

A Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis of CPC's International Publicity from the Perspective of Visual Grammar

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How to cite this paper: Liang, Y. Z., & Jiao, X. P. (2024). A Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis of CPC's International Publicity from the Perspective of Visual Grammar. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 12, 603-615.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.1210040>

Received: September 13, 2024

Accepted: October 28, 2024

Published: October 31, 2024

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Abstract

International Publicity contains a variety of modal symbols including text, pictures and sound, and their meanings are expressive. It is conducive for the Communist Party of China to use international publicity to exhibit its images so as to build a good international public opinion environment for China. Based on the theory of visual grammar, this paper uses NVIVO software to analyse the Communist Party of China's international publicity, focusing on the compositional, interactive and representational meanings of picture symbols in the video. It is found that CPC constructs the international image at life's full flowering through multi-modal symbols.

Keywords

Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis, Visual Grammar, Image Construction

1. Introduction

International publicity is one of the audio-visual presentations that are planned, filmed, recorded, edited, dubbed, scored and composed into video with the aim of making the audience captivated at first sight through sensory stimulation. It exhibits the unique image of the object to the audience who are different people in the international community by pictures and sound, thus audience has a good impression on the object, such as good opinion and credence. The first highly popular publicity video of the Communist Party of China, *The Communist Party of China is on the Road with You*, was produced by the Road to Recovery Studio and appeared overseas back in 2013. In 2016, the public services advertising team

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of CCTV produced and released *Who am I* for the 95th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, which was broadcast millions of times and was well received by the people. In 2022, the New Media Department of the *People's Daily* produced and released an international publicity of the Communist Party of China, CPC. Once CPC was released, the publicity triggered a heated discussion and won many favorable comments. International publicity is a three-dimensional carrier for the construction of the Communist Party of China's international image, which can improve the communication effectiveness of the Party's international image (Ji & Ma, 2022). The connotations of international publicity can be explored through the principles of linguistics, international relations, communication studies, and other disciplines. From a linguistic perspective, international publicity integrates multiple modalities of text, images, and sound, making them a form of multimodal discourse. As a video that combines text, images, sound, colour and other modalities, the international publicity can present the Communist Party of China in a three-dimensional manner in many ways. It is an integral part of the Communist Party of China's presentation of itself in the international community, serving as a crucial means for countries, organizations, and others to shape their image, disseminate information, and garner support on the international stage and it also plays an important role in building a good international public opinion environment for China.

Multi-modal discourse refers to the co-existence of language with other symbolic resources to co-construct meaning. So far, discourse analysis is basically limited to language itself, that is, it only pays attention to the language system and semantic structure itself and their relationship with social culture and psychological cognition, ignoring other forms of meaning such as images, sounds, colors, etc. The rise of multi-modal discourse analysis in the West in the 1990s has gone a long way towards overcoming these limitations. This paper therefore uses multi-modal discourse analysis as a framework, and uses the visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006) as a theoretical basis to investigate the compositional meaning, interactive meaning and representational meanings in the international publicity of the Communist Party of China, aiming to explore how the meaning is constructed through multi-modality, and the purpose of promoting the image of the members the Communist Party of China is achieved, and what kind of image is constructed.

2. The Academic Origins of Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis

Multi-modal discourse analysis plays an important role in constructing national image. It breaks through the traditional linguistic definition of language and extends its research scope to various modalities such as visual and auditory, such as language, technology, images, music, etc., aiming to comprehensively depict the complexity of the world of human symbolic communication. In the book *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*, Halliday extended the field of systemic functional linguistics, explaining his view that

