

Multi-modal Discourse Analysis of the Opening Ceremony of Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games

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Abstract: With the popularization and development of digital media, various symbolic resources such as sound, image, and actions were used to construct meaning, so multi-modal discourse analysis (MDA) emerged as required. However, previous research on MDA mostly focused on static texts, such as posters, web pages, and emblems, limited attention has been given to dynamic resources that contain multiple symbols. Therefore, this paper chooses the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games to explore how each symbol works together to construct meaning in the opening ceremony. It is hoped that this paper can provide a new angle for the audience to appreciate the opening ceremony as well as other videos and films, interpret China's national image represented in the opening ceremony, and analyze the enthusiasm and passion of Chinese.

Keywords: Multi-modal Discourse Analysis; The opening ceremony; Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games; Meaning construction

1. Introduction

Since the American linguist Harris published a series of papers on the topic of "discourse analysis" in 1952, many discourse analysts have carried out a large number of studies and investigations, put forward many relevant theories, and achieved significant research results. However, most of these theories only focus on the linguistic system and semantic structure itself. In the past two decades, scholars of social semiotics have increasingly recognized that language is only one of the symbols for expressing and understanding meaning. Facial expressions and body language in dialogue, music, stage settings, dance, and costumes in drama are all semiotic modes that produce meaning ^[1]. In addition, with the rapid development of science and technology, the traditional discourse analysis, which only focuses on language-dominated communication, not only fails to meet the needs of communicators but also affects the construction and understanding of meaning. At the same time, semiotic resources like images and music are playing an increasingly important role in language communication. Under this research background, multi-modal discourse analysis (MDA) came into being in the 1990s and attracted much interest from scholars and linguists.

The opening ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games is a typical multi-modal discourse material that integrates images, sounds, and colors which help to construct meaning comprehensively and accurately. Besides, it won the "Golden Garland" prize at the 32nd Milan International Sports Film and Television Festival (FICTS). It is necessary and worthwhile to learn more about this delicate and expressive video from different perspectives. Thus this paper chooses the MDA as the theoretical foundation to explore how images in the opening ceremony construct representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning and what effects have been achieved. Besides analyzing typical images, this study tries to figure out how different symbols in the video work together to deepen audiences' understanding of China's national image and provide a new appreciative perspective for audiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies Abroad

In the West, one of the earliest representative scholars who adopted a systemic way of MDA is Barthes. His academic paper *-Rhetoric of the Image-* about MDA was published in 1977 to explore the relationship between different modes and how interact with each other to influence the understanding

of meaning^[2]. However, it didn't raise too much attention. In the 1990s, Kress and Van Leeuwen, the two outstanding linguists, proposed a theory of Visual Grammar in *Reading Images: Grammar of Visual Design*^[3]. They believed that systematic functional grammar could be applied to investigate various symbols including language, pictures, and music, etc. Likewise, there are also other scholars investigating multi-modal discourse on a hierarchical basis. For instance, the grammatical units of film and television works were investigated to explore how different levels of symbols are integrated to construct meaning^[4]. Besides, the theoretical framework of multi-modal interaction was adopted by Norris^[5] to analyze dynamic recordings. A detailed and comprehensive methodological framework of MDA was constructed by Jewitt^[6].

While till now, studies on MDA abroad have changed from theoretical research to practical application. The multi-modal features of science text in *Travels in Hypermodality* were explored by Lemke^[7]. The multi-modality of mathematical texts was investigated by O'Halloran^[8]. In addition to the above two works on MDA from visual modality, scholars in social semiotics schools also focus on other semiotic resources. Auditory semiotics like sound, music, and speech were studied in Van Leeuwen's work^[9]. The visual and verbal modes of a picture book were analyzed by Moya and Pinar^[10].

From the above presentation, it can be found that foreign scholars have made great contributions to the theoretical construction and practical application of MDA from different aspects, which provides a lot of implications and enlightenment for the relevant research in China.

