

A Study on Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Movie Posters

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Abstract—Movie posters, which belong to a multimodal discourse with rich connotation and unique images and texts, often use multiple social symbol resources such as images, words and colors to coordinate and co-construct discourse meaning. This kind of discourse is direct and clear, and has strong visual impact which can quickly convey information to the audience, attract the attention of the audience, arouse the desire to watch and realize the best persuasion function. This paper uses the theory of multi-modal discourse analysis and takes the movie poster *Braveheart* as an example to explore how different symbol modes, such as images, words and colors, can cooperate, complement and reinforce each other, so as to successfully complete the construction of interactive significance with the audience.

Keywords—Multimodal Discourse analysis, Interactive Meaning, Poster of *Braveheart*

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of modern media makes it more and more common for language and non-language symbols to combine and interact to realize textual meaning. Non-language symbols such as layout, color and sound can compensate for the uniqueness of language symbols and make the meaning expression more stereoscopic and profound. Under this background, more and more scholars have made a transition from single mode to multi-mode and from static study to dynamic study. Multimodal discourse analysis has become popular in the field of linguistics. Multi-modal discourse includes media, advertising, video and other modes, while movie poster is the most widely accepted form of discourse, which conveys the theme and connotation of the movie to the audience through unique and thoughtful visual design.

Some scholars have done relevant researches on movie posters. Luo Xiaochun interpreted how images and languages jointly constitute meaning to achieve the effect of movie publicity, relying on the analysis framework of visual images and the theory of systemic-functional linguistics.[1] Zhao Xueyai and Zhao Yingcong studied how to construct interpersonal meaning by combining words, images and pictures.[2] Li Peng used semiotics to interpret movie posters,[3] while Zhang Naidi interpreted movie posters from the perspective of Chinese traditional elements in the design of movie posters.[4] All these researches interpreted movie posters from different perspectives such as function and design, providing different perspectives for people to better understand movie posters.

Considering main function of the movie posters is to establish interact with the audience, this paper, based on the multimodal discourse analysis theory, taking the movie posters of *Braveheart* as an example, analyzes how different symbols such as images, text and color mode, to cooperate, reinforce each other, resulting in a combined force to successfully complete the construction of meaning with the audience.

II. A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE MOVIE POSTER OF BRAVEHEART

Braveheart, directed by MEL Gibson, is a war movie produced by Paramount Pictures. Based on the court politics of England in the 13th and 14th centuries and centered on the war, the movie tells the story of William Wallace, the leader of Scottish uprising, who struggles unrelenting with the rulers of England. The movie won five Awards at the 68th Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director. Behind such a huge success, it can be said that the poster (Figure 1 below) contributed to the publicity.

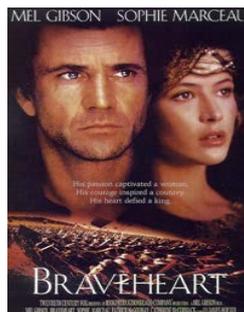


Figure 1: Movie Poster of *Braveheart*

The poster especially highlights the facial feature picture of Wallace and Princess Isabella, who are movie's protagonists. The picture is located in the middle and upper part of the poster, which takes up most of the space of the poster. They are looking at the distance, with angular features, handsome, resolute and solemn expression. The top of the poster bears the names of two actors: Mel Gibson, Sophie Marceau. The center of the poster is composed of three lines: "His passion captivated a woman. His courage inspired a country. His heart shocked a king". Now we will start from the image, text and color social symbol mode to study the generation and construction of the interactive meaning between the poster and the audience.

III. THE INTERACTIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOVIE POSTER OF BRAVEHEART

A. *Interactive Meaning of Images*

Kress and Leeuwen hold that interactive significance is about the relationship between the producer of the image, the things represented by the image (including people) and the audience of the image, showing the audience's attitude towards the representation.[5] Interaction meaning is composed of four elements including contact, social distance, attitude and modality. These four elements respectively form a system, and the selection in each system will ultimately affect the interaction between the image and the audience. Now, with the help of the theory of "interactive meaning" of images, we explain how the symbol selection in each poster system achieves the construction of interactive meaning with audience.[6]

B. *Contact*

"Contact" refers to an imaginary contact relationship established between the participants in an image through eye direction and the audience. When participants' eyes are directed at the audience, the images are called "demanding", indicating the meaning of the participants' requests to the audience. When the participant is not a living person or animal, or when the participant's eyes do not point at the audience, the image is called an "offering" that expresses the meaning of providing information.

From the perspective of "contact", the eyes of participants Wallace and Isabella in the poster image do not point at the audience, and they do not establish the imaginary interpersonal relationship with the audience. The two protagonists, all with their eyes fixed on the distance in the same direction, suggest the audience that the two participants are close to each other, and the female protagonists seems to lean on the female protagonists as if there is an intriguing story between them. Thus, the audience's desire to explore the story is naturally aroused, and they may choose to watch the movie to find out the story.

