

A Comparative Analysis of China and American Corporate Overseas Video on the Basis of Hall's Model and Multimodal Discourse Analysis -----Taken The Song and Dream It Possible As Examples

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Abstract—Corporate overseas videos play an important role for companies to promote their products abroad. This paper explores how the corporate overseas videos adapt to other culture. A bridge has been built between cross-culture theory and linguistic theory in this paper. Hall's model and multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) are applied in this paper as theoretical framework. It reveals that the corporate overseas promotional video is a cross-culture production in intercultural communication (ICC), so its contents must adapt to the target country's culture. By analyzing the interactive meaning shown in the videos, the paper illustrates how video producers practice MDA into promotion.

Index Terms—Hall's model; MDA; corporate overseas videos; ICC

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization, economic exchanges among countries are more and more closely linked, leading to fierce business competitions among different companies and industries. Companies are sparing no efforts to strengthen efforts to promotion. The improvement of film and television techniques diversifies advertising promotional techniques, among which corporate promotional video is the preferred way of shaping corporate brands, widely used in many companies to promote the reputation of the enterprises.

Corporate promotional video only has a history of 30 years. However, due to its powerful influence, it has become an indispensable mass communication tool in companies. The rapid development of economy stimulates the development of advertising industry, meanwhile, the creation of corporate promotional video enters to an advanced era. Compared to print advertisements, advertising video, a kind of commercial advertisement, is dynamic and vivid. It can better show the corporate culture through words, voice, pictures, animations and special effects. With increasingly frequent economic exchanges among countries, more and more companies want to expand their business abroad. Thus, corporate promotional videos are adopted by many companies to increase brand awareness, build brand competitiveness

and establish good corporate image overseas. Culture is diverse. Different regions and countries have different culture, so if the company wants to let their products known and accepted by foreigners, their culture should be known in advance, which is cross-culture communication. If the producers make the corporate video adapting to the culture of the target country, the consumers will get a better understanding of the product. If not, the company fails to take full advantage of the corporate video. So, it is useful and meaningful to study how to make a good corporate video.

As the world moves from a language-dominated culture to the one in which multimodal discourse becomes increasingly important, more and more commercial advertisements begin to adopt the concept of multimodality in their ads design in order to show their objects to their interactive participants successfully. The interactive participants, also the imaginary viewers will present the represented participants in the ads according to their different social contexts. Whereas, successful ads are able to convey sufficient information to their potential customers and arouse their consuming desires after each viewer's own individual discursive analysis of the ads.

The present studies mainly focus on national or city's publicity films, there are not much research pays attention to corporate promotional videos. What's more, most of the studies on commercial advertisements look at translation strategies or pragmatic strategies. They pay more attention on print advertisement. There are a small number of studies focus on the corporate videos from the angle of culture. Few people study corporate videos from the perspective of multimodality. This paper combines the cross-culture communication theory with multimodality, explores corporate overseas promotional videos from the perspective of cross-culture communication on the basis of Hall's model and from the perspective of social semiotics to find out several useful strategies for companies in their process of propaganda, by comparing Apple's promotional video, *The Song*, in China and Huawei's promotional video, *Dream It Possible*, in America.

This paper attempts to answer two questions:

- 1) What are the differences between the two videos?
- 2) What strategies we can use for promotion on the basis of ICC and MDA?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The purpose of making corporate overseas videos is to help people from the different culture know the products. The culture diversity of the various countries around the world arouses the conflicts among different culture, which leads to difficulties and barriers of mutual understanding. In view of culture differences, it is necessary to consider different culture backgrounds while making corporate overseas promotional videos.

A. Corporate Overseas Videos

Corporate overseas video, an important method to promote the development of enterprises, has been widely used by many corporations in commercial competitions to promote their brands, increase the reputation and competitiveness. Film and television technology is applied in making corporate promotional videos to show the scale, history, products, service and culture of the companies. The major task of making corporate overseas videos is to attract the customers from overseas to expand consumer groups. No matter how exquisite and gorgeous the video is, it is a wild-goose chase when the overseas customers cannot understand.

After collecting a number of relevant documents, the author finds that a number of studies of corporate videos focus on its effectiveness, technique of expression and route of transmission. Sun Ling (2013) pointed out that making corporate videos has become the priority choice for modern enterprise to promote corporate culture and build up corporate image. Yang Shiming (2009) studied the characteristics of high-context advertisements, which focused on the study of the verbal aspect. But there is not special research to analyze corporate overseas videos from the perspective of cross-culture communication.

