

A Humorous Multimodal Study of the Movie “This is not What I Expected”

Zhang Hui

Nanjing Vocational University of Industry Technology, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210000, China

Keywords: Humor, Multimodal, Complementarity, Intensification

Abstract: Film, as a typical example of multimodal discourse analysis, is a blend of auditory and visual sense, through various means such as language, image, sound, movement and symbols of resources to bring the audience an audio-visual feast. Lu Jin, played by Takeshi Kanagi, represents the superior upper class, while Gu Shengnan, played by Zhou Dongyu, is the representative of the civilian class. Two people with different characters and classes fall in love with each other because of food, which produces scenes of joy that make people laugh. Based on the theory of multimodal discourse analysis and the theory of humor, this paper discusses the mechanism of humor in the movie “This is not what I expected” and analyzes the loving process between the hero and heroine from meeting, knowing, getting along with each other and falling in love. This paper also discusses the synergistic effect of different modalities in the film.

1. Introduction

"This is not what I expected" is a romantic film directed by Xu Hongyu. Takeshi Kaneshiro and Zhou Dongyu star in the movie. The film tells the love story of a mismatched man and woman who fall in love because of food. The English title of the film properly interprets the wonder of love, and also fits the way of the hero and heroine meeting, getting to know each other, getting along and falling in love. As a successful romantic comedy, the director properly uses language, image, sound, action and other multi-modal expression techniques to convey his understanding of love to viewers, "Love is crazy and childlike and there is a sense of loss of control."^[1]

2. Theory review

2.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse refers to the phenomenon of using auditory, visual, tactile and other senses to communicate through language, image, sound, action and other means and symbolic resources. Using the theory of systemic functional linguistics, Zhang Delu divides the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis into: (1) cultural level; (2) context level; (4) form level; (5) media level.^[2]

The significance of multimodal discourse analysis is that it can integrate language with other relevant meaning resources.^[3] It can not only see the role played by the language system in the

process of meaning exchange, but also see the effects of other symbol systems such as images, music, colors, etc., so as to make the interpretation of the meaning of discourse more comprehensive and accurate, and discover how human beings use multiple modalities to achieve the purpose of social communication. ^[4]

2.2 A theoretical analysis of humor

Foreign theories on humor began with Superiority Theory in the 17th century, Incongruity Theory proposed by Schopenhauer (1819) in the 18th century, ^[5]and Freud in the 20th century (1976) proposed the Relief Theory.^[6] In the field of linguistics, there are semantic script theory (SSTH) proposed by Raskin (1985).^[7] Pragmatic studies include Grice's (1975) cooperative principle, ^[8]Austin's (1962) ^[9]and Searle's (1969) speech act theory, ^[10]Sperber & Wilson's (1986) relevance theory.^[11] The conceptual integration theory of Fauconnier & Turner (1995) has been studied in cognitive linguistics.^[12] Computational linguistics studies include Ritchie's (1999) theory of incongruity-resolution and so on.^[13]

This paper will study the mechanism of humor from the following four categories: (1) superiority theory. Due to the differences in social status, strength, physical defects and other factors, the strong have a sense of superiority and pleasure in the attack, contempt and ridicule of the weak; (2) release theory. Emotions are stored in the nerves as energy and guide actions. Laughter comes from the release of energy in the repressed nerves; (3) psychodynamic theory. Brain cognition evaluates the degree of injury, and if the injury is within the expected range, the mood shifts from worry to relief; (4) incongruity theory. Visual action humor comes from the inconsistency between the visual anticipation of the action (the precursor) and the subsequent outcome. In verbal humor, auras produce archetypal meaning frame and implicit meaning frame through puns, metaphors and other forms, and transfer between implicit meaning frame and archetypal frame, resulting in incongruity, attacking and subverting the expected frame. In this process, the cognitive mechanism is built into an intermediate framework, so that the misbehavior can be resolved, the emotional tension turns to relaxation, and the feeling of pleasure is generated. ^[14]