C. *Social Distance and Attitude*

The relationship between participants and audiences in the image depends on the social distance of the image, which is usually related to the frame size of the shot. Close distance: Only face or head can be seen; Personal proximity: Head and shoulders; Personal distance: Above waist; Social proximity: The whole person; Society distance: whole person and surrounded by space. The public distance is at least 4 to 5 people away. The attitude is reflected through the "perspective", expressing the subjective and objective attitude towards the participants. The images can be viewed from an angle of view, a horizontal perspective and a vertical perspective.

From the perspective of "social distance", the designer chooses the close distance to show the facial features of the two protagonists, so that the audiences could capture the information of the male and female protagonists at the first glimpse. The male and female protagonists are well known, which becomes a major attraction of the movie. Close interpersonal interaction with the audience would make the audience happy and willing to watch movies. The attitude is reflected through the "perspective", expressing the subjective and objective attitude towards the participants. The choice within the "attitude" subsystem is reflected by the perspective. The image is taken from the horizontal perspective, which reflects the equal relationship between the participant and the audience. The angle of the side gives people a sense of alienation and detachment. Considering that the focus of the movie is to restore the complicated entanglements in the long history of Britain and reflect on the history, the angle of the side is in line with the historical theme of the movie itself, allowing people to objectively examine the spiritual suffering of ordinary people in major historical events.

D. *Modality*

Modality refers to the truth or credibility of the statement we make about the world we live in. It is usually classified into three categories: high, medium and low. The resources of the "modality" embodiment are very abundant in the image, color saturation, color differentiation, color attune, contextual (referring to background from none to extremely detailed), reproduce (referring to the details from the abstract to the maximum representation), depth (referring to the perspective from no depth to the maximum), lighting (referring to from the images of a maximum of light and shade to no light and shadow) and brightness (referring to the degree of bright from the largest number of different level to the only two of brightness and darkness), with a total of eight visual markers in the image of modality system of the high and low value.

The poster of Braveheart is an image with high modality oriented by natural senses, which is consistent with the theme of the movie. The image has a full black background, which is expressive, intriguing and inspiring, remarkable in the ordinary. The text is written in full black. Two colors of black and bronze are complementary to each other, striking contrast, producing intense visual stimulation effect.

The figure in the image is reappeared in close-up, with the head picture of black background, and consistent color collocation, harmonious light and shadow, delicate lightness and darkness. The audience enjoys elegant visual feast of returning to the original nature. The choice of the image and color mode is an explanation of the theme itself: the resolute expression and the combination of the two colors reflect the theme of the movie, which is completely consistent with Wallace's heroic fighting, pursuit of love and final heroic dedication.

E. Interactive Meaning of Text

According to Halliday, interpersonal meaning refers to the function that people use language to conduct social activities, and people use language to communicate with others, establish and maintain interpersonal relations, influence others' behaviors with language, express their subjective judgment or evaluation of things, test or change others' views, etc. [7] In the process of speech, the speaker plays a specific role of speech, and is also assigned a certain role to the recipient.

Within the framework of interpersonal meaning, interpersonal function is mainly embodied by tone system and modal system. The communicative roles and the things exchanged constitute the main speech functions: providing, commanding, presenting and asking questions. From the perspective of grammatical structure, statement, question and command are realized respectively by the declarative mood, interrogative mood and imperative mood.

At the top of the poster, the male and female protagonists are identified by their capitalized names: MEL GIBSON, SOPHIE MARCEAU. The text design in the middle of the poster selects three statements: "His passion captivated a woman. His courage inspired a country. His heart defied a king." Its structure is well-balanced, arranged in a neat way, striking contrast, and profound meaning, with a strong rhetorical effect through parallelism and climax. In order to attract the audience to watch the movie, it aims to arouse the suspense in the audience's mind and stimulate the audience's thinking, so as to generate a strong interest in the message conveyed by the poster and successfully establish a communication and interaction platform between the participants and the audience. These three sentences are the key information of the key publicity of the movie, followed by the "BRAVEHEART" in bold and bold font, which catches the audience's interest and desire to watch the movie, thus completing the interactive effect between the text and the picture of the poster.

IV. SUMMARY

The poster design of Braveheart mainly uses the symbol modes of images, words and colors to construct the interactive meaning between the audience and the poster. The word-image-text composition is in line with the psychological reading habits of the audience. Text distribution and image explain the title and subject. The image is in the center, which brings strong visual shock to the audience. Color is reflected through embedding in the image and language, with the main color of black and bronze, which is the profound and dignified symbol, and consistent with the image of the protagonist. After analysis, we find that these modes of symbols refer to each other, reinforce each other, cooperate closely, be indispensable and cooperate in coordination, so as to deliver the profound theme of this movie: love and war. It can be said that the design of the multi-modal poster is concise, pure and beautiful, subtle, profound meaning, giving people a warm visual impact and meaningful charm.

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