

## **Challenge on Wheels: A Multimodal Analysis of the Discourse of the Syrian Refugee Nujeen Mustafa**

**By**

**Dr Dalia M. Hamed**

Faculty of Education, Tanta University, Egypt

**Dr Maha Al-Harhi**

College of Languages, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Saudi Arabia

**Dr Hala J. Alshahrani**

College of Languages, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Saudi Arabia

**Dr Waleed Samir Ali**

Faculty of Education, Tanta University, Egypt

**Prof. Wesam M.A. Ibrahim**

Faculty of Education, Applied College, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, Saudi Arabia and Tanta University, Egypt

Email: [wmibrahim@pnu.edu.sa](mailto:wmibrahim@pnu.edu.sa)

### **Abstract**

Beginning in 2014, the 16-year-old Syrian female refugee Nujeen Mustafa fled war-torn Syria to travel to Europe and finally resettle in Germany in 2016. Nujeen was born with Cerebral Palsy, a life-long disorder that affects the ability to move and communicate. This neurological condition makes a person unable to maintain balance. Being a disabled refugee, Nujeen travelled through her 3.500-mile journey in a wheelchair pushed by her sister, Nasrine. The National Geographic Channel produced a short film<sup>1</sup> summarizing Nujeen's incredible journey. In this film, Nujeen narrates her inspiring story which is meant to have an impact on all people, whether able or disabled, refugees or citizens. This paper analyzes Nujeen's discourses, verbal (both spoken and written) and visual, as presented in the film. It assumes that filmic communicative messages can be best interpreted through a multimodal analysis of the verbal (spoken and written) and semiotic discourse elements. It employs Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of visual communication (1996, 2001, 2006) to decode the messages encoded in the film discourse. The analysis concludes that a multimodal functional analysis of filmic discourse provides a rich account of the filmic communicative meaning. Films are popular communicative instruments due to their effectiveness in employing both the verbal and visual modes of telecommunication. As a result, Nujeen became the first disabled person to brief the United Nations Security Council. This analysis attempts to spotlight an underprivileged female refugee who defied disability and war to become an icon of human endurance and persistence.

**Keywords:** Nujeen Mustafa; Visual Grammar, Multimodal Analysis

### **Introduction**

People always experience daily situations and happenings that pose challenges as to how to deal with. In the process of dealing with these challenges with a certain defiance,

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<sup>1</sup> The film of Nujeen Mustafa's story is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rK6qzwwOi0>

communication plays a crucial function in the transmission of experiences and information across boundaries. Means of communication are diverse especially in a globalized world where the post-internet revolution in information and communication technology is a distinguishing feature. Films are popular communicative instruments due to their effectiveness in employing both verbal and visual modes of communication. In order to fully comprehend the impact of a certain film, a closer look at the verbal/visual structuring of film discourse must be taken into consideration.

Nujeen Mustafa, a teenager born with Cerebral Palsy, was forced at the age of sixteen to flee from war-torn Syria in a wheelchair. Cerebral Palsy is a life-long disorder that affects the ability to move and communicate. This neurological condition makes a person unable to maintain balance. In 2014, Nujeen embarked on the 3,500-mile journey, gradually escaping from the war in Syria to Germany, in a wheelchair pushed by her sister, Nasrine. Her progress on her journey was picked up and tracked by the BBC and other journalists. The National Geographic Channel later produced a short film summarizing Nujeen's incredible journey to reach safety. Though this short film only lasts about two minutes, it conveys to all people, whether able or disabled, the inspiring story of Nujeen's extraordinary determination and strong will to overcome her neurological disorder and the desperate situation of her home country.

This paper is motivated by Nujeen's short film, a film that reflects the powerful persistence of a girl suffering. In consequence, an attempt to analyze this film is carried out, assuming that a filmic communicative message can be best interpreted through a trimodal analysis of the spoken, written and semiotic discourse elements. The analysis adopts a functional-linguistic approach both to spoken and written discourse and to visual discourse to reveal the meanings in Nujeen's story- meanings that render the story so effective.

"It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions" (Rorty, 1979, p.12). Accordingly, it is likely that the visual elements of communication are the ones that most influence people's perceptions of reality. Nevertheless, when images are accompanied by verbal texts, they can be remarkably effective in producing impressions. The essence of communication is to make a person understood. For this purpose, in any communicative situation, a number of significant elements should be focused on. These elements include: the communicator, i.e., the person doing the talking, the content of his/her message, the medium of communication, the audience to whom he/she is speaking and their response to the message (Wagner, 1955). This paper focuses on the interpretation of the meanings encoded in moving visual and verbal texts such as films. Decoding messages in filmic discourse depends on analyzing the components of the spoken/written text and the visual elements as well, in order to understand their resulting effects.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the spoken, written and visual text-structure of the filmic discourse in order to uncover the way discourse techniques cohere and harmonize in a manner that renders Nujeen Mustafa an icon of and for all refugees. Hence, the paper attempts to answer the following research question:

- To what extent does Kress and van Leeuwen's multi-modal approach provide a comprehensive analysis of Nujeen's film?
- In what ways does the verbal (spoken/written) discourse work with the visual so as to influence the interpretation and emotional effects of watching Nujeen's story?

This study is significant in that it uses multimodal analysis in an attempt to illustrate meaning-impact through using linguistically inspired analytical techniques to investigate the functions of the verbal, written and visual components of filmic discourse.

## **The Grammar of Visual Design in Analysing Discourse**

Discourse is more than verbal interaction; it includes all forms of non-verbal communication as well (Johnstone, 2002). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) believe that the term discourse encompasses language as well as other forms of social semiosis such as visual images. Discourse, according to Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999, p.38), includes language (written and spoken and in combination with other semiotics, for example with music in singing), non-verbal communication (facial expressions, body movements, gestures, etc.) and visual images (for instance, photographs and films). The concept of discourse can be understood as a particular perspective on these various forms of semiosis - it sees them as moments of social practices in their articulation with other non-discursive moments. (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.38). Moreover, the term “discourse” refers to the messages mediated by both language and images “in a mushy mixture of the articulable and the visible” (Deleuze, 2006, p.33). As a result, visual representations should be the core of discourse analysis. Adopting the same line of thought, the term discourse in this paper is used to refer to all the semiotic elements (i.e., verbal and visual) of social practices. To fully account for verbal and visual elements in the selected film, we apply Kress and Van Leeuwen’s grammar of visual communication (1996, 2001, 2006) to decode the messages encoded in the visual discourse.