social symbols other than language can also create meaning. On this basis, the theory of multi-modal discourse analysis emerged. Multi-modal discourse analysis refers to the use of images, sounds, colors, page layouts and other symbolic resources to interact with language to form visual, auditory, tactile and other reflections of the human brain on the properties of objective things that act directly on the sense organs for the purpose of expressing information. In the history of multi-modal discourse analysis theory, we can see that Halliday first proposed in the systemic functional grammar that the three main meta-functions of the language system are conceptual function, interpersonal function and discourse function. On this basis, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) proposed visual grammar, which corresponds to the three meta-functions of language, suggesting that images are also social symbols with compositional meaning, interactive meaning and representational meaning, which forming a framework for the analysis of visual grammar for multi-modal discourse analysis. Compositional meaning can be subdivided into three elements: framing, salience and information value, depending on the relationship between the image and the interactive elements linked into a unified whole. Interactive meaning is subdivided into four elements: contact, distance, point of view and modality, depending on the specific relationship formed between the audience and the participants in the image. Representational meaning is divided into narrative reproduction and conceptual reproduction according to the presence of vectors in the image, where the representation of vectors in narrative reproduction consists of processes such as action, reaction, speech and psychology. As an audio-visual presentation, one of the most distinctive features of the international publicity is the mixture of multiple symbolic modalities, such as text, pictures, music and other symbolic systems that co-exist to construct meaning and convey information. Visual grammar analysis studies the role of each modality in the discourse in expressing the meaning of the discourse, and therefore, visual grammar theory is applicable to the analysis of multi-modal narrative research in promotional films.

Research on multi-modal discourse analysis in China began with the introduction of foreign theories. Li Zhanzi (2003) first introduced the relationship between multi-modal discourse analysis and social semiotics, and detailed the visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen. Since then, domestic scholars have carried out research related to multi-modal discourse analysis, such as the theoretical basis and research methods of multi-modal discourse analysis and its significance (Zhu, 2007), the design of multi-modal semiotics and the cultivation of multi-modal literacy (Hu, 2007). At present, the results of multi-modal discourse research in China are mainly based on visual grammar, for example, Li Dezhi (2013) uses a visual grammar theoretical framework centred on “representational meaning”, “interactive meaning” and “compositional meaning” to analyse in details. For example, Li Dezhi (2013) uses a visual grammar theoretical framework centred on “representational meaning”, “interactive meaning” and “compositional meaning” to analyse in detail the hypertext examples of advertisements in CNTV and New

York Daily News. Jiang Keyi and Wang Jiayi (2021) combines the content analysis method and visual grammar theory to analyze the innovation of the documentary China in the Tea World in the theme content selection and presentation mode, and then interprets and reconstructs the spirit of tea people, tea events and tea ceremony presented in the documentary. The international publicity CPC under study has multiple sign systems, including image, language and sound, and involves visual and auditory modalities. Visual grammar can increase people's interpretation dimensions of images, helping audiences better understand the attitudes and positions expressed in images (Bian, 2021). This paper therefore uses multi-modal discourse analysis as a framework, and uses the visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006) as a theoretical basis to investigate the representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meanings in the international publicity of the Communist Party of China, aiming to explore how the meaning is constructed through multi-modality and the purpose of promoting the image of the members the Communist Party of China is achieved, and what kind of image is constructed.

3. Multi-modal Discourse Analysis of the CPC

CPC, the Communist Party of China's international publicity in 2022, is 2 minutes and 51 seconds long and consists of 1 paragraph of text, 149 frames of visual images and 1 soundtrack.

3.1. Language Texts

The language of the promotional video consists of a piece of text:

“Who am I? I am not a born leader. I was once so weak that only a few comrades were there for me. For me, everything did not always go smoothly. I have passed through adversity, and made great sacrifices while marching ahead. I was not born to be invincible. All that I do is to keep dreaming and fighting. All along I stay true to my original aspiration and mission. As long as I am alive, I will devote myself to teaching (Zhang Guimei). I would rather risk my life defending my country than back off for the sake of remaining alive (Qi Fabao). I must run faster so as to save more patients from the virus (Zhang Dingyv). I have dedicated to my whole life to my country, and I shall have no regrets about it (Huang Xvhua). I shall come from the people, have my roots among the people, and be dedicated to serving the people. Nothing can separate me from the 1.4 billion plus Chinese people. Humanity again stands at a crossroads in history. I care about the earth, the future and destiny of humanity, and wish to move forward in tandem with all progressive forces around the world, I hold the firm belief that this country is its people, and the people are the country. All the struggle, sacrifice and creation has been tied together by one ultimate goal. Our Party has dedicated itself to achieving lasting greenness for the Chinese nation, and committed itself to the noble cause of peace and development for humanity. Our responsibility is unmatched in importance, and our mission is glorious beyond compare (general secretary of the

18th 19th and 20th Central Committee of CPC, Xi Jinping). My name is the Communist Party of China.”