3. A multimodal study of humor in the film

Lu Jin, played by Takeshi Kaneshiro, is the president of a multinational economy, vitriolic and arrogant, with a serious cleanliness obsession and only one hobby--delicacy. Gu Shengnan, played by Zhou Dongyu, is a creative chef in a western restaurant, whose life is confused and messy. She is in secret love with the general manager of the hotel. Since the hotel suffers a business crisis, the general manager proposes to break up. Just then Lu Jin played by Kaneshiro Takeshi planned to buy the hotel and met the heroine, Gu Shengnan. Lu Jin, played by Takeshi Kanagi, represents the superior upper class, while Gu Shengnan, played by Zhou Dongyu, is the representative of the civilian class. Two people with different characters and classes fall in love with each other because of delicacy, which produces scenes of joy that make people laugh.

3.1 Meeting each other

The hero and heroine first met in the parking lot, when Gu Shengnan was struggling to scratch the hero's car in order to revenge for her bestie. Lu Jin found his car was damaged, immediately took out a mobile phone shooting, and calmly pointed out that Gu Shengnan was recorded by the parking lot cameras. At this time, Gu Shengnan's bestie called to ask where she was. With the three big words "dog man and woman" in the car's cover, her bestie asked anxiously: "Are you going to the wrong floor?" Lu Jin then pointed out the huge number "3F" on the wall of the parking lot.

From the cultural point of view, Lu Jin is the owner of the car, the party whose interests are harmed, representing the upper class of society; Gu Shengnan is the car-destroyer, representing the common class of society. While Lu Jin is calm and indifferent, Gu Shengnan, the original aggressive saboteur, who goes to the wrong floor and scratches the wrong car, becomes the one at a loss. The reversal of the two people's position causes humor. The director fully attracts the audience's attention through the three big characters "dog man and woman" and Gu Shengnan's noisy scratching sound at the beginning of the scene. The humor is produced by the combination of auditory modality and visual modality. The noisy scratching sound highlights the foreground information and strengthens the visual modalities that appears later. The voice of second floor emphasized by Gu Shengnan's girlfriend on the phone belongs to the speech auditory modality. Lu Jin points to the word "3F" on the wall, which is a typical visual modality, and thus the audience's cognitive tension is released and humor is generated.

Gu Shengnan hurried to apologize, but Lu Jin flatly refused. Then Gu Shengnan unexpectedly took out a tool to change the original characters "dog man and woman" to "good dog man ", plus a heart sign, which makes audience laugh. Lu Jin insisted on calling the police, then Gu Shengnan guaranteed to repair the car. Lu Jin was not satisfied and said the insult could not be made up. Gu responded: "You can insult me." Lu Jin's "insult" was to write his assistant's phone number on Gu Shengnan's head, asking her to contact his assistant when the car was fixed. At this time Gu Shengnan was at a loss with the phone number on her head standing in front of the car engraved with the three characters "dog man and woman". The release theory in the analysis of humor holds that emotions are stored in nerves in the form of energy and guide actions. Laughter comes from the release of energy in repressed nerves.^[14] Gu Shengnan quickly changes the original characters—"dog man and woman" to "good dog man", plus a heart-shaped sign. Such a childlike and innocent behavior makes the audience from the original depressed and tense emotion to be released producing a sense of pleasure. Lu Jin's "insult" to Gu Shengnan is within the acceptable range of moral and social evaluation. According to the psychodynamic theory of humor, "The brain's cognition will evaluate the degree of injury, and if the degree of injury is within the expected range, the emotion will shift from worry to relief."^[2] When the audiences see this scene, their emotions change from the original worry to pleasure, resulting in humorous emotions.

