

A Study on the Characteristics and Translation Strategies of Multimodal External Discourse in China's Mainstream Media

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China's mainstream media serves as the primary discursive front and a crucial communication platform for constructing the national image. Applying multimodal translation theory and analyzing multimodal corpus characteristics, this paper conducts a detailed case study of the external discourse in the Japanese Edition of People's Daily Online. It examines the multimodal translation strategies employed in its external publicity videos and the image of China they construct. The study finds that these cultural publicity videos in the Japanese Edition of People's Daily Online fully embody principles, such as fidelity in multimodal translation. Collectively, they present multimodal external discourse characterized by peace, cooperation, synergy, interaction, mutual learning, and reciprocity, which is readily understood and accepted by international audiences. This discourse constructs a national image of China that is rich in profound cultural connotation, committed to cultural exchange, self-reliant, inclusive, united, and striving for progress.

Keywords: multimodal, China's national image, external discourse, Japanese Edition of People's Daily Online

Introduction

The new type of mainstream media has made significant contributions by constructing an external communication matrix through diversified information dissemination methods, excavating compelling Chinese stories, and thereby establishing a brand effect in information propagation (Shen, 2022). Research on external discourse translation is flourishing within translation studies, with recent interpretations of its connotations and framework at the national level (Ren, 2023). This primarily includes constructing external discourse from the perspective of the correlation between translation and international communication capacity (Wu, 2022), and explaining how to tell China's stories well from the angles of complete translation and adaptive translation (Fei & Huang, 2021). Research on using multimodal means to construct the national image is also burgeoning. Wu Jianguo, Li Diqiao, and Zhang Hongshan (2021) explored the self-constructed and other-constructed effects of the national image through multimodal elements using the narration of "Beautiful China" as their corpus. Shao Shuai (2024) investigated the impact of cultural differences on translation and national image construction through multimodal elements like comics. However, overall, research on translational discourse from a multimodal perspective remains relatively insufficient, particularly regarding the use of multimodal external discourse translation strategies to construct a positive national image, which requires further in-depth study. This

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paper takes the Japanese version of the animated series “CHN” from People’s China’s external publicity video column as its research corpus. On one hand, drawing on multimodal translation theory, it analyzes the translation principles embodied therein and the national image it constructs. On the other hand, based on examples from multimedia video translation practice, it explores the main strategies of multimodal translation, analyzes the current translation strategies of mainstream media, and aims to highlight the important role of language in serving the nation and society.

Multimodal External Discourse and Its Classification

The concept of “multimodality” originated from Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2006) exploration of visual grammar. Multimodality refers to the use of multiple semiotic modes to create a semiotic product. Their source theory, visual grammar, posits that semiotic resources in modes other than language, such as images, can also construct meaning, and advocates using linguistic theories to systematically analyze and describe visual discourse, which has long been neglected in linguistics. From a multimodal perspective, linguistic signs are merely one factor within the entire framework of expression.

Characteristics of Multimodal External Discourse

Synergistic Nature

The synergistic nature primarily refers to the coordination of various modal elements within multimodal external discourse to collectively achieve the goal of constructing a specific image. It coordinates different modes, leveraging more intuitive elements like images and sound to present the national image. Chinese scholar Zhang Delu (2018) proposed the “stratified model of multimodal discourse construction”, emphasizing that the dissemination of the national image requires modal matching across three levels: the material layer (technical carrier), the cognitive layer (cross-cultural interpretation), and the value layer (a community with a shared future for mankind). In summary, multimodal external discourse exhibits synergy both in its horizontal deployment and vertical development.

Adaptability

First is cultural adaptability. Generally, within different cultural systems, specific linguistic or non-linguistic modes may carry different meanings (Hu & Li, 2024). For instance, in Chinese cultural systems, the color red symbolizes celebration, auspiciousness, prosperity, or revolution and progress, carrying positive connotations. However, in English-speaking cultural systems, red often symbolizes bloodshed/violence, financial loss, or debauchery/obscenity, carrying negative connotations. Based on adaptability, choices are made regarding which cultural elements from the source text to retain, considering their importance and the target audience’s degree of familiarity. Methods, such as omission, substitution, and paraphrasing can also be employed to handle source content that may conflict with target culture norms or potentially cause misunderstanding, ensuring the multimodal design accounts for the decoding habits of the target culture.

