

Analysis of Anti-epidemic Discourse in the Perspective of Multimodal Criticism --The example of children's perspective

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Abstract: As the COVID-19 epidemic sweeps across the world, a large number of multimodal anti-epidemic texts with the theme of fighting the epidemic have emerged in the media in order to win the people's war, the overall war and the blocking war, and some public communication videos are refreshingly narrated from children's perspective. To address this phenomenon, the paper takes multimodal critical discourse analysis as an entry point and discusses it within the three-dimensional framework of Fairclough critical discourse analysis. In the process of further analyzing such discourse, the enhancement of children's discourse, the cohesion of social relations, and the reshaping of identity construction in social reality are achieved, and then the process is contextualized and rationalized. Finally, the contradictions of the discourse order are revealed in the process of comparison and suggestions are given with a view to having a positive impact on children's development.

1. Introduction

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 epidemic, scholars have mainly studied the communication phenomenon under public health emergencies, and have achieved certain results in terms of public opinion guidance, response strategies, communication patterns, and image construction in various media. However, it is worth noting that in the various texts that emerged during the epidemic, children, a vulnerable group that usually lacks the right to speak, are more frequently mentioned and expressed, and such discourse essentially reflects the contradiction, conflict and de-escalation of the discourse order. As David Buckingham (2005) argues, the idea of childhood has been "a socio-cultural product" and "an adult's discourse." In fact, in the context of constructivist thinking, any description of children inevitably assigns a certain ideological character to childhood, and children are viewed in different ways in different historical periods, cultures and social groups. In the context of the social call to fight the epidemic together, how are children as a social group spoken of? How are children's social identities and social relations practiced by various discourses? How do such practices participate in and contribute to social change? These are some of the questions that deserve further consideration.

Thus, the author further collected for such phenomenon, and the survey was conducted by China Central Television, supplemented by microblog, WeChat, Bilibili and other self-media platforms. The time frame is limited to December 30, 2019 to December 30, 2020. Videos with certain influence and representativeness were selected as the research objects and analyzed. In addition, the paper adopts the definition of children as a social group in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and considers all minors between the ages of 0 and 18 as children. The selected multimodal texts, mainly videos, are summarized as follows: the public communication video "The Gift Chapter", the microblog video "Happy Childhood under the Epidemic", and the short video of children's anti-epidemic song "Mobile Cabin Hospital is Amazing" etc.

2. Analysis And Exploration of Multimodal Critical Discourse

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) regarded modality as a system of ideograms and proposed the paradigm of visual grammar based on the functional grammar of Halliday system. With the rise of

multimodal discourse analysis, the multimodal meanings in various texts, including "television, film, photography, popular songs and music", have gradually entered the research field of scholars. However, questions about how different symbolic resources are invoked and stimulated, how multiple modalities interact and cooperate with each other, and how the meaning of multimodal texts is constructed and understood from the perspective of critical discourse analysis are still under discussion. The paper intends to take the perspective of constructing the meaning of multimodal texts and discuss it within the three-dimensional framework of Fairclough Discourse Analysis by taking Multi-modal Critical Discourse Analysis as an entry point. The aim is to analyze the multimodal texts that emerged during the epidemic from children's perspectives or related to children's themes, and to explore the invocation of symbolic resources, meaning production, discursive practice and the process of social practice.

2.1 Meaning and synergy of multimodal sign systems

The analysis of the meaning of language modality in multimodal discourse analysis mainly inherits Halliday's metafunctional study of language from a social semiotic perspective, and systematically depicts the grammatical units at all levels, from words, phrases, sentences to discourse segments. Language is described and analyzed in detail in the context of three major metafunctions (conceptual, interpersonal, and discourse functions). In addition, Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2006) similarly trichotomous framework of representation, interaction, and composition provides a powerful tool for the interpretation and study of image modalities. In addition, in terms of synergistic and cooperative relationships between modalities, Zhang Delu (2012) integrated the elaboration, extension, and enhancement based on Barthes and Kress & Van Leeuwen's research on graphic relationships and continues the framework of inter-modal relations (Zhang, Delu: 2009) that Barthes and Kress had generalized, including complementary (reinforcement and non-reinforcement) and non-complementary (overlap, inclusiveness and contextual interaction) relations. In this paper, the idea is extended in the specific analysis.