B. Hall's model

Edward Hall put forward high and low context culture. The work from which Hall (1976) created his model was *Beyond Culture*. In explaining this model, he defined high-context and low-context messages as follows:

A high-context (HC) communication message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.

A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.

He classified the following cultures on such a continuum in order of lowest to highest context: Swiss-Germans, Germans, Scandinavians, Northern Americans, French, English, Italians, Latin Americans, Arabs, Chinese, (added in Hall & Hall, 1987, 1990), and Japanese.

Previous studies mainly focus on advertising discourse on the basis of Hall's model. Han (2013) compares Chinese and American advertisement language from three perspectives: vocabulary, sentence structure and rhetorical

devices.

C. Multimodal Discourse

As the pioneering work in the application of systemic-functional theory to visual images, Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) reading images provides the first systematic and comprehensive account of the grammar of visual design. By looking at the semiotic elements and structures of design-color, perspective, framing and composition Kress and Van Leeuwen examines the ways in which images communicate meaning.

The multimodal perspective follows Halliday's and Hasan's (1985) idea viewing context and culture as 'a set of semiotic systems and a set of systems of meaning'. Visual expression is playing a vital role in various aspects of our daily life. Unlike in the past where language used to be in the central position, now the interplay of text, image, gesture or even music is becoming the mainstream. To cope with the current trend, advertisement has also evolved from the mere presentation of product or service to the inextricably display of the commodity and the lifestyle it represents and corporate ideology it stands for. In terms of research approach, semiotic approach is the most popular approach in multimodal study.

Interdisciplinary study is also practiced. Schroeder (2008) analyzed how representational conventions work alongside rhetorical processes in advertising combining theories including snapshot aesthetics and the transformational mirror of consumption. With the help of Halliday's Systemic-functional Grammar, Huang (2001) analyzes advertisements in detail from the perspective of textual structure, three meta-functions, coherence and cohesion, and discourse model. This study combines the less discovered aspects by conducting multimodal analysis on the promotional videos..

III. METHODOLOGY

Apple's promotional video, *The Song*, in China and Huawei's promotional video, *Dream It Possible*, in America are collected as the materials used for study.

The Song was released in Feb. 1st, 2015 by *Apple*, on the eve before Chinese Spring Festival. The plot goes like this: The girl and her grandma live together. The granddaughter found a long-playing record of her grandmother recorded in 1947 when she was cleaning the house. So, she decided to rerecord it and added her own Cover By Keane with the aid of Apple devices. And she stored the song in iPad mini to let her grandmother enjoy the music.

Dream It Possible was released in Oct. 4th, 2016 by *Huawei*. The story is about a girl named Anna, 15-year of pursuing her piano dream. Accompanied and supported by her grandfather and other family members, through her unremitting efforts, Anna finally shined on the stage of Vienna Concert Hall. And she clutched Huawei P9 to her bosom tightly.

Comparative analysis is adopted in this paper by comparing two corporate overseas videos from two famous companies. Through comparing and analyzing the similarities and differences of the two videos, strategies

about how to make the corporate overseas videos better adapting to the target country are summarized.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. High Context Vs Low Context

1. Indirect and implicit messages Vs Direct and explicit messages

According to Hall's model, culture is classified into high context culture and low context culture. In HC culture, the meaning of the information contains in the relation between communication environment and communication participants. Most of Asian countries belong to HC culture; in low context culture, the meaning of the information can be expressed clearly through language without guessing on the basis of cognition. China is a typical high context country so that Chinese prefer to speak in an implicit way. By comparison, Americans prefer to speak frankly. They belong to low context culture. Therefore, if the corporate overseas promotional videos carry too much implicit information, it is not helpful for the company to promote their products to low context countries. In other words, realistic style is more popular than impressionistic style in low context countries.

HC advertisement is applied in *Dream It Possible*. In the whole video, there is no words introducing Huawei P9 only with a picture of Huawei P9 shown several seconds at the end of the video. The video is about a girl pursuing her music dream, and she succeeded, which implies the growth of Huawei. Many American audience feel touched after watching the video. According to the comments from YouTube and Twitter, many netizens compliment that the video is an amazing piece of art or a touching story. They can understand the story, but they have no idea about the product. Many people even do not know it is a corporate promotional video. They think it is an inspirational micro film, a kind of chicken soup. The reason is that the video is too implicit to understand for the people from LC cultures.