2.2 Previous Studies at Home

Compared with the research on MDA abroad, the exploration related to MDA in domestic is about ten years later. In the initial stage, domestic scholars mainly introduced theories from the West. The pioneer in the study on MDA was Li^[11], who introduced MDA in the paper called *Social Semiotic Approach to Multimodal Discourse* by giving a detailed and comprehensive introduction to the social semiotic approach of MDA proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen. At the same time, it discussed the significance of the approach in better understanding language as social semiotics, and in managing MDA in English teaching. To improve the basic theory, many scholars have made great achievements. Hu studied the distinction between multimodal semiotics and multimedia semiotics and the relationship between multimodality and computer semiotics^[12]. Zhu discussed four problems relevant to MDA, namely, the generation of multimodal discourses, the definition and property of multimodal discourses, and the theoretical basis, contents, methods, and significance of MDA^[13]. To be more important, Zhang built a synthetic theoretical framework for MDA based on systemic-functional linguistics, which was made up of five levels, including the level of context of culture and situation, the semantic level, the formal level, and the level of media^[14]. In the meantime, it concluded the relationship between different modalities as complementary and non-complementary, which provided guidance for future studies. And whether multi-modal grammar was needed to conduct MDA research. At the same time, some scholars studied the relationship between different modalities. Wei investigated MDA from various visual aspects such as image, composition, color, and typography^[15]. Li and Lu explored the theoretical foundation, research methodology, and development prospects of multimodal semiotics and concluded that there was much exploration space for multimodal semiotics in systemic grammar construction of modalities^[16]. These studies had reached an agreement that different modalities were working together to construct meaning, but there is still a long way to illustrate their specific functions in the future.

In addition, previous research on MDA at home mostly focused on static texts, such as posters, picture books, web pages, etc. For instance, Zheng and Zhang explored the construction of China's image represented in the cover of *The Economist* in terms of MDA^[17]. Teng and Miao investigated how representative meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning were constructed in the picture book on the basis of Visual Grammar^[18]. Wang analyzed political media photos from the perspective of MDA to explore the pragmatic meaning of these images^[19]. From that, it can be seen that most research has attached great importance to static texts while few studies focused on dynamic resources such as promo videos, documentaries, films, and opening ceremonies.

3. MDA of the Opening Ceremony of Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games

Based on previous studies in the literature review, the author aims to conduct a MDA of the opening ceremony of the *Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games* by analyzing how the representational meaning, interactive meaning, and composition meaning are constructed through the typical shots with various

characteristics of multi-modality.

3.1 Representational Meaning

Representational meaning is realized through the relations of representative participants and their actions, which shows people's understanding of natural society. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, it can be divided into the narrative image and the conceptual image^[20]. Narrative image mainly presents the whole development of the process and focuses on action, which is influenced by the actions and speech of the participants. The Conceptual image represents a stable, persistent state of the participant, influenced by processes of classification, analysis, and symbolization.

3.1.1 The Analysis of Narrative Image

Within narrative images, three different kinds of processes including action process, reaction process, and verbal and mental process are employed to express meaning.

For the action process, the vector is formed by a slant that represents the action. The people who send out the vector is considered the "actor" and the actors themselves can also be a vector. The "goal" is to whom or to which the vector directs. In Figure 1, two famous athletes -Liu Yang and Su Bingtian- are alternating the torch. They clench their hands in the air with their arms forming "the vector". Their past Olympic experience reflects the constant drive and never-ending struggle of the Olympic athletes to achieve new goals and overcome themselves. Besides, the Olympic spirit of unity and cooperation can be reflected in their action of clapping. It is a vivid exposition of the Olympic motto of "Faster, Higher, Stronger and Together".

The difference between the action process and the reaction process is that the vector of the reaction process is formed by eyelines which refers to the direction of the glance of one or more representative participants. In this case, the actor and goal are changed into "reactor" and "phenomenon". The "reactor" refers to the participant who looks and the "phenomenon" refers to which or whom the reactor's eyeline aims at. In Figure 2, Bach, the president of the International Olympic Committee, and Cai Qi, the president of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, are looking at each other. Their eyelines form the vector with one of them being "the reactor" and the other "the phenomenon". Bach is delivering his speech and showing great thanks to Cai Qi who cooperates fully with the International Olympic Committee and other parties to overcome the impact of the pandemic and does a good job in organizing the event. At the same time, Cai Qi bends and bows to Bach which shows the humility and politeness of the Chinese, and also shows Chinese etiquette and civilization with a history of 5,000 years. There is no verbal and mental process, this part is omitted in the present study.



Figure 1: Action process

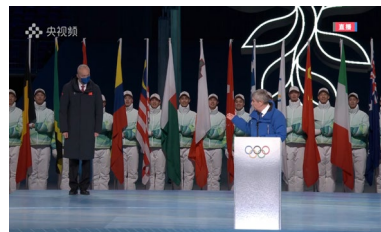


Figure 2: Reaction process

3.1.2 The Analysis of Conceptual Image

Compared with a narrative image, the conceptual image does not involve actions or events. It is more stable and is constructed based on the analytical and symbolic process.

In the analytical process, there is a part-whole relationship between the carrier and possessive attributes. In Figure 3, the first two parts illustrate the 24 solar terms in the traditional Chinese calendar, leading the main content in general by way of an overview. The last part of the picture shows the rainwater in the 24th period aided by figures, Chinese characters, and explanations. It shows us a part-whole relationship vividly.

