

Interaction of Visual Grammar and Multimodal Metaphor: A Case Study on Anti-epidemic Comic

Sai Ma

School of Foreign Languages, North China University of Science and Technology, Tangshan 063000, Hebei, China.

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Abstract: Based on the analysis of multimodal metaphor / metonymy which combines social semiotics and cognitive theory, this paper brings the meta functional theory of visual grammar and conceptual metaphor / metonymy theory into the same analysis framework, and explores the cooperative relationship between the two in terms of operation mechanism and meaning expression. The research shows that conceptual metaphor / metonymy with inclusion relationship provides a channel for visual grammar to connect the virtual and the real, while visual grammar stimulate the interpretation of conceptual metaphor / metonymy.

Keywords: Visual Grammar; Multimodality; Conceptual Metaphor / Metonymy.

1. Introduction

Mode is a social symbol system to realize meaning and a symbol resource to express meaning shaped by social culture. (Kress, 2010, p.79) Various symbolic discourses have the function of expressing thinking structure and cognitive experience (Zhang Delu, 2013), which provides two main research paths for multimodal research. One is the social semiotic path based on systemic functional linguistics, the other is the cognitive linguistic path based on conceptual metaphor theory. The complementary research model will be more conducive to the study of multimodal discourse. (Wang Zhenhua, 2020) At present, multimodal research is mainly based on a single perspective of social semiotics or conceptual metaphor, and the combination of the two approaches is rare. This paper selects the anti epidemic propaganda cartoons released by CCTV news microblog account during the epidemic period as the research materials, constructs the analysis framework by combining the multimodal metaphor / metonymy and visual grammar theory, explores the multimodal complementary analysis model of social semiotics and cognitive linguistics, and then reveals the meaning construction path of multimodal anti-epidemic promotion discourse.

2. Literature review

2.1 Visual grammar

Visual grammar is a representative theory of multimodal research in social semiotics. It is rooted in the language metafunction of systemic functional linguistics, which is the expansion and extension on visual modal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). Language has three metafunctions: ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function (Halliday, 1985). Ideational function reflects the inner and external world of language users, interpersonal function establishes and maintains the relationship between people, while textual function plays the role of organizing information and reflecting their relationship. Other than language, image, sound, action and other modes are all complete ideographic systems, which can also be used to realize the three meta functions. As Kress and van Leeuwen argued that "His model with its three functions is a starting point for our account of images, not because the model works well for language (which it does, to an extent), but because it works well as a source for thinking about all modes of representation." (2006, p.20) SFG and VG present some similarities as regards their semiotic categories. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.114-115) In visual grammar, representation corresponds to the Ideational Function, Interaction to Interpersonal function, and Composition to Textual function. There are two kinds of participants in Visual Grammar: Interactive Participants and Representational Participants. Interactive Participants represent the individuals who create and observe pictures, and Representational Participants represent the entities in the pictures. The behavior that characterizes participants is called transaction, which also corresponds to Transitivity process. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.47-50) Similar to the Ideational

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Function of SFG, representation of Visual Grammar can also be realized by processes as Narrative and Conceptual Process. Narrative Process corresponds to the Material Process, that is, the process of “doing things”. Conceptual Processes are image representations of the general state of affairs of Participants and general truths about the world (Kress; van Leeuwen, p.114).

2.2 Multimodal metaphor and metonymy

Conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains: source domain and target domain. Conceptual metaphor is the mapping of structural patterns from source domain to target domain, which reflects the corresponding relationship between entities from source domain to target domain. (Lakoff, 1993, p.206-208) As the basic way of human cognition, conceptual metonymy is a two-way cognitive process that takes place in the same Idealized Cognitive Modal (ICM). Conceptual metonymy is the mapping relationship between different cognitive categories in the same cognitive domain.

3. Research design and methods

This paper selects the anti epidemic comic published on the official microblog of CCTV news center on January 31, 2020 as the research corpus, and constructs an analytical framework by combining visual grammar theory and conceptual metaphor / metonymy theory for multimodal discourse analysis.



Figur 1. cheer on hot-dry noodle.

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1 Visual grammar analysis

The scene depicted in the picture is the quarantine ward, and the personification image of Wuhan specialty snack “hot-dry noodle” is located in the lower left corner of the picture. “Hot-dry noodle” sitting on the bed, another “hot-dry noodle” doctor in the ward is treating it. “Hot-dry noodles” eyes with tears, looking out of the window at other personified food. In front of the window, two personified foods hold slogans with the words “cheer on! Wuhan”. Similarly to Material Processes in SFG, Narrative Processes in VG depict a physical action which expresses an event, a movement or a change in state (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.56). Classificational Processes concern an existing taxonomy of Participants and the role they play in representational structures (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.81). Although all the characters in the picture are different, they are essentially from the category of food, so they belong to Covert Taxonomy, which can be transcribed as “They all belong to one category-food.” Symbolic Processes visually represent what a Participant ‘means or is’ and explore the meanings and the ideological aspects which compose Participants’ identities in visuals (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.108). In the picture, “hot-dry noodles” is the Carrier of attributes, and the isolation ward shows that he is a patient under quarantine. Through Composition, “hot-dry noodles” are foregrounding and separated from other characters, so the visual structure of the picture can be written as “hot-dry noodles is the one under quarantine.”