Principles for Translating Multimodal External Discourse

Principle of Fidelity

The translation of multimodal diplomatic discourse should first adhere to the principle of fidelity. Fidelity emphasizes the functional correspondence of various modes during translation, rather than mechanical formal replication. Different modes possess specific meaning-making functions within the social semiotic system;

translation must ensure that the modal combination in the target text can realize a meaning potential similar to that of the source text. The principle of fidelity in multimodal translation concept encompasses three dimensions. Firstly, content fidelity, complete information: The core of fidelity in translating multimodal diplomatic discourse lies in the accurate transmission of core facts and precise information. Secondly, intent fidelity, achieving objectives: Maintaining the strategic communication purpose of the original discourse and promoting cultural exchange. The translation of multimodal diplomatic discourse serves national diplomatic needs and the current objectives of national image building; it should neither lack self-confidence (engaging in self-denigration) nor excessively exaggerate the national image.

Principle of Synergy

The principle of synergy refers to the requirement that the translation of multimodal diplomatic discourse not only aligns with the semantics but also ensures the synchronization and harmony of information across different modes. Emotion is a core communicative efficacy of multimodal discourse. Forceville's (2008) theory of "multimodal metaphor" demonstrates that image-music combinations can directly activate audience emotions.

Case Study of CHN Promotional Videos Applying Multimodal Translation Principles

Principle of Fidelity



Figure 1. International promotion video of Chinese civilization (People's China Japanese Edition, 2024-03-11).

This frame is taken at 01:06 in the video (see Figure 1). It consists primarily of visual modes (blue and white porcelain, and white clouds) and linguistic modes (the Chinese text “美轮美奂，巧夺天工是我” and its Japanese translation “壮大な美しさ 巧みな技術”).

The idiom “巧夺天工” (qiao duo tian gong) originates from Guo Pu's *Book of Burial* from the Eastern Jin Dynasty. The phrase “巧夺造化” from the text later evolved into “巧夺天工”. Through widespread use in literary works of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, it became a classic idiom describing human craftsmanship that surpasses nature, still widely used in art, architecture, and crafts.

In this multimodal translation, it is rendered as “巧みな技術” (takumi na gijutsu), meaning “skillful

technique”, omitting the original cultural connotation of “far surpassing nature” or “rivaling nature”. While being succinct, it faithfully conveys the characteristics of magnificence and exquisiteness in China’s image. On the other hand, considering the multimodal text combined with the image—the exquisite porcelain floating above clouds implies that the ancient skills of the Chinese nation are so superb that they reach the heavens. A direct translation implying “stronger than nature” would violate intentional fidelity and fail to serve the current national image building goal; it might instead tarnish China’s image, potentially giving Japanese audiences a sense of arrogance. Therefore, this multimodal translation adheres to the fidelity principle by appropriately omitting certain details while faithfully reconstructing a Chinese image that is both subtle and rich in connotation.

Principle of Synergy



Figure 2. International promotion video of Chinese civilization (People’s China Japanese Edition, 2024-03-11).

For instance, at 01:30 in the video (referenced conceptually as Figure 2), visual modes like the Olympic rings and a global village indicate the political nature of this multimodal material. The linguistic modes are the Chinese “我追求天下为公，天下大同” and its Japanese translation “天下は公のためにあり、大同であることを私は求める”.

Firstly, from a stylistic perspective, the multimodal translation of the text uses standard polite form (-masu/desu). From this angle, the synergy becomes more apparent. The traditional Chinese concepts “天下为公” (tian xia wei gong) and “天下大同” (tian xia da tong) originate from the pre-Qin *Book of Rites*, conveying the spirit of Chinese cooperation. Analyzing from the source culture’s starting point, a direct translation of “天下为

公，天下大同” might cause comprehension difficulties for native Japanese speakers. Here, the visuals need to supplement and extend the meaning for Japanese and other language readers. Thus, the original video uses visual elements like the “Olympic rings” and “global village” to attempt to evoke reader resonance. If the original Chinese text were directly translated using corresponding classical Japanese, the modern visual elements and the archaic Japanese translation would likely create a sense of disconnect.

Conclusion

This study, using the Japanese version of People's China's “CHN” promotional videos as its corpus and applying multimodal translation theory, has explored how to effectively convey the core values of China's stories through cross-cultural translation strategies. It is noteworthy that shaping China's contemporary image involves not merely linking various elements but, more importantly, reducing the information gap between the target and source audiences through textual cooperation and adaptation in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, the design models for news reports and integrated media products should comprehensively utilize text, images, video, sound, interaction, and other modes to collectively express culture and history.

Simultaneously, translators in practice need not only solid fundamental language skills, but also the ability to synthetically use multimodal signs like text, images, and audiovisual elements to construct meaning for China's stories. This enables the translated multimodal cultural products to continuously adapt to the needs of the times, thereby allowing the world to further understand a comprehensive, authentic, and vibrant China.

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