

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of "Common Destiny" in "The Belt and Road" Documentary on the Xuexi Qiangguo Platform

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Abstract

Using visual grammar as the theoretical basis, the author makes an analysis of the use of images in the "Belt and Road" documentary "Common Destiny" and reveals that in the "Common Destiny" foreign publicity video the visual grammar analysis shows that the camera operator and the main characters in the "Common Destiny" foreign publicity video is realized via representational, interactive and compositional meanings of the images through the processing of vectors, contacts, viewpoints, distances, information values, framing, saliency values and borders. The analysis shows that the documentary "Common Destiny" mainly uses images of people, near and far viewpoints, social distance and enhancement and highlighting of information values to achieve three representational, interactive and compositional meanings of the video. The four colors of yellow, blue, red and black chosen in the video symbolize the positive and broad significance of the Belt and Road Initiative, and these elements of cultural context reflect China's offer of a Chinese solution for the development of the world and the building of a community of shared future for mankind.

Keywords: Xuexi Qiangguo Platform, the Belt and Road video, Common Destiny, multimodal discourse analysis

1. Introduction

"The Belt and Road" initiative aims to bridge infrastructure gaps and promote economic development in participating countries. It focuses on investment in transportation, energy, telecommunications, and other sectors, aiming to improve infrastructure capacities and spur economic activities. This initiative has the potential to foster economic growth, reduce regional disparities, and enhance competitiveness.

Multimodal discourse analysis is increasingly being incorporated into research studies due to its ability to provide a more comprehensive understanding of communication practices. Traditional linguistic analysis often focuses solely on language, neglecting the rich insights that can be gained from analyzing other modes such as images, gestures, and sound. By adopting a multimodal approach, we can uncover the nuanced meaning-making processes that occur through the interaction of multiple modes. This is particularly relevant in studies that aim to explore complex phenomena such as digital communication, visual media, or cross-cultural communication, where understanding how different modes interact is crucial. Moreover, multimodal discourse analysis can also shed light on power dynamics, identity construction, and social practices, providing a more holistic understanding of communication in various contexts. Therefore, incorporating multimodal discourse analysis in documentary studies allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of communication practices, leading to deeper insights and a more complete understanding of the phenomena under study.

The research question is how the concept of "common destiny" is constructed and communicated in the documentary through multimodal elements. The purpose is to conduct a multimodal discourse analysis of the documentary to uncover the discursive strategies used to promote the idea of "common destiny", emphasizing that this analysis contributes to the broader understanding of how multimodal communication influences the construction of shared narratives and values within the context of a significant international initiative. The research methodology used in this study is visual grammar analysis.

2. Literature Review

Xuexi Qiangguo is a platform supervised by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. Under the international section of the Xuexi Qiangguo platform, there is a Belt and Road column which contains many videos. These videos are well-produced, with strong communication power and representativeness. Among them, there are 6 special documentaries under the "Belt and Road" column: "Common Destiny," "Interconnected Roads," "Bright Bonds," "Wealthy Paths," "Financial Interconnection," and "Building Dreams on the Silk Road."

Scholars at home and abroad have used multi-modal discourse theory to analyze different language materials. Wang Lifan and Wen Yan (2008) mainly introduced the theory and methodology of multi-modal discourse analysis, elaborating in detail on the multi-modal analysis software ELAN and its functions. They also used examples to illustrate the application of ELAN in applied linguistics. At the same time, they discussed the value and significance of multi-modal discourse analysis.

Tang Qingye and Shen Ao (2018) found through their review that domestic research on the "Belt and Road" mainly focuses on various aspects such as infrastructure, economy, finance, and geo-relations of countries along the route. However, there is limited research on political discourse and the core concept of the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind," with a tendency towards vagueness and generalization. Research on the ontology of the "Belt and Road" discourse, historical resources, and theoretical studies is relatively weak, and there is limited research on audience differences, misinterpretations and challenges from foreign media, as well as zero-reporting studies. Therefore, further optimization is needed for the construction of the "Belt and Road" discourse system. The two scholars integrated the concept of the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" with the "Belt and Road" and propose constructive suggestions and recommendations, providing important insights and guidance for a deeper understanding of its relationship with China's foreign political discourse system construction and promoting research on innovation in China's political discourse system.

