



## A Research on Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in China's National Image Publicity Film: Taking *18-Minute Feature Movie* as an Example

LI Yaxi<sup>[a]</sup>; ZHAO Yushan<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.

\* Corresponding author.

Received 10 July 2019; accepted 23 September 2019

Published online 26 October 2019

### Abstract

National image is the overall impression and evaluation of a country. And the image publicity film is one of the most efficient ways to shape and improve the national image of a country. This paper makes use of the cognitive mechanism of multimodal metaphor and metonymy to analyze the phenomenon of multimodal metaphor and metonymy in China's national image publicity film *18-minute Feature Movie*, which aims to find out their function in the construction of national image.

**Key words:** National image; Multimodal metonymy; Multimodal metaphor; Publicity Film

Li, Y. X., & Zhao, Y. S. (2019). A Research on Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in China's National Image Publicity Film: Taking *18-Minute Feature Movie* as an Example. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 19(2), 84-88. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/11337>  
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11337>

### INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, metaphor and metonymy are the basic cognitive mechanisms of human beings, which are usually taken as important carriers for people to understand the world, to express their emotions and make them meaningful. Metaphor and metonymy, which are two typical figures of speech, not only exist in language, but also exist in other modes such as sounds, images and words (Wang & Liang, 2005, pp.130-135). As a kind of typical multimodal discourse, the national image publicity film is one that has a visual text with images as

its carrier in the field of communication pattern. Based on this fact, under the help of cognitive mechanism of multimodal metaphor and multimodal metonymy, this paper tries to deconstruct the China's national image in the publicity film: *18-minute Feature Movie* from the cognitive perspective, which is aimed at enriching the research field of multimodality, emboldening the cognitive interpretation of the publicity film and providing a new dimension for the construction of China's national image in a new era. Therefore, China can establish a good image in the world and show its charm in a better way by increasing the publicity of its national image.

### 1. MULTIMODAL METAPHOR AND METONYMY

Metaphor is ubiquitous in our language, thought and action, and the conceptual system by which human beings think and behave is built on it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 7). As a kind of thinking pattern, metaphor not only exists at linguistic level, but also can be found in some non-linguistic symbols, such as images, sounds and gestures. Based on this, Forceville put forward the theory of pictorial metaphor in 1996. He expanded the research field of metaphor from language to other modes, such as images, sounds, music, gestures. In 2009, he defined multimodal metaphor as a kind of metaphor in which the source domain and the target domain are represented in, or mainly in, different modes (Forceville, 2009, p.24). He also connected modes with human being's five senses and divided them into five different categories: visual (image), auditory (sound), tactile, olfactory and gustatory (Forceville, 2006, pp.379-402). In national image publicity film, there are mainly three kinds: words (voiceover and subtitle), images (dynamic and static image), and sounds (background music).

According to cognitive linguistics, metonymy is the cognitive salience in a same cognitive domain, whose

fundamental function is reference. It is also considered as a universal linguistic phenomenon or a basic thinking pattern. There is no clear academic definition of multimodal metonymy. Taking the definition of multimodal metaphor as an example, the definition of multimodal metonymy can be interpreted into that the source domain, which is constructed by two or more modes like vision and sound, starts the target domain belonging to the same cognitive domain. Peirsman and Geeraerts divided metonymy into six categories according to the spatial or material proximity of metonymy: individual entity stands for the collection, subevent stands for complex event, spatial part stands for whole, antecedent stands for consequent, a place stands for people living in here, and a piece of clothing stands for person (Peirsman & Geeraerts, 2006, pp.269-316). Compared with multimodal metaphor, there are less than independent researches on multimodal metonymy both at home and abroad, and most of these researches are relevant to multimodal metaphor. Metonymy was accidentally found by Forceville. He found that products can be replaced by their trademark or brand image when analyzing pictorial metaphor (Forceville, 1996, p.98). Metonymy exists between spoken language and body language no matter whether metaphor exists or not, and metonymy is also a prerequisite for metaphor to construct meaning (Waugh, 2009, pp.22-23).

There are connections and differences between multimodal metaphor and multimodal metonymy, which means that they are often intertwined. Metonymy not only can enrich or expand the meaning of metaphor, but also can make the abstract metaphorical target field more specific.

