

Multi Modal Analysis and Comparison of Epidemic Prevention Propaganda Posters between China and the UK: Taking Covid-19 Epidemic Prevention Propaganda Posters as an Example

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Abstract

The promotional poster integrates various modes such as narrative images, text, and colors to express the theme of the promotion in a condensed manner. This article selects two epidemic prevention propaganda posters released by the Propaganda Bureau of the Central Propaganda Department of China and the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK as research objects. Based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar Approach(SFG), the visual grammar constructed by Kress and Van Leeuwen is used to analyze and compare the representational, interactive, and compositional meanings in epidemic prevention posters from the aspects of language, images, colors, etc., in order to explore how epidemic prevention propaganda institutions in China and the UK use text and graphics to achieve the purpose of promoting epidemic prevention measures.

Keywords: Chinese and British epidemic prevention propaganda posters, multimodal analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar Approach, Visual Grammar

1. Introduction

With the emergence of the information age and new media, people's sources of information are becoming increasingly diverse, with various images, sounds, and colors flooding people's lives. Language texts have also evolved from single characters to multimodal forms. While multimodal discourse forms enrich people's communication styles, they have also attracted attention in the field of linguistics. Multimodal discourse refers to the phenomenon of using various senses such as vision, hearing, and touch to communicate through language, images, sounds, actions, and symbols(Zhang delu,2009)[1]. As a form of visual art, posters integrate text, color, and graphics, which can immediately attract people and achieve good publicity and educational effects. The process of people reading posters is actually a multimodal discourse process of decoding these symbolic elements. Posters can be divided into commercial posters, cultural posters, movie posters, and public welfare posters according to their purposes(Li Huiyan, 2014)[2]. And epidemic prevention propaganda posters belong to a type of public welfare poster. At the beginning of 2020, just as the people all over the country are celebrating the coming of the New Year, a sudden COVID-19 hit Wuhan, which swept across the country and then spread in European countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. In order to popularize epidemic prevention measures and raise public awareness of prevention, epidemic prevention propaganda agencies in various countries have released epidemic prevention propaganda posters. This article intends to compare and analyze the interpersonal function, representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning in Chinese and British epidemic prevention posters based on the theories of systemic functional grammar and visual grammar, using a combination of description and explanation. The aim is to explore how epidemic prevention propaganda agencies in China and the UK use text and graphics to promote epidemic prevention measures.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Systemic Functional Grammar Approach

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a general linguistic theory that studies how language functions in society (Huang Guowen, 2005)[3]. According to the Systemic Functional Grammar theory proposed by Halliday (2004)[4], language has three metafunctions or purely logical functions, namely, conceptual function, interpersonal function, and discourse function. The interpersonal function refers to the ability to express the speaker's identity, status, attitude, motivation, and their inferences about things. It is the interactive relationship between the speaker and the

listener, as well as the speaker's attitude towards what they say or write. Interpersonal function is mainly achieved through tone, person, and modality. This theory can be used to analyze the construction and expression of interpersonal meaning in discourse. The tone components can be divided into declarative tone, interrogative tone, exclamatory tone, and imperative tone. Personal pronouns indicate the directionality of the topic and the relationship between the communicators. Mood expresses the speaker's attitude and viewpoint.

2.2 Visual Grammar Theory

Based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar Approach, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006)[5] constructed a visual grammar theory. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, "Visual grammar is the study of how people, objects, and events in images form a whole, and how images encode social behavior and communication" (Yang Xinzhang, 2009)[6]. According to Halliday's three metafunctions, namely conceptual function, interpersonal function, and discourse function, visual grammar theory also contains three corresponding meanings: representational meaning (corresponding to conceptual function), interactive meaning (corresponding to interpersonal function), and compositional meaning (corresponding to discourse meaning). According to Li Zhanzi (2003)[7], representational meaning refers to the concentration of characters, events, and environments in images, and representational meaning can be divided into narrative representation and conceptual representation. The difference between the two is that narrative representation includes vectors while conceptual representation does not include vectors" (Liu Yunlu, He Xuliang, 2020)[8]. The meaning of interaction reflects the relationship between participants and performers, manifested in four aspects: contact, social distance, perspective, and modality. The significance of composition lies in information value, highlighting, and framing.

3. Multi Modal Analysis and Comparison of Epidemic Prevention Propaganda Posters Between China and the UK

To compare the Chinese and British epidemic prevention propaganda posters from a multimodal perspective, this article selects two epidemic prevention propaganda posters respectively released by the Propaganda Bureau of the Central Propaganda Department of China and the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK as research objects. Figure 1 is Chinese epidemic prevention promotion poster, and figure 2 is British epidemic prevention promotion poster.