Halliday’s systemic functional grammar of three major meta-functional analysis is adopted for analysis as follows: First of all, the ideational function is examined. The textual content of the paragraph tells the story of members of the Communist Party of China’s steadfast adherence to their original aspiration, such as Zhang Guimei who devoted herself to the cause of education and children’s welfare in the frontier ethnic areas, Zhang Dingyu who did his best to save patients in the earthquake accident in Wenchuan in 2008 and in the novel corona-virus pneumonia epidemic in 2020, Huang Xuhua and Qi Fabao dedicated themselves to the national defense of China, etc. The text of the passage depicts their ordinary but also great images, which is also the message conveyed to the audience. The second is the interpersonal function. The text mainly shows the history of the development of the Communist Party of China and the deeds of its members, thus it tends to provide information. Finally, there is the textual function, in which the entire text adopts the first-person declarative sentence type of stating facts, stating the fact that the construction of the Communist Party of China itself has been closely integrated with the modernization of the country and the dream of national rejuvenation, in which it plays a decisive role as an overall leader. The last sentence is an answer to the title of the film: “Who am I? I am the Communist Party of China”, which echoes the first and last lines and gives a deep impression on the audience.

3.2. Visual Images

Based on Kress and van Leeuwen’s visual grammar theory, this paper analyses CPC according to a three-layer structure. Based on visual grammar theory, the paper uses NVIVO software to encode each 149 frames of visual images of CPC, and the resulting encoding reference points are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. References coded of 149 frames of pictures of CPC.

First-level nodes	Second-level nodes	Third-level nodes	References coded	
Representational meaning	Conceptual representation		11	
	Narrative representation		138	
Interactive meaning	Contact	Offer	132	
		Demand	17	
	Modality	High sensory modality	147	
		Low sensory modality	2	
	Social distance		Personal distance	33
			Social distance	19
			Public distance	13

Continued

		Vertical view	10
	Visual angle	Front view	115
		Upward view	24
		Give prominence to participants (connection)	81
	Framing	Integrate participants and background (disconnection)	7
Compositional meaning	Information value		109
	Saliency		147

3.2.1. Representational Meaning

An image has representational meaning in the sense that it can reveal the relationships between the participants through the symbols in the picture. The representational meaning is also divided into narrative representation and conceptual representation by the presence or absence of slashes, especially diagonal lines, i.e. vectors. Narrative representation presents the action of the participants or the change of events in the image, while conceptual representation represents the symbolic meaning of the participants (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). By examining the vectors in the images and the factors that indicates the interaction process of the participants, 138 of the 149 frames of the international publicity are narrative representations and 11 are conceptual representations, which is 92% narrative representation. For example, **Figure 1** shows two people holding out their arms to each other, with the arms forming a diagonal line, indicating that they are emitting a vector action and that they are reciprocating the position of the emitted vector action, which is a narrative representation. The two persons in the picture help each other, which corresponds to the words move forward in tandem with all progressive forces around the world here, and is a narrative representation of the text. This shows that in the era of accelerated globalization, the Communist Party of China adheres to the common destiny of mankind, seeks happiness for the people with a broad world mind, and has established the image of a leader in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics who is confident, self strengthening, honest and innovative. As another example, conceptual representation does not have a strong diagonal line to guide the audience's eyes, but represents meaning by showing the categories, characteristics and attributes of objects. **Figure 2** shows the Red Boat where the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China completed its agenda, the place where the Communist Party of China set sail, the beginning of the Party's quest for the happiness of the Chinese people and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and the starting point for the initiation of the Party's original intention and mission. The Red Boat therefore symbolises the initial stage of the Communist Party of China, and in this international publicity video it conveys the tenet of remaining true to original aspiration and bearing the mission firmly in mind. This shows the image of the Communist Party of China that always keeps its mission in mind and strives constantly.



Figure 1. Two arms clasped together.



Figure 2. Red boat on the southern lake.

3.2.2. Interactive Meaning

The interactive meaning of an image can be divided into contact, social distance, perspective and modality, which can work together to reflect the complex, subtle relationship between the content of the image and the audience.