Taking the Li Ziqi series of videos as an example, Sang Xiuyue (2020) analyzed and interpreted the construction of meaning in multi-modal discourse interaction, providing insights for discourse teaching.

Sun Xiaomeng and Qin Yan (2020) conducted a multi-modal discourse analysis of Xi Jinping's keynote speech video at the first China International Import Expo's opening ceremony and found that multi-modal discourse is of positive significance for the construction of the "Belt and Road" discourse system. The study shows that multi-modal discourse plays an important role in enriching conceptual meanings, clarifying discourse connotations, and disseminating value concepts and ideologies. This has positive implications for enhancing China's international discourse power and promoting the construction of the "Belt and Road" discourse system.

Shi Xingsong and Xu Wenjuan (2020) used content analysis and quantitative analysis to summarize 158 SSCI journal articles published between 2004 and 2018 on network multi-modal discourse research in terms of development status, research themes, and research methods. Based on these survey results, they provided relevant suggestions and inspirations for domestic research on network multi-modal discourse.

Pan Yanyan (2020) reviewed the development history of multi-modal discourse analysis and multi-modal critical discourse analysis, opening up new perspectives and fields for multi-modal discourse analysis research.

Zhang Delu and Zhao Jing (2021) made a valuable exploration on whether it is necessary to analyze multi-modal grammatical issues in multi-modal discourse analysis. The analysis found that the need to analyze multi-modal grammar is determined by various factors, including the purpose of analysis, discourse levels and structures, and analytical perspectives.

Bie Jinqiu and Zhang Xinyue (2022) conducted a multi-modal discourse analysis of the "Telling Chinese Festivals" series of video shorts from the perspectives of culture, context, content, and expression. The analysis shows that images are the main modality in the video shorts, and texts and sounds are coordinated with images, reflecting discursive meanings.

Yang Yi and Chen Changlai (2022) constructed a multi-modal analysis framework for teacher discourse, expanding the research perspective, enriching the reference system and its connotations, and exploring the interactive and complementary relationships among various modalities.

Scholars have found that international network multi-modal discourse research mainly focuses on areas such as online language teaching, online daily interactions, social media discourse, network discourse and pragmatic analysis. Domestic research on network multi-modal discourse mainly focuses on online language teaching, teacher discourse, network discourse and pragmatic analysis, and critical discourse analysis. Some scholars have conducted multi-modal discourse analysis of Xi Jinping's keynote speech video at the first China International Import Expo's opening ceremony and found that this research is of positive significance for promoting the

construction of the "Belt and Road" discourse system.

There is limited research on multi-modal discourse analysis of online videos in China, and there has been no specific study on multi-modal analysis of "Belt and Road" videos on the Xuexi Qiangguo platform. Therefore, in order to expand the research scope and object of multi-modal discourse analysis of online videos, it is necessary to study the "Belt and Road" videos and explore the construction of China's "Belt and Road" discourse system.

3. Theoretical Framework

Domestic scholars have constructed a theoretical framework for multimodal discourse and proposed various research paradigms and analysis models. Zhang Delu and Zhang Ke (2022) provided a comprehensive overview of discourse analysis models. They proposed eight main models of discourse analysis. The first model is Mitchell's genre analysis, the second is Halliday's systemic functional linguistic discourse analysis, the third is Sinclair & Coulthard's discourse structure analysis, the fourth is Brown & Yule's discourse construction analysis, the fifth is the pragmatic perspective discourse analysis, the sixth is critical discourse analysis, the seventh is positive discourse analysis, and the eighth is multimodal discourse analysis.