Compared with *Dream It Possible*, *The Song* does better in acculturation. High context advertisement is also applied in *The Song*, but it is specially made for Chinese people. From beginning to end, there is also no words promoting Apple products. The company released this video a few days before Spring Festival. What's more, the story in the video is also closely related to Spring Festival, which can resonate Chinese customers. And *The Song* made by the granddaughter is with the help of Apple products. From the contents of the video, we can see that the producers have a good mastery of Chinese culture. They do not give detailed information of the products, but skillfully embedding the products in Chinese traditional festival, which can better touch hearts of Chinese customers. However, Huawei failed to make the video adapt to American culture. The story is also very moving, but it is not suitable to HC cultures. It is too implicit. Unlike Chinese, Americans prefer to see something in details. They are willing to be shown explicit information of products. It is pity that Americans cannot understand the connotation of the video.

2. Contexts Vs Words

HC cultures emphasize contexts, but LC cultures pay more attention to concrete words. People from LC cultures do not like listening or speaking empty words. HC advertisements prefer to use scene, which can be perceived but cannot be described with words. The audience can interpret the meaning of the advertisements from the context by means of implicit non-verbal symbols.

An inspirational context, a successful story of a dream-seeking, is built in *Dream It Possible*. In the video, the producers portray an image of a dream-seeker. The words in the video contribute to create an atmosphere of striving for dream but not to the product itself. While *The Song* also pays attention to context built, it is specially made for HC country, China. It builds the atmosphere of the Spring Festival. Chinese people, born in HC environment, are good at speculate meanings from contexts. They can easily understand meanings the video wants to express.

3. Collectivistic Vs Individualistic

From the culture factor, Chinese prefer to stay in groups, so they care about their families. However, Americans emphasize individualism and appreciate independence and self-improvement. Thus, Chinese customers and American customers from two different cultures hold different opinions to the corporate videos.

Apple released the corporate video, *The Song*, a few days before Spring Festival with theme of family affection. A warm story between the grandmother and her granddaughter helps Chinese people experience an emotional communication. The contents of the video indicate that American producers are very familiar with Chinese traditional culture. Chinese people stress on family, so *The Song* is a very successful promotional video because it grasps Chinese the softest place of their hearts, family, which can touch Chinese deeply.

American culture is individually oriented stressing independence. Self-development is emphasized. *Dream It Possible* tells a story about a girl's persistence of dream-seeking, implying the development of Huawei, from a small company to one of the world's top 500 companies, which does conform with American culture. The combination of the products and the target country's culture is helpful to resonate with customers and promote products easily.

B. Multimodal Discourse Analysis & Culture Reflection

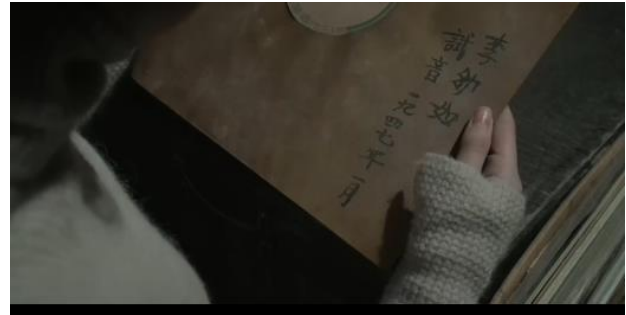
Social semiotic theory plays an important role in multimodal discourse analysis, which studies the contributions and interactions of linguistic and non-linguistic modes. Corporate videos are multimodal systems with words, sound, colorful images and gestures. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) framework documents Halliday's three metafunctions of language: the systems of meanings for the ideational, interpersonal and textual, which are respectively labeled as representational, interactive and compositional. A successful advertisement is a fine representation of the combination of verbal and visual semiotic mode. The major aim of making corporate videos is to promote products, which is a type of interaction with customers. Interactional meanings enable customers to negotiate social relations and express

attitudes. This part concentrates on interactional meaning of the two videos.

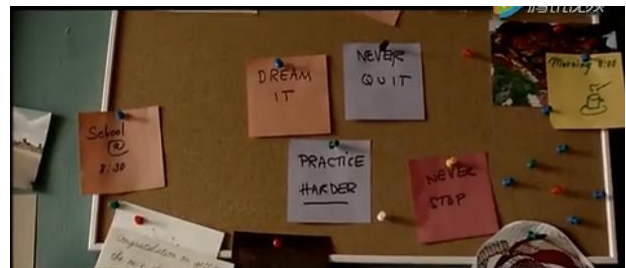
1. Images & Colors



The above four pictures are the screenshots of *The Song*. The video starts with alleys, bicycles, daffodils, a phonograph and an old house, which bring people into old memories. What's more, bright colors are not adopted in the video, which helps to create reminiscent atmosphere. Both the images and colors of the video cater to Chinese people's nostalgic feelings.



