Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Sport Events Icons Display of 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games Opening Ceremony

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Abstract: This research is a multi-modal discourse analysis of the sport events icon display program at the Opening Ceremony of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. With the complexity of the research case itself, and the rapid changes in media communication methods, traditional discourse analysis theories can no longer meet the practical significance of fully understanding the meaning of the discourse and providing guidance for the creation of similar texts in the future. In accordance with the guiding of multimodal discourse analysis framework, this research analyzes the discourse from three levels, namely visual level, aural level and cultural level. The research separately summarizes the content features presented in each level. More importantly, the research has discovered the relevance among the three diecourse levels, which together construct the complete textual meaning of the case through superimposition.

Keywords: multimodal discourse analysis, 2020 Tokyo Olympics, icons, qualitative study

1.   Introduction

This study selected the sport events icons display show at the opening ceremony of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games as a case study. At the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics on the evening of July 23, 2021, Japan showed the world many programs with its own characteristics within a few hours. The case selected for this study is one of the programs that lasted only more than four minutes: *ALL JAPAN KASOH GRAND-PRIX at the Opening Ceremony*. The actors have to wear special humanoid costumes, use various props, cooperate with each other, and finally use their bodies to present the humanoid icons of all 50 sports events of the Tokyo Olympics in turn. The source of inspiration for the program is actually a variety show named *ALL JAPAN KASOH GRAND-PRIX* produced by NTV and first broadcast in 1979. This is a cross-dressing creative competition show with funny contents. Participants use some auxiliary tools or methods, and transform them into various things with their own body, which is creative and humorous. The host, Miss Etiquette, contestants and judges of the show are all using various movements or physical forms to make the audience laugh, and this show is broadcast in many countries and regions.

According to the above contents, the discourse analysis of this case can be started from a multi-modal perspective. For hundreds of millions of viewers around the world, though it is impossible to experience the sense of smell, touch and taste of this program, this show is full of visual and aural elements. The body language of the actors wearing special flat doll costumes, the costumes themselves, the expressions of the actors who show their faces without the special costumes, the props, the background music throughout the show, and most importantly, the 50 Olympic event icons

presented in the program will also be an image symbolic modality. At the visual and aural modal level, how does the case of this research construct discourse? Is the content presented by the visual and aural modalities relevant? Can they jointly provide help for the presentation of the entire program? In addition to the superficial discourse description, what are the deeper meanings and values of the symbolic resource system presented in the program? In the 1950s, American linguist Zellig Harris proposed the discourse analysis theory that had a profound impact on the field of linguistic research. As a qualitative research method, discourse analysis theory uses semiotics, structuralism, and linguistic analysis methods to analyze the structure, meaning and content of the text, and explores the different interpretation methods of meaning and the ideological parts. In addition, by analyzing a large number of actual cases, scholars have come to the conclusion that the discourse analysis theory also helps us understand the inherent laws of discourse and the relationship with social culture, ideology, and psychological cognition. However, this set of theories that originated in the 1950s can only be applied to language level [1]. Today, when traditional media is gradually declining and digital media and other emerging media continue to develop, the discourse analysis theory obviously needs to be supplemented and improved. The form of discourse is not only composed of linguistic parts under the powerful force of media, it is also filled with lots of non-verbal parts. From color, shape, size, eye contact, movement, to the level of volume and frequency, and even the sense of touch, taste and smell. From a biological point of view, these media symbol systems for communication are the modals. Establishing an analysis framework from the perspective of multiple modalities helps to get rid of the limitations of complex discourse analysis by using a single modal. Using multiple modes will make the results of discourse analysis more comprehensive, accurate and effective.

This analysis framework based on multiple modalities is called 'Multimodality', which is a related concept of social semiotics. The earliest scholar who studied the theory of multimodal discourse analysis was Roland Barthesta. His thesis *Rhetoric of the image* published in 1977. In this paper, the author explores the relationship between language and visual meaning. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen proposed that modes are the ways of representing information or the semiotic channels we used to compose a text. Multimodality is the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event. They also studied the relationship between multiple modalities and media. Gunther Kress thought that communication and expression need to rely on language and other symbolic modalities to realize together [2]. In this, symbol resources can be completely described, and the meaning of symbol resources has also been made and represented.

