An Analysis of Multimodal Discourse in Public Service Announcements from a Multimodal Synergy Perspective—Take Cherish Food, Chinese Virtues Public Service Announcement as an Example

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Abstract: The forms of discourse are gradually diversified with the progress of science and technology, and the forms in which people carry out information transmission are also multimodal. Public service announcements (PSAs) are one of the most common mediums for transmitting educational information in people's daily life, and they are presented through pictures, words, sounds and other multimodalities. The current multimodal discourse analysis of PSAs has been less studied under the multimodal synergy perspective, and the multimodal synergy theory proposed by Zhang Delu is of great significance in explaining how PSAs can appropriately play their educational nature. Under the guidance of visual grammar theory and Zhang Delu's multimodal synergy theory, this paper explores the construction of interactive meanings and inter-modal coordination in a CCTV PSA titled Cherish Food, Chinese Virtues, to reveal how this kind of advertisement can realise its educational purpose and stimulate the public's power of action through the integration of multiple symbolic resources.

1. Introduction

On the basis of Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, scholars represented by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) define multimodality as all the channels and media involved in communication, which includes symbol systems such as pictures, colours, music, technology, etc., in addition to the traditional linguistic symbols. Besides, as far as multimodality is concerned, they also put forward the theoretical framework of "visual grammar" of visual pictures, which considers that symbols have reproduction meaning, "interactive meaning" and "compositional meaning". China's research on multimodality started relatively late, and the earliest date can be traced back to Li Zhanzi's introduction of the theory of visual grammar and the research method of pictures constructed by Kress & van Leeuwen in *Social Semiotics Analysis of Multimodal Discourse* (2003).[4]

The academics' current achievements in multimodal discourse analysis theory research are remarkable. In the study of multimodal discourse meaning construction, Wang Qingyu and Gu

Yanhua et al.[5] (2021) constructed multimodal discourse meaning for Chinese medicine cultural media. Yuan Xiaolu and Nai Ruihua (2022) combined Halliday's systemic functional grammar,[6] Kress & van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Zhang Delu's multimodal discourse analysis framework to propose a multimodal analysis framework for the international dissemination of "Cultural China", and analysed the viewpoints from the cultural level, contextual level, content level and expression level respectively. The multimodal discourse analysis of the view from the cultural level, contextual level, content level and expression level, respectively, explores the multimodal strategy of the documentary film "Cultural China" international image dissemination, and promotes the "going out" of Chinese culture. In the study of contextual elements in multimodal discourse, Deng Ruolan and Sun Xiaomeng (2022) analyse the identity and functional shift of contextual elements in linguistic discourse and multimodal discourse,[2] and sort out and explore the development of context theory. However, there are fewer theoretical studies on multimodal synergy. Zhang Delu (2009) explored a comprehensive theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis. And he 2023 conducted a study on modal fusion patterns in multimodal discourse construction. Han Yanfang (2022) conducted a multidimensional analysis of multimodal synergy in multimodal discourse.[3]

In conclusion, with the help of the visual grammar theory of interactive meaning proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen, it is possible to analyse how interactive meaning is constructed in PSAs. In addition, the complete meaning expression of PSAs relies on the synergy of multiple modalities, and the multimodal synergy theory proposed by Zhang Delu (2009) in the current academic research helps to explain how PSAs achieve the purpose of the advertisement with the help of multiple modalities.

2. Visual grammar

Based on Halliday's three major metafunctions, Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) extended Halliday's three major metafunctions to visual pictures, and they argued that all the functions that linguistic symbols have, visual symbols also have. Therefore, they proposed the visual grammar theory. Visual grammar theory includes reproduction meaning, interaction meaning and compositional meaning. Reproduction meaning has the function of conceptual meaning, which includes narrative reproduction and conceptual reproduction. The difference between narrative repertoire and conceptual repertoire is whether or not it has a vector. Vectors are oblique lines between participants, such as glances or hand movements. Narrative reenactment has vectors through which events are reproduced as they occur. Conceptual reproduction does not have vectors, so there is no course of action for the participants of the picture. Compositional meaning has the function of discourse meaning, which includes information value, salience and framing. Compositional meaning reflects the overall layout of the picture. Information value represents the different information conveyed by the elements in different positions in the picture. For example, the top and bottom positions represent ideal and real information respectively; the left and right positions represent known and new information; the centre and edge positions represent primary and secondary information respectively. Framing refers to separating or connecting elements in a picture through various lines; saliency refers to drawing attention to different elements in a picture through their differences (e.g. size, colour and position).