Figure 1. Chinese Epidemic Prevention Promotion Poster



Figure 2. British Epidemic Prevention Promotion Poster

3.1 Interpersonal Function Analysis

Based on systemic functional grammar, interpersonal function is reflected in three aspects: mood, person, and modality. From Figure 1 and Figure 2, it can be seen that both Chinese and British epidemic prevention propaganda posters use an imperative tone, with the Chinese side generally using an imperative tone, such as “不聚餐/bù jù cān” “打包走/dǎ bāo zǒu” “少停留/Shǎo tíng liú”, etc; The British side uses such expressions as “Wear a face covering/pay alert/control the virus/save lives”. These expressions are consistent with the identity of the “speaker”, who is an official institution with authority. Therefore, using imperative tone to express a “demand, must” reflects the resolute attitude of the “speaker” and the severity of the epidemic. In addition, both use conditional sentences to express hypotheses, with the Chinese side using “如就餐/rú jù cān” in Figure 1 and the English side using “if you can” in Figure 2. “如/rú” and “if” make the tone more gentle, weakening the tone’s toughness. In terms of person use, Chinese epidemic prevention propaganda advertisements do not use any person, but from the object of the imperative sentence, we know that it contains the subject “you”; The British epidemic prevention propaganda advertisements are also mostly unmanned phrases, with only two phrases using “you”, namely “if you can” and “you must”. Regarding the use of modal words, Chinese epidemic prevention advertisements use high value modal words such as “不/bù” and “别/bié”, as well as low value modal words such as “能/néng”; The British epidemic prevention advertisement uses a high-value modal word “must” to indicate the necessity of wearing masks. In addition, a low value modal word “can” was used to make the tone appear euphemistic. The combination of high and low value modal words represents the combination of strong and weak attitudes, making it easy for the public to accept and achieve the purpose of propaganda.

3.2 Reproduction Significance

According to visual grammar, reproducing meaning refers to the concentration of characters, events, and environments in an image. By comparing Figure 1 and Figure 2, it can be seen that Figure 1 is a representation of the environment, which refers to places that are prone to spreading the epidemic, such as restaurants, shops, elevators, and other places with high traffic and enclosed spaces in Figure 1; And Figure 2 depicts both characters, such as people infected with the epidemic, and environments, such as enclosed spaces like buses and supermarkets. The different reproduction meanings of Figure 1 and Figure 2 also reflect the different focuses of epidemic prevention propaganda in the two countries, that is, China’s epidemic prevention measures focus on “less gathering” and not going to enclosed places; The UK’s epidemic prevention measures focus on “wearing masks” and do not restrict access to places.

3.3 Interactive Significance

According to visual grammar, interactive meaning reflects the social relationship between language users (official institutions) and language receivers (readers). Contact is an aspect of evaluating the meaning of interaction, which

can be divided into providing images and requesting images based on whether there is eye contact between participants and viewers. The Chinese epidemic prevention propaganda poster in Figure 1 highlights the environment and text, with no participants and therefore no contact with readers; In Figure 2, there are participants in the British epidemic prevention poster, but both of them have no eye contact with readers. To provide similar images, this is in line with the main purpose of epidemic prevention propaganda posters, which is to provide information to readers rather than to obtain information.

The second aspect of interactive meaning is reflected in “social distance”. Social distance indicates the closeness between participants and viewers (readers), reflected by the size of the camera frame. From Figures 1 and 2, it can be seen that the lens in Figure 1 is far away, with blurry details and no focus, indicating that the poster and Chinese institutions are providing information with an objective attitude; The lens in Figure 2 is closer, with clear details and a focus on people, creating a close distance and emotional resonance with readers. This also reflects the approachable attitude of British institutions.

The third aspect of interactive meaning is reflected in the “perspective”, which is divided into “horizontal perspective” and “vertical perspective”. From Figure 1 and Figure 2, it can be seen that both Chinese and British epidemic prevention posters adopt a horizontal perspective, which reflects the equal status of the poster and the viewer (reader), increases reader participation, and brings readers closer together.