3.2 Knowing each other

The hero and heroine know each other in the hotel because of food. Gu Shengnan summarizes Lu Jin's past with one dish "ci shen", but Lu Jin does not know the meaning of truffles in this dish. Then the hotel manager standing beside explained: "Truffles are the hotel's most expensive ingredients, of course, in order to flatter your noble status." Deeply confused, Lu Jin asked to meet the chef. But chef Gu Shengnan did not want to see him, and asked a male chef to explain the meaning of truffles to Lu Jin. "Truffles are hidden in the ground. The plants growing around will inexplicably die, so that it can be easily found. This means that only by killing the plants around it can it become the noblest food." Gu Shengnan's colleague said nervously.

The manager's explanation of truffles is in line with the general cognition of the public for this kind of food - expensive, noble. The male chef invited by Gu Shengnan is very nervous and confused when he appears, which is undoubtedly revealed through body language. His explanation is unexpected by the audience, but is very consistent with Lu Jin's character – mean, picky and arrogant. According to the incongruity theory, visual action humor comes from the inconsistency between the visual anticipation of the action (the precursor) and the subsequent outcome. In verbal humor, auras produce archetypal meaning frame and implicit meaning frame through puns, metaphors and other forms, and transfer between implicit meaning frame and archetypal frame,

resulting in incongruity, attacking and subverting the expected frame. In this process, the cognitive mechanism is built into an intermediate framework, so that the misbehavior can be resolved, the emotional tension turns to relaxation, and the feeling of pleasure is generated.^[14] Here, the truffles metaphorize for the hero. The audiences through the actor's performance and lines accept the director's explanation of "truffle". The incongruity is resolved and humor is produced. The humor here is mainly composed of verbal and auditory modalities. The actor's wonderful performances, especially the nonverbal modalities from the male chef who explains the meaning of truffles to Lu Jin, fully attract the audience's attention and pave the way for the subsequent verbal humor.

After listening to the explanation of the male chef for the truffle, Lu Jin angrily walked into the kitchen to find the one who truly cooked the dish. Gu Shengnan hiding in the corner gave her colleague a picture of escaped octopus, then sneered away. Lu Jin heard the sound and chased to the bathroom, where encountered Gu Shengnan. Lu Jin identified her as the chef who made the dish "ci shen" through the smell of her garment and said: "You are such a sloppy person that will leak soup when drinking. Flies are cleaner than you." The charm of the film lies in the diversity of expression techniques. The actors' actions, expressions and scene changes promote the plot through visual modalities. Speech, music and background sound are interwoven together to fully activate the audience's auditory senses and complement each other. The humor is composed of the image modality—the picture of "octopus spitting ink" and the olfactory modality. Gu Shengnan drew the picture of a runaway octopus as a metaphor to express her unwillingness to meet Lu Jin, showing her childlike innocence and loveliness. Although Lu Jin identified Gu Shengnan through the smell on the garment, he pretended not to know who she was and said the arrogant words to show his great sense of superiority.

3.3 Getting along with each other

According to the theory of superiority in the analysis of humor, the strong have a sense of superiority and pleasure in the attack, contempt and ridicule of the weak ^[14] One day, chef Gu Shengnan asked for leave. Lu Jin could not find the chef he liked, so he personally came to the door with food ingredients to ask Gu Shengnan to cook for him. During the meal, Lu Jin expressed his view of not eating with people at the table: "The lower the animals are, the more likely they eat together such as ants, flies, vulture, local dogs... while eagles have always eaten alone." Lu Jin's remarks, accompanied by a buoyant music, fully show his sense of personal superiority by comparing himself to a superior animal like an eagle, and others to inferior animals such as ants, flies, vultures, and local dogs. Gu Shengnan pointed out that people and animals were not the same, meaning that humans were social animals, while Lu Jin responded: "Yes, they are not the same. They are not as noisy as you are," which means that Gu Shengnan was even inferior to the above-mentioned animals. Lu Jin's sarcastic remarks embarrass Gu Shengnan and show his psychological superiority, which makes the audience laugh.