A mode can be defined as “a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack are examples of modes” (Kress, 2009, p. 54). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 177) define multimodal discourse as any discourse that utilises two or more semiotic modes (e.g., spoken/written language and images or other semiotic modes) to convey its meanings. They develop a grammar of visual design which proposes that images, like textual discourse, can be analysed through examining their grammatical features (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). Their visual grammar aims to “describe the way in which depicted elements - people, places and things - combine in visual ‘statements’ [...], just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 1). This grammar is based on the notion that the visual elements in an image can correspond to the grammatical components of written language: for example, action verbs (e.g., doing, going) are realized visually by elements called vectors; and locative prepositions (e.g., in bed, at home, on the floor, upstairs) are realized visually by characteristics that create the contrast between foreground and background like overlapping, the gradients of focus and the degrees of colour saturation (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, p. 46).

The roots of Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) visual grammar, which is considered a major development in Social Semiotics, can be traced back to Halliday’s (1985) functional grammar which construes all linguistic representations of actions, events and experiences of the world as process types and participants. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) argue that visuals convey three strands of meanings which can be correlated with Halliday’s three metafunctions in respect to verbal language: (1) representational (ideational), since visuals construe experiences about the world as perceived and offered by their creators; (2) interactive (interpersonal), since there is a social relation between what or who is represented in the visuals, the visual creator, and the viewer(s); and (3) compositional (textual) meaning since, like verbal language which needs to be organized to form a coherent text, the elements of a

visual need to be composed and organised into an integrated whole. They further elaborated that a social actor analysis of visuals can be conducted via transitivity patterns. This kind of analysis would require the analysts to identify what or who are pictured, the represented participants, their activities, and the attributes attributed to them.

This section provides a summary of the main features of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual grammar or the syntax of visual images.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) identify two processes as carrying meaning in images: conceptual and presentational processes. Conceptual processes identify the represented participants: the persons, places or things in an image. The interactive participants are those who read, make or view the image. The Actor is the participant from which the vector (a starting point of a process) emanates, while the Goal is the participant at which the vector points or the participant to whom an action is done. This relation is called a transactional structure, something done by an Actor to a Goal. If an image has more than one participant, meaning is made through the highlighting of one participant in relation to other ones. As for the conceptual processes in visuals, Kress and van Leeuwen recognise three major kinds: classificational, analytical, and symbolic processes. Classificational processes are those which relate the represented participants in terms of a taxonomy of types of things, or classes of things (1996, p. 79-88). Analytical processes, on the other hand, relate the participants in terms of part/whole relations, where one participant represents the 'whole', referred to as the carrier, and the other participants (of any number) are the 'parts', termed the Possessive Attributes. Symbolic processes relate to the meaning associated with a participant in a visual. These processes are further classified into two categories: Symbolic attributive (which represents the meaning and identity conferred to the carrier, such as a virtue, motif, or greater significance) and Symbolic suggestive (which represents the meaning and identity as coming from within or deriving from qualities of the carrier).

Presentational/ Narrative processes in images are those where participants are connected by a vector, that is why such images have a vectoral pattern. While conceptual patterns represent participants in terms of their meaning, presentational patterns represent actions and events. A narrative visual must have a vector formed by depicted elements such as bodies, limbs, tools or running roads. There are two kinds of narrative processes: the actional and reactional. Actional processes are those in which an action creates a relation between the represented participants. The Actor, the participant from which the vector departs, is often the most salient participant through its size and place in the composition. If the image has only one participant, an Actor, the resulting structure is non-transactional because the process has no goal. If the image has only the goal, something happening without showing the doer, the structure is an event. Reactional processes, on the other hand, are those in which the vector is formed by an eye line, a look, a gaze or by the direction of the glance of the represented participants. The Reacter is the participant who does the looking, and the Phenomenon is the participant at whom the Reacter is looking. Like actions, reactions may be transactional or non-transactional. In the latter case, there is no Phenomenon and it is left to the viewer to think what a participant is looking at. This creates a powerful sense of empathy and identification with the represented participants.

Images involve two kinds of participants: the ones represented, i.e., the depicted elements, and the interactive ones. Interactive participants are those who communicate with each other through the image (the producer and the viewer of the image). Social interaction between participants is depicted by gaze, the interrelations between frame size and social distance and by perspective. As far as gaze is concerned, the image seeks to bring about an

imaginary relation between the represented participants and the viewer. When the represented participants look directly at the viewer's eye, the vector -formed by the participants' eye lines – connects the participants with the viewer. Here, contact is established even if it is an imaginary one. This configuration creates a visual form of direct address as it acknowledges the viewer, addressing he/she with the visual equivalent of "you". This also constitutes an 'image act' (cf. speech act) because the producer has used the image to do something to the viewer. It is for this reason that this kind of image is called "a demand" as the participant's gaze demands that the viewer enter into an imaginary relation with him or her.

Other images address us indirectly. Here, the viewer is the subject of the looking and the represented participant is the object of the viewer's scrutiny. No contact is made. This kind of image is called "an offer" as it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information or objects of contemplation.

As for the size of frame and its relation to social distance, viewers are positioned so they respond to the represented participants with varying degrees of familiarity. Close shots show the heads and shoulders of the participants, thus conveying close personal distance. Medium close shots cut off the subjects at the waist, conveying a greater degree of personal distance. Close and medium close shots convey a sense of personal interest and involvement. Medium long shots, on the other hand, show the whole figures of the participants. These shots convey a more remote social distance that is characteristic of impersonal affairs. As for long shots, they show the whole figures of participants at a long distance. These shots relate to a further degree of social distance at which business and social interactions are conducted in a more formal and impersonal sense. Very long shots are even wider and, hence, they convey a very far social distance which may characterize people as strangers. The size of frame, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), can suggest social relations between represented participants and viewers: close distance means that the represented participant and the viewer are closely engaged, middle distance suggests a gap between them, and long distance means that the represented participant is out of reach.

Perspective refers to the selection of an angle, a point of view or an attitude. There are two kinds of images: subjective and objective. In subjective images, there is a central perspective, with a certain imposed point of view. Hence, the viewer can see what there is to see only from this particular point of view, that has been selected and imposed on him/her. In objective images, there is no such central perspective.