Based on Gunter Kress's (2006) visual grammar and Halliday's systemic functional grammar, Zhang and Zhang (2022) constructed a framework for multimodal discourse analysis that corresponds to the concepts function, interpersonal function, and textual function, representing recontextualization, interactional meaning, and composition meaning, respectively. They applied this theoretical framework to analyze the multimodal discourse of the TV show "Mei Mei Yu Gong, He Er Bu Tong" and a public service anti-smoking advertisement. This framework posits that representational meaning is mainly achieved through transitivity, text, sound, and vocabulary; interactional meaning is manifested through gaze, perspective, contact, and modality; compositional meaning is expressed through framing, information value, and salience; and cultural context is reflected through historical, cultural, social customs, and values orientations. As is shown in the following Figure 1:

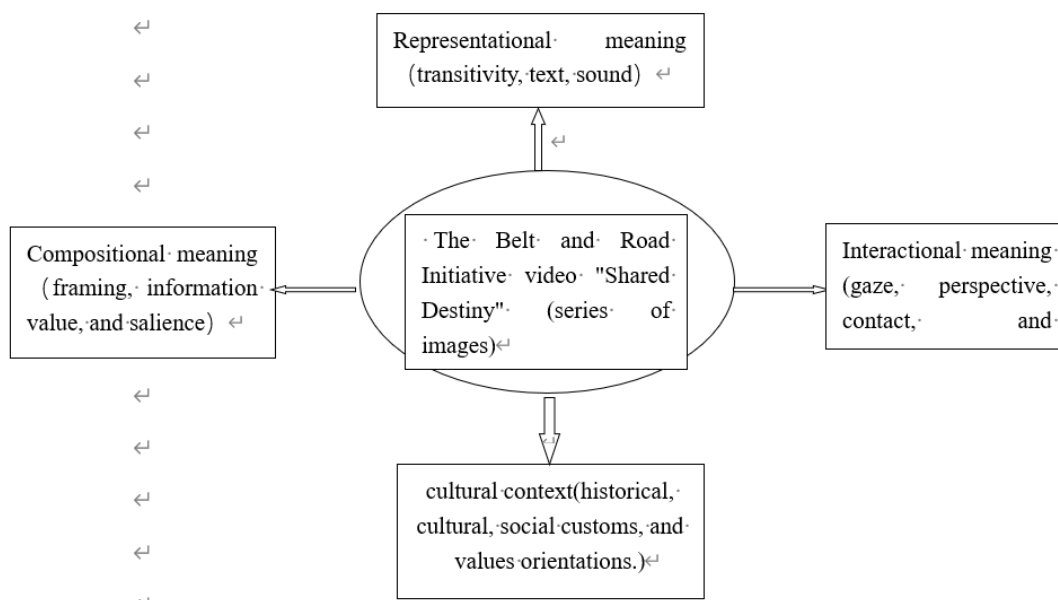


Figure 1.

4. Analysis of the Opening of the Documentary "Common Destiny" from a Multi-modal Discourse Perspective

The multi-modal discourse analysis in the following three section is based on Zhang and Zhang's theoretical framework (Zhang and Zhang, 2022). It posits that representational meaning is mainly achieved through transitivity, text, sound, and vocabulary; interactional meaning is manifested through gaze, perspective, contact, and modality; compositional meaning is expressed through framing, information value, and salience; and cultural context is reflected through historical, cultural, social customs, and values orientations.

Analyzing the multi-modal discourse of the "Belt and Road" videos allows us to explore the role of language in meaning exchange and the effects of other symbolic systems such as text, images, sound, color, and cinematography in this process. This enables a more comprehensive and accurate interpretation of the meaning

of video discourse and reveals how the "Belt and Road" videos use multiple modes to achieve effective information communication.

The main purpose of the multi-modal discourse analysis of the "Belt and Road" videos is to verify how visual and auditory grammar coordinate with each other to achieve interactive meaning and attract audiences to learn about the Belt and Road Initiative. In terms of auditory grammar, we make an analysis of how the narrator's commentary complements the sounds in the video to verify whether the narrator provides supplementary or contextual information for the audience.

Through multi-modal discourse analysis, we compare the language of the narrator and the video frames in the "Belt and Road" videos, exploring the effects of other symbolic systems such as text, images, sound, color, and cinematography in this process. This allows for a more comprehensive and accurate interpretation of the meaning conveyed by the narrator's discourse, revealing the multi-modal discourse characteristics of the "Belt and Road" videos.