2.2 Re exploration of Multimodal Symbol Systems

Machin (2013) first introduced the concept of Multi-modal Critical Discourse Analysis and argued that its advantage over the traditional model of Critical Discourse Analysis lies in the more systematic descriptions and analysis of multiple semiotic modalities (as distinct from specific description and closer reading) to reveal the actions, circumstances, identities, and ideologies hidden within the discourse through a more systematic description and analysis of multiple symbolic modalities. However, the disadvantage is obvious: too much focus on technical descriptions can easily lead to the neglect of certain issues that can be revealed through direct observation. Regarding the selection and supply characteristics of symbol systems, Zhang, Delu, and Hu, Ruiyun (2019) distinguish between supply characteristics of symbol systems, including "invariant supply characteristics of concepts, materiality-derived supply characteristics, variable supply characteristics of context-driven metaphorical supply characteristics, and underlying semantic features." Similarly, Machin & van Leeuwen (2016) emphasize the process of critical analysis on the third level regarding the symbol's signifier, signified and meaningful, macroscopic significance.

Thus, the focus of multimodal critical discourse analysis is not on applying the idea of systemic function to an infinite number of different sign systems, but on analyzing how different modal sign systems are invoked in different social factors and cultural contexts to perform discursive practices and reveal their underlying connotations and ideologies. In this regard, Machin's (2016) proposed multimodal critical discourse analysis of social and affordance-driven (Lin Jing, 2019) or "affordance-driven" (Tian Hailong, 2018) is an attempt to change the direction of multimodal research at this stage. "The literacy of meaning is a process of inter-subjective interaction in society." (Hu, 2009) The concept of "intersubjectivity" in social semiotics deserves further attention. In the existing research field, although it describes in detail the process of meaning generation by participants in different roles, choosing different modal sign systems in certain social activities, actions or events. However, with the development of mass media, more and more different contexts have been created, and the existing

multimodal discourse analysis system is still inadequate in terms of discourse scope (discourse field), discourse tone (discourse purpose), and discourse mode (discourse style), and some qualities arising from the synergistic use of different modalities cannot be better revealed in the existing system; the critical discourse analysis perspective can precisely compensate for this deficiency.

3. Rediscovery of Multimodal Discourse Analysis from a critical perspective

3.1 Multimodal Situational Contexts

In Halliday's perspective, cultural and situational contexts are seen as a relationship between system and instantiation, with the context being the environment in which the discourse is produced. In response to this new change in the notion of context, Halliday & Mathieson (2014) propose a "division of labor", arguing that in multi-symbolic communication, symbol systems begin to divide labor at the level of context. According to Zhang, in the contextual context of language, other symbol systems outside of language that are relevant to the present communicative activity are considered as contexts. This observation is certainly insightful. As mentioned above, with the rise of internet-enabled mobile terminals such as cell phones and the development of wearable devices such as headsets, people can receive new information that incorporates multiple modal symbols anywhere and anytime, and speakers mobilize as many symbol systems as possible to enable people to better enter the context of their expressions. Intelligent multimedia has given the speaker more power, and the concept of text, which was originally in the domain of critical discourse, has become a part of the meaning and synergy of multimodal sign systems, constituting the production and distribution process of text in the tone of discourse and the coherence and intertextuality in the scope of discourse, and participating in the contextual context together with the discursive practice.

3.2 Multimodal Discursive Practices and Social Practices

It is worth noting that discursive practices serve as a balance between discursive and social practices, and this paper extends and further elaborates the following three relationships that Fairclough distills: First, the practice of power is largely discursive, and the relationship between society and hegemony constitutes the origin of both social and discursive practices. Second, changes in the discursive order respond to social changes, including "democratization, commodification, technologization" (Norman Fairclough, 2003), "reconceptualization", and "legitimation" (van Leeuwen 2008a). Third, the influence of ideology and politics focuses on the construction of meaning in social identities, social relations, social realities, and knowledge and belief systems. All these social practices, in turn, are simultaneously and automatically constructed into the meaning recognition of multimodal symbol systems, the power, intertextuality, and coherence in discursive practices, and the selection of situational contexts, and are devoted to the production, reproduction, and transformation of relations of domination. Based on this, the multimodal critical discourse analysis system will reveal the process of children's discourse construction in multimodal anti-epidemic texts in depth on the basis of the original functional description of the linguistic system.