In the following chapters, the research will first summarize the findings of previous scholars' studies on related research topics, and then try to use different theories to conduct multimodal discourse analysis on various levels of the case, and get the correlation between different modalities and come to a final conclusion eventually.

2. Literature review

2.1. The case background: The Olympic Sports events icons and *ALL JAPAN KASOH GRAND-PRIX*

Li Jinlong and Zhang Zhixue, etc proposed that as an important part of the Olympic landscape, sports icon design should have the following functions: the differentiation, direction, area, description and aesthetic function [3].

The latter two functions are more relevant to the subject of this research. The description function can accurately, clearly, and concisely describe sports events to the public, and the aesthetic function can highlight the two-dimensional beauty of form and the dynamic beauty of human movement. The design language of these icons is the embodiment of the aesthetic function. Ge Lingkun summarized the general rules of the design language of Olympic sports icons. The author proposed that these icons

are generally simple in strokes and single in color, which can maximize the message conveyed by the designer. At the same time, as a manifestation of formal beauty, the composition of these icons is balanced and stable, the visual tension is obvious, the arrangement and combination are very regular, the visual rhythm is smooth, and the different icons are consistent in terms of direction and size. The Olympic sports icons with a good sense of design can also bring inspiration to the icon design of other things in life [4].

Yao Lan's research complements the functions of the Olympic sports icon. Yao proposed the symbolic function of the national spirit of the host country and the transmission function of the national and regional culture of the Olympic icon [5]. Also as part of exploring the function of cultural transmission, scholars such as Suo Xiaowen analyzed the typical design style of the Olympic sports icons. They first put forward that the so-called design style is a unique aesthetic that is formed by the unification of subjective and objective when the designer is working. Afterwards, these scholars reviewed the development history of sports icon design in the modern Olympic Games over a hundred years in chronological order. From the Art Deco movement that emerged in France in the 1930s, to the first use of sports icons in the Berlin Olympics in 1936, to the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the first complete set of icons was formed and officially certified, and then Mexico City, Sydney and The Beijing Olympic Games used light effect art techniques, Australian indigenous art and traditional Chinese seal carving art respectively; in 1994, Norway used rock painting art techniques in the Hamel Winter Olympics [6]. These cases all showed that with the development of the times and the changes in people's understanding and aesthetics, the Olympic Games is not only a sports competition, but also a showcase of the arts and culture of various countries. These sports icons gradually formed a set of individual and complete national language expression system, which promoted exchanges between countries.

ALL JAPAN KASOH GRAND-PRIX, as a famous variety show, is a typical research case in the cultural field. Tang Si proposed to divided the visual elements of *ALL JAPAN KASOH GRAND-PRIX* into three main parts. The first part is the participants of the show. The show, whether it is hosts, players, guests or live audiences, can participate in the game, and the whole stage is very happy. The second part is the game part. In this game, the participating players can dress up as various objects, animals, film and television characters, etc. The game without any restrictions fully demonstrates the creativity of the players. The third part is the atmosphere created by the program as a whole. It is not only relaxed and humorous, but also meaningful [7]. The program organizers hope to inspire innovation and creativity in the whole society.

2.2. The Multimodal discourse analysis framework

In terms of finding a theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis, Zhu Yongsheng proposed that multimodal discourse analysis absorbed Charles Peirce's semiotic theory, and the basis of the analysis was the systemic functional linguistic theory created by Michael Halliday. Multimodal discourse analysis considers language to be social semiotic and meaning potential. Zhu Yongsheng collectively referred to systemic functional linguistics and semiotics here as systemic functional semiotics. Systemic functional linguistics is a branch of systemic functional semiotics [8]. Zhang Delu also proposed that the most suitable theory is the theory of systemic functional linguistics. The theoretical framework was mainly composed of five systems: the cultural, contextual, meaningful, formal and media level.