## 2. THE STYLISTIC FEATURES OF NATIONAL IMAGE PUBLICITY FILM

National image publicity film is a typical dynamic multimodal discourse which contains various modes of expression technique and semiotic resources (Shen, 2012). It endows objects with metaphoric and symbolic meaning by using montage. It also transforms conception into hypertext forms to achieve its publicity purposes. The images are combined to express profound implication for the audience to deduce it (Hao & Li, 2010). The image presentation and semiotic mode in *18-minute Feature Movie* also implies profound thinking logic and meaning.

*18-minute Feature Movie* is longer than any other China's national image publicity film before, seeking to introduce more Chinese people from different nationalities, occupations and ages as well as more different Chinese geographical architectures from all over the country to the world. It elucidates China's harmonious concept of sustainable development, diversity and co-prosperity through more than 800 images which relate to different factors, from political, economic, social, cultural, educational to environmental. And it tries to present both

ancient and modern China to the world from different aspects so that the contemporary China's values, morality and development concept can be shown to the world in a better way.

*18-minute Feature Movie* consists of three parts: the opening part mainly reviews the changes of China and puts forward the existing problems. The body part elaborates China's eight major development themes respectively: the first theme mainly talks about the fact that China will confidently open its door to the world. The second theme is that China will adhere to sustainable development. The third theme is mainly taking about that China will share its fruit of development with all over the world. The fourth theme refers to the fact that China will respect different culture in the world and hope to become prosperous together with other nations. The fifth theme is about China's responsibility to the world and its pursuit of freedom. The sixth theme introduces China's efforts of expanding its democracy and make its authority more stable. And the seventh theme shows China's attitude to the economic differences, that is, the mutual respect. The last theme shows that although China has achieved many great achievements in all respects, it still keeps prudent all the time. Among them, there is a review of history, affirmation of achievements, and reflection on the current situation and problems. The last part highlights China's national spirit and its people's attitude. The film ends with classical music.

## 3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF MULTIMODAL METAPHOR AND METONYMY

The national image is interconnected with a country's comprehensive conditions, like politics, economy, society, culture and geography. It also refers to a relatively stable overall impression and comprehensive comment of a country (Liang, 2013, pp.113-117). The national image publicity film constructs a great number of multimodal metaphors and metonymy by using sounds, words, images and other modes, through which various models play different roles but have mutual relations. Apart from being the most important carriers of information, language and image are also the main means to presenting metaphor and metonymy in multimodal discourses.

### 3.1 The Construction of Multimodal Metaphor

Metaphor has explanatory function that links the source domain and the target domain together by establishing a connection between their similarities. It is helpful to accelerate the cognitive process of the audience and make it easy for the audience to accept and understand. By means of multiple senses, multimodal metaphor is more likely to stimulate the cognitive ability of the audience and their emotion from multiple perspectives and channels rather than just by a single abstract linguistic symbol. The *18-minute Feature Movie* adopts the following multimodal metaphors to strengthen its explanatory influence.

### 3.1.1 China Is Confident and Brave

There are several voiceovers from *18-minute Feature Movie* which are used to imply the fact that China is confident and brave.

[1] In 1979, China opened the biggest window in the world to the outside and China suddenly dazzled people with the panorama of change.

[2] Thirty years of opening has been a time of bravely facing the new and stepping forward on a path of our own choosing.

[3] We believe China will deliver an answer before too long.

In the above voiceovers, sentence [1] indicates that reform and opening is the starting point of China to become confident. Sentence [2] shows that while keeping pace with the world and integrating into the trend of the development, China tries to maintain its own distinctive features and face new opportunities and challenges bravely and stick to the path of socialist development with Chinese characteristics with great confidence. And there is no doubt that this confidence comes from the support of the growth of GDP, long history, profound culture, and the joint efforts of all Chinese people. And sentence [3] means that although faced with many doubts, China assures that it will deliver a satisfactory answer in the near future.

Along with the voiceovers, there are images that present brilliant smiling faces of 11 Chinese people from different gender, occupation, age, ethnic groups, including a young girl, a small child, a woman from ethnic group, a teenager, a monk, an old people, and a worker. The high-density and concentrated montage strongly stimulates the optic nerve of audience and creates a kind of empathic effect which make them influenced by Chinese people's genuine sense of happiness and joy. Chinese people represent China to a great extent, which means that these happy and sincere smiling faces in the movie not only show the happy life of the vast majority of Chinese people, but also reflect China's spirit of open and confident. The images, subtitles and voiceover are used together to reinforce China's brave and confident character.