Using the opening of the 6-episode documentary series "Common Destiny" as the corpus, four random images from the opening are selected. Image 1 appears between 6 to 7 seconds, image 2 appears between 25 to 27 seconds, image 3 appears between 43 to 44 seconds, and image 4 appears between 1 minute 28 seconds to 1 minute 37 seconds. Multi-modal discourse analysis is conducted from three perspectives: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning.

4.1 Analysis of the Representational Meaning, Interactive Meaning, and Compositional Meaning of Image 1



Image 1.

From a structural perspective, Image 1 consists of the CCTV logo, a close-up of a female character, a faded background, and subtitles. The representational meaning of this image is mainly conveyed through the clear close-up shots of the female, her gestures, and facial expressions. The female in the image is the initiator of the action, touching her forehead with her hand to express the potential meaning of thinking. This is reinforced by the subtitles, which suggest a road that allows us to touch our ancestors, metaphorically indicating the ability to perceive ancestors and trace the ancient Silk Road.

The interactive meaning is achieved through gaze, perspective, and contact. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Firstly, the image is a close-up shot, with the female character touching her forehead and closing her eyes, indicating her deep thought and pursuit of the ancestors' road, creating visual interaction with the audience. The closed eyes represent a form of gaze, demonstrating a pensive expression.

From a compositional meaning perspective, this image represents a close social distance, as the audience can see the character's face and shoulders, which subtly brings the audience closer. In terms of information value, the image consists of the CCTV logo, the female character, a faded background, and subtitles. The female character is positioned in the center of the screen, making her more prominent and enhancing the information value.

4.2 Analysis of the Representational Meaning, Interactive Meaning, and Compositional Meaning of Image 2



Image 2.

From a structural perspective, Image 2 consists of a distant high-rise building, the sea level, a character image, and subtitles. The representational meaning of this image is primarily conveyed through the close-up image, facial expressions, and upper body posture of the male character (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Specifically, the male in the image is the initiator of the action, holding the steering wheel with one hand, indicating that he is in control of the direction. This aligns with the subtitle "Wealth flows here" and suggests someone who is in control of wealth.

The interactive meaning of this image is achieved through gaze, perspective, and contact (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Firstly, the image is a close-up shot, showing the male character holding the steering wheel and wearing a smile, turning his head to create physical and verbal interaction with the audience. Secondly, the distant high-rise buildings and landscape are blurred, gradually becoming smaller in the image, allowing the audience to first encounter the male character's image before seeing the background. This visual interaction is achieved from left to right, from near to far.

From a compositional meaning perspective, this image is a close-up shot that highlights the upper body, creating a close social relationship with the audience. The audience can see the male character's face and shoulders, which brings them closer. In terms of information value, the male character's image is positioned on the far left of the screen, with a clear image of his smiling face and articulation of speech, making him the main focus and starting point of information. The distant high-rise buildings and sea level are positioned on the right, gradually becoming blurred, serving as the background. This image primarily highlights the male character's control of the high speed boat's direction, symbolizing the flow of wealth, which resonates with the subtitle "Wealth flows here."

4.3 Analysis of the Representational Meaning, Interactive Meaning, and Compositional Meaning of Image 3



Image 3.

From a structural perspective, Image 3 is composed of the CCTV logo, a desert wind turbine installation, distant skyline, and subtitles. The representational meaning of this image mainly presents the wind turbine installation in the desert, symbolizing clean energy that brings light to the desert. This aligns with the subtitle "It brings us light," metaphorically suggesting that the "Belt and Road" brings light and prospects to the world, just like electricity.

The interactive meaning of this image is manifested through gaze, perspective, and contact (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The image shows the wind turbine installation from near to far, with the central wind turbine being larger and clearer, creating a close-up shot. The rest of the wind turbines gradually extend into the infinite distance, providing a visual impact for the audience.

From a compositional meaning perspective, this image consists of the CCTV logo, wind turbine installation, skyline, and subtitles. The large wind turbine is positioned in the center of the screen, making it more prominent and serving as the main subject. The remaining wind turbines are smaller in size and serve as the background, extending into the distance.

