

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Green Book's Poster from the Perspective of Visual Grammar

Tinghua Zhu

School of Foreign Language, Nanning Normal University, Nanning 530000, China;

451699964@qq.com

Abstract

As a promotional material, movie poster is the multimodal discourse of images, letters, colors and typeface. The paper introduces the multimodal discourse, visual grammar and analyzes the poster of Green Book with the theory visual grammar. It is novel to analyze its multimodal discourse from representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning of visual grammar. This paper not only has broaden the field of multimodal discourse analysis, but also enriched the study dimension of movie poster. Viewers can get different perspectives of the movie Green Book from its poster's multimodal discourse.

Keywords

Multimodal discourse analysis; visual grammar; movie poster; "Green Book".

1. Introduction

Going back to the past study of multimodal discourse, lots of great academic achievements made on verbal communication. However, its analysis on the non-verbal communication is rare. As the advent of information age accelerates the development of movie marketing, more scholars noticed the multimodal discourse of the movie poster. The increased popularization of sound, image, through the computer, TV and the Internet is undoubtedly behind this new emphasis and interest in the multi-semiotic complexity of the representations that we produce and see around us (Iedema,2003:33). Being the main promotional media, the movie poster provides viewers with theme and content vividly. Because based on the content of movie , movie poster often combines its titles, main characters, the director and so on and it can interact with people by the virtue of the color, image and words. That it to say, movie poster is seen as a visual communication design which combines words with images and other elements.

Therefore, this paper will take the movie Green Book as an example to analyze its multimodal discourse with the visual grammar. And the study can help us to understand the multimodal discourse and enrich the dimension of movie poster research especially the practicality of visual grammar on movie poster.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Different from traditional discourse analysis which pays attention to monomodal text-language, multimodal discourse analysis is more complicated.

2.1.1. Multimodal Discourse

It is Zellig Harri that first propose the term "discourse", which was written in his paper in 1952. Many linguists started make the discourse analysis on linguistic symbol and other levels since then. But the scope of study on discourse analysis is only about text which is mono-modal. With the diversification of information science and technology as well as the mutual penetration and

influence of various cultures, linguists' researches were not limited to study the traditional monomodal discourse but multi-dimensional discourse beyond language level. Van Leeuwen (2003) gave multimodality a definition as the association in which different semiotic modes are connected together—such as, language and picture—in a communicative artifact and event (Liu, 2012:6).

2.2. Visual grammar

Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) created systemic and comprehensive grammar of visual analysis framework on the basis of Halliday's SFG. They call this theory as Visual Grammar (VG) which is a rather mature and systemic theory of MDA in the book *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Corresponding to three functions in SFG, Kress & Leeuwen deemed that Visual Grammar also has three meanings, namely, the representational, interactive meaning and compositional meaning. The researches involve a wide variety of fields: textbook illustration, advertisement, photographs, children's drawings, three dimension sculptures and buildings and so on.

In 2006, Kress & van Leeuwen published the second edition of *Reading Images*. It updated its data source with new materials on moving images, colors, web and web-based images, as well as anticipates the future of visual communication. The next section will introduce the three meanings of visual grammar in detail with the poster of *Green Book* as an example.

3. The Poster of Green Book: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The movie *Green book* is adapted from a true story of the black pianist Dr. Shirley hire a white person Tony as the driver and assistant to help him accomplish a piano tour. The black pianist is a sophisticated, knowledgeable and skilled doctor instead of other black people. However, the white person Tony is rude, defiant and cunning. Faced all kinds of challenges on the way of tour, Shirley and Tony break down stereotypes about each other and become good friends.

3.1. Representational Meaning

Any semiotic system outside any system of signs can be on behalf of the experience of the world in a referential sense (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996:40). The representational meaning is divided into Narrative Process and Conceptual Process according by the Vector whether they have or not. If there are vectors, the process is Narrative Process. Otherwise, it is Conceptual Process.

3.1.1. Narrative Process

Narrative process presents unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006:79). It mainly expresses the event and logical relation which they want to throwing the action process, reaction process as well as the speech and mental process.

In the poster of *Green Book*, Tony and Shirley look in different directions and their postures, eyes are seen as vectors respectively. Similarly, they both are reactors because of their gazes. The background is the road near which some black farmers are working in the movie. However, from the picture, Tony tilts to his left and look out of the window and the direction is towards those black farmers. Namely, those black farmers are receivers to Tony. For Shirley, his eyes towards us, so we viewers are receivers. On the other hand, Tony is driving the car and Shirley sits behind and stretches his arms against the window. So the car is the receiver to them.

3.1.2. Conceptual Process

Conceptual representation represents participants in terms of their more or less stable and timeless essence, and in terms of class, or structure or meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006:79). Based on the classification process, analytic process and symbolic process, it embodies the

more stable nature. The classification process ties represented participants in the poster by the categorization and at least one of participants plays a “subordinate” roles to others(Li, 2003 :4). As the white person, Tony is the driver of the black man Shirley from the picture. So Tony is the subordinate role for Shirley here, which draws viewers’ interests. For another, green book is the safe travel guide for the black in the movie. And the poster is look like the guide because of its color. So from the symbolic point, this poster is the symbol of the special guide.

3.2. Interactive Meaning

Interactive meaning can make a given relationship between viewers and the world in the picture. By their interaction, film audience could get the attitude to the represented images(Li,2003:4). Distance, contact, modality, and angle are the four elements in this meaning.