1) Contact

Contact in images was divided into solicited and offered images based on whether the participant made direct eye contact with the audience. In the solicited images, the participant makes contact with the audience through direct eye contact. The offering images, on the other hand, are simply providing some kind of information to the audience. As can be seen from **Table 1**, 132 of the 149 frames have no direct eye contact between the participant and the audience, meaning that the offering type of image accounts for 89% of all images. The producers of the film focused on showing the history of the Communist Party of China and the deeds of its members, such as showing the ordinary deeds of party members' lives through the documentation of real-life scenes of daily life of Zhang Guimei and Zhang Dingyu. The 17 images that make direct eye contact with the audience all appear at the end of the film in the sublimation phase of the main theme. All 17 images show the participants smiling sincerely at the camera, and the participants in the images seem to establish an intimate social relationship with the audience. And it is advantageous for audience to be deeply affected by the inclusiveness behind the word humanity as if he had experienced it oneself.

2) Modality

The modality is related to the saturation of the colors, lighting and details. And it can be divided into two levels: high sensory modality and low sensory modality. The

higher the saturation of colors, the brighter the lighting, or the richer the details, the higher the modality of the image. Vice versa. Out of 149 images, 147 have rich colors or clear lighting and details, making them high sensory modality images, which is 98% is high modality in all of the images. High modality images have a high visual impact, which can help to attract attention and give a sense of refreshment for audience. Therefore, some specific image elements, such as the picture of Red boat on the southern lake in historical records and the white hair on Huang Xuhua's right temple, left a deep impression on the audience in **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**.

3) Social distance

The image maker can suggest the relationship between the reproducer and the audience through the choice of distance (including personal distance, social distance and public distance) (Li, 2003). In the 149 frames of the film, the image distances with the highest number of frames make personal proximity and social distance. In **Figure 3**, for example, Huang Xuhua's head occupies nearly half the size of the right-hand side of the image as a representational participant, and is combined with the nuclear submarine image on the left to visually demonstrate Huang's great contribution to China's national defence as a member of the Party. Social distances, on the other hand, are mostly found in images showing multiple people, with **Figure 4**, for example, showing Party members engaged in various trades and industries, suggesting that countless Party members have chosen to give and dedicate themselves to the country and the people, quietly struggling for the better life to which the people aspire. The selection of subjects for filming includes outstanding party members Huang Xuhua in **Figure 3** and mass party members in **Figure 4**, which also implies the different contributions made by members of the Communist Party, both of which aim to serve the people.



Figure 3. Nuclear submarine and HuangXuhua.



Figure 4. The medical staff pushing the patient.

4) Visual Angle

The choice of visual angle of the image designer realizes the different attitudes of the audience towards the image. Visual angle can be divided into three view-points: vertical view, front view and upward view. The fact that 115 of the 149 frames of the international publicity, or 77%, of the images are displayed with a front view of the representational participants indicates that the international publicity focuses on the equal relationship between the participants and the audiences of the images. The close proximity to the representational participant in the image allows the audience to become absorbed in the process and to understand the deep meaning of the word COMRADE, as shown in **Figure 5**, which is a front view of members of the Communist Party of China taking the oath. Taking the front view, the audience of the image is placed in the visual angle of the photographer, thus, the relationship between the audience and the participants is equal which creating a sense of dialogue and a resonance atmosphere, and it is easier to empathize with the image participants (Huang, 2022). The upward view, which accounts for 16% of the images, consists of 24 frames, indicating that the audience of the image is in a vulnerable position, as in **Figure 6**, where part of the audience is the Chinese people, who were exploited and oppressed by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism during the period of democratic revolution, and therefore look up at the Communist Party of China, which is holding the torch of revolution. Such an expression suggests both the leadership position of the Communist Party of China over the Chinese people and the foresight and ignorance of the people at a time of ignorance, hence there is the adoption of upward view. A vertical view allows the image to encompass more elements and gives the audience a sense of overview.



Figure 5. The back of the oath taken by members of the CPC.



Figure 6. Soldiers on horseback holding torches high.

