

A Multi-modal Discourse Analysis on D&G's Advertisements

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Abstract—With the development of science and technology, information can be transmitted from the mono-modal text to the multi-modal text such as image, sound, article typesetting, body language, spatial language, architectural design, and so on so forth. Accordingly, the former researches only concern the language symbols, which is not enough. Based on Kress & van Leeuwen's theory of Visual Grammar, this article aims at having a multi-modal discourse analysis on D&G's advertisements, including the controversial video released in 2018 and some posts, which were discussed if racial discrimination was involved. This article will analyze the context behind these social symbols, and discuss if D&G achieved its ideographic function and commercial intention. The analyzing process will be conducted through three levels of meaning based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics. Firstly, to analyze the representational meaning which includes the narrative process and the conceptual process. Secondly, to figure out the interactive meaning containing three elements, namely the contact, the social distance, and the power relation. Thirdly, to get the compositional meaning which consists of three elements, namely the information value, the salience, and the framing. Through these three levels of analysis, the reason that why D&G fails to achieve a positive effect of publicity can be revealed. This study will help people understand the non-linguistic symbols better and see the potential meanings of advertisements.

Index Terms—Multi-modal discourse analysis, visual grammar, D&G, advertisement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapid development of multimedia, especially the Internet, and the scientific and technological applications, the way by which we receive the information is not only by the text, but by more and more non-linguistic symbols, such as image, sound, article typesetting, body language, spatial language, architectural design, and so on. Since the traditional discourse analysis cannot keep up with the new method of information transmission, here comes the multi-modal discourse analysis. This approach stressed that focusing only on the language should be changed into paying more attention to other non-linguistic social symbols, and the connection between the linguistic and non-linguistic symbols [1]. There were researches about advertisements which only analyzed from the mono-modal text, the language. To analyze the diversified advertisements of a brand, just considering the language is not enough. Thus taking the controversial advertisements of D&G for examples, this paper will adopt the multi-modal discourse analysis to figure

out the implication, and discuss if D&G achieved its ideographic function and commercial intention.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study takes the theory of Visual Grammar as the theoretical framework to analyze the propaganda video released in 2018 and the previous print advertisements of D&G. Based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, regarding the three metafunctions in systemic functional linguistics, respectively the ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function as prototypes, Kress & van Leeuwen systematically analyzed various visual products such as graphics, images and sounds, and proposed the concept of Visual Grammar [2]. In the framework of Visual Grammar, the representational meaning corresponds to the ideational function, the interactive meaning corresponds to the interpersonal function, and the compositional meaning corresponds to the textual function [3]. The theory of Visual Grammar makes people have a systematic theoretical analysis towards visual symbols, such as graphics, images, sounds, body languages, and so on. And it provides a framework for people to further understand the elements of language connotation, psychological mechanism and power relationship hidden behind these visual products [4].

A. Representational Meaning

According to Kress & van Leeuwen (1996), the representational meaning consists of two processes, namely the narrative process and the conceptual process. The narrative process refers to a process of committing an act or a dynamic process, which shows how an event being pushed forward by action and reaction of its participants, or the material and verbal and mental processes of the participants. While the conceptual process is a static process in which the relationship between event participants is determined by their classifications, the analytical and the symbolic process.

To make a distinction between these two processes, the vector is a crucial part. Simply speaking, the participants in a narrative process interact with each other, showing a dynamic process. Comparatively, the conceptual process is much more stable without a vector. It presents a process of an event or participants' actions, revealing the uncertainties in a certain situation.

B. Interactive Meaning

Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) have defined this concept as "the interaction between image's authors and viewers". And it can be further explained as that "images are another form of visual resource involving two types of participants, namely represented participants and interactive participants". The represented participants refer to the person, the place, the

event described in the image, while the interactive participants mean that there are interactions between viewers and the producer. This definition illustrates the relationship among the image, the image viewers, and the image producer. Specifically, the interactive meaning itself consists of three basic elements, respectively the contact, the social distance, and the power relation. Changes in the built-in attributes of these three elements themselves reveal the interaction between the represented participants and the interactive participants.

C. Compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning refers to the composition of all the components that show the complete meaning of a picture (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The compositional meaning consists of three elements, namely the information value, the salience, and the framing. These three elements can be applied not only to the analysis of a single image, but also to the visual and textual analysis of large and complex images, such as large paintings, architectural designs, and map tables in scientific articles. Combined with the compositional meaning, we will discuss how the elements are corresponded with each other on a semiotic level. In short, a systematic and scientific analysis upon the multi-modal discourse can be conducted within the framework of Visual Grammar.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Multi-modal discourse analysis was first gradually launched in the west in the 1990s. Kress & van Leeuwen had suggested that other senses, such as images, sounds and movements, were also specific symbols as same as the language, and founded its basic theoretical system on the basis of Halliday's systematic functional grammar [5]. Another Western linguist, Bernsen, believes that multimodal expressions are two or more single modes that can be decomposed into simultaneous expression of meaning [6]. In China, so far, the multi-modal discourse analysis is still in its initial stage, and few related publications have been published.

A. MDA

MDA is an analyzing method based on linguistics, using multiple senses, like vision, hearing, and touching, to combine the language and the non-linguistic symbols like images and sounds. It can analyze the ideographic system and discourse meaning of various symbols from a holistic perspective, thus it can explain the interactions in the process of human's communication better.

The multi-modal discourse analysis includes the discourse form of visual mode, auditory mode, tactile mode, and spatial mode. It can be concretely explained as the vocal language, the silent language, the external practice activity, in which the vocal language mainly refers to the text, the image, the video, the animation, the color, the music and so on, and the silent language mainly refers to the emoji, the space layout, all kinds of body languages, and the external practice activity refers to the interaction through the senses. That is, to enhance discourse comprehension and internal power by the social situation of individuals and society. The multi-modal

discourse analysis emphasizes the comprehensive application of each discourse mode.

B. Previous Studies on MDA

Business discourse is full of both language and other non-linguistic symbols, and is a high-density multi-modal activity. Although scholars adopt different methods, there is a common trend, that is, it's gradually from abstract and out-of-context analysis to the analysis which combines social behavior and culture. Considering the psychological theory of human consciousness, Norris proposed the multi-modal analysis combining dynamic and static analysis. She adopted the theory of foreground-background continuum, to record and analyze the whole on-the-phone communication between the boss named Tanya and the staff of a website design company. She found that Tanya's spoken language, body language, eyes, gestures and head actions built several identities simultaneously, like the boss, the partner, the of friends and the participants in the research project [7]. The study emphasizes that identity is not a unified, static one, but depends on a particular scenario and is built with other social activists. Besides, there is multi-modal analysis on advertisements. Lock did a research on advertisements on the Hong Kong mass transit railway by adopting the multimodal discourse analysis, also combining Halliday's theory of the relation between texts and contexts [8]. He found that the bimodal texts of the subway advertisements which include the language and image express and construct the situational context and cultural context. But they were failed to analyze the ideology of a commercial advertisement from the multimodal discourse analysis, based on Visual Grammar.

C. Research Design and Method

The paper will take the video advertisement released in 2018 and some former print advertisements related to China of D&G for examples, to conduct a multi-modal analysis on its ideology from the three aspects of Visual Grammar, the representational meaning, the interactive meaning, and the compositional meaning.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, one video and five posters of D&G's advertisements which are designed for Chinese market will be analyzed. The representational meaning, the interactive meaning, and the compositional meaning behind the advertisements will be the focus. Specifically, the video is going to be studied from its representational meaning, and the posters will be analyzed from the interactive and compositional meaning.

A. Analysis of the Representational Meaning

The representational meaning consists of two processes, namely the narrative process and the conceptual process. The narrative process refers to a process of committing an act or a dynamic process, and the conceptual process is much more stable without a vector.

1) Narrative process

The narrative process shows how an event being pushed forward by action and reaction of its participants, or the

material and verbal and mental processes of the participants. In the video named *Eating with Chopsticks* produced by D&G, there are three scenarios, in which a thin female model in red cheongsam respectively eats a pizza, a sweet roll, and some pasta noodles with the traditional Chinese eating tool, chopsticks. But the advertisement is not speaking the integration of Chinese culture and western culture, because it gives people a weird feeling. First, the model's face is almost an Asian face with slender eyes. This kind of Asian women's image suggests a stereotype. And during the eating process, due to the awkward actions, the model keeps laughing. Combining with its background music and the aside, it's easy to make people feel that it's a jeer. Second, the materials which are shown in the video are quite representative. The model uses chopsticks trying to pick up the western food, and she always fails to do it. And on her thin wrist there are splendid accessories. Third, the verbal language describing the chopsticks and the western food are quite different. It uses strange and small for chopsticks but great and big for pizza.

