Tuld but also viewers (and students) to understand the verbal message (Figure 5).

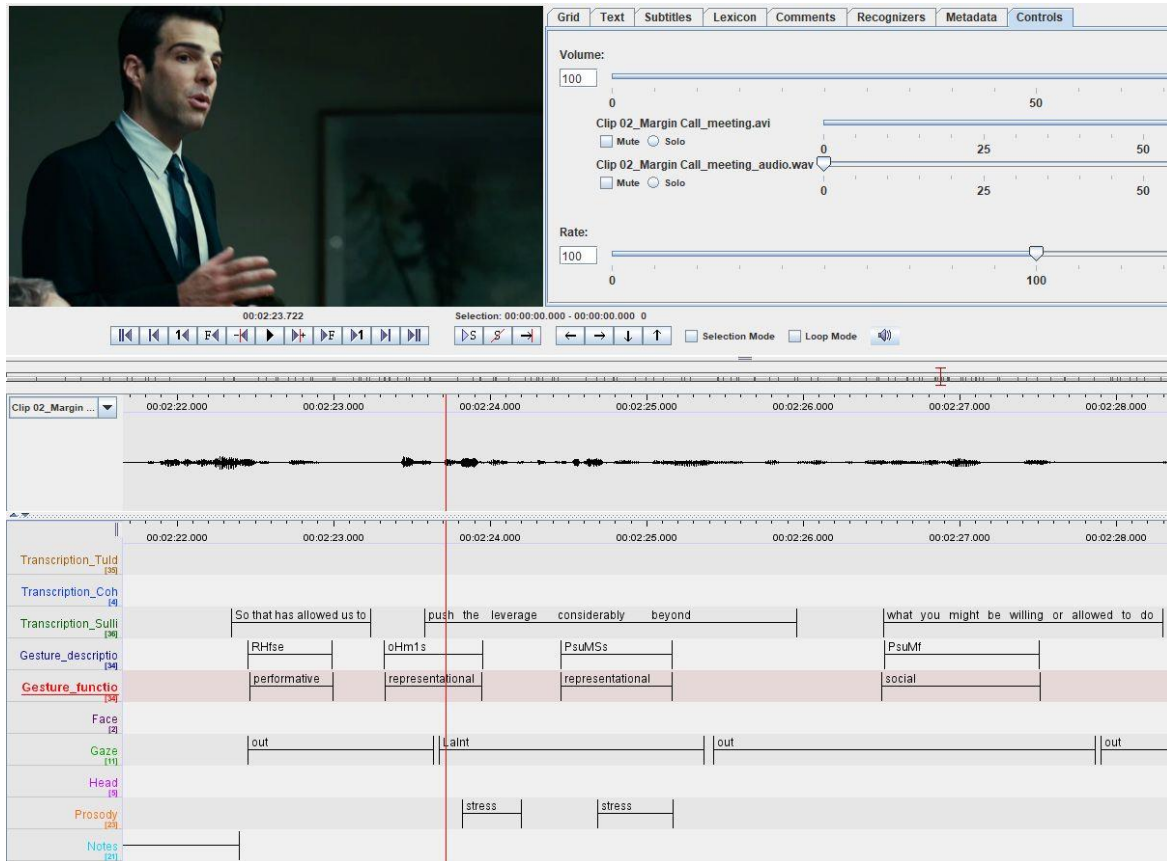


Figure 5

Gesture performing a representational function in an explanatory sequence (Clip 2).

Table 3 lists the gestures used by the speakers in this meeting and the main functions they perform. It is worth pointing out that the number of gestures in this clip is nearly double those in Clip 1, despite the same clip duration – i.e., 34 in Clip 2 vs. 18 in Clip 1.