A horizontal angle can refer either to a frontal or an oblique point of view. Frontal angled participants are depicted facing the camera. This conveys a sense that what is in sight is part of our world and relates to a connection, attachment and involvement between the represented participants and the viewer. This would likely evoke a sense of "us", whereby both the depicted participants and the viewers share common concerns. An oblique angle, on the other hand, suggests that the represented participants are not part of our world, and that they have a world of their own. Here, the viewer is being positioned to adopt a detached point of view. In this sense, the represented participants are not part of the viewer's world: they are to be seen as "them" rather than "us".

A vertical angle suggests power relations. If the represented participants are seen from a high angle, the viewer is in a position of power. High angles make the subjects seem small and insignificant. A low angle, however, makes the subject look imposing and awe-inspiring, showing the represented participants as being powerful.

The layout of the image and its textual coherence, i.e., information value and salience, are also significant in the grammar of visual communication. Information value has to do with the placement of elements. The left is the side of given information, something assumed to be known. The right, on the other hand, represents new information-what is not known or agreed upon. Hence, such elements are crucial to the point of the message. Given means commonsensical and self-evident while new means contestable.

The elements of an image in the upper section are represented as ideal, and they represent “what might be”: promises, aspirations and dreams. Elements in the lower section, on the other hand, represent ‘the real’, showing “what is”. When something is represented as ideal, it is considered the most salient part of the information being conveyed.

If a visual composition places an element in the middle with other elements around it, one will refer to the central element as the Centre and to the other elements as the Margin. The Center is the nucleus of information to which all other elements in the Margins are subservient.

Salience, then, can create a hierarchy of importance among elements. Elements become more salient as they are moved towards the top or the left or the central part. Objects in the foreground are more salient than those in the background.

In Kress and van Leeuwen’s model, the verbal sections of a visual are referred to as syntagms. A transitivity analysis of the referential choice and the ideological effect of syntagms is quite significant for a comprehensive social actor analysis. Indeed, this type of analysis “shows us who is mainly given a subject (agent/ participant) or object (affected/patient) position [...] simply it is asking who does what to whom” (Machin and Mayr, 2012, p. 104). The activated social actors, the ones who do things and make things happen, are generally important and are usually foregrounded and presented as capable of “action, for making things happen, for controlling others and so forth, is accentuated” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 150). For the passivated social actors, on the other hand, “what is accentuated is their subjection to processes, them being affected by the actions of others” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 113). In the analysis of the verbal sections, this paper focuses mainly on: (1) mood, (2) naming, (3) the use of pronouns, and (4) the use of metaphors.

### ***Films and Communication***

Films are a powerful means of communication due to being distributed all over the world and being accessible to all social classes. In addition to being a source of amusement and pleasure, films are also widely used in classrooms to achieve pedagogical objectives. They can spread certain values and pave the way for social change. Clair et al (2009) state that films deserve more scholarly attention:

Beyond entertainment, film possesses the capacity for establishing a relation with a public as well as speaking on behalf of or about a certain group of individuals. Film creates an image of society and organizations, presents issues, affects policy-making, and promotes certain practices. As a communicative mode, a film aims to present an amusing or unusual experience in an entertaining or interesting way. As a result, participants are expected to be specific persons belonging to larger societies or more general groups; and most processes are expected to be material. (Clair et al, 2009, p. 71)

Due to the significance of films in our world, we believe that we need to pay attention to film-literacy or, in other words, we need to learn how to analyze films in order to be able to grasp the messages they tend to convey. In this paper, we support the notion of film literacy

through providing a trimodal analysis of the film to reveal how verbal and visual elements were weaved to communicate the film's message.

## Methodology

The film is divided into shots according to the setting change. Accordingly, twenty-seven film shots are identified; the relevant written and spoken discourse items are transcribed. Each visual representation and the accompanying discursive practices are examined. The analytical framework is inspired by the contributions of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001, 2006).

## Analysis and Discussion



**Figure 1** *The First Shot*

The interactive participants targeted by the visuals are whoever watches the film. These participants are invited to sympathize with the main represented participant: Nujeen. The ultimate aim behind the film is to make the audience identify with Nujeen's case as a Syrian refugee. The Film begins with the sound of a girl introducing herself briefly saying: "My name is Nujeen and I was born in Syria with Cerebral Palsy." The thematic structure of this utterance delivers the message that Nujeen has chosen to orient her discourse around her identity and that she wants to tell listeners and viewers that her identity is summarized in her birthplace and her lifelong condition of being disabled.

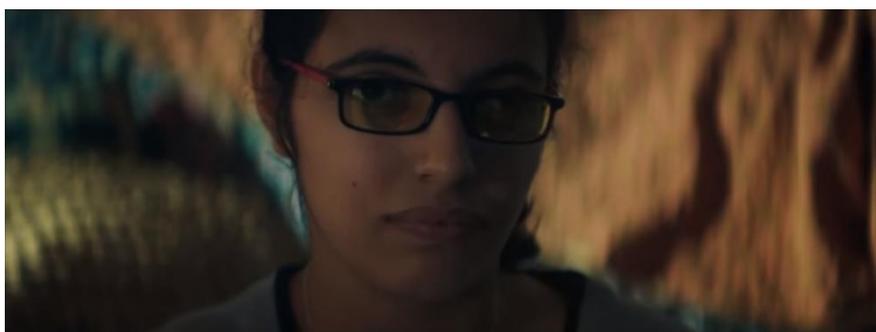
Through the interpersonal function of discourse, Nujeen tries to construct a channel of communication between her and listeners/viewers. That is why she plays the role of a person giving information. She employs the Indicative Mood to invite viewers/listeners to receive the information she offers. Of course, Nujeen is certain of her words since she is talking about her own life.

We have a relational/identifying (intensive) process in "My name is Nujeen" where the Token/Identifier "my name" is given the identification Value of "Nujeen". The following clause contains a material process clause "was born" in which the Goal is "I". The rest of the clause forms the Circumstances of Nujeen's birthplace "in Syria" and of being born with Cerebral Palsy.

In consequence, the very first sentence explains the elements in the experiential structure of the clause: the Participant, Processes and Circumstances.