The fourth aspect of interactive meaning is reflected in “modality”. The modality reflects the authenticity and reliability of the image (Du Yuanyuan, 2020)[9]. Mood is reflected through the brightness and saturation of colors. Modal can be divided into high modality, medium modality, and low modality. Among them, high modality corresponds to high saturation and high brightness; Medium modality corresponds to medium saturation and medium brightness; Low modality corresponds to low saturation and low brightness. From Figures 1 and 2, it can be seen that the Chinese epidemic prevention posters mainly use white, light blue, deep blue, a small amount of deep red, orange, and green, with light blue being the main color, and overall showing a moderate value; The British epidemic prevention propaganda posters mainly use dark blue, bright yellow, white, and black, with a small amount of dark red, blue, and red, mainly dark blue, showing a high modal value overall. By comparing the two, it can be seen that the English epidemic prevention posters have higher modal values, higher authenticity and credibility, and are also easier to attract audiences (readers). By comparing these four aspects, it can be seen that the interactive significance of British epidemic prevention propaganda posters is higher than that of Chinese epidemic prevention propaganda posters.

3.4 Composition Significance

According to Kress&van Leeuwen (2006), the meaning of composition can be discussed from three aspects: information value, framing, and highlighting. The information value is reflected by the position of elements in the image, and different positions result in different cognition, thus providing different information. Kress&van Leeuwen (2006) argue that the left side represents known information (common sense information), while the right side represents unknown information (new information); Above is ideal information, below is real information. From Figure 1 and Figure 2, it can be seen that the arrangement of text and images in Chinese epidemic prevention propaganda posters adopts a “circular” structure from inside to outside, but the arrangement is relatively messy, with some text leaning below the image, some leaning above the image, and some text embedded in the image and blocking the background image. This uncoordinated arrangement of text and images can easily cause visual and cognitive discomfort to the audience (readers). And the position difference between “同/tóng” and “战/zhàn” in the “共同战疫/gòng tóng zhàn yì” is not obvious. According to people’s reading habits from left to right and top to bottom, it is easy to see it as “共战同疫”; The British epidemic prevention propaganda poster adopts a “linear” structure with two parts of graphic and textual arrangement, and the text arrangement is orderly, located at the core, visually more coordinated, and more in line with the cognitive habits of the audience (readers). It is easy for the audience (readers) to obtain information and better reflects the promotional role of the poster.

Highlighting is an important reference point for the meaning of composition. Highlighting is reflected through the position, size, and color of elements in the image. According to Kress&van Leeuwen (2006), the middle is the core information and the edges are the secondary information. Comparing Figure 1 and Figure 2, the core information of Chinese epidemic prevention posters uses low saturation colors (light blue), and the font is small and located in the background image, which is easily obscured. However, the secondary information uses high saturation colors (deep blue) and deep red, and the font is much larger than the core information; The epidemic prevention propaganda poster in the UK has the core information located in the middle position, with larger font size than the secondary information, and uses white text on a blue background to highlight the text. However, as one of the core information, “wear a face covering” can be further enlarged in font size. By comparing the

information value and highlighting, it can be seen that the composition significance of British epidemic prevention posters is higher than that of Chinese epidemic prevention propaganda posters.

4. Conclusion

This article is based on the theories of Systemic Functional Grammar and Visual Grammar (Kress&van Leeuwen), and compares and analyzes the interpersonal function, reproduction meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning of slogans in Chinese and British epidemic prevention posters. Research has shown that in terms of language modality, the most commonly used tone in Chinese and British epidemic prevention propaganda posters is imperative, indicating advice and commands. Chinese epidemic prevention posters use unmanned subject clauses with three characters each, which are short and straightforward. In contrast, British epidemic prevention posters use a small number of personal subject “you” to highlight the target audience of epidemic prevention advertisements. In terms of modality, both Chinese and British epidemic prevention propaganda posters use a combination of high and low value modal words, which not only express a resolute attitude but also have a soothing effect. From the comparison of reproducing meanings, it can be seen that Chinese epidemic prevention posters focus on reproducing “places where epidemics are prone to occur”, while British epidemic prevention posters focus on reflecting “susceptible objects of epidemics”. The comparative results of interactive significance indicate that the Chinese and British epidemic prevention propaganda posters focus on providing visual aids and information, without eye contact with viewers (readers). Both adopt a horizontal perspective to depict the equal status of the poster and the viewer (reader). However, the British epidemic prevention posters use close social distance and high emotional value, which have a good promotional effect of being close to readers and increasing credibility. Furthermore, British epidemic prevention propaganda posters have higher information value and prominence, are more in line with the cognitive habits of viewers (readers), and have higher compositional significance. Therefore, based on multimodal analysis, it can be seen that the British epidemic prevention posters reflect better information dissemination effects.

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