A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Construction of Chinese Corporate Image in Documentary Memorandum of State-owned Enterprises

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Abstract: *To be a successful competitor in economic globalization, Chinese enterprises should not only attach importance to investment interests but also construct a good image. With the rapid development of information technology, the multimodal features of discourse become increasingly obvious. Documentary, a specific reality-based film genre, is produced to communicate with the world through multimodal semiotic resources which has gradually become one of the ways for people to known an enterprise and provides a new research direction for corporate image construction. This paper employs Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar to focus on how multimodal semiotic resources in documentary are employed to make meaning and to reveal the intention and probes into the underlying ideology and power relation, which greatly contributes to the overseas development of Chinese corporate image and national image.*

Keywords: *Multimodal critical discourse analysis, Corporate image, Documentary*

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of a sluggish global recovery and increasing risks in financial markets, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was inaugurated in China in late 2013. Under the leadership of BRI, more and more companies march into the global market, playing a vital role in the tide of globalization. With the development of Internet, information transmission becomes more and more diversified. The analysis only based on the text's language is not enough because other semiotic resources like images, sounds, and videos also create meanings. As a typical multimodal discourse, documentary is one of the attempts for increasing the social concern towards the corporate image construction. Therefore, this paper combines critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis to explore the multimodal features and the multimodal discourse strategies employed in documentary discourse in which meanings and corporate images are mediated and to probe into the underlying socio-cultural factors which contribute to the multimodal discursive construction of corporate image.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was put forward by Fairclough in 1992[2]. It is aimed to reveal the influence of ideologies on a discourse, counteraction between a discourse and ideology and how they are derived from social structure and power relations and how they serve from the perspective of linguistics, sociology, psychology and communication[11].

Fairclough pointed out that CDA is not only just a process of analysis but also is a criticism by revealing hidden ideology in commonsense people already accept. The discourse is a social practice that represents social structure with the purpose of clarifying the interrelationships among language ideology and power. Fairclough initially proposed a Three-Dimensional Model in 1989[1] by combining text analysis and social criticism: text, interaction and context. But in 1992, three dimensions are modified as text, discourse practice and social practice respectively in *Discourse and Social Change*[2]. Corresponding to these three dimensions of discourse, the analytical activities of the well-known

three-dimensional model are elaborated in three dimensions or stages of CDA, namely description, interpretation, and explanation.

2.2 Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar

Since twentieth century, the development of discourse analysis has made great progress. In the age of information and internet, people's reading materials are no longer single text mode, but various modes, so discourse analysis has changed from single modality to multimodality accordingly. Based the three meta-functions of language[3], Kress and van Leeuwen [5] put forward Visual Grammar to explore the interpretation of images meaning. They proposed three meta-functions of images, namely representation, interaction and composition. Representation is the ability of semiotic systems to represent objects and their relations in a world in the semiotic systems of a culture. Interaction means that any semiotic mode has to be able to project the relations between the producer and the reproducer[6]. Composition is concerned with how elements in images are organized in meaning.

Representational meaning can be classified into two types: narrative and conceptual. The interactive function is realized by three systems: contact, social distance and attitude. Composition describes the spatial and structural relationships between the participants, and between a participant and the image as a whole[7].

2.3 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

With the development of critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, some scholars found that these two approaches were mutually complementary. David Machin and Andrea Mayr[8] proposed Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) in the book *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: a Multimodal Introduction* in 2012. They thought that both verbal and visual texts adopt certain strategies so that some texts are superficially normal but are ideological in nature. MCDA mainly focuses on how various symbols in multimodal discourse interact and construct discourse meaning from the perspective of criticism, aiming at revealing the implicit power relations and ideology in multimodal discourse.

3. Data Collection

The Documentary *Memorandum of State-owned Enterprises was* made by CCTV Finance Channel. It recorded the pursuit, exploration, tribulation and development of state-owned enterprises including modern state-owned enterprises, different opinions on globalization with western countries and the achievements and difficulties of the reform of enterprises. The documentary has 6 episodes and shows the viewers the history, current and future development of China's state-owned enterprise reform through the vivid documentary of key figures, the details of major events and the exclusive analysis of several cases.

4. Corporate Images and their Multimodal Features

From the perspective of Visual Grammar, some screenshots selected from the documentary will be analyzed in terms of representation, interaction and composition. And different types of corporate images will be concluded based on the investigation of the multimodal features of the documentary.

4.1 Representation

There are narrative processes and conceptual processes for representing meaning. Narrative representations can be further divided into action processes and reaction processes. In action processes, the Actor is the most salient participant from which the vector initiates for viewers through action[7].

Figure 1 is an action process. Two men depicted are showing the number of employees through gestures. The two Actors who are speaking in this documentary are the most salient participants positioned in the foreground and represented larger than the other employees who don't face the camera lens. Their arms and eye lines form vectors emphasizing the large production scale and aiming to convey the basic information of the corporate in order to establish a good working atmosphere and also to the maximum of work efficiency. As in this case, both verbal and visual semiotic resources including the gestures, warm facial expressions show the intensified relation established to create

meaning and also express a powerful corporate image and emphasize the willingness of the possible cooperation with the listener.

Figure 1 The employee is talking with the foreign customer

4.2 Interaction

The interactive function of images in the documentary is not only the general appearance of the frames, but also a specific relationship shared by the documentary producers and viewers alike.

Figure 2 Employees are training

Figure 2 belongs to offer images in contact level. The represented participants have no direct gaze at the viewers, but glare at the screen in the documentary. It aims to offer the information that all represented participants listen carefully and accept the training seriously. The core information of the staff training process in this case is complying with the corporate goal of producing good products, and also provides an objective way for viewers to partly know the corporate activities and then form an overall impression of the company.