### 3.1.2 China Has Profound Cultural Implication

At the beginning of this film, there are several subtitles as following.

[4] The 55 ethnic minorities in the far North, South, East, West of China, over thousands of years, have mixed with Han culture and added to our cultural richness and diversity.

[5] The world has seen how much China's profound history and cultural essence has given, lead us to flexibility and unity when facing fast transformation.

[6] Chinese people have never cherished their cultural heritage more than today.

With the help of word mode, voiceover [4] highlights the richness and diversity of traditional culture. It is

because with profound cultural implication that China can be more tolerant and flexible when facing great changes since reform and opening. In voiceover [5] and [6], China is also endowed with human capabilities, like the verb *face* and *cherish*, both try to illustrate the fact that Chinese people has realized the importance of traditional history and culture. It not only has become a unique national gene inherited from generation to generation, but also become the footing stone of happy life for the future.

Besides, visual modes which indicate historical culture also can be found in the whole movie. Including the quintessence of Chinese culture: Beijing opera, Taiji boxing, Calligraphy, and Chinese painting; the Chinese folk game: diabolo; the Chinese traditional instruments: erhu and fou; and something with distinct Chinese characteristics such as Embroid, Celadon Porcelain and ethnic costumes; and some historical and cultural relics: the Palace Museum, the Great Wall, Hutong and the Bell and Drum Tower in Beijing, the Potala Palace in Lhasa, the Forest of Stele, Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an, Change Face, Wide and Narrow Alley in Chengdu, etc. The culture symbol is so abundant that it not only reflects China's long history and profound cultural connotation, but also underlines that Chinese civilization is diverse and inclusive.

As for the sound mode, this feature movie takes Chinese classical music as its main background music. There are different kind of Chinese musical instruments in it, such as Chinese bamboo flute, Guzheng, Glockenspiel Chimes and so on. Complemented with images words and voiceovers contained rich culture connotation, the melodious background music constructs the multi-modal metaphor that China has profound historical and cultural implication.

### 3.1.3 China Is Sincere and Honest

The following voiceovers appear in the third theme, the fourth theme and the sixth theme respectively:

[7] Sharing the benefits of growth in a reasonable way is an unwavering goal we must pursue.

[8] Chinese netizens are showing their instant compassion and eagerness to strengthen the society by helping those most in need.

[9] The world applauds such training for democracy.

The whole movie itself constructs a metaphor that China is a storyteller with great sincerity and honesty who tries to show his attitude and to the world. From voiceover [7] and [8], it can be inferred that although China has already had great changes, it still keeps calm and remembers its original heart of developing itself. At the same time, it sincerely shares the fruits of development with people from all over the world. In this publicity film, China not only shows its significant achievements, but also points out its problems, for example, environment pollution, the education of migrant's children, the gap between the rich and the poor, which need to solve

urgently. But China is willing to face these problems with sincerity and devote to make up its shortcomings.

On the other hand, the eight themes utilize eight key words to show that China is confident, sharing, responsible. As a result, China's national image becomes more vivid and real.

### 3.2 The Construction of Multimodal Metonymy

According to cognitive linguistics, metonymy is a salience in the same domain which provides psychological accessibility to another conceptual entity. In the 18-minute feature movie, there are many metonymies with representational and textual functions. Before identify multimodal metonymy, it is necessary to for people to learn about China's national condition, history and culture. Dynamic images have so powerful empathic effect than words that they can transform audience's thinking into emotion, intuition into feeling (Xiong, 2010). Therefore, based on the mechanism of metonymy, almost every image in this movie has its own referential meaning.

#### 3.2.1 Individual Entity Represents Collection

This kind of metonymy is adopted frequently in publicity film, which is also relatively important device to realize textual coherence. there are many interviews in each theme of this feature movie, whose interviewees are mostly ordinary people. But from the perspective of conceptual metonymy, they represent people from different ages and walks of life. For example, in the third theme (Development with Sharing), there are several foreign interviewees whose dialogues are as follows:

Interviewee 1: I came here twice a year for business, and fell Chinese people are very nice.

Interviewee 2: I have been China and studied in university. There are many opportunities in business.

Interviewee 3: Every part of China, you have like different culture, I think it's the best place in Asia.