"Hot pot is the first erotic food on the list." Lu Jin finally began to eat at the same table under the insistence of Gu Shengnan. One day Lu Jin and Gu Shengnan enjoyed hot pot with delicious puffer sashimi together, unexpectedly the poisonous puffer sashimi made them hallucinate. At this moment, in addition to the speech modality, the action modality formed by the wonderful performances of the two leading stars is the main modality of humor production. The speech modality supplements the missing information of the action modality, making the audience understand the abnormal behavior of the two people at this time. Because of the poisonous puffer fish, two people had the illusion of rain. They shared one umbrella on the road to shelter from the unreal rain, one asking for the heavy rain, one shouting "small". They are like two innocent children to release the heart of all the repressed energy at the moment. The director skillfully uses the shooting technique to make the

raindrops on the car glass disappear from the bottom up, indicating the recovery of Lu Jin from the poisonous puffer fish. Gu Shengnan who was still in a hallucination refused to take back the umbrella, since she was worried about Lu Jin's health. Lu Jin, once to be mean and arrogant, was confused with Gu Shengnan's inappropriate behavior. At this moment the hero's sense of superiority disappeared. Two people for the first time faced each other equally and warmly. The release theory holds that emotions are stored in nerves as energy, directing actions. Laughter comes from the release of energy in repressed nerves.^[14] Because of the poisonous puffer fish, the hero under illusion for the first time puts down his sense of superiority, feels the heroine's sincerity and concern, and releases the long-suppressed energy in his heart, resulting in a sense of pleasure.

3.4 Falling in love with each other

Lu Jin expressed his love for Gu Shengnan firstly in the office of food market. Lu Jin who was fastidious, arrogant and demanding confessed, "I can't choose to like your good points and dislike your shortcomings. I cannot help deciding whether I like you or not." At the climax of the movie, Gu Shengnan finally understood Lu Jin's love for her. Melodious background music sounded in time, and properly set off the heroine's pleasant mood. Gu Shengnan then asked, "That means you like me, right? Am I the sexiest person in the world?" Zhou Dongyu, who plays Gu Shengnan, is a young and pure actress instead of a sexy star. Gu Shengnan who was shy at the moment protected her chest with a handbag, which mismatched the sexy image she referred to. "You're the most most generic sexy person." Lu Jin's answer expressed his helplessness with the use of overlapping words and semantic ups and downs, which triggered the audiences' laughter. Satisfied Gu Shengnan was prepared to open the office door, but the door handle was suddenly broken. The original melodic background music suddenly stopped. Lu Jin with a face of helplessness looked at the camera unbelievably, then the film episode "I like it" sounded in time, which was a good contrast to Lu Jin's helpless state of mind at this time. The humor here is mainly generated by the speech modality, supplemented by actor's action modality and auditory modality brought by the background music, which strengthens the humor of the language modality.

Because of Gu Shengnan's career, there has been no opportunity for her to see the sun falling. After knowing that Lu Jin decided to satisfy her wish by finding a neighbor's balcony to watch the sunset together. The sunset shone on the white tile and red brick of the balcony, creating a peaceful and warm picture. With the light song "Living on the earth to bask in the sunset" at the end of the film, the two people watching the sunset side by side, hand in hand, constitute one of the most beautiful images in the film. Suddenly, due to hunger, Lu Jin's stomach made a disharmonious sound, and then so did Gu Shengnan. She proposed to cook firstly, while Lu Jin unexpectedly said that he would cook by putting out his homemade instant noodles that he usually had because of insomnia at midnight. Here visual action humor comes from the inconsistency between the visual expectation of the action (the precursor) and the subsequent outcome.^[14] Gu Shengnan as a chef in the film is good at cooking, so the audiences preconceive that she should cook. Lu Jin's behavior unexpectedly surprises the audience, constituting the incongruity.