4.3 Composition

The compositional meta-function corresponds to the study of aspects related to image design and visual resources arrangement.
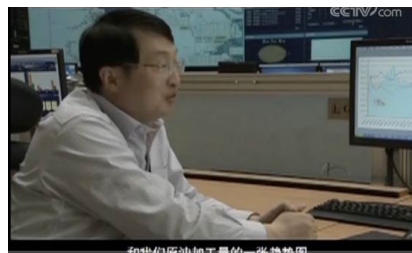

Figure 3 The professional employee is explaining the data

In Figure 3, both Given-New structure and Ideal-Real structure are identified. In terms of a Given-New structure, the man is the given information that viewers all know that he is the employee who has professional knowledge and skills. The new information in the right introduces the trend chart of crude oil production, which is related to the enterprise development. The new information in this image can further be divided into the Ideal-Real structure. The information contained in upper screen is the ideal information, showing the chart which is the professional knowledge only available for professional employees, emphasizing the need of professional employees. The information contained in lower part is the real information, which is the Chinese subtitle. It provides basic information for viewers to know the company. A favorable corporate image in terms of professional and technical level may thus be constructed.

5. Multimodal Discourse Strategies for Constructing Corporate Image

Based on intertextuality analysis, the multimodal feature of intertextuality should also be a concern, because the intertextual references are not only created by the explicit use of linguistic devices but also by the use of a number of different semiotic modes[9]. The multimodal intertextual relations are classified into the vertical interweave referring to the relationship between one modality and horizontal interweave referring to the relationship among different modalities[4].

5.1 Specific Intertextuality

Specific intertextuality refers to the incorporation of the concrete sources coming from genres of other discourses into the current discourse[10].

Figure 4 The employees are discussing the model of the product

Figure 5 The employee is checking the product

In Figure 4, the product is creatively represented as a virtual form which is realized by a small model performed by the employees. The model shows the intertextuality to the real products. The creative way to show products is easily accessible to viewers and in general helps to leave an impression of innovative manufacturing company on viewers. The products presented in Figure 5 are the real products. Representing real products in the documentary is always together with the workers who are looking at or checking on it meticulously, motivating the viewers to follow the gaze direction of the represented participants and thus to focus on the product itself. The actual representational way of the products is more direct to get viewers involved, and facilitates the formation of a professional image and a cooperative image.

5.2 Generic intertextuality

Generic intertextuality refers to the intermingling of elements in a discourse from different styles registers or genres[10].

Figure 6 The man is giving an speech

The man in Figure 6 announced the number of enterprises in the *Fortune Global 500*. Such a statistical representation provides a more objective way to show the improvement of Chinese enterprises. Visually, the speaker is represented wearing suits standing up with a microphone behind the address table and looking at the table. The gaze of the speaker which directs at the table indicates that there is a writing form of the utterance placed previously on the table. The mixing genres of both the written form and the form of public speech create intertextuality. The information source, in this case, should be speculated by viewers according to the clues hidden both visually and verbally. A covert generic intertextuality may constitute a professional image of the company who has achieved great progress.

6. Socio-cultural Factors Underlying the Multimodal Discursive Construction of Corporate Image

Considering how the corporate images are constructed by multimodal semiotic resources, the socio-cultural context in which the documentary is produced may be closely associated with and account for the corporate image construction.

6.1 Situational Factors

The production of documentary entails a large number of communication processes in which the communication barriers are situated, especially in a context of communicating with different cultures.

Figure 7 The Chinese and foreign employees are discussing the work

As Figure 7 shows in order to promote better communications in time, both Chinese and foreigner communicate in English when confronting with communication barriers mainly caused by language barrier. This choice of verbal representation of the communication way aims to show the influences of this objective and long-term existed barrier on whether the work will go smoothly. The rich knowledge of different languages workers will improve working relationship and work efficiency and avoid conflicts, which will lead to the construction of a favorable corporate image.

6.2 Institutional Factors

The discourse analysis are required to be sensitive in critical language analysis to properties of the society and institutions we are concerned with[1]. Institutional factors are mainly attributed to the documentary producers and the documentary production methods.

There are many scenes to show one of the leader of the company in both collective and individual ways. In Figure 8 and Figure 9, different perspectives are used to show a same kind of scene which describes the leader observing the work progress. The low angle and eye-level angle are the main ways to present the leader, respectively showing an authoritative identity and an ordinary identity. These different angles used for descriptions contribute not only to the identities of the represented participants, but also to the broader environment employees work, which all influence the construction of an active and responsible corporate image.

Figure 8 The leader is observing the working process

Figure 9 These two people are discussing working process

7. Conclusion

This study employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) to focus on how multimodal semiotic resources in documentary are employed to make meaning and to reveal intention. In text dimension, this study firstly explores the multimodal features of the documentary based on Visual Grammar. In discursive practice dimension, how multimodal discourse strategies in documentary work and affect corporate image construction in the production, comprehension and reproduction of discourse are examined based on intertextuality analysis. In the social practice dimension, the socio-cultural factors underlying the multimodal discursive construction of corporate images are investigated at situational and institutional levels. On the one hand, the multimodal critical discourse analysis of documentary can not only extend the scope of multimodal discourse analysis, but also provide a new perspective for studying corporate image construction. On the other hand, this study will contribute to improving people's level of multi-literacy, promoting the understandings of the general overseas Chinese corporate image, and also providing insights for companies into the enhancement of corporate image.

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