

Harmonious Discourse Analysis of Multimodal Eco-Speech in New Media

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Abstract: This paper analyses an eco-speech video *Man vs Earth* on a social network media platform under the perspective of harmonious discourse analysis theory. It is found that compared with that in traditional media, the multimodal eco-discourse in new media can make full use of the synergy between verbal modality and non-verbal and non-physical modalities such as sound effects and scene arrangement, which produces a metaphorical artistic effect, and better expresses the indictment of human's behaviours of destruction of nature, as well as the appeal for human beings to pursue the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. This study explains the interpretive power of harmonious discourse analysis on multimodal ecological discourse in non-Chinese contexts, enriches the methodology of harmonious discourse analysis, and provides a new perspective for the study of multimodal eco-discourse in new media.

Keywords: Harmonious Discourse Analysis, Eco-Speech, New Media

1. Introduction

Drawing on the wisdom of traditional Chinese Confucianism and Taoism, harmonious discourse analysis is a localised and characteristic innovative attempt at ecological discourse analysis put forward by Professor Huang Guowen, which has been noticed and recognised by scholars both at home and abroad^[5]. Recent studies related to harmonious discourse analysis mainly pay attention to its theoretical foundation, philosophical roots, research principles and other macro aspects, and the research methodology of harmonious discourse analysis as well as the refined mode of analysis need to be further explored^{[4][6]}. Also, most of the existing harmonious discourse analysis studies are set in Chinese social and cultural contexts, and there are only a few studies on non-Chinese contexts. Therefore, the context scope of the application of harmonious discourse analysis needs to be verified and enriched^{[9][14][20][21]}. In addition, with the advent of the new media era, the main carrier of discourse dissemination has changed from traditional media to online media with a high degree of multimodality and interactivity, whereas most of the current applications of harmonic discourse analysis focus on written discourse in speech modality, and there is a relative lack of research on multimodal discourse in online new media^{[10][15][23]}.

In view of this, this paper will combine the theory of harmonic discourse analysis under the dual perspectives of social symbolism and conceptual metaphor, and take a million-played English eco-speaking discourse *Man vs Earth* on the social networking platform YouTube as an example, to demonstrate how to use the framework of harmonic discourse analysis to explore the meaning of multimodal eco-discourse in new media in a non-Chinese context.

2. Literature Review

Based on Stibbe's eco-philosophical view and Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, Harmonious Discourse Analysis (HDA) is rooted in the Chinese context and draws on the ecological wisdom of traditional Chinese Confucianism and Taoism, which is a product of the localisation of eco-discourse analysis^{[2][3][12]}. The research goal of harmonious discourse analysis is to explore the relationship between language and ecology and the influence of language on ecology, and it holds the ecological philosophical worldview of the harmonious relationship between human and nature. The harmonious ecological concept

is further crystallised into the “human-orientedness” research assumption and three research principles, namely the principle of conscience, the principle of proximity and the principle of constraint, which aims to promote harmonious relationships between people, between people and society, and between people and nature^[4]. Influenced by the Chinese Confucian concept of ecological philosophy, “human-orientedness” is based on human problems, and starts from and works for solving human problems, where the definition of people emphasise social and political nature rather than the biological sense of humans^{[1][8][21]}. Huang also pointed out that although harmony discourse analysis is dependent on Chinese context, it is not contextually limited and can be “widely applied to ecological discourse analyses of different countries, regions, and ethnic groups at different stages of development and in different social contexts”^{[3][22]}.

Harmonious discourse analysis has made achievements in both domestic and international academic circles, and has gained the attention and recognition of international scholars^[13]. In terms of theoretical studies, for example, Huang and Zhao (2021) formally put forward the concept of “harmonious discourse analysis”, a Chinese localised concept of eco-discourse analysis, for the first time in the field of international eco-linguistics, and elaborated on its theoretical foundation, philosophical roots, analytical principles and analytical framework^[7]. Zou (2021a), also at the theoretical level, made an analysis of harmonious discourse analysis from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, and attempted to construct a cognitive mechanism capable of fostering habitual and unconscious eco-philosophical states of mind^[24]. When it comes to practical studies, Zhang and other scholars (2021, 2022a, 2022b) have also successively explored the main factors of the sustainable vision resonance of scenic sensory ecology with the psychological harmonious perception^{[17][18][19]}.

The current domestic research on the theory of harmonious discourse analysis in China mainly focuses on the theoretical promotion and empirical application. Most of the research on harmonious discourse analysis at the theoretical level pays attention to the macro description of its theoretical foundation, research purpose, research assumptions, etc. For example, Huang and Chen (2016) discussed the eco-linguistic research path under the perspective of ecological philosophical outlook, which contributed to the formation of the harmonious discourse analysis theory^[5]. Zou (2021b) explored the strategy of using metaphors at the discourse level, promoting the construction of a harmonious discourse expression mode^[25]. At the practical level, harmonious discourse analysis provides the basis for analysing ecological discourse in different genres such as poetry and novels. For example, Lu and Chang (2019) built a framework for harmonious discourse analysis based on functional discourse analysis and conducted a comparative historical analysis of harmonious discourse of the two poems sharing the same title Water of the Lake Hong poems in terms of the ecological view, historical context and discourse acceptance^[11].