According to Halliday, grammar "enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality" (1985, 101). The grammar of visual design, therefore, is expected to augment reality. Concerning the visual design of this shot, the ideational function informs viewers that Nujeen

is the main participant represented. This shot is not dynamic, as no moving elements are detected. The static image is an indication of Nujeen’s physical condition. This conforms to the output of the verbal analysis. The interpersonal functional analysis presents Nujeen as an item of information to contemplate, due to her indirect gaze at the viewers. Again, this is in line with the verbal analysis of her words. Being fully depicted in a long shot, Nujeen is not shown to be close to viewers, a normal point as she has just been introduced. The image has been photographed horizontally from an oblique angle. This oblique angle means “detachment” as it conveys that whatever happens in that image is not part of the viewer’s world. As for the vertical angle, the picture is at eye level, showing differences in power. Textually, Nujeen’s foregrounded position on the right side endows her with the value of being the New element presented to the viewer and the most salient one too.



**Figure 2** *the Second Shot*

In this shot, Nujeen continues to talk saying: “I couldn’t go to school.” The Indicative Mood invites viewers to interact with the information presented. Nujeen is the Actor in the material process happening. This sentence develops from the preceding ones in presenting Participant, Process and Circumstance. Nujeen is the central Participant, static but looking directly to the viewer’s eyes with the result of establishing a connection. Through her direct gaze Nujeen interacts with the viewer. As a result, interpersonal attachment is created. This shot is depicted so closely as to make the viewer feel intimacy towards the represented participant. The frontal angle of the camera serves the same function. The vertical camera angle shows Nujeen to be of significant importance. She is the salient element in the shot, due to her centrally-foregrounded position. The viewers are likely to become more engaged with Nujeen’s concerning her suffering.



**Figure 3** *The Third Shot*

In this shot, Nujeen offers another piece of information: “so T.V. became my classroom”. This is because the girl is disabled and, consequently, is forced to learn through T.V. The Ideational meaning presents the structural components “T.V.” and “classroom”. The interpersonal meaning, the exchange of information made by the declarative clause, invites

viewers to start focusing on Nujeen’s act. As a Token, T.V. is given the Value of “classroom” in a relational/intensive process that marks the beginning of the display of the girl’s remarkably distinguished qualities.

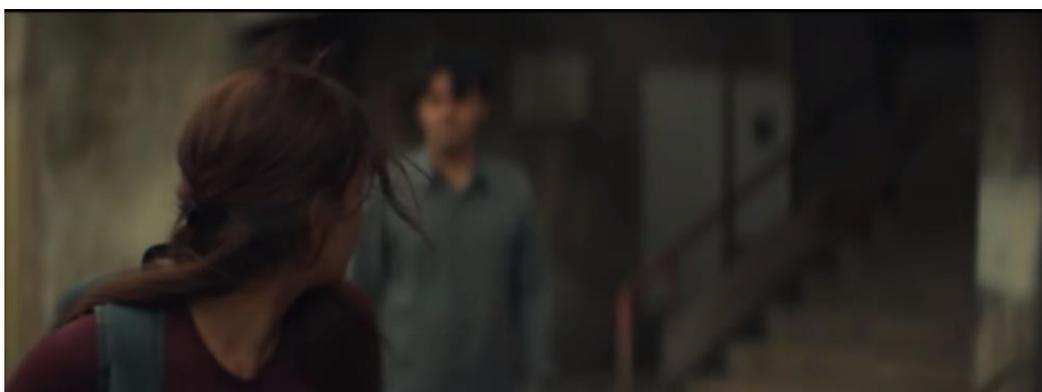
Newly-represented elements, the T.V. and the astronaut, form the Phenomenon which Nujeen looks at. Movement, through the astronaut, makes his image active. Direct communication is established by Nujeen’s gazing at the astronaut who, in turn, gazes directly at viewers. Elements are at eye-level, showing no power over the viewers. Nujeen and the T.V. are the most salient elements.



**Figure 4** *The Fourth Shot*

In this part, circumstances change due to the beginning of the war in Syria. This part marks a time-shift “When the war came”. A new message is negotiated, with “war” being foregrounded by Nujeen. She offers this information to set the scene for the coming change in spatial setting. The Actor is “war”; the process a material one. The effect of that process is presented in the fifth shot.

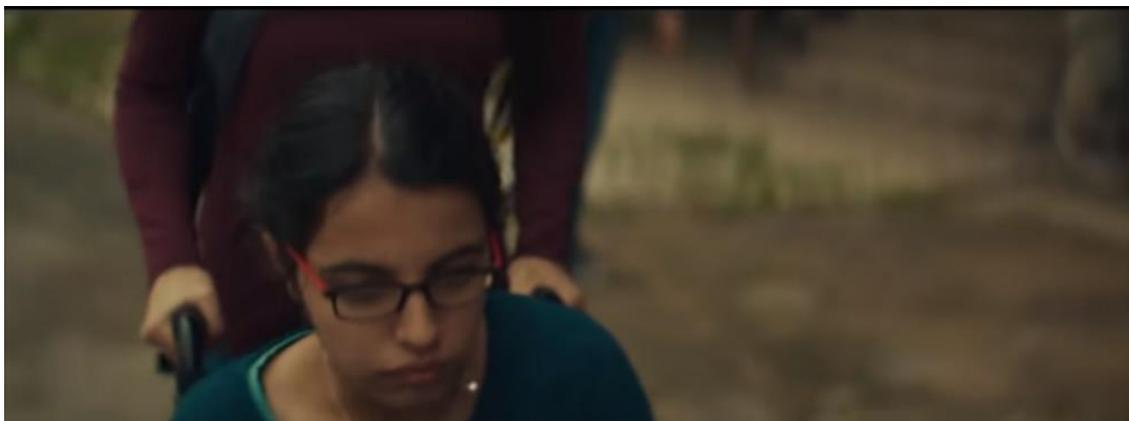
In a dynamic design, suggested by moving downstairs, this image presents a new participant: the man carrying Nujeen. The Vector, the imagined line, formed by the man’s downward movement, features an actional process. The Vector formed by Nujeen’s direct gaze forward marks her ambition. The absence of any target point at this stage of her life is reflected in the non-transactional process in which Nujeen, the Reactor, does not have a certain Phenomenon to look at. We are, again, in contact with Nujeen due to her gaze facing the camera. She is close and salient as illustrated in the shot.