The topic selection of this research is more integrated with the other four levels, except for the formal level part. At the media level, Zhang Delu proposed that it was mainly divided into language media composed of sound symbols and written symbols, accompanying language composed of volume, pitch and accent. Nonverbal media composed of head, hands, legs, and torso movements [9].

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen believe that language analysis needs to link context and social practice. In this practice, the content of multimodal discourse analysis combines text, image, audio and video. Through this analysis, it can be found that similar language forms may produce different meanings [10]. For example, there are four projects funded by the ESRC and one funded by the Swedish National Research Foundation, could be seen as the first complete theoretical interpretation of multimodality as a social semiotic approach [11]. The above two scholars also explored how visual grammar conveys meaning. They stated in the book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* published in 2006 that visual composition is a kind of grammar that combines the depicted people, places and things into a meaningful whole. The authors proposed five narrative visual expression approaches: actions, events, reactions, mental processes, and speech processes. Any given subject can use any of these ways to express different interpretations of reality. The authors also pointed out that images can not only express representational meaning, but also have interactive meaning [12]. Hong Gang also explored the level of meaning, he took the meaning of the multimodal video discourse of the song *You and Me* at the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games from images and sound divided into two aspects. The author used the visual image analysis grammar framework for interpretation. That is, how the different elements that make up the picture proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen interact to construct the meaning of the picture. In the video discourse, the author divided the visual meaning into three aspects: information, saliency, and viewing angle. About the sound, the study chose the sound montage theory for interpretation [13]. Zhang Xiaofeng proposed that the theory of sound montage is the creation, selection and splicing of sound. Mainly presented together through language, music and sound, the three are coherent and complementary, forming a rhythm together [14].

Zhou Mengli's research explored the cultural and contextual level. She used the English Promo Video of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics as a case to conduct a multimodal discourse analysis, and proposed that the video showed Chinese ideology at the cultural level, the language field, tenor and language at the contextual level. This kind of cooperation forms the entire dynamic multi-modal discourse. The author pointed out that the interactive integration of the audiovisual modalities of the video constructs the implicit meaning of the video [15].

The above-mentioned researches generally focused on summarizing and analyzing the composition of each modal level of a multimodal discourse, and did not propose how the various modal levels work together to influence the production of the entire discourse. In addition, most of the theories used in the above studies to analyze a certain modal are linguistic theories, and this research needs to analyze more from communication-related theories. The above two points will be the innovative part of this research.

3. Multi-modal Discourse Analysis of the Program

The specific case analysis will focus on each of the three levels: visual, aural and cultural discourse.

3.1. Visual Discourse Analysis

As part of multimodal discourse analysis, the following content is an analysis of the visual discourse of the case study. Combined with the actual content characteristics of the case, the analysis will start from four aspects: the actors' costumes, the actors' motions, the props and the production of the media.

The first is the analysis of the costumes worn by the actors in the show. As mentioned above, the topic of this research is inspired by the program called *ALL JAPAN KASOH GRAND-PRIX*. The main form of this show is that the contestants participating in the show will put on a variety of strange and interesting special costumes, pretending to be various characters or species, and comparing which dress is more interesting and creative. In this performance at the opening ceremony, the actors dressed

up as icons for the 50 sports events of the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics. The characters in these icons are small people with dark blue skin, white vests and no faces, so the actors wore the same dark blue sealed costumes and white vests, and they also wore dark blue sealed headgears, without any face painting outside. In some special cases, when two actors who showed off some events like Kumite, Kata, Judo and wresting, they wore the doboks symbolizing the events on top of the blue special costumes. Such a look was rather monotonous, peculiar and funny among the actors in all kinds of glamorous costumes throughout the opening ceremony, but the visual effect brought by this dressing was most in line with the description function of the performance as a visual discourse. These costumes clearly and accurately depicted all the sports icons of the Tokyo Olympics. In addition to the special costumes mentioned above, there was another costume in this show. When the sailing icon was displaying, it was performed by an actor wearing a normal polo shirt. The icon of the event was in the chest of this shirt. This processing method not only saved the cost of props for displaying complex icons of sailing sports, but also allowed the entire program to avoid the aesthetic fatigue caused by a single actor's costume, which was in line with the aesthetic function of visual discourse.