From their appearance and direct words, it is easily to identify their identities and occupations. They are businessman, student and tourist visiting or living in China, and they all have a good impression of China and its people. To some extent, these foreign interviewees represent the rest of foreigners who live in China from different occupations. What they talk about is the voice of all foreigners in China. That is, they believe they also benefit from the economic development of China, from which they have more business and educational opportunities. It also highlights the theme of development with sharing. On the other hand, these foreigners' views and emotions are so representative that they establish a connection with other audience, which is good to make them agree their statements. With a great number of INDIVIDUAL ENTITY REPRESENTS COLLECTION metonymy, China's national image become more authentic and reliable.

#### 3.2.2 The Living Place Represents Its Inhabitants

This type of metonymy is an indispensable part of publicity film, which is usually used to highlight the characteristics of a place to show the image of people living in there. As an integral part of the local population, each group appeared in the feature movie not only represents the living conditions of people from different parts of China, but also represents the all-round landscape and situation of China. The feature movie shows the vast territory of China. From north to south is the Inner Mongolia and Hainan Island. From east to west is the Greater Khingan Mountains, Tibetan Plateau. It lets the world know more about China, especially its beautiful scenery and rich resources. By the means of metonymy, it also provides a chance for the world to know about Chinese people and their lives. For example:

From 5'32" to 5'48" of the film, there are several shots about the bustling street and charming urban night of Shanghai, from which we can imagine people's lives in there, busy but enjoyable.

As Chengdu's typical landmarks, Chunxi Road, Wangjiang Pavilion Park, Qintai Raod appear at 9'54", 16'17" and 17'02" respectively. Chunxi Road is the most prosperous commercial street in Chengdu, while Qintai Raod is a historical relic with strong traditional and colorful culture. They show audience a city combined prosperity with peace. What's more, Wangjiang Pavilion Park is place for recreation. From the point of view of metonymy, the living place is usually used to present its inhabitants. So people in Chengdu not only cherish their traditional history and culture but also develop their economy at the same time. That is, they live a harmonious and happy life.

#### 3.2.3 Action Represents Behavior

In publicity film, this kind of metonymy usually refers to the involved person's behavior in terms of his or her actions. For an instance, in the end of the 18-minute feature movie, hundreds of Chinese people's smiling faces form the shape of the Chinese character of China. The action of smile can be used to express Chinese people's becoming confident and their warm welcome to the world. With the help of the action of "smile", the Chinese people's behavior of "welcome the world" can be expressed in a more concrete and intuitive way. It emphasizes that that China open its door with confidence and welcome the world to China.

---

## CONCLUSION

---

This paper analyzes the construction of the multimodal metaphor and metonymy in China's national image publicity film from the cognitive perspective, which aims to figure out their different functions in constructing textual meaning. Started from the mechanism of multimodal metonymy and metaphor, this feature movie



not only uses languages and words to present the whole Chinese traditional culture and modern development, but also uses sounds, images and other modes to present China's characteristics from different perspectives. Based on this, it is better to arouse the audience's emotional resonance and enhance their good impression on China. In addition, the feature movie brings out its theme by means of the combination of different modes and metaphor and metonymy, which succeeds in making the abstract concept more specific and visualized. Therefore, the purpose of publicity film is achieved and China's national image becomes more appealing.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Forceville C. (1996). *Pictorial metaphor in advertising* (p.98). London: Routledge.
- Forceville, C., & Urios-Aparisi, E. (2009). *Multimodal metaphor* (p. 24). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Forceville, Charles J., & Urios-Aparisi, E. (Eds.) (2006). Non-verbal and multimodal metaphor in a cognitivist framework: Agendas for research. *Cognitive Linguistics: Current Applications and Future Perspectives* (pp.379-402). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by* (p.7). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Liang, X. B. (2013). Research on the construction of conceptual metaphor about national image. *Journal of Hubei University*, (2), 113-117.
- Mittelberg, I. & Waugh, L. R. (2009). Metonymy first, metaphor second: A cognitive-semiotic approach to multimodal figures of thought in co-speech gesture. In Forceville & E. Urios- Aparisi (Eds.), *Multimodal metaphor* (pp.120-121). Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Peirsman, Y., & Geeraerts, D. (2006). Metonymy as a prototypical category. *Cognitive Linguistics*, (3), 269-316.
- Wang, X. P., & Liang, Y. H. (2015). Research on the cognitive mechanism of multimodal publicity discourse. *Journal of Chongqing University*, (6), 130-135.