Some scholars have pointed out that although harmonious discourse analysis is rooted in traditional Chinese wisdom, it is not restricted by context, and can be equally applied to the ecological discourse analyses of different types of texts in different socio-cultural contexts^{[3][23]}. However, the discourse types analysed in existing studies are relatively limited, mainly focusing on traditional written text discourse, and there is an urgent need to encompass more discourse types, such as dynamic multimodal eco-discourse of the new media era in order to enrich the research methodology of harmonic discourse analysis. In addition, although domestic scholars have tried to show the global universality of the path of harmonious discourse analysis and the traditional Chinese philosophical wisdom behind it to the international and domestic societies, most of the research objects under this path are Chinese discourses, and fewer studies have focused on the interpretive power of the ecological philosophical concept of harmony on non-Chinese discourses in Western contexts^{[9][20][21]}. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the scope of the applied contexts of the harmonious discourse analysis path, so as to provide more examples to support its universality.

3. Research Methodology

There are two main research perspectives in the field of linguistics for multimodal discourse analysis: the social semiotics perspective based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the conceptual metaphor perspective based on Cognitive Linguistics (CL). The social semiotics perspective provides a macro-semantic framework, while the cognitive metaphor perspective provides a micro-analysis for analysing explicit multimodal metaphors. The former guides the direction of the latter’s analysis, and the latter triggers a new sociosemiotics process. Zhang (2013) proposes that in actual multimodal discourse analysis, the two can be combined by first analysing the macro-metafunctional framework of the discourse

from the social semiotics perspective, and if there is a multimodal metaphor in the discourse, the multimodal metaphor will be further analysed within this framework, with the aim of capturing the microscopic and dynamic cognitive meaning construction process^[16]. Under the guidance of harmony concept, this paper will combine the above social and individual cognitive perspectives to maximise the effectiveness and strength of multimodal discourse analysis.

4. Corpus Selection

The corpus selected for this study is the ecological keynote speech video *Man vs Earth* released by Prince ea, which has over six million views on the YouTube website. *Man vs Earth* is 4 minutes 06 seconds long with English subtitles and is divided into four parts: introduction, development, climax and conclusion. The introductory part describes the insignificance of human beings compared to the earth, the developmental part accuses human beings of causing damage to nature and other living things, the climax elaborates on the inseparable relationship between human beings and nature, and the ending part expresses the call for human beings to protect the earth from now on.

5. Case Analysis

The following is specific analysis of the typical discourse fragments in *Man vs Earth* based on the ecological concept of the harmonious relationship between human and nature. The selection of typical discourse fragments is based on two criteria: firstly, the content of the discourse fragments can clearly convey the central idea of the part of the speech; secondly, the modalities involved in the selected discourse fragments should be comprehensive, and they should be able to reflect the synergistic effect of the verbal modality and the non-verbal non-physical modality.

5.1. If you condense the Earth's lifespan into 24 hours, that's one full day, then we have been here on this planet for 3 seconds

The above discourse fragment is derived from the introductory part of a speech. The main modality of the fragment is the speech modality, which consists of a material process, an identifying-type relational process and an existential process. The actor of the process of doing is the audience of the video, and the goal is the historical duration of the earth's existence. The identifier of the relational process is the historical duration of the earth's existence and the identified is "the duration of a day". The existent of the existential process is human beings. The three processes simultaneously construct the rhetoric of metaphor: if the duration of the Earth's history is compared to a day, then human beings, as a species, have only existed for three seconds, which more clearly reflects the difference in duration between the two. At the same time, the discourse fragment makes use of both textual print resources and illustrative print resources (as shown in Figure 1). The illustrative print is a bar chart comparing the length of the history of the earth and that of human beings, which presents the gap between the two more intuitively to the audience through the visual sensory channel; the textual print "3 SECONDS" emphasises the youthfulness and insignificance of the species of human beings compared with Mother Earth by reproducing the key contents of the verbal modality. The two print modes are not directly involved in the communicative process, but are a reinforcement of the main speech modality through verbal visualisation. The synergy of the three modes stimulates human's deep reverence for nature by expressing the insignificance of human beings compared with nature, prompting human beings to realise that the idea of dominating nature is absurd and impractical, and that they should seek to live in harmony with nature. This is in line with the principle of conscience in the concept of harmonious ecology, and therefore this discourse fragment is ecologically beneficial.