3.2.3. Compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning reflects the composition of the overall meaning of an image. Compositional meaning relates elements of different meanings to each other through framing, information value and salience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Framing refers to the way in which an image highlights participants or blends them into the background through differences in colour or the division of lines. The images in this film have a clear difference in colour or division of lines that places the participants in the middle of the image, highlighting them. As in **Figure 7**, the silhouette of the gallows in the image forms a square, highlighting the central figure of the Chinese Communist Party member who has dedicated his life to the revolutionary cause and is willing to die, further rendering the hardships of I have passed through adversity. It shows the image of a revolutionary who, in the period of the new democratic revolution, led the Chinese people bravely and tenaciously to carry out the revolutionary struggle, fought bloody battles, and persevered under the leadership of the CPC with lofty revolutionary beliefs. The information value is reflected by the placement of the pictorial elements in the composition. The film is narrated from the first-person perspective of a person, so the portrait elements are placed in the middle of the image, focusing on the fact that the party members are the integral part of the Chinese Communist Party. As in **Figure 8**, Zhang Guimei's back is in the middle of the image, while Zhang Guimei's self-report plays a supporting role in the image, expressing more fully the meaning of the image, i.e. the lofty spirit that Party members can selflessly dedicate themselves to the Party's cause. Undoubtedly, as the principal of Lijiang Huaping Girls' High School, Zhang Guimei has dedicated herself to women's education in low economic areas. Salience refers to the extent to which individual elements in an image attract the audience's attention and is achieved through the position of the participants, their size and the contrast of colour and sharpness. Most of the images in this film place the participants in the centre of the frame, with a background that informs the audience of the relevant information, enhancing the expressiveness of the image through the strong contrast of colour like **Figure 9**. In **Figure 10**, for example, the red cloth is placed in the foreground and the soldier with his hand raised to take the oath is behind the cloth. The red colour that fills the whole image is very appealing to the audience and reflects the important political advantage of the Chinese army in following the Party's command.

3.3. Background Sound

International publicity mainly uses visual modalities to convey information and sound modalities to enhance the image, both of which work organically with each other to mobilize the audience's emotions (Yuan & Li, 2022). Sound can be a powerful symbolic element in international publicity. It can be used to represent different aspects of a story, such as the emotional state of a character or the tone of a work. The background music of the international publicity begins with the atmospheric *Epic*, accompanied by the male voice of the narrator tells the history of the

Communist Party of China through difficulties and hardships in a low voice. Then came the monologues of Zhang Guimei, Qi Fabao, Zhang Dingyu and Huang Xuhua as the members of the Party. As the video turns to tell the mission and task of the Communist Party of China, the background music turns into the lively melody of *Hope*, echoing the theme of the international publicity, i.e. the CPC's dedication for the Chinese nation and the noble cause of peace and development for humanity. Sound can thus add another layer of meaning to the international publicity and help to create a more immersive experience for the audience. The interaction of sound and image together portrays the image of the Communist Party of China, which is concerned with the future and destiny of mankind from a global perspective, and provides ideological guidance and strength for action to solve the various challenges facing mankind.



Figure 7. The back of CPC member who walking towards the gallows.



Figure 8. The back of ZhangGuimei.



Figure 9. A slowly unfolding red cloth.



Figure 10. Soldiers swearing behind the red cloth.

4. Conclusion

The international publicity video CPC tells the history of the beginning and development of the Communist Party of China and the heroic deeds of its members from the perspective of the first person. The elements of the Red Boat, the martyrs heading for the execution ground, the battle in the gunfire, the road across the motherland, and the declarations of Zhang Guimei, Qi Fabao, Zhang Dingyv and Huang Xuhua and other party members, as well as ordinary party members who come forward in times of danger, together demonstrate the hardships of the development of the Communist Party of China and the spirit of striving to stick to the mission and task. Based on the framework of multi-modal discourse analysis, this study uses the visual grammar analysis theory to study how CPC constructs the image of the Communist Party of China through the use of text, pictures and sound. The study shows that international publicity comprehensively uses text, pictures and sounds to express meaning. The text symbol system is the main source of information, while the compositional meaning, interactive meaning and representational meaning of pictures intuitively show the history of the Communist Party of China from its establishment and development to its unremitting struggle for the happiness of the Chinese people and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. As a symbol element, sound becomes the supplement and extension of the picture and text. The three modalities of text, pictures and sound work together shape the image of the Communist Party of China: remaining firm in its belief, fearless of hardships and dangers, mindful of its original aspiration and the wellbeing and happiness of the people, and striving for a community with a shared future for humankind. This study analyzed the text, images, and sound of the international publicity video CPC. The analysis of various dimensions of the data was slightly simple, and there is a lack of in-depth discussion on the possible reactions of the audience. Future research can start from these points. Although there are deficiencies, this study also provides a solid foundation for the feasibility of visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis in China.

Internet Document

International Publicity of the Communist Party of China CPC [Video file]

Retrieved from

<http://cpc.people.com.cn/20th/n1/2022/1019/c448334-32547835.html>.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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