3.2.1. Contact

Contact establishes an imaginary relationship between represented participants and interactive participants. In other words, the direction of the look, the gaze of represented participants, the viewing angle all play key roles in identifying the relation. What’s more, the demand act and the offer act are the main image acts in here. If the character stares viewers from high point, this action can be said as demanding obedience. Otherwise, it is called as demanding compassion(Li,2003:5).

Tony and Shirley show us different gaze in the poster of Green Book. Shirley has the eye contact with us from a little high point. Maybe he is demanding something. Tony didn’t look at viewers so there is no imaginary personal relation between Tony and viewers. If we don’t learn about what happened on the road they were driving on, we can’t grasp what Tony looking at on earth. Therefore, viewers have a lot of curiosity about the movie.

3.2.2. Social distance

The social distance refers to social connection among different participants inside and outside the multimodal discourse. To viewers, the closer the distance between them and depicted participants is, the closer relationship they have.

Tony and Shirley both represent their arms, shoulders and heads, that is, personal distance in the picture. So even though a white man Tony is or a prominent pianist Shirley is, they are close to film viewers.

3.2.3. Angle

The angle consists of the horizontal angle and the vertical angle. While the horizon angle is categorized as the oblique angle and frontal angle, the vertical angle is composed by high angle, eye angle and low angle. The angle is always help people to perceive the attitudes between viewers and depicted persons.

So we can learn a little about the characters in the poster from the view of angle. Tony belongs to the oblique angle and Shirley presents the frontal and high angle.

3.2.4. Modality

Kress and van Leeuwen concluded that modality depends on what is considered real (or true, or scared) in the social group for which the representation is primarily intended (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996:156). And Kress and Hodge hosted that many a way are used for realizing modality: non-verbal and verb, through non-deliberate (hesitation, ums, etc). And intentional features contain fillers (sort of), adverbs (probably quite good), modals, and mental process verbs and intonation (Kress and Hodge, 1979:127).

So modality is also an indispensable dimension of interactive meaning. It mainly includes high modality, median modality and low modality. Besides, colors play a key role in modality. Namely, highlighted colors are the trait of the high modality while less highlighted colors in median modality. However, the colors of low modality belong to white and black(Li,2003:5).

Looking from the poster, we can find that the dominant color is aquamarine that is between green and dark blue. For one thing, this color symbolize the title "Green Book", which is used for black person in the movie. For another, as the highlighted color, it expresses a kind of serene and hope. In this film, the hope is to eliminate the discrimination against the black and realize the true equality of the black and the white.

3.3. Compositional Meaning

When it comes to compositional meaning, there are three elements, namely, information value, salience and framing. Compositional meaning integrates the representational meaning and interactive meaning.

3.3.1. Information Value

The information value refers to the information transmitted by the relative position of the visual element in the image. Through the placement of some elements in picture, information value is exemplified in different degrees. So from center to edge in a picture, the importance is decreasing gradually. From left to right, it is the transformation that from known information to new noticed information. As for from top to bottom, it transforms from ideal to realistic.

For something to be given means that it is presented as something that the audience already knows, as a familiar starting point and agreed upon the point of departure for the message. For something to be new means that it is presented as something which the audience still do not know, or perhaps not yet agreed upon the point of departure by the viewer, therefore as something which the audience must pay special attention to (Krees & van Leeuwen, 1996: 187).

In the poster, its ideal part is the upper section, blue sky, which presents the names of these two characters. Under these characters' name, a phrase "INSPIRED BY A TRUE FRIENDSHIP" is presented. Therefore, this movie is a true story so that it will intrigue people to know what the story is. And at the second half of the poster, it is the name of this film "GREEN BOOK" with a larger size. Tony is in the left while Shirley is in right. It maybe tell the information that black man Shirley is new for viewers' stereotypes. Under the "GREEN BOOK", "THANKSGIVING" is printed with smaller size. This is the movie expresses thanks to viewers.

3.3.2. Salience

All letters are printed in white In terms of salience, it can be expressed by intensifying size and color contrast to draw viewers' attention at first sight. The larger the depicted participant, the greater the importance is. In the poster of Green Book, the car is magnified and these two presented participants are placed in the foreground, which perhaps means more things will be taken place in the car. And we also can realize that Tony is the main character for Shirley because he is larger than Shirley. Similarly, the title "GREEN BOOK" is also magnified with a large size beneath the images of Tony and Shirley.

3.3.3. Framing

Framing is another dimension of compositional meaning, which refers to the fact of whether there exist the framing devices to disconnect or connect elements in one picture, including that they belong to or do not belong to together in a sense (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 140). The poster of Green Book makes full use of the car window to actualize the framing. From the car, this poster is divided into two parts which we discussed above.

4. Conclusion

Taking the poster of Green Book as the case, the paper discussed its multimodal discourse in details with the visual grammar. From the paper we learn about the representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning of visual grammar. It extends visual grammar through elaborating each of meanings with the poster of Green Book. It is found that movie

poster is the main propaganda means as well as the work with multimodal discourse. Taking posters as a multimodal discourse to analyze not only can help viewers have a better understanding of the film, but also provides a new perspective for the audience to reflect on what the movie is talking about. It may actually make you a more thoughtful person as you learn to connect with the various characters. As the theme of the movie Green Book, we know that black racism needs to be eliminated and we should respect everyone.

On account of the limited personal academic capacity, the more comprehensive and professional analysis with visual grammar need to be applied in the study. So from my view, more endeavors need to make in poster with multimodal discourse. Because the study contributes to enriching MDA and visual grammar in poster domain. People can grasp the knowledge of MDA as well as the more novel and profound themes of movies.

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