4.2 Conceptual metaphor / metonymy analysis

Conceptual metaphor is the mapping of structural patterns from source domain to target domain, which reflects the corresponding relationship between entities from source domain to target domain. In the picture, “Foods cheer on hot-dry noodle” and “hot-dry noodle is under quarantine” are source domain which mapped to “Cities support Wuhan” and “Wuhan is locked down”. Cognitive linguists regard metonymy as a basic cognitive tool and way of thinking of human beings. Easily captured or perceived salient features of the entity are applied to map or replace all aspects of it. In the picture, the substitution of food for different cities constitutes a part-whole conceptual metonymy, that is, “hot-dry noodles” instead of “Wuhan” and “food from different cities” instead of “different cities”. There is an inclusive relationship between conceptual metaphor and metonymy, that is, conceptual metaphor contains conceptual metonymy. The conceptual metonymy of “hot-dry noodles” (Wuhan) and “food from different cities of China” (Other Cities) is embedded in the conceptual metaphor “Cities support Wuhan” and “Wuhan is Locked down”.

4.3 A combined operation mode

Both Visual Grammar and Conceptual Metaphor / Metonymy have strong explanatory power for pictures, the operation mode is as follows:

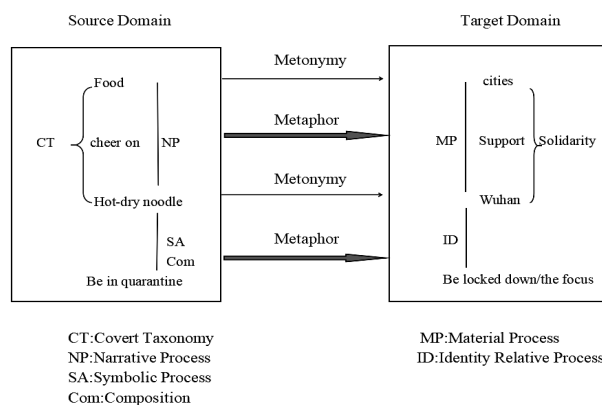


Figure1. Research Paradigm

Conceptual metaphor and metonymy also provide a bridge for the interactive meaning of visual grammar. The classificational process of VG reflects that “hot and dry noodles” and “other foods” belong to the same category of “food”. From the perspective of multimodal metaphor / metonymy, the verbal language “cheer on Wuhan” leads the visual angle from the virtual image to the real world. This connection is realized through conceptual metaphor and metonymy, that is, “belonging to the same category” is mapped to “uniting as one and going through the difficulties together”, which breaks through the psychological connection between the two semantic relations and arouses the audience’s similar emotion and feelings. According to Forceville (1996, p.33), “metaphor is not a simple descriptive expression, but a carrier of values and ideas”. Therefore, in the interpretation of interaction relationship, conceptual metaphor / metonymy provides cognitive evidence for visual grammar.

From the perspective of visual composition, the image of “hot-dry noodles” has been highlighted in terms of proportion and framework. In terms of size, “hot-dry noodle” is much larger than other foods and are placed in the foreground; For the frame, it is separated from other characters by frames such as windows. This kind of composition reflects the symbolic process from VG, that is, “hot-dry noodle” is recognized as the quarantined individual and the focus of attention. The symbolic process is mapped to the real Wuhan through conceptual metaphor and metonymy, that is, Wuhan was in the state of closure at that time, and all over the country were concerned about the epidemic situation in Wuhan. This kind of visual composition also highlights the similarity between the source domain and the destination domain of metaphor. By foregrounding the image of “hot-dry noodles”, it guides the viewer to change the perspective from the virtual comic to the real world.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of the combination of visual grammar and conceptual metaphor / metonymy, The study found that conceptual metonymy and conceptual metaphor have an inclusive relationship in the research corpus, and the source domain of conceptual metonymy is contained in the source domain of conceptual metaphor, which is manifested as the conceptual process and narrative process of visual grammar itself or its participants; Conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy provide cognitive basis for the realization of the interactive function of visual grammar, and they are the bridge from the virtual to the real world; The composition function of visual grammar highlights the similarity between the source domain and the target domain, which helps to stimulate the image viewer’s interpretation of conceptual metaphor and metonymy.

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