The symbolic process shows what a participant represents. The participant in the symbolic process is called the "carrier" and the symbolic meaning represented by the qualities of "carriers" refers to the "symbolic attribute". Figure 4 shows what the welcoming pine fireworks look like. It is a symbolic process with the firework of the welcoming pine acting as "the carrier". The welcoming pine with its

moving posture, like a gentleman standing to welcome guests with a warm and generous feeling, has become a symbol of peace and friendship between China and the world. It also represents China's warmth of welcoming to athletes who are from all over the world to compete and travel in China, reflecting the hospitality and enthusiasm of the Chinese people. In addition, the welcoming pine is born in the rocky mountains, rooted in a place without a bit of soil. It can desperately grow into the cracks of the rocks in order to survive. Thus, the pine also represents the spirit of athletes who are not afraid to fight and compete with others to surpass themselves continuously.

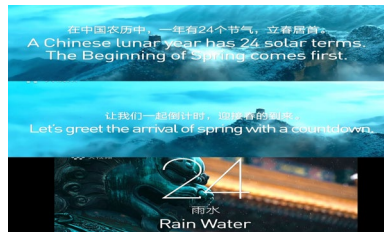


Figure 3: Analytical process



Figure 4: Symbolic process

3.2 The Analysis of Interactive Image

Kress and van Leeuwen define interactive meaning as the interaction between the producer of the image, the participants in the image, and the viewers^[20]. It explains how images interact with the audience, and reflects the relationship between them through contact, distance, and perspective.

3.2.1 Contact

Contact is set up by eyelines, gestures, and facial expressions between participants and viewers. The contact system can be classified into two types: the demand act and the offer act. The former refers to the participants' contact with viewers directly and aims to demand something from the viewers or want to tell them something. While the latter argues that the participants just provide information to viewers. In Figure 5, the representative participants all have contact with viewers through gestures, facial expressions, and eyelines, so the demand act is created. The Italian athletes are waving their hands to the viewers which creates the demand act through their gestures and facial expression. The man flew a kiss to the camera and the woman greeted the camera with excitement, which reflects their passion and enthusiasm for attending the Olympics. Their smiling faces indicate the recognition of China, which also reflects that China has made efforts to make the athletes have a good experience.

3.2.2 Distance

In terms of the degree of intimacy between the representative participants and viewers, close shots, medium shots, and long shots are used to show distance respectively. Figure 6 presents two different perspectives of one athlete who is practicing the standard pose of speed skating. In the upper part, this is a medium shot since we can see his body above his knees. In the lower part, only the head and shoulders are shown, so it is a close shot. His facial expression and sweat-soaked hair are visible. Viewers can be affected by his determined expression and the serious attitude of athletes towards the Winter Olympic Games and their striving force of the Olympic spirit.

3.2.3 Perspective

Perspective is about the selection of angles, which also indicates the relations between representative participants and interactive participants. It mainly includes horizontal and vertical perspectives. In Figure 7, from the position of representative participants, it can be identified that the shot is taken from a horizontal perspective. The use of a horizontal perspective creates two effects. On the one hand, it gives viewers a feeling that they are involved in the happy scene, wrapped in the warmth and kindness of the Chinese as well as harmony and joy between them. On the other hand, the sitting of the old man in the middle with the young around him allows viewers to acquaint themselves with the traditional virtues of China. For the above two aspects, viewers may be bursting to come to the harmonious society and taste the profound Chinese traditional culture.

Reflecting the power relation between representative participants and interactive participants, the vertical perspective primarily embodies high angle and low angle. Figure 8 was taken from a very high angle. From a high angle, you can see the unique charm of light and shadow in the Beijing Olympic Central District. Besides, owing to the successful holding of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, many venues have been reserved and put into use since then, which lays the

foundations for the hosting of the 2022 Olympic Winter Games. The reform utilizing of old venues embodies one principle of Beijing's bid for the Olympic Winter Games—holding the game in an economical way, which is highlighted in its venue planning. Such planning shows viewers' confidence to host this event with adequate preparations and its reasonable bidding concept.



Figure 5: Contact



Figure 6: Distance



Figure 7: Horizontal perspective

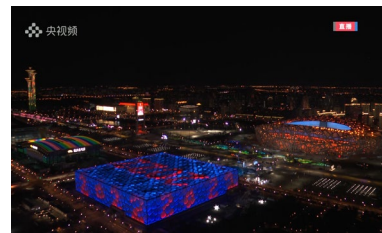


Figure 8: Vertical perspective

3.3 The Analysis of Composition Meaning

The composition meaning relates the representational meaning and interactive meaning of the image by means of three subsystems, including informational value, salience, and framing.