The motions of actors were also an important part of the visual discourse of the show. Motions could play an extremely important descriptive role in referring to sports icons. Costume wearing was the consistency of most actors in this show, and different motions were the key to allowing the audience to recognize and distinguish different sports. For example, when showing a football icon, the actor still wore a dark blue special costume, but posed a kick shot. This motion could make the audience immediately realize that the icon referred to football, and through the precise display of the actor, the audience would immediately feel the design of the football in the icon of the Tokyo Olympics, which was also in line with the aesthetic function of the icon. In addition to body movements, eye expression was also a kind of movement display. As mentioned earlier, in most of the show, the actors wore headgears without facial expressions. Only when showing sailing, the actor did not wear a special costume. In his performance, he couldn't find suitable props to display the icon, and he was restless. Such expression language also added a bit of humorous aesthetics to the show. The show at the opening ceremony retained its source of inspiration, whether it was the use of body or eye movements, that is *ALL JAPAN KASOH GRAND-PRIX*. In this show, the contestants do not just wear special clothes to imitate people and things, but also need to use actions and expressions to create a show effect.

Props were another key to distinguish and describe different sports. They could also play an important auxiliary role in displaying sports. For example, when showing the icon of water polo, the actor made a lifting motion. With just this, the audience could not understand what kind of sport it was. However, the actor was holding a dark blue ball as in the icon, but this action was very similar to the action of dunk in basketball, and did not reflect the water polo game environment. So another actor raised a wave-shaped prop. This way the audience could quickly and accurately understand what the sport was.

The following part analyzes the media level of the selected topic visual discourse. Lens language and editing techniques were important components of the media-level framework in visual discourse. The first is lens language. For example, in the topic selection program, when the actors were presenting the icon of beach volleyball, since the icon of the event of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was the shape of a person diving into the sand to save the ball, the on-site photographer used with the shooting method of rotating the camera 90 degrees clockwise, the actor only needed to stand naturally and lift his hands upwards. Through the change of the camera angle, the scene of the actor diving to the ground was accurately and cleverly constructed, which completed the description of the icon while avoiding unnecessary troubles and safety hazards. The editing method also provided a lot of convenience for the actors and the entire program group to describe the icons. When displaying the icons of various swimming sports, the director switched to a pre-recorded video. This video was still

displayed by actors wearing blue and white costumes with the assistance of props. There was no difference in the display of other icons, and there was no obvious interruption to the audience's visual perception. The only difference was that the background of the edited image was not as cluttered as the live image. In conjunction with the post-production team, English name subtitles had been added to the bottom of the TV screen for all 50 icons including swimming, so that the audience could better identify sports events. In addition, the pre-edited clips would have a higher error tolerance rate compared to the live shots, and promoted the quality and completion of the entire program.

Based on the case study, it can be found that in the icon display program at the opening ceremony, the above four parts did not appear one after the other, nor did they appear at the same time from the beginning, but the four parts gradually appeared and overlaid on each other. And there were also more changes in the form of performances. This way of presentation allowed the audience to feel the fluency of the program without feeling dull and monotonous, avoiding the appearance of the audience's aesthetic fatigue as much as possible, and maximizing the visual communication effect of the discourse.

3.2. Aural discourse analysis

The next content is an analysis of the aural discourse of the case. Different from the previous part, this part will expand from two aspects: the selection and application of music in the show, and the combined functions of the aural and visual parts.