**Figure 5** *The Fifth Shot*

This shot is accompanied with the phrase “my sister and I”, introducing a new participant/Actor: “my sister”. This image shows Nujeen’s sister actively moving, pushing Nujeen in her wheel chair. The image is dynamic. This structure is required because the story

is about the girls' journey. The Girl, Nujeen, is placed on the left position to clarify that she is known to us. She is salient, but does not look at viewers. This means that viewers are invited to think about the girls' future.



**Figure 6** *The Sixth Shot*

This shot presents the second half of the information structure presented in Shot 5. Here, we are faced with the New element “had to leave”. It is clear that Nujeen tries to establish a transaction with the viewers using the Indicative Mood to offer information with a high degree of Modality reflecting their necessary reaction to the war in Syria. The process is material with Nujeen and her sister as Actors without a defined Goal. No destination is decided by the Actors. This absence of a circumstantial location presents the Actors' suffering and encourages the viewer to empathise with Nujeen and her sister.

This image is composed of the same elements as the previous one. It is also dynamic with a Vector matching the girls' direction of movement. No direct look is established. This helps in presenting the girls as themes to consider. Being depicted at a close distance, Nujeen becomes the viewers' close/salient participant.



**Figure 7** *The Seventh Shot*

In this shot, Nujeen returns to talk about her personal feelings saying “I wasn't supposed to see”. This clause invites an interpersonal relation through its Indicative Mood and high degree of Modality. The process is mental with ‘I’ as a Senser.

Elements in this image are Nujeen, her sister and the wheel chair. Consequently, a Vector is drawn by the girls' direction of movement. This visual structure offers Nujeen's physical incapacity as a matter the viewer should concentrate on.



**Figure 8** *The Eighth Shot*

“[T]he bright side of my dream” is a continuation of Nujeen’s words in Shot 7. This phrase functions as a Phenomenon, the thing that is not to be seen by Nujeen. This phrase functions as a motivation for further identification with a disabled young girl who lost her home.

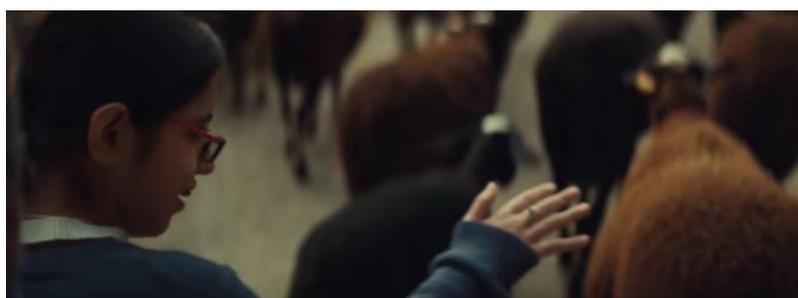
The visual structural components resemble those of the Sixth Shot. This reminds viewers of the girls’ anguish.



**Figure 9** *The Ninth Shot*

In this part of Nujeen’s story, a significant shift in the story begins as Nujeen says “so I made it an adventure”. In the message, Nujeen is the Given element “I” as we know that, at this stage of the story, Nujeen is a homeless disabled young refugee. The New structure is “it” in reference to Nujeen’s dream. Nujeen’s use of Indicative Mood aims at offering new information recounted with a flavor of definiteness. Nujeen surprises us as she changes her pathetic condition into that of optimism and determination. This justifies the use of a material process in which Nujeen “I” is the Actor and “it” is the Goal. Nujeen plays the role of an active Doer. In all previous shots, she was the disabled helpless refugee.

The newly-depicted elements, the trees and the cattle, the Vector formed by the movement forward, the girls’ location in the central area and the frontal camera angle all serve to pave the way for Nujeen’s adventure and optimism.



**Figure10** *The Tenth Shot*

This shot is a development of the shift which started to take place in Shot 9 - a shift from inability to ability, from powerlessness to powerfulness and from weakness to confirmed strength. When Nujeen says “I discovered all the things”, she stresses this shift. The pronoun “I” functions as the Given element to make it clear that Nujeen is the focus. The material process, “discovered”, functions as an escape hatch from the girl’s misery. The Indicative Mood is suitable as Nujeen offers her new life experience and wants viewers to react to her belief in herself. The material process is also apt as it reflects Nujeen’s role as an Actor, a Doer making a change and discovering new life as her Goal.

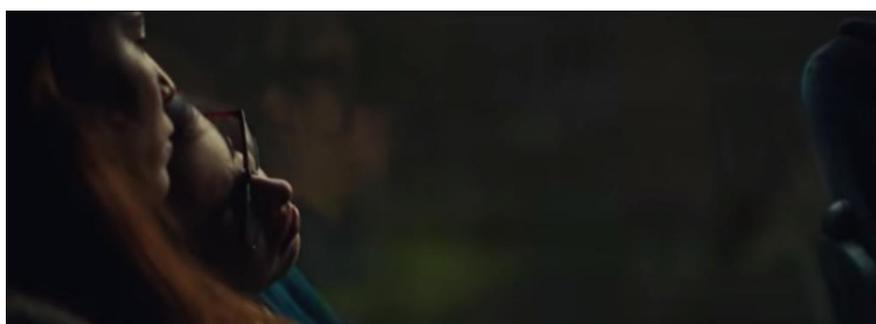
This image has a focus: Nujeen, the salient participant, is smiling and touching the cattle. The two Vectors formed by the girls’ forward movement and Nujeen’s gaze at the cattle stand for the girls’ decision to go forward in their life as an innocent adventure. The close shot serves to focus on the intimacy between the viewer and the represented participants.



**Figure 11** *The Eleventh Shot*

This shot has just a two-word spoken phrase; “like boats”. However, it is understood that the Given element is Nujeen and New element is her discovering of boats. This two-word phrase stands for the newly-offered adventures recited by Nujeen, which aim to stimulate viewers to receive her narration and feel as if they are communicating with her. Though we are faced with just a two-word phrase, two processes are understood. The first is the material process with Nujeen as an Actor in the process of discovering the Goal - the new experiences. The second is a relational/Intensive process in which “things” as the Token is identified with the Value “boats”.

Nujeen, her sister, the sea, refugees, the boat and the buoy depict the miserable conditions of refugees and the danger they are subjected to. As suggested by the moving sea, the image is dynamic. There is no Phenomenon to look at. Image elements are depicted from an oblique angle to refer to their detachment from our world and their state as Topics to think of. The low camera angle is a signal of close relation with the girls.