4. Anti-epidemic discourse from children's perspective

4.1 Children's identity construction

In retrospect, children during the epidemic can be divided into two main categories: pro-lifers (who were themselves infected with the new coronavirus) and bystanders (who were not themselves infected with the new coronavirus). The article "Epidemiological characterization of novel coronavirus pneumonia" published in the Chinese Journal of Epidemiology in February 2020 showed that as of January 26, the rate of children under 10 years of age with the disease was 0.35%, which shows that the infection rate of the child population during the neo-coronavirus outbreak was low. In addition, children themselves are slightly less mobile than adults and are less likely to participate in the actual fight against the epidemic. However, the public service communication video "The Gift Chapter"

chooses to start the narrative from the perspective of children, and the significance of this identity role deserves further exploration.

First of all, it is necessary to analyze the process of the different symbolic systems in "The Gift Chapter", which starts with the piano music of "Bugs Fly" in the background, with a child's voice telling "I'll give you Daddy's/mother's XX, which is", and with such the first half of the text is formed by the prose repetition of such sentences. In the systemic function perspective, through the child's tender voice, the intimacy of "daddy" or "mommy", and the giving attribute of "sending", we can directly determine that in this context the child as the giver offers a gift to his or her relationship. The child's verbal role as a giver to the person with whom he or she is close is directly determined by the child's tender voice, the intimate address of "dad" or "mom," and the giving attribute of "sending." In addition, the process of giving is also the process of "asking the hearer to do something" (Hu, 2005). The recipient "you" in this sentence is highlighted by the three-second-long image of the Yellow Crane Tower in the video in synergy with the linguistic modality, indicating that the extension of "you" refers to the people of Wuhan, which serves to reduce entropy and disambiguate (Feng, 2020). However, given that the epidemic was spreading across the country on February 26, 2020, the connotative meaning of "you" may be further associated by the viewer with all the people who are seriously affected by the epidemic and need assistance.

Starting from the tone of the discourse, the process of production and distribution of the text is further clarified. The author of the text is the Advertising Management Center of China Central Television. Most of the language in the video is dubbed by children's voices, and the animators may be children's voice actors or real children, but both are essentially trying to recreate the role of children; the protagonists include staff members who were on duty during the epidemic, such as health care workers, police officers, community workers, cooks, construction workers, etc., as well as patients with Newcastle pneumonia who were treated during the epidemic. The audience of the text is mainly the public in China, with the aim of "promoting the preservation of public morality, current political philosophy, and public interest." (Liu, Linqing, and Hequn, 2014) As part of the state television, the "authors" of the text are also officially recognized mainstream media, naturally located in a high "power" position due to their strong influence and authority, choosing children. The choice of children as "anime creators" reduces their "power" status in terms of age, and uses acts of giving based on the principle of politeness, reinforces the power of the speaker (children) and the obligation to the recipient (people in areas with severe epidemics), and uses speech acts that benefit them. The overlapping of the two strategies further distances the viewer. In portraying the child, the text not only expresses the innocent nature of the child, but also gives the child the traditional family ethical ideals shared by the public, and sets a higher standard of thinking and behavior, carrying social moral standards such as maturity and understanding, and a spokesman for traditional Chinese virtues is born.

It is worth noting that "The Gift Chapter" is different from other public service videos during the epidemic period in that other types of videos tend to open with a news report style, intercepting actual news clips during the New Crown epidemic, highlighting the severity of the epidemic and rendering the anxious tension through the overlapping and blurring of sounds. The opening chapter of "The Gift Chapter" is in line with Shu's "The Gift Chapter". In contrast, "The Gift Chapter" is accompanied by the soothing music piece "Bugs Fly", which makes the tone of the conversation seem like a situational dialogue between children and their peers.

4.2 Children's social relations constructs

Following each of the "I'll give you" sentences are high modality comments in the form of monogloss, such as "most, much, all "This presents the subjective attitude of the child who is directly responsible for the speech." Relevance is also a form of discourse" (Hu Fanzhu 2017), and children's responsible and positive evaluations on the other hand verify the validity of the "discourse norm" from an outbreak crisis management perspective. Although the issue in question is a war without smoke and mirrors, and children themselves are not involved in the social work of fighting the epidemic in a practical sense, the text highlights children's identity as children of epidemic workers, which not only provides a unique perspective for the audience, but also enhances the discourse of children as social

actors themselves. A cross-sectional comparison of the "cartoonist" variant in other public service videos shows that most of them are narrated by adult male announcers with a serious and formal tone, and the juxtaposition of children's voices is evidence of their elevated status.