Interactive meaning has the function of interpersonal meaning, which expresses the attitudes held by the participants towards the people and the environment in the pictures through contact, social distance, perspective and affect. Contact can be divided into two categories: soliciting and offering. When there is eye contact between the participant and the viewer, it is said to be solicited. Conversely, it is referred to as offering. Distance reflects the distance between the participant and

the viewer, and the distance is proportional to the closeness of the two. Perspectives include horizontal and vertical perspectives; horizontal perspective means that the viewer is substituting into the picture and can actually feel the events happening in the picture. Vertical perspective, on the other hand, represents the power relationship between the participants and viewers of the picture. In this case, the viewer is not substituting himself/herself into the picture. In addition, the level of affect is related to the sharpness of the colour of the picture; the brighter the colour, the stronger the emotion conveyed.

3. Theory of modal synergistic relationships

Zhang Delu explored a comprehensive theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis in 2009, and he argued that there are complementary and non-complementary relationships between modalities. While complementary relations contain reinforcement and non-reinforcement, non-complementary relations contain overlapping, inclusiveness and contextual interaction. Reinforcing relationship means that when one modality serves as the main form of communication, the other modality reinforces it, and the three main types of relationships are highlighting, assisting and expanding. Non-reinforcing relationship implies that modalities complement each other and are indispensable, and it contains coordination, union and intersection relationships. In addition, Zhang Delu (2023) believes that discourse is not an objective statement of reality, but rather it is modified, deleted, highlighted, and downplayed based on the speaker's purpose to express his or her meaning. Moreover, he argues that meaning cannot exist independently, but must be embodied by specific symbols or combinations of symbols, e.g. by language, or by language in conjunction with other modalities, and also by symbols other than language, such as pictures, animations and so on. In other words, the meaning of multimodal discourse has to be embodied by selecting multiple modalities, involving the synergy and configuration of multiple modalities. Therefore, this paper intends to analyse a public service advertisement in CCTV advertisements by combining the theory of multimodal synergy proposed by Zhang Delu, and analyse how public service advertisements make use of multimodal synergistic relationships to achieve their advertising purposes.

4. Graphic Interactive Meaning Building

Meaning in pictorial interactions is constructed through contact, social distance, perspective and affect. The four differ in terms of expressing participants' attitudes towards the characters and environment in the pictures. Taking the CCTV PSA *Cherish Food, Chinese Virtues* as an example, the following section describes how contact, social distance, perspective and mood are used to construct meaning in graphic interaction.

4.1 Contact

Contact arises from eye contact between participants and includes both "demanding" and "offering". When there is eye contact between the participants and the audience, it is referred to as "demanding". Anyway, it is called "offering". The diagrams in this advert converge as offers. Take Figures 1 and 2 as an example. The scene in Figure 1 is a parent taking a child on a tour of a variety of grains, where the parent not only explains to the child, but also uses hand movements in order to explain more clearly. The scene in Figure 2 shows a primary school teacher teaching students about the Chinese virtue of thrift and diligence in the Disciple's Rules, with the students chanting along. In both Figures 1 and 2, there is no eye contact between the participants and the audience, and the unemotional physical object in both scenes, the giant grain, does not make eye contact with the audience, so both belong to the category of "offering" images.

The PSA adopts the design of "offering" pictures, avoiding the audience's direct visual contact with the video participants, which enables the audience to be more engaged in the content of the advertisement and easy to realise the purpose of the advertisement. The theme of the advert is to protect the environment and cherish food. This theme is not only in line with the traditional Chinese virtue of diligence and thrift, but also reflects the image of our country as a responsible big country. Especially the two scenes in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 imply that education should be "home and school together", cultivate children's correct values from childhood, and better reflect our country's attention to protecting the environment, which demonstrates the style of a great nation.
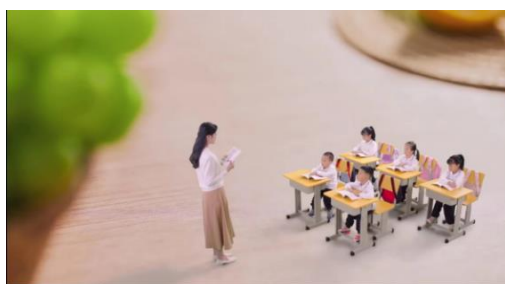

Figure 1: Example of an "offering" image.