N	Transcript	Gesture – abbrev.	Gesture – detailed description	Gesture – function
1	Jared, it’s a little early for all that. Just speak to me in plain English.	PdDC	palm down describing circles	performative
2	I’d like to speak with the guy who put this together.	LOBJu	lifting object up	indexical
3	That would be Peter Sullivan. Right here.	oHfpINT	open hand forward pointing interlocutor	indexical
4	--	RoH	raising open hand	performative
5	And <b>please</b> ,	PdMf	palm down moving forward	parsing
6	Speak	PdMf	palm down moving forward	parsing
7	as you <b>might</b>	PdMf	palm down moving forward	parsing
8	to a <b>young</b> child	PdMf	palm down moving forward	parsing

9	Sir, as you may	PuMf	palm up moving forward	indexical
10	or may not know	PuMS	palm up moving to one side	indexical
11	I work here for Mr. Rogers	PdMS	palm down moving to one side	indexical
12	At MBS.	OPsu	opening palms up	performative
13	Just relax. Stand up.	FPSMu	facing palms moving up	performative
14	Tell us in a clear voice.	PsdPMSs	palms down parting and moving to the sides	performative
15	Well, as you probably know,	PdMf	palm down moving forward	indexical
16	over the last thirty-six to forty months	PsuMSs	palms up moving to the sides	social
17	<b>combine</b>	PsuMSs	palms up moving to the sides	social
18	in <b>one</b> tradable security.	FPSd	facing palms down	representational
19	as I imagine	PuMf	palm up moving forward	indexical
20	Well, the firm is currently doing a <b>considerable</b> amount of this...	PsuMSs	palms up moving to the sides	social
21	Now the <b>problem</b> ,	PuMS	palm up moving to one side	social
22	Well, we have to hold...	PuMS	palm up moving to one side	modal
23	So that has allowed us to	RHFse	rotating hand thumb & forefinger extended	performative
24	<b>push</b> the leverage	oHm1s	open hand moving to one side	representational
25	<b>considerably</b>	PsuMSs	palms up moving to the sides	representational
26	what you might be willing or allowed to do	PsuMf	palms up moving forward	social
27	in <b>any</b> other circumstance,	PdMS	palm down moving to one side	representational
28	<b>thereby</b>	PsuMSs	palms up moving to the sides	social
29	Now, thank you, Mr. Sullivan.	FPSd	forefinger pointing down	performative
30	and give me some rope here	oHFsMqbf	open hand with fingers moving quickly back and forth	performative
31	What I'm guessing it says	FTE	forefinger touching eyebrow	modal
32	What does your model say that that means	SN	scratching nose	social
33	You're speaking with <b>me</b> , Mr. Sullivan.	oHsMb	open hands moving back	indexical
34	That loss... would be greater than the current market capital (...)	oHm1s	open hand moving to one side	social

Table 3  
Summary of gestures in Clip 2.

Most gestures are used by two characters, namely Peter Sullivan and the CEO, John Tuld. Out of a total of 34 gestures, 19 are used by Sullivan in his explanatory sequences, while 12 are used by Tuld accompanying directives, in the form of orders and requests. Therefore, both verbal and non-verbal cues contribute in representing the role of these two characters.



## 4. Teaching applications

The two clips selected from *Margin Call* both show the context of a company meeting and offer different suggestions for their uses in the a Business and Economics class. Taking Clip 2 as an example, it is always worth pointing out the importance of setting the background. First, a brief synopsis of the film should be provided, since not all students may be familiar with the story. Second, the scene shown in the clip should be introduced as well by describing the situational context, who the participants are, their role, etc. Then, students should just watch the clip once in order to get an idea of the main content, and watch it a second time to do a listening/watching comprehension exercise, e.g., a completion exercise where the missing items could be specialised vocabulary, parts of idiomatic expressions and some verb forms. Correction could be made either by watching the clip again with pauses and with the subtitles in English, or the instructor could simply read through the complete transcript, stressing the words that were originally omitted. Finally, students could do a comprehension exercise with True/False questions to be corrected later on.

At this point, attention should be paid to the meeting context and to the participants' roles by analysing not only verbal but also, and especially, non-verbal cues. Various types of activities can be designed in order to raise learners' awareness of the import of non-verbal communication. An example could be to divide the class into different groups and assign each one a non-verbal cue such as gestures, head movements, gaze direction, facial expression, etc., on which to focus while viewing the clip. Then, each group should watch the clip, with the instructor pausing it at relevant moments in order to give students enough time to note down the description of the assigned visual element in their own words. For this purpose, they could utilize a prepared form as illustrated in Table 4 below for gestures.








N	Image	Transcript	Gesture description + interpretation
1		Well, we have to hold...	<i>(*) Palm up moving to one side → modal function: showing self-confidence</i>
2		So that has allowed us to	
3		push the leverage	
4		considerably	
5		what you might be willing or allowed to do	
6		in any other circumstance,	
7		thereby...	