**Figure 12** *The Twelfth Shot*

This shot is accompanied with one spoken word “trains”. In spite of that, it is understood that the word “trains” plays the same role performed by “like boats” shown in the previous shot.

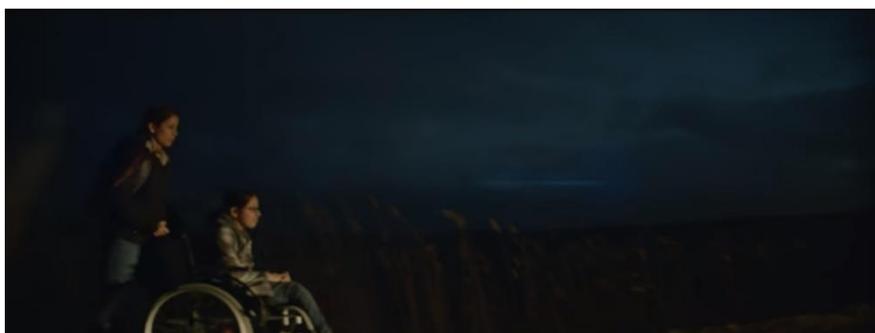
This image has Nujeen and her sister in a train, moving without a definite destination.



**Figure 13** *The Thirteenth Shot*

This part is connected with the clause “and the best hot chocolate I have ever had”. This clause is assumed to be a continuation of the list of things Nujeen has “discovered”. Nujeen, the implicit Given element, continues her message to present the New elements she has discovered and witnessed. The Indicative Mood allied with her sense of self-confidence are appropriate to the process of offering her experiences and adventures. The material process of discovering hot chocolate shows Nujeen to be an active Actor with the function of detecting experiences in life and negotiating these experiences with viewers and listeners. Though hot chocolate may be a common drink for most people, it may not be so for a disabled refugee.

The hot chocolate is the new element depicted. Nujeen, in her action of drinking with a smile, makes the image dynamic. Viewers are invited to contemplate Nujeen and try to figure out her inner power.



**Figure 14** *The Fourteenth Shot*

The words linked to this shot explain the reasons the trains, boats and hot chocolate are all considered to be an adventure by Nujeen: “and I wasn’t supposed to make it in Syria”. The Indicative Mood and the high degree of Modality offer an explanation, a justification for Nujeen’s attitudes. She is presented as being an Actor whose Circumstance of having a physical disability in a developing country like Syria has prevented her from discovering new experiences like boats and trains. Once this active Actor frees herself from the clutches of war, she triumphs over her incapability.

Nujeen, her chair and her sister become the salient elements in a dynamic shot. The Vector formed by the movement tells that they are advancing in their life, but with no Goal. The oblique camera angle encourages viewers to reconsider the girls’ status.



**Figure 15** *The Fifteenth Shot*

No verbal discourse is presented here.

The visual structure presents a man waving to Nujeen and her sister. This is a dynamic design due to the girls' moving forwards. This image tells that the two girls are salient participants, close to the viewer and powerful.



**Figure 16** *The Sixteenth Shot*

This shot is accompanied by “or Turkey” in reference to another new experience offered by Nujeen, that of passing through Turkey. It is understood that Nujeen is the Actor. The Goal is Nujeen’s material process of discovering new experiences. Another process is implicated in the word “Turkey”, it is an intensive/Identifying Relational process as the Token “all the things” is identified with the Value “Turkey”.

This image presents Turkey as the girls’ current location. Their dynamic position in the center of the design, their closeness and the low camera angle show them as the viewer’s friends.



**Figure 17** *The Seventeenth Shot*

This shot, with the phrase “or Austria”, echoes the previous one and performs the same function, with the only difference of replacing “Turkey” with “Austria”.

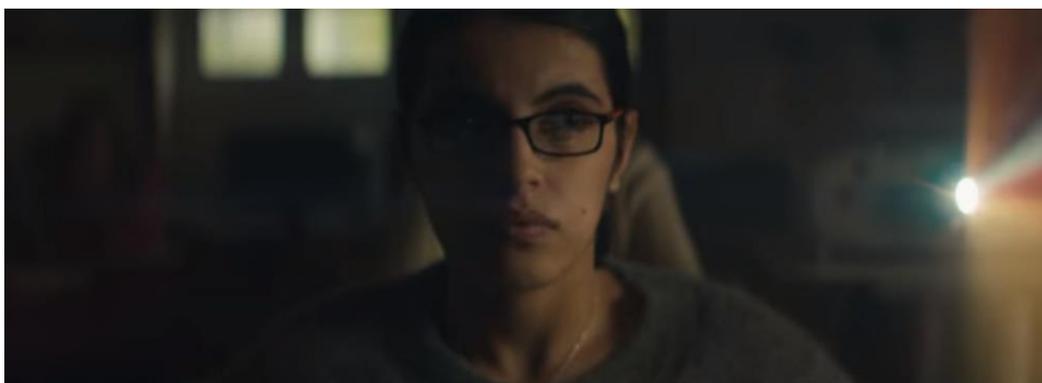
The visual design illustrates people in active motion as being the Phenomenon looked at by the girls. The use of public distance is suitable because neither Nujeen nor the viewers know the newly-represented participants. However, the frontal camera angle informs us that those participants belong to the viewers' and the girls' world. All participants in this image are at eye-level, this conveys their equality in significance and importance.



**Figure 18** *The Eighteenth Shot*

In this shot, Nujeen says “but in classroom”. This prepositional phrase is a Circumstance for Nujeen’s new location in a real class. The coming shot is accompanied with a clause clarifying this Circumstance.

Nujeen and her pen in the classroom represent the visual elements in this shot. Nujeen appears active without her sister for the first time. The Vector drawn by her gaze presents her as a Reactor considering a Phenomenon. Though no Phenomenon is obvious in the design, it is implicated that Nujeen is staring at her teacher. Nujeen is salient, foregrounded, closely related to viewers, powerful and active. This is the first image that does not implicate or suggest Nujeen’s the difficulties of physical condition.



**Figure 19** *The Nineteenth Shot*

In this shot, Nujeen explains the reasons for her sense of gratitude that she is in class; “I was never supposed to be”. This clause has the function of delivering the message that “I” never expected to go to a real classroom. The Actor “I” presents her explanation to the viewers using the Indicative Mood and a high degree of Modality to reflect, with strength, her self-satisfaction in order to induce viewers to admire her powerful spirit. This clause represents Nujeen as an Actor overcoming her past circumstances and witnessing new ones.