3.3.1 Information Value

Information value refers to the elements in images that are determined by their position: left or right, top or down. And different positions have different meanings. If the element is on the left of the image, it indicates that it is the given information. If the element is on the right, it refers to the new information. If it is on the top it refers to the ideal information, while the bottom part refers to real information. On the left of Figure 9, dozens of young people walk side by side through a long river of images that show the moments of people's lives from all over the world. The element placed on the left is presented as "given", which means something viewers have already happened, while the element on the right is "new", something which is not yet known or something viewers have to pay special attention to. It also shows that young people are the hope of the world and the future of the motherland. They are really enough to lead us into a new era.

3.3.2 Salience

Factors that affect the salience include color contrasts, size, sharpness of focus, and other specific cultural factors, such as the human figure or a symbol. Then I will take the emblem as an example. In Figure 10, the emblem of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games combines Chinese calligraphy, ice slides, and gentle skiers together. The dancing herringbone character "Winter" is placed at the top of the image as the ideal message making the image of youthful and energetic skiers vivid, which aims to emphasize the athlete-centered humanism concept. The middle part of the emblem consists of the black text "Beijing" and "2022", which show us the host city and date of the Winter Olympics. Below the emblem is the Olympic rings, which highlight the Olympic tenet of unity, friendship, and peace.

3.3.3 Framing

Framing refers to whether there exists a connection or disconnection of elements in the image. Frame links, contrast of color, and other framing devices are used to separate individuals or groups. In Figure 11, the middle line is employed to express the meaning of two different groups of people. The upper part shows the performance of professional athletes, while the lower part shows some ordinary people. Such framing makes the audience realize that ice and snow sports are closely related to everyone around the world, which echoes the aim of "encouraging 300 million people to practice winter sports".



Figure 9: Information value

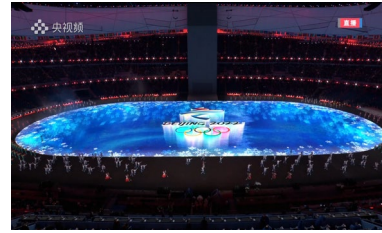


Figure 10: Saliency



Figure 11: Framing

4. Conclusion

This paper conducts a multi-modal discourse analysis of the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar to explore how representational, interactive, and compositional meaning are constructed by integrating language, image, text, color, and layout design.

4.1 Major Findings

Firstly, this paper explores the meaning construction of the visual modality in the opening ceremony by analyzing some typical figures. In the aspect of representational meaning, the narrative process and conceptual process both play an important role in constructing meaning. It indicates that China has made a great effort to successfully host the Olympic Winter Games and the Chinese are friendly and enthusiastic to welcome athletes from all over the world to China to participate in the competition and visit China. In terms of interactive meaning, the frequency of offer acts is higher than demand acts, but they work together to make a connection between participants and viewers. The contribution of both demand acts and offer acts in contact, the change of shots in distance, transformation of angles in perspective reflect the confidence and preparation of China and the charm of ice and snow sports. With regard to the compositional meaning, the analysis of information value, saliency, and framing demonstrates the integration of Chinese culture, sports, and Olympic spirits and reflects the improvement of cultural self-confidence.

What's more, language is not only a factor that constructs meaning. Images, colors, layouts, and other symbols also play a crucial role in conveying meaning. Non-verbal symbols should be taken into consideration to conduct multimodal discourse analysis. Only in this way can we better understand the ideas conveyed by posters and videos.

Finally, the MDA of the opening ceremony for the Olympic Winter Games is of great significance to pedagogical implications, national image construction, and cultural dissemination. In terms of pedagogical implication, the present study provides the audience with a new angle to appreciate the opening ceremony as well as films, videos, etc. In terms of national image construction, the analysis and interpretation of the opening ceremony allow people to have a better understanding of the connotation and implication behind each program, which helps to construct the image of China. In terms of cultural dissemination, the MDA of the opening ceremony can attract audiences' attention to the traditional cultures contained in the opening ceremony.

4.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

Though the research is carried out with great effort, it is still unavoidable that there are still some limitations that need to be pointed out for the sake of further study. Due to space limitations, only some typical figures are selected for analysis and the qualitative methods are the main part, so the results and

achievements in the research may be somewhat subjective. Therefore, further research on MDA can be carried out through more quantitative methods to ensure the objectivity of the research. Despite the above limitations, this research is still a new try, which may arouse great interest in the other opening ceremonies as well as films from the perspective of MDA and help viewers have a better understanding of the connotation of each program.

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