Figure 2: Example of "offering" image and top view image.

4.2 Social distance

Social distance is related to the framing proximity of a picture and can reflect the social relationship between the person or object in the picture and the audience. A close-up view generally includes only the upper part of the person or object, such as a facial expression, which represents an intimate relationship. A medium view can generally include the full view of the person or object and represents social relationships. The far view can generally include four and more people or objects and represents public relations. In this article, there are three images intercepted, Figure 3 belongs to the close-up view, Figure 4 is the mid-range view, and Figure 5 is the far-range view.

In Figure 3, the picture has a short social distance, so the audience can intuitively feel the facial expressions of the characters in the picture, and through the participants' body movements and the giant grain around them, the audience can very easily understand that the scene wants to express the meaning of the hard-won food. In addition, the nods and smiles of the children and their parents imply their affirmation of the behaviour of cherishing food, which in turn conveys that cherishing food represents a sense of social responsibility. Figure 4 belongs to the medium shot, which chooses the farmer as the most relevant participant to the theme, but the audience cannot see the facial expression of the participant. The medium shot enables the audience to see the full picture of the participants, implying social relations. The farmer's hard sowing behaviour is easy to cause the audience to reflect, strengthen the theme and stimulate the audience's sense of responsibility. Figure 5 belongs to the telephoto lens, there are four participants in total, and the background is the giant grain, which can clearly reflect the scene of the event. The scene is close to life, and it is easy to

draw a close psychological distance with the audience. In addition, the scene also implies public relations, through the body movements of the participants and combined with life experience, the audience can guess that the scene is related to the gathering, and the surrounding grain also helps to highlight the theme of saving food.

In conclusion, the use of different social distances in PSAs to reflect the intimate relationship between viewers and participants can highlight the theme of the advert and stimulate viewers' sense of social responsibility. The close-up view helps viewers to be more engaged in the content of the advertisement, while the medium and distant views provoke viewers to think and take action.

Figure 3: Example of close-up image and horizontal view image.

Figure 4: Example of a medium-view image.

Figure 5: Example of a distant view image.

4.3 Perspective

The perspective body reflects the viewer's attitude towards the picture participant and consists of horizontal and vertical perspectives. Horizontal perspective is presented in two forms, either by presenting the picture participant frontally or by presenting the picture participant sideways. Frontal presentation implies participation, while lateral presentation is indifference. Vertical perspectives are presented in three ways: high, horizontal and low. The different angles symbolise the different power relationships between the audience and the participants. The high perspective represents the viewer's superiority over the participant, the horizontal represents an equal relationship, and the low perspective represents the viewer's inferiority to the participant.

The PSAs selected in this paper are mainly in horizontal perspective. Taking Figure 3 as an example, when the audience is in the horizontal perspective, the participants of the picture are intuitive to the audience, and the audience will not feel the power disparity with the participants of the picture, so they can be more easily brought into the picture, and realise that the protection of the environment and the cherishing and saving of food is one of the social responsibilities, which inspires the audience's sense of responsibility. The advert also uses a small amount of vertical perspective, as exemplified in Figure 2. In this case, the viewer is in an elevated position and is in a better position than the participants of the picture. However, this design does not emphasise the power relationship in that spot, but rather the dominant position of the viewer, so that the viewer realises that the implementation of the action relies on self-initiative. Therefore, the design of Figure 2 is to make the audience realise that they have been educated from childhood to save food, which from the side can inspire the audience to take action and mobilise self-consciousness.

In short, the combination of horizontal and vertical perspectives not only enriches the content of the advert, but also enhances the viewer's sense of participation and responsibility.