This image is similar to the previous one in its design. It only presents Nujeen’s classmates and depicts her from a frontal angle.



**Figure 20** *The Twentieth Shot*

The new point in this part is Nujeen’s first use of the Imperative Mood as she says: “so imagine how I feel”. This command invites viewers to carefully consider Nujeen’s ambitious mind. The process is mental in the sense that Nujeen is the Senser; the way she feels is the Phenomenon.

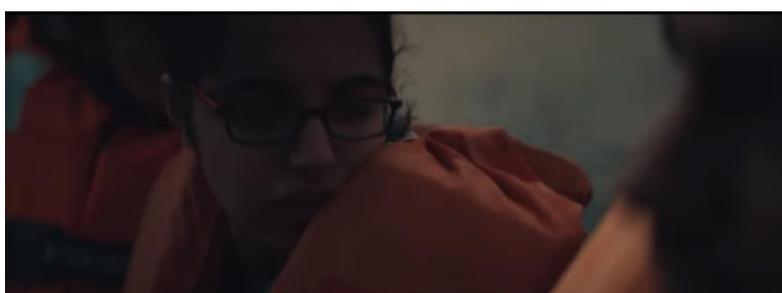
In this image, Nujeen answers the question she has verbally asked. Simply, she smiles with happiness in her wheel chair. Her close-camera depiction, her facing the viewers, her centered-position and her movement, all function to describe Nujeen’s ability, strength and significance. She seems to address viewers with a visual “you” so that they may react to her determination.



**Figure 21** *The Twenty-First Shot*

No verbal discourse is presented here.

This image is a reflection of Nujeen’s past events. The design reminds viewers of her experience with trains. Nujeen is the main visual element in a dynamic event. Her reflection through the glass of the window is a representation of her focus on her future life. Nujeen and her reflection draw a line connecting the girl and her image. The girl and her image gaze at each other. Each is the other’s Phenomenon. Nujeen’s reflection faces the camera to negotiate directly with viewers asking them to learn how such a girl becomes able, in spite of her disability, to change her fortune. The close shot affirms the point that Nujeen is the viewers’ close friend. The low angle intensifies her strength of character.



**Figure 22** *The Twenty-Second Shot*

No verbal discourse is presented here.

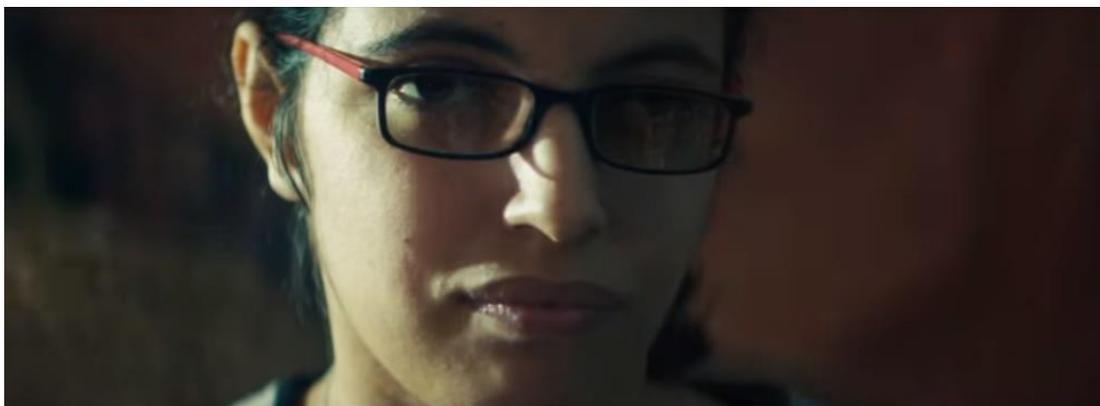
In this shot, which provides a visual memory, it is being suggested that Nujeen is going back over her journey by boat.



**Figure 23** *The Twenty-Third Shot*

No verbal discourse is presented here.

This is an image of Syria. Nujeen remembers her past life, the experiences she has gone through and the hardships she has triumphed over. This shot, and the previous two, do not include any verbal discourse - that of Nujeen's voice. This is appropriate because the three shots are about the girl's memories. The image of the Syrian boy playing is a symbol of optimism. The boy is positioned to the right to implicate that he is the New, the new future that is anticipated.



**Figure 24** *The Twenty-Fourth Shot*

In this part, Nujeen continues the words she uttered in Shot 20 about her expected feelings, saying “when people tell me I can’t”. This subordinate clause is completed in the following shot. However, it is understood that Nujeen is explaining her sense of pride. The process is verbal, with people as the Sayer/Teller and Nujeen as the Receiver of people's frustrating comments. The Indicative Mood and the high Modality expressed in the sentence above present a new exchange of information: that Nujeen will never surrender. The process in the second part of the sentence, “I can't”, is Relational/Intensive as Nujeen (The Token) is identified with the Value expressed in the following shot.

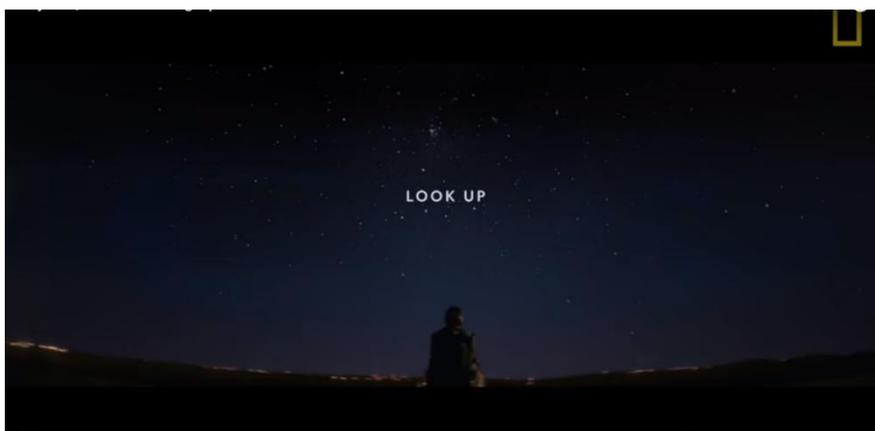
After her recollections, Nujeen is portrayed the same as her image in Shot 2. This is a further memory concerning her past when she was a prisoner of her physical condition.