4.4 Analysis of the Representational Meaning, Interactive Meaning, and Compositional Meaning of Image 4



Image 4.

From a structural perspective, image 4 is composed of Chinese and English subtitles of "Belt and Road" and a large documentary. The significance of reproduction in this image lies in the fact that "Belt and Road" is the initiator of the action, mainly referring to the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, with the audience being the recipients of this title.

The main significance of interaction in this image is achieved through perspectives and contact (Zhang and Zhang, 2022). It is a close-up shot where the "Belt and Road" font is relatively large, making it eye-catching and attracting the attention of the audience. This creates a visual impact and forms a positive visual interaction with the viewers.

From a compositional perspective, this image consists of Chinese and English subtitles of "Belt and Road" and a large documentary. The yellow "Belt and Road" font is the largest, located at the center of the screen, highlighting its position and emphasizing the information it represents. The remaining English subtitle "THE BELT AND ROAD" is positioned below, with smaller font size and hidden information value.

In addition, the selection of colors in the image is also carefully considered. It is well-known that in Chinese culture, yellow is homophonic with "royal" and in ancient times, only emperors and nobility could wear yellow clothes, symbolizing supreme power. Yellow represents positivity, nobility, and joy.

4.5 Interpretation of Cultural Context in the Four Images

Culture context was first proposed by anthropologist Malinowski in 1923. Each speech community includes its own history, culture, customs, social norms, and value orientations. These factors reflecting the characteristics and ways of speech communities constitute the cultural context (Huang Guowen, 2006).

From a cultural context perspective, the materials such as characters and scenery selected in the four images come from different countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa, representing the three continents. These four images present the "Belt and Road" initiative from different perspectives: "a road that can touch ancestors", "wealth flowing here", a combination of Chinese and English logo of "Belt and Road", and "bringing brightness". These images fully demonstrate the confidence and hope of the characters towards the Belt and Road initiative and the development opportunities it brings to local economies, presenting a unique Chinese solution to the world.

The colors of the characters and objects in the four images mainly consist of four major colors: yellow, blue, red, and black. The female costume in Image 1 is mainly composed of black and red, where black represents formality and red represents optimism and enthusiasm. Image 2 has a blue theme, highlighting the broad opportunities for creating wealth, like the vast ocean. The combination of yellow and blue in Image 3 also highlights the positive and extensive implications of the Belt and Road initiative. The yellow theme color in Image 4 represents the positive and significant meaning and orthodox meaning of the Belt and Road initiative initiated by China. The use of different languages by other characters in the video suggests the broad prospects and opportunities brought by the Belt and Road initiative to different countries and ethnicities. These perspectives reflect the diversification and foresight of the Belt and Road initiative, ultimately aiming to build a community with a shared future for mankind, benefitting all humanity, and contributing Chinese solutions and strategies for the progress of humanity.

5. Conclusion

Through a multimodal discourse analysis of the opening video of the documentary "Common Destiny" on the Xuexi Qiangguo platform, this study explored how such videos embody the ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function in terms of visual, auditory, linguistic, and non-linguistic symbol systems.

By clarifying the relationships among various symbol systems such as visual, auditory, linguistic, and non-linguistic, a more comprehensive interpretation and understanding of the representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning conveyed by the "Belt and Road" documentary "Common Destiny" was achieved. It revealed the multimodal discourse characteristics of the "Belt and Road" videos on the Xuexi Qiangguo platform: the documentary "Common Destiny" mainly uses the combination of character images and perspectives, enhancement and highlighting of social distance and information value to achieve the representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning.

Multimodal discourse analysis provides a valuable exploration and inspiration for the construction of a multimodal discourse publicity system for "Belt and Road" videos. The analysis further expands the research field of "Belt and Road" foreign publicity videos on the Xuexi Qiangguo platform, verifies the applicability of multimodal discourse analysis in foreign publicity video analysis, effectively expands the research field of linguistics and journalism communication integration, and has important guiding significance for the construction of a discourse system with Chinese characteristics.

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