Judging from the presentation of the entire program, the rhythm of this music was very lively and rapid, which also met the requirement of the program that actors could fully display all 50 icons in less than five minutes. However, in the overall rapid rhythm, this music had very rich changes and was very musical and layered, so that the audience would not feel dull after listening, but think this is a kind of fantastic music. Specifically, in the first 13 seconds of this music, only simple plucking sound was used as a prelude to gradually introduce the audience's attention to the following part. Starting from the 13th second, the entire background music entered the main melody, accompanied by intermittent synthetic sounds, trying to remind the audience not to shift their attention. Starting at 1 minute and 10 seconds, the melody gradually slowed down, and the tone changed to only the solo bass chords. At 1 minute and 58 seconds, vocals appeared, accompanied by the melody returning to the complicated and cheerful part of the beginning. At 2 minutes and 3 seconds, the sound became single and deep again, this time it was a melody of bass beats. After 22 seconds, the melody was complicated again, and the human voice appeared for the second time. The vocal content this time was "Oh yeah, be my side", which happened in the intersection of the rowing and water polo icons. This human voice part also appeared intermittently in the later part of the performance until the end. In another melody low point of 3 minutes and 15 seconds, the addition of electronic music elements combined with the bass sound made the complexity of the entire music reach a peak. Starting from 3 minutes and 43 seconds, the melody returned to the beginning of the last time, until the end of the music. To sum up, this background music had multiple transitions of melody, and used a variety of musical instruments and performance methods, combining traditional and modern expression methods, showing a continuous, layered and highly expressive communication effect.

In this discourse, the aural part did not exist independently, but was always associated with the visual part and manifested together. The perfect combination of the soundtrack and the live pictures also marked that the auditory part of the text was matched with the visual part, which had played a powerful role in the realization of the descriptive function of displaying many icons in the program. Besides, the brilliance of the music itself, together with the visual part, promoted the dynamic presentation of the aesthetic meaning of the icons. When the music was in the prelude stage, the actors were preparing to enter the stage. When the music entered the main melody, the actors also started their sequential display of the 50 sport icons. The editing of the music in the program was also just

right. As mentioned earlier, this background music had very diverse levels, and its melody had seen many rises and lows. In the visual part of this research, it had been analyzed that the screens of the program were not all live broadcast screens, but switched into a part of the pre-photographed screens. The audience of the show would find that in the live broadcast, the background music was a cheerful, rushing and upbeat melody throughout. When the director switched to the editing screen, the music became a low part of the melody.

Since the actors needed to show all 50 sports icons in less than five minutes of the show, the rhythm of this show would not be slow. Therefore, with the aid of rhythmic, rapid and cheerful music composed of a variety of percussive timbres, and with the perfect fit of the editing, the display of the video images could be displayed in an orderly and smooth manner. Among the sound elements of the program, the most significant role in controlling the rhythm of the program was the sound of "duang" when every single icon appeared. This sound reminded the audience of the appearance of every icon. Obviously, changes in the beats were also controlling the rhythm of the show. From the water polo icon No. 32 to the archery icon No. 38, the beat length of each of them occupying the background music was only a half of the first 15 icons, and only a quarter of the marathon swimming icon No. 17. Furthermore, when the camera was switched to the later stage, the changes in music timbres, rhythm and melody could also prompt the audience's attention. These changes in music could make the program more audible. At a word, in the live scenes, the coherent background music played a significant role in maintaining the rhythm and functions presentation of the program.

3.3. Cultural discourse analysis

As important parts of the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis mentioned in the previous section, the contents of the aesthetic level will also be the emphasis of the following cultural discourse analysis. At this level, the research will focus on the development history of the Olympic sports events icons and the design background of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics sports events icons. In the context and the general environment of the Tokyo Olympics, the creativity and design of the performance team and planners, as well as the use of media by the broadcaster, reflect the significance of the cultural discourse.

As early as the 1920s, Austrian sociologist Otto Neurath began to conceive and create the Isotype, which is the abbreviation of International System of Typographic Picture Education, and it is also a graphic communication system. Neurath hoped that through this system guided by certain rules, simplified images could be used to convey social information to the general public efficiently, intuitively and widely [16].