4.4 Mood

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argue that mood is mainly represented through the sharpness of colours, including high, medium and low mood. In addition to textual symbols, colours also have the function of constructing meaning. The PSAs selected for this paper have the characteristics of "high colour vibrancy of the giant grain, medium colour vibrancy of the characters and low colour vibrancy of the background". This contrasting design can easily make the audience focus on the giant grain and characters with high colourfulness, which makes the audience have a strong sense of participation. In addition, the five scenes covered in the film are close to people's daily lives, which can easily resonate with the audience, realising the purpose of the PSA, which is to call on citizens to save food, and stimulate the audienc's sense of social responsibility.[1]

5. Multimodal Synergy Relationship Construction

PSAs are multimodal texts, combining text, audio and images. Creators can make full use of the multimodal collaboration to convey the theme of the advert to the public in a slow and easy way. Moreover, the audience can absorb the concepts conveyed in the advert in a subtle way and enhance their sense of social responsibility. According to Zhang Delu's theory of multimodal synergy, there are two main relationships between modes, complementary and non-complementary.[8] In the PSAs selected in this paper, pictures account for the highest percentage, followed by auditory, and text accounts for the least. In the following, we will elaborate how the PSAs use multiple multimodal synergy to highlight the advertisement theme from the reinforcing and non-reinforcing relationships.[7]

5.1 Reinforcing Relationships

Reinforcing relationships are when one modality serves as the primary form of communication and another modality reinforces it, and can be summarised as salient, auxiliary and augmentative.[8]

In the adverts selected for this paper, the sound modality aids the image modality and acts as a reinforcement for it. Throughout the advertisement, the background music is light and soothing. The viewers, assisted by the sound modality, can stay in a relaxed and happy mood, which makes it easier for them to accept the scenes of the image modality and understand the educational content conveyed by the advertisement. In addition, one sound modality that deserves special attention is the 31st second of the video (e.g. Fig. 6), a farmer's sigh, together with the farmer's labouring

behaviour, can greatly stimulate the audience's sense of hearing and vision. Thus, the audience is stimulated to think and realise that food is not easy to come by. Moreover, the text corresponding to the sound modality is also presented in the picture with the background sound to highlight the text modality, which strengthens the text modality. In conclusion, the choice of advertisement design with reinforcing relationship helps to highlight the theme of treasuring food in the PSAs and raise the audience's awareness of saving food.

Figure 6: Example of a reinforcing relationship.

5.2 Non-reinforcing relationships

Non-reinforcing relationships indicate that the modalities complement each other and are indispensable, and they encompass co-ordination, association and cross-relationships.[8]

The non-reinforcement relationship is the main relationship in the adverts selected for this paper. All the clips in the advertisements in which the background sound is the recitation of poems and quotations are the non-reinforcement of the image modality by the sound modality and the text modality, and the three modalities are coordinated and united, so that the audience can understand the meaning of the pictures more easily. Take Fig. 7 as an example, from the 5th to the 9th second of the advertisement, the background sound is reciting "A porridge and a meal, think of the place where they came from is not easy to get." from Zhu Zi's Family Trainings, and the content of the text is consistent with that of the background sound. At this point, the image modality can make the audience's attention more focused due to the intervention of the background sound, while the presentation of the text can make the theme of cherishing food expressed in the picture clearer.

In conclusion, in this advertisement, the image modality is often in the foreground as the main modality, which is complemented by the union of the text and sound modalities. The combination of the three modes makes the content of the advertisement more smoothly expressed and coordinated with the graphic and text. The three modalities jointly construct the overall meaning of the advertisement, which helps to achieve the purpose of the PSA to raise the public's awareness of food conservation and enhance the sense of social responsibility.

Figure 7: Examples of a non-reinforcing relationship.

6. Conclusion

Under the guidance of Visual Grammar Theory and multimodal synergy Theory, this paper

conducts a multimodal discourse analysis of the CCTV public service announcement (PSA) *Cherish Food, Chinese Virtues* to analyse its interactive meaning and the synergistic relationship among modes. Visually, the PSA is designed with no visual contact between the participants and the audience, close-up shots and horizontal perspective, which helps the audience to be more immersed in the advertisement and enhances the sense of participation. The pairing of distant shots and vertical perspectives can trigger the audience to think. In addition, the design of the advert's mood can make the audience's attention more focused. In terms of multimodal synergy, the text modality and sound modality reinforce and complement the image modality, which helps to achieve the purpose of the advert to raise citizens' awareness of food conservation and enhance their sense of social responsibility. In short, different modes need to cooperate with each other to form an organic whole, so as to achieve the purpose of the advertisement. Through in-depth analysis of the various modes and their interrelationships in PSAs, we can better understand the communication mechanism and impact effect of PSAs.

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