In the public mind, children are a symbol of innocence and beauty. Their thinking and behavior are sometimes childish and absurd, but at other times they are extraordinarily mature, embodying the "childishness" that adults envy. In the midst of an epidemic, we, as ordinary people, usually position ourselves as the "protected" ones, while the weakness and infancy of children in turn inspire the sense of responsibility and mission of adults. "The weaker the child is, the more likely he is to attract sympathy." (Qiao Shihua, 1998) Not only that, the children's simple wish and firm tone of "waiting for you to come home" also give courage and encouragement to the adults in the midst of confusion. In addition, it makes the audience realize that whether it is the medical personnel who go out on the New Year's Eve, the social workers who keep on their posts, or the soldiers who rush to the front line. In the family dimension, they are also parents, who also bear family responsibilities. The adoption of children's roles, on the one hand, connects the public with the children in the text, so that the two can reach an emotional synchronization. On the other hand, through the substitution of kinship, each audience in the family relationship is further connected to the epidemic workers in the text. The connotative meaning of the concept of "parent-child" evokes the perception of family, which further forms the society, and eventually, through the process of discursive practice, forms the discourse of "sacrificing the small for the big" in the Chinese context. The discourse of "giving up the small for the big" in the Chinese context is formed through the process of discursive practice.

4.3 Constructs of social reality about children

The repeated use of the act of giving ostensibly places the child in a position of power to perform the act of giving, and the dispositional form implies the child's disposability over the parents themselves, but in fact it also suggests the child's close and inseparable dependence on the parents in contemporary society, with their powerless and vulnerable position potentially highlighted. The word "jiaozhen" in the sense of "very serious" is in fact a positive and negative word. It is also a response to the problem of people's dissatisfaction with the overly strict management of the staff, and the evaluation of "putting your mind at ease", which is in line with the positive meaning of competence and tenacity in the social esteem of the judgment system.

The image modality intersects and unites with the language modality, but the child's image in the image modality is in a state of deletion and the material act of "giving" is weakened. The abstract concepts such as "jin er (strength), jiaozhen (seriousness), shouyi (craft), shouhuo (harvest), jianqiang (doughtiness), and shouhu (guardianship)" are used for the gifted objects in the children's act of gifting, and the images of carrying construction materials, strictly observing traffic barriers, making food, and harvesting and packing greens are used to highlight the gifted objects and the social work they represent, and the main characters of the text emerge. The main character of the text appears. At the 57th second, the music fades and the piano solo ends. The preservation of the simultaneous recording constitutes a manifest intertextuality in the text. The sound of the video is the military medical personnel's vow to support Wuhan: "Not one of them will be left behind. In fact, "the actual functionality of the act of action is diminished during the ritual practice, and the ritual needs to focus on and fix the abstract meaning that the act is given" (Ronald L. Grimes, 1995). The fast-paced speech accompanied by children's chorus further pushes the video to the climax, and then the video is a recreation of the interaction between children and parents, "Mommy went to fight the monster, did you know?", "Daddy, mommy, go!" The video is a great example of the interaction between the children and their parents: "Mommy is going to fight the monsters," "Daddy, Mommy, go for it!", "Daddy, you have to eat more over there", "Mommy said she will pick me up when the flowers bloom in spring."

The restoration of the scene undergoes a process of reconceptualization, and it is easy to see that the author has made a deliberate "rearrangement" (van Leeuwen, 2008) of where the parent-child interaction occurs in the text. (Van Leeuwen, 2008) The sequence in fact should be: medical personnel going out → farewell separation from relatives → work and support → remote dialogue with children,