In 1936, the Berlin Olympic Organizing Committee designed icons for a large number of sports for the first time, which were used on various occasions of the game to facilitate people to identify various sports. However, at the first Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964, a complete set of icons that were related to each other and the overall design style had been used to today really appeared. The core figure of this Olympics Icon Design Committee was Mr.Masaru Katsumie, who was the famous Japanese art critic and fully absorbed the core concept of the Isotype, requiring icons to be simple, intuitive, and able to overcome barriers between different ethnic cultures and languages. The design of static sports icons for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics was still affected by the long-term influence of the 1964's design. Designer Masaaki Hiromura clearly expressed his views on inheriting the ideas of his predecessor. Compared with 1964, the more significant innovation in icon design in 2020 was the dynamic icon designed by Kota Iguchi. The basic pattern of this set of icons was the same as the static version. Kota Iguchi deconstructed the static icons into a complete process from point and surface to typical movements of sport. The icon displayed at the Opening Ceremony of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics did not violate the classic Isotype aesthetic principles. It found a solution for the icons that usually appeared in print media suitable for large-scale live broadcasts.

Affected by the severe COVID-19 epidemic sweeping the world, the Tokyo Olympics was the first postponed Olympic Games in history, and there was no audience at the opening ceremony. In the opinion of Mr. HIRO-PON, a pantomime performer who was one of the main actors of the show, the display of flat and non-emotional icons also needed to be interesting.The program still had to be accurate and vivid to express the icons, while giving the hundreds of millions of viewers in front of the screen a sense of participation and substitution. Mr. HIRO-PON pointed out that this performance needed to completely simplify and "two-dimensional" the icons, and this statement came from Japanese. This concept means that, from the perspective of our viewers, some of the manga, anime, and video game that are popular and influential all over the world produced in Japan are all artificially created flat works. Even some computer-made stereo images, they still belong to this category on the screen and printing plane. The two-dimensional world constructed by these planes has become one of the most important components of Japanese contemporary popular culture. However, the world of the second dimension must be fictitious, and real photos and film and television works are not included, In the icon show, which was the "three-dimensional" real world constructed by real people, Mr. HIRO-PON gave the icons emotions, so that the audience would have a sense of substitution when watching the performance. The program staff designed real imitations for 50 two-dimensional icons in turn, and then continuously adjusted and modified them in actual practice, cooperated with the media's use of camera and editing, and finally all the flat icons were shown to the people all over the world in front of the screen as a very innovative and vivid form. The whole performance not only reflected the Japanese two-dimensional design culture, but also reflected the unique charm of the three-dimensional reproduction of *ALL JAPAN KASOH GRAND-PRIX* as a source of inspiration.

4.   Conclusion

In the part of visual discourse analysis, the research mainly discusses the performers' dress, motions, props and media production. In the show, the performers wore specially designed and produced costumes, imitating the actions of the icons, and restored the original flat image of each icon. At the same time, with the joint efforts of props, photographers and post-editors, the whole performance had become more vivid and interesting. Several important elements of visual discourse were not independent of each other, they interacted with each other and jointly constructed all the icons and performances for the audience.

The aural discourse part discusses the background music and sound effects used in the performance, as well as the relationship between the sound and the image of the program. The study finds that the musical instruments, rhythms and tones used in the background music of this performance all conformed to the overall style of the program, and consistent with the progress of the visual part, and some sounds are highly related and suggestive to the visual content. As a multi-modal discourse, the program is the result of the joint construction of visual and aural discourse.

The cultural discourse part discusses the development history of Olympic sports icons including 2020 Tokyo Olympics, and also studies the typical Japanese cultural phenomena that appeared in this icon display program. They are also an important part, which is delivered through visual and aural discourse.

This study is a case research based on the multimodality analysis framework. However, this research is not limited to summarizing and analyzing the discourse characteristics of the various modalities of the case, but is dedicated to finding the correlation between the various modal discourses from a holistic perspective. Research has found that not all discourses in a multimodal framework exist independently. In the cases selected in this study, the discourses form a gradual relationship. When the aural and cultural discourses are formed and exert their meaning, they are based on the content presented in the visual discourse, and the contents of the three discourses appear

superimposed. On the contrary, the presentation of the meaning of the case in each independent discourse part is not complete.

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