2) Conceptual process

The conceptual process is a static process in which the relationship between event participants is determined by their classifications, the analytical and the symbolic process. The participants of the video represent two sides or classes, the Chinese and the western. The symbolic process is implicated in the video, that is, the Chinese culture has a conflict with the western culture, and the western culture is superior to the Chinese traditional culture.

B. Analysis of the Interactive Meaning

The interactive meaning illustrates the relationship among the image, the image viewers, and the image producer. It contains three elements, the contact, the social distance, and the power relation.



Fig. 1. Three models are running, laughing at the camera.



Fig. 2. A model poses behind a passer-by without her knowing.

1) Contact

It consists two kinds of contact, one is to gaze at the lens, and the other is not to. Normally, gazing at the lens makes viewers feel that they are asked for something, while not gazing at the lens produce a feeling of giving. As you can see from the Fig. 1 to Fig. 4, the models are gazing at the lens, and it expresses a strong sense of connection between the image and the viewers, and seems like that the image producer is asking for something from the viewers.



Fig. 3. A model in gorgeous clothes sits on a simple chair, with cleaning tools by her side.



Fig. 4. A model is laughing behind a passer-by without her knowing.



Fig. 5. The driver was photographed without knowing.

2) Social distance

Social distance can be expressed by the distance between the lens and the objects. For examples, a close and personal relationship is expressed by a close shot, a social relationship is shown by a middle shot, and an objective relationship is expressed by a long shot. As in the all photos of the series of *D&G loves China* (Fig. 1-Fig. 5), the distance is quite social, so it express the meaning on the social level. What's more, except for picture 3, the others all involve some common Chinese in the pictures. And these Chinese figures are closer

to the lens than the models, which are magnified with bad intentions. Thus their distance to the viewers is shortened and they will be observed carefully by the audience without knowing that.

3) Power relation

It means the angles of the lens, usually an angle of depression stresses the power of viewers, an angle of eye level means an equal power, while an angle of elevation expresses a higher power of the represented participants. The angles in the set of pictures are almost at an eye level, so the power relation is equal.

C. Analysis of the Compositional Meaning

The compositional meaning consists of three elements, namely the information value, the salience, and the framing.

1) Information value

The information value could be centralized or bipolar. By observing the Fig. 1 to Fig. 5, the D&G's models wear in beautiful dresses and wear exaggerated jewelry, but the common Chinese passers-by dress simply and look not so good. The information it transmitted are going to two sides, one is extravagant western world, but the other is backward China.

2) Salience

Salience is another aspect of compositional meaning. It refers to the different degrees of attraction by the elements in the image for the viewers. Simply speaking, salience is being noticeable. As for a commercial poster, the brand or the model should be focused only. But in this set of pictures, due to the attractive Chinese figures occupying a lot of the pictures, the viewers are trying to look at both the D&G's models and the Chinese figures, and make a comparison.

3) Framing

Framing should take the connection between the images and the surrounding into consideration. There are maximum relevance and maximum non-relevance. In these pictures, the connection between extreme modern-dressed figures and the old buildings belongs to maximum non-relevance.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Since multi-modal text is used for more and more advertisements by the admen, it's significant to look into the hidden meanings and understand the ideology of the text. Every brand has the right to choose their advertising form whichever is to get more profit. Some success while some fail. In 2018, the advertising video and posts released by D&G aroused controversy, due to some issues may involving racial discrimination. Therefore, here comes the need to analyze its advertisements, figuring out if it reached the ideographic function and commercial intention. By conducting an analysis on this issue with Visual Grammar Theory through three aspects namely are representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning, it can be found that D&G regarded China as a stereotype which is

backward feudal country. Specifically, the video made a grandiose contract between the western and China, which conveys a conception of that the awkward Chinese traditional culture can't keep up with the western culture. Besides, the posts suggested the same feeling too. Since it didn't satisfy the target readers or audience, D&G has gone far away from its ideological function and commercial intention.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

There is only one author, Lu Zhou, accomplishing the paper from introduction to conclusions.

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