Table 4  
 Example of activity based on the analysis of gestures  
 in an explanatory sequence of Clip 2.

Due to the high occurrence of gestures and other non-verbal elements, Clip 2 should be divided into separate scenes. Thus, the form in Table 4 refers to one of the explanatory sequences in which Sullivan attempts to explain the problems of the company to his boss, Tuld. As can be noted from the third column, students are asked not only to describe the gestures portrayed in the still images shown in the left-hand column, but they should also think about the functions they perform and their effect on the interlocutor. In order to make the task easier, the corresponding transcript is also made available in the central column. An example of a possible student answer is provided for the first frame. The student might first describe the gesture physically (i.e., “palm up moving to one side”), and then attempt to interpret its function in the context. In this case, it appears to have a modal function to express the speaker’s self-confidence while suggesting what could be done to save the company. Sullivan, who is intimidated by his boss, however, has to show him his expertise and that he perfectly knows what he is talking about. This gesture, together with his direct gaze towards his interlocutor, contributes to achieving this effect.

Ideas should be then discussed as a class, and results could also be shown by the instructor using the ELAN software, thus integrating the analysis of the different semiotic resources altogether. Figure 6 shows the multimodal analysis of the explanatory sequence in question, with annotations regarding gestures, gaze direction, and prosodic stress.

With the possibility of actually watching and listening to the clip while showing the multi-tiered analysis, ELAN allows for a thorough investigation of communicative events. In this way, students have all the tools needed to be able to consider how non-verbal communication contributes to shaping the characters’ stance and its role in the meaning-making process.

After this in-depth multimodal analysis, the comprehension exercise with True/False questions should be completed again and, this time, corrected in order to verify to what extent the multimodal analysis of the whole clip helped the students to understand it. Moreover, other linguistic phenomena that have emerged in Clip 2 can be analysed as well, i.e., idioms, speech acts, etc., based on the topics of the course, and particular attention should be paid to specialised vocabulary, perhaps with an exercise to trigger meaning.

Finally, the clip itself can also be used for other types of language learning activities. For instance, on the lexical level, since the clip is about a company meeting, collocations with the lexeme ‘meeting’ could be provided, as well as a list of recurring phrases and expressions used to open, run and close a meeting, with special focus on the role of the chairperson. On the grammar level, exercises on one of the wide range of grammar topics that can be found in the transcript could be done: the passive voice, question types, modal verbs, tense revision, etc.