but in the text it is reshaped into medical personnel going out → work and support → remote dialogue with children → farewell separation from relatives. The reshaped part of the farewell separation flashes by in a quick picture splice and is only ten seconds long. The late child voiceover here is a multi-person harmony, and the voice remains firm and smooth, without painful reluctance or hesitation, dominating with the light pink text modalities, and the most heart-wrenching parting of life and death during the epidemic is soothed by the serene atmosphere. Similarly, it is not difficult to find the origin of the phrase "fighting monsters" in the part of farewell separation, which originates from a video of a nurse of the Anhui medical team saying goodbye to her four-and-a-half-year-old daughter. In the original news report, the phrase "don't fight the monster" was repeated by the young daughter, but the young daughter's response was removed during the video editing process. All of the children appear to be encouraging or expectant of their parents. This expectation echoes the promise of "Mom" to "pick me up when the flowers bloom in spring." echoes. In the traditional Chinese moral and cultural context, being a human being means "giving up one's life for righteousness", and there is also the warning that "if one does not keep one's word, one does not know what one can do", and that vows and promises are worthy of being kept and maintained with one's life. On the one hand, it is the fulfillment of past promises to save lives, and on the other hand, it is the fulfillment of promises made to children to persevere in the epidemic and return safely.

4.4 The paradox of children's discursive order

When children are used to construct a discourse system, an "ideal" child is invariably created who is fully aware of the seriousness of the epidemic and is willing to say "I give you my favorite children". In a cycle of similar child-themed works, the notion that "children should be kind and selfless" was rationalized and naturalized, gradually becoming an unquestioned social common sense and discourse order. Although effective, such discourse objectively reinforces and even solidifies the inherent good image of children under the influence of powerful propaganda such as mainstream media. It tends to obscure people's attention to and consideration of the real needs of younger children and gradually becomes a stereotype out of touch with reality, which is not conducive to creating a social atmosphere suitable for children's growth.

In the process of collecting the corpus, the author also found that some of the interview videos were diametrically opposed to the presentation of "The Gift Chapter" when the reporter interviewed an 8-year-old boy from the Panzhihua (whose parents were both on the front line involved in the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic) and asked, "How did you feel when you knew your mom and dad were going to the front line?" Holding back tears, he replied, "A bad feeling, because I felt lonely at home alone and could only regulate myself by taking deep breaths." The self-published video "Happy Childhood Under the Epidemic" also expresses the most real psychological changes and objective needs of children growing up in the midst of the epidemic through re-empowerment of children's expression, and the United Nations Children's Development Fund has released a video calling on "parents to see the visible or potential changes in their children in the midst of the epidemic."

In addition, the children's song "Square Cabin Hospital is Amazing" has received great attention on the Internet (it was first released on bilibili and has accumulated more than one million plays after being redistributed on various platforms), and it tells the stories of what happened in the Square Cabin Hospital during the epidemic from the children's perspective. However, "The Square Cabin Hospital is Amazing" received a lot of negative feedback, which not only became the material for netizens' spoof clips, but also aroused the attention of "Bright Times", which wrote an article "The Square Cabin Hospital is Amazing" is questioned, and the key to creation is to be heartfelt" to make polite criticism. and suggestions. On the other hand, the high-profile praise of the hospital is at odds with people's grief and sorrow in the epidemic, and the hospital has become a symbol of the fight against the new pneumonia epidemic. The Chinese people's determination to support each other in spite of life and death, rather than the "laughter" that spread throughout the country. To create an image of children, we should get to know them from their perspective and understand their emotions. When we create multimodal texts through children's perspectives and images, children should not be just objective objects to be represented, but a subject worthy of respect. When major public health and safety

incidents occur, children can certainly play a role in soothing the public and stabilizing public opinion, but the real voices of children should not be ignored in the process of application.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to conduct a multimodal critical discourse analysis of children's discourse in the anti-epidemic text within the three-dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis. The paper rediscovers how the various elements in the context participate in the various processes of discursive practice, and analyzes how the social identities of "bystanders, givers, children of the workers, and the potentially weak" are constructed in the anti-epidemic discourse from the children's perspective to enhance the children's discourse power, realize the emotional connection between the audience and the workers, and form the discourse of "sacrificing the small for the big". The paper also reveals how the social identities of "bystanders, givers, children of staff, and potential weaknesses" are used to enhance children's discourse, achieve emotional connection between audiences and staff, and form the discourse of "sacrificing the small for the big". The paper also reveals the reasons why some emotions and facts are omitted and reset in the reconceptualization process, and why the rationalization process constitutes an action in the discourse. Finally, by comparing multimodal anti-epidemic discourses from children's perspectives on different media platforms, we restore the parts of the existing texts that are contradictory to the established social discourse order, with a view to providing positive implications for children's development, insight into the shortcomings of existing discursive practices, and lessons learned.

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