Through the preparation of the first half of the film, Lu Jin's instant noodles go through the audiences' cognitive mechanism and build the middle frame, eliminating the incongruity and producing humor. The light and melodious song at the end of the film, the warm and funny dialogue from the hero and heroine, the hot instant noodles and the sleeping couple make the audiences realize in laughter that "love is crazy and childlike, and there is a feeling of being out of control" through the interaction and complementarity of visual and auditory modalities.^[2]

4. Conclusion

The movie “This is not what I expected” has sold 210 million yuan at the mainland box office, and the movie has achieved a successful romantic comedy through the synergy of the actors' visual modality, action modality, auditory modality and even olfactory modality. Most of the humor in the film is constructed by two or three different modalities. The more modalities involved; the more information will be brought. The enhancement, prominence and complementarity between different modalities bring the audience double enjoyment. As a food romantic film, delicacy has been throughout the film. The director uses the visual modality of food, the actors' speech modality and the auditory modality of the food itself to make the audience seem to smell the aroma of food and salivate.

This paper also draws on the theory of superiority, release, psychodynamic and incongruity in the theory of humor analysis to analyze the different humor mechanisms produced by the interaction of multiple modalities. The hero and heroine get together because of the food, but also because of the collision of their different classes and personalities. The film "This is not what I expected" allows the audience to enjoy an audio-visual feast in laughter through the use of auditory, visual and other modalities.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Philosophy and Social Science Research Project of Jiangsu Universities "Discursive Construction of City Image in Public Crisis—Taking the Government WeChat ‘Nanjing Release’ as an Example" (Project No.2020SJA0670), also acknowledges support from Outstanding Young and Middle-aged Teachers and Principals Overseas Research Program from Colleges and Universities in Jiangsu Province (Project No.[2019]12), and acknowledges support from the project “A Comparative Study on Discourse and Communication Effects of Colleges’ Official WeChat—Taking NIIT and SZPT for Example” funded by Nanjing Vocational University of Industry Technology(Project No.DJYB21-01)

References

- [1] Tan Zheng, Xu Hongyu, Huang Zhaojie, “An Interview with Director Derek Hui: Live for Love and Love for Food”, *Film art*, Vol 374, No. 3, pp.39-44, 2017
- [2] Zhang Delu, “Multimodal discourse theory and the application of media technology in foreign language teaching”, *Foreign language education*, Vol 30, No. 4, pp.15-20, 2009
- [3] Gibbon, Dafydd, Inge Mertins & Roger K, Moore *Handbook of Multimodal and Spoken Dialogue systems*, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000
- [4] Zhu Yongsheng, “Theory and methodology of multimodal discourse analysis,” *Foreign language research*, No.5, pp.82-86.2007
- [5] Schopenhauer, A. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1819.
- [6] Freud, S, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, New York: Penguin, 1976
- [7] Raskin, V, *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, Berlin: Springer Netherlands, 1985
- [8] Grice, H. P. *Logic and conversation* [A].In P.Cole & J. L. Morgan (eds.).*Syntax and Semantics3: Speech Acts* [C]. New York: Academic Press, 1975
- [9] Austin, J. L, *How to Do Things with Words*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962
- [10] Searle, J. R, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969
- [11] Sperber, D. & D. Wilson, *Relevance and Cognition*, Oxford: Blackwell. 1986/1995.
- [12] Fauconnier, G. & M. Turner, “Conceptual integration and formal expression,” *Psychology Press*, 10(3): pp. 183-204, 1995
- [13] Ritchie, G, *Developing the incongruity-resolution theory*[C]// *Proceedings of the AISB 99 Symposium on Creative Language: Humor and Stories*. Edinburgh: 78-85, 1999
- [14] Zhang Lixin, *Affective Cognitive interaction model of visual and verbal humor: A functional cognitive study of multimodal humor*, Nan Jing:Southeast University Press, 2012