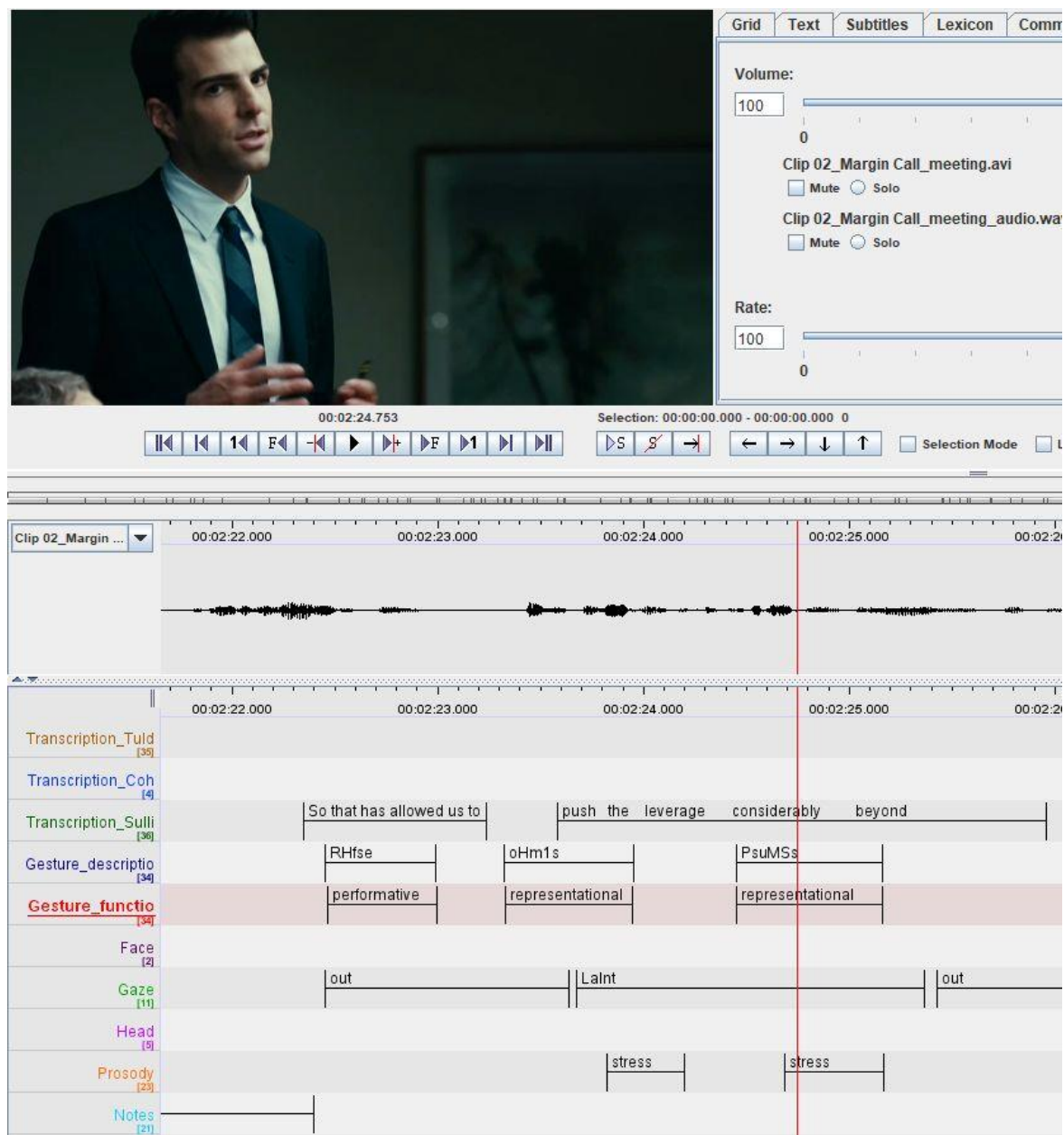


Figure 6

Example of the multimodal analysis of a scene of Clip 2.

This is just an example of a lesson plan based solely on Clip 2, but there are also other options. One could use both Clip 1 and 2 in combination, since they provide a representation of two different types of meetings. In this case, the focus of the lesson could be on the participants' role in each meeting with special attention to register shift from the restricted meeting in Clip 1 to the board meeting in Clip 2 – i.e., the casual style of interlocutors in Clip 1, where the informal context allows them to be even blunt, as in turn 28, where Peter Sullivan admits that his choice to work in a bank is solely motivated by salary vs. the employees' more controlled way of speaking to the boss in Clip 2.

## 5. Conclusions

The present work has shown the richness of the film genre as a multimodal product that can be used as a teaching resource also in specialised contexts such as a Business and Economics class. In particular, it is better to use film clips rather than the entire film (see, *inter alia*, Moskovich, Shaf 2012; Donnelly 2014; Baños, Bosch 2015), because this would be far too demanding for students. Conversely, short clips allow for in-depth analysis and give students enough time to concentrate on specific aspects or phenomena. The advantages of using film clips in the classroom are multiple. First, they provide models of spoken language, in general, and of specialised discourse in context, in particular, i.e., the business meeting in this case study. For this reason and for their plausibility as natural communicative events, they also “have the potential to engage students’ interest” (Timmis 2005, p. 118). Second, they represent a valid chance for students to be exposed to the language spoken by native speakers, thus becoming aware of different accents and varieties, e.g. British English spoken by John Tuld vs. American English spoken by all the other characters in Clip 2. Third, being multimodal, film clips are the perfect tool to raise students’ awareness of the importance of non-verbal cues such as gestures, posture, gaze direction, as well as intonation, in the meaning-making process. Finally, they allow for more practical activities and exercises based on the selected clips, for example to trigger grammar rules, specialised vocabulary, and so on. Last but not least, they can also be used to introduce key concepts according to the topics of the course, e.g., the structure of the meeting and its main communicative functions in the Business class.

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