The speech video also takes advantage of the high degree of multimodality of network video to produce unconventional visual fusion through scene arrangement (as shown in Figure 1). The beach and the suitcase, sofa and umbrella obviously belong to two completely different categories. The speaker sits on a leather sofa on the beach, where a suitcase is placed on the right side of the sofa, and an umbrella stands upright on the left. This stands for industrial civilisation intruding into the natural landscape, thus realising non-conventional visual fusion. This visual fusion is a multimodal metaphor, in which the source and target domains are entirely embodied by the image modality, with the coast and beach representing Mother

Nature, and the industrial products of human beings representing their technological development. Compared with the abstract words like nature and technological development, it is more vivid to specifically present the concrete things that human beings can personally touch in life, implying that the development of human beings, like an invader, has already had an adverse impact on nature. At the same time, placing human products on top of the natural landscape also implies that human beings will find a new way to balance development and ecology. This object arrangement not only stimulates human reflection and ecological conscience on the impact of technological development on the environment, but also expresses good wishes for a harmonious relationship between human development and the ecological environment in the future, which has a high ecological value. The scene arrangement modality echoes the theme of the main speech modality, namely seeking the harmonious way of living with nature, through the unconventional visual fusion, which is conducive to triggering the audience's corresponding introspection.



Figure 1: Textual print resources, illustrative print resources and scene arrangement in the introductory speech part

5.2. Three seconds, and look what we've done

The above discourse fragment is derived from the developmental part of a speech. The main modality of the fragment is the speech modality, which consists of a material process and an identifying-type relational process. The actor of the material process is human beings, and the goal is their behaviour of destroying nature. The identifier of the relational process is the audience and the identified is human beings' behaviour of destroying nature. Both of the processes don't point out the specific ecologically unfriendly behaviour. Therefore, the discourse segment utilizes a large number of video prints to complement the main speech modality (as shown in Figure 2). The video print resources show the ecological devastation caused by human beings, such as deforestation, oil leakage, plastic crisis, etc., which makes it clear for the audience to understand the specific meaning of what damage human beings have done to nature. In addition, the case also contains the natural sound effect of the waves, which creates a serious and heavy atmosphere and emphasizes the great harm of the evil acts of human beings against nature. The three modes work together to present the alarming facts of human destruction of the ecological environment. There is no obvious ecological value tendency in this discourse fragment, so the case belongs to ecologically neutral discourse.



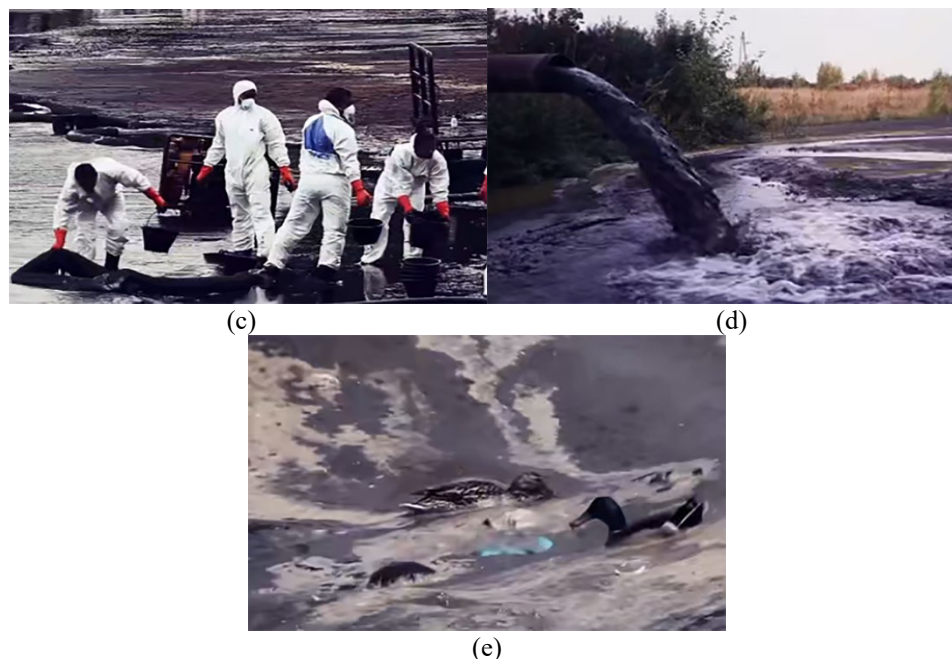


Figure 2: Video print resources in the developmental speech part

6. Conclusion

Under the dual perspective of multimodal discourse analysis, the article applies Huang Guowen's theoretical framework of harmonious discourse analysis to analyze Prince ea's ecological speech. There are following two main findings: (1) Harmonious discourse analysis is equally pervasive to multimodal eco-discourse analysis in non-Chinese language contexts, and (2) taking full advantage of the synergy between non-verbal non-physical modalities and main speech modality can express more vividly ecological discourse meaning. This paper analyses an eco-speaking video on a social networking platform, which enriches the methodology of harmonious discourse analysis and expands the scope of its application, and at the same time provides a new perspective for the analysis of multimodal eco-discourse in new media.

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