**Figure 25** *The Twenty-Fifth Shot*

“[B]e an astronaut” is Nujeen’s Value, the value she endeavors to achieve regardless of her physical condition and her hardships. The final words uttered by Nujeen summarize her hope in life. This shot with its accompanying phrase of Nujeen’s aspired Value “to be an astronaut” could have been the final scene of the story. But this short film ends in an inspiring manner as presented in the following final part.

This shot is a recollection, it reminds viewers of Nujeen’s learning from T.V. The visual components are the same as in Shot 3.

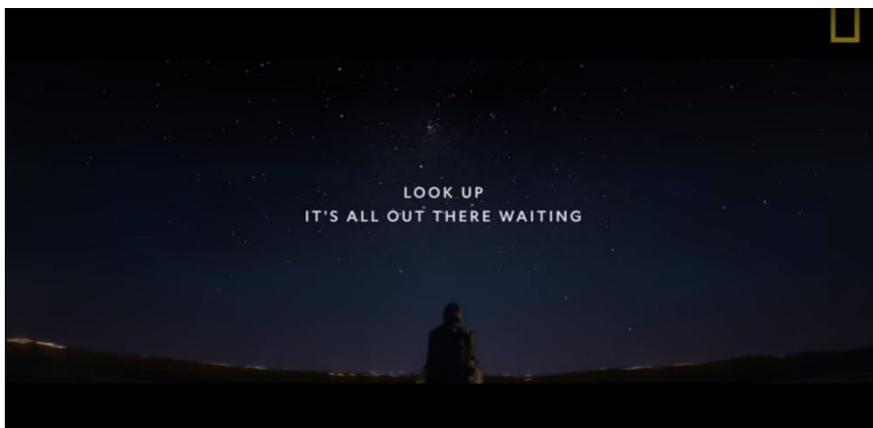


**Figure 26** *The Twenty-Sixth Shot*

The creative point here is the use of written discourse as the imperative clause “look up” is written high in the sky while Nujeen is silently sitting in her wheel chair looking at the sky. The subject of the imperative is implicitly “you”, and it may be referring to the viewers in general or to Nujeen in particular. The Imperative Mood invites viewers to engage with the story and to try to guess the intended person(s) addressed by the command and the reasons behind this command. The process is behavioural. The Behaver could be either all people in general or Nujeen in particular. The Circumstance “up” denotes the place or the direction of looking.

The visual design presents Nujeen, her chair, the sky and the written clause “look up” as the depicted participants. In her act of looking at the sky, the Vector drawn by the line of her gaze shows Nujeen to be the Reactor gazing at The Phenomenon, in this case the sky and the written discourse high in it. This transactional/reactional process is depicted from a frontal camera angle creating attachment with viewers. The written discourse is a demand that Nujeen and the viewers be positive and ambitious. Though the written discourse is assumed to be high above, it is seen clearly. This distance tells that success is not easy, but achieving it is not far-fetched.

The central position that of Nujeen, is a marker of her importance. The top position of the written discourse is an indication that looking up and anticipating the future are the ideals, the aspiration and the dream that all, including Nujeen, must think about.



**Figure 27** *The Twenty-Seventh Shot*

Another creative use of written discourse is employed. A sentence appears in the sky reading: The interpersonal exchange is achieved in “IT’S ALL OUT THERE WAITING” by the Indicative Mood as this clause offer a justification for the previous use of Imperative Mood and, accordingly, encourages viewers to identify with the story and its final moral. The process is Relational/Intensive in the sense that “All” as a Token is identified with the Value of “WAITING” and the Circumstance “OUT THERE” shows the location that all people, or Nujeen, should focus on.

This image is the same as the preceding one except for the addition of another clause written in the sky. It justifies the command that all are to look up because all dreams are waiting for those who struggle and fight, as Nujeen does, to achieve them.

## **Conclusion**

Critical Discourse Analysis is at the heart of human interaction as it creates an awareness about social actors’ needs and interests (Wodak, 2001, p.11). This research explores the multimodal representation of the Syrian refugee, Nujeen, through the interplay between visual, verbal and written modes of communication. Multimodality renders the communicative message-based meaning more influential (Norris, 2004). Analysis shows that disability is by no means an obstacle impeding one’s dreams. Nujeen’s optimism and defiance make her an advocate for the refugee youth. Nujeen’s resolution and determination inspired this research so that her unique journey gives voice to the Syrian refugee crisis.

This film, though being short, makes use of three modes of discourse: the verbal (Nujeen’s voice), the written (the text in the sky) and the visual (image communication). The three modes of discourse work together and serve the three functions: that of presenting Nujeen’s message to the world, that of offering Nujeen as an icon of contemplation and inducing people to interact with her and that of representing her inspiring experience.

Every element in the clause has a function. The analysis covers twenty-seven shots. Four shots do not offer any verbal discourse. The final two shots present discourse in written form. As far as the functional analysis of the verbal discourse is concerned, the messages communicated indicate Nujeen as the actor in the centre of the story. She is foregrounded due

to her initial position as the topic of almost all clauses. The plot is advanced with Nujeen, presenting new information concerning her situation. This information depicts Nujeen's journey in her wheel chair from Syria to Europe.

Concerning Mood, all clauses, with the exception of one, adopt the Indicative Mood, which is suited to the purpose of offering Nujeen as an icon to speculate. High Modality functions as a tool to present Nujeen as a highly mentally-able girl in spite of her physical disability. In this way, a communicative exchange between Nujeen and her viewers is created.

Material processes, presenting Nujeen as an Actor making changes, outnumber other process types. It is surprising that material processes are overwhelming as Nujeen is physically disabled. This portrayal of Nujeen as an active Actor serves to present her as a symbol of inner strength.

Visual communication performs the function of presenting Nujeen's spectacular life-journey. She is the main participant represented in almost all shots. She is portrayed as being active in almost all shots. This portrayal aims to show that her disability, owing to her fighting spirit, has been transformed into energetic power. Though she suffers from cerebral palsy, she aspires to be an astronaut. Though she is a Syrian refugee, she considers her home country to be heaven.

The multimodal analysis has revealed that the three metafunctions of discourse have been chosen and set to show that Nujeen is not disabled. Those who bend in the wind of unfavourable circumstances, those who surrender to hard conditions and give up dreaming are the disabled.

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