This is a long-playing record of the girl's grandmother. From the screenshot, we can find Chinese traditional character 'shi', which shows the carefulness of the producers. And the gap between customers and enterprises will be narrowed by this way.



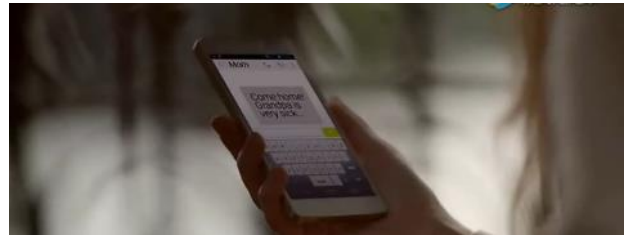
Compared with *The Song* with the theme of family affection, *Dream It Possible* portrays a story of growth and persistence. The first two pictures show the growth of the girl, which implies the development of Huawei. What's more, bright colors adopted in the first two pictures imply the bright future of the company. The last two pictures show the hard-working of the girl with the words on the wall like "Never quit", "Dream it" and

“Never stop” and the subtitle “When you dream come alive, you’re unstoppable” and the stave pasted on the mirror, all of which suggests the girl’s persistence on her way of dreaming. The girl’s diligence and self-improvement symbol the company’s spirits, and also in accordance with American individualistic culture.

2. The Combination of Products and Culture



There is no doubt that, while promoting the corporate culture, the aim of making corporate videos is to promote products. Thus, it is important to embed the products properly into videos. Apple does it skillfully. The granddaughter rerecorded her grandma’s record with aid of MacBook and stored the music into iPad, and finally her grandmother listened the music by means of Apple earpods. What’s more, from the second screenshot, we can see that the photo between grandmother and granddaughter is shown on the screen, which bonds the product and Chinese culture, family complex together. In the last picture, grandmother enjoys the music happily with her hand touching her granddaughter’s face. It’s really a warm picture.



However, *Huawei* is barely satisfactory in this point. In the whole video, Huawei P9 only flashes for one second. The video overemphasizes the integrity of the story, but neglects the promotion of the product, which will make customers feel ambiguous.

3. Size of Frame & Social Distance

Another dimension to the interactive meanings of images, related to the ‘size of frame’, to the choice among close-up, medium shot and long shot, and so on. In everyday interaction, social relations determine the distance we keep from one another. Edward Hall (1966) has shown that we carry with us a set of invisible boundaries beyond which we allow only certain kinds of people to come. With these differences correspond different fields of vision. At intimate distance, we see the face and head only. At close personal distance, we take in the head and the shoulders. At far personal distance, we see the other person from the waist up. At close social distance, we see whole figure. At far distance, we see the whole figure with space around it. China is HC culture. Thus, close-up is applied in *The Song* to reduce the distance between customers. And the product can be seen clearly in close-up shot.

V. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Several strategies can be summarized after the comparison and analysis of the videos. Firstly, it is necessary for companies to make corporate overseas videos adapting to the culture of the target country. Respect is the premise and foundation of communication. Respecting other countries’ culture patterns and communicating information as their patterns doesn’t mean condescending to their culture, but acculturation. *The Song* made by *Apple* sets a good example for other companies. For HC cultures, HC advertisements should be made, and vice versa. Whereas if the company makes HC corporate videos for LC countries, which not only can not make contributions to the promotion, but also causing some negative effects. Secondly, corporate promotional videos are multimodal discourse with images, sounds, colors and gestures, so good integration between the contents of the video and culture will make the video more perfect. If the theme of the video is reminiscence, the main color should not be bright. The aim of making promotional videos is to promote products, so the products must be shown in the video whatever in HC cultures or in LC cultures. In HC cultures, the video can focus on contexts. But in LC cultures, the video should concentrate on the products. Finally, companies can invite the experts from the target country to take part in video production because they are more familiar with their local culture. Xu Anhua, Chinese famous director, was invited by Apple to

help to make the company's corporate overseas video.

This paper has contributed to the study of corporate videos from the perspective of cross-culture communication and multimodality. It introduces Hall's model and social semiotic theory to the study of corporate videos. It also builds a bridge between cross-culture theory and linguistic theory. Today, in the economic globalization, if the company wants to find its place in other countries, acculturation is an important strategy that the company must master.

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