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Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Cultural Tourism Promotional Film: Hubei, in Chu Color

Jing Chen, Li Wu*, Yin Huang

Wuhan City Polytechnic, Wuhan, China
**Corresponding Author. Email: 02006001@whcp.edu.cn*

Abstract. Cultural tourism promotional films hold profound cultural values, cultural inheritance, cultural communication, and the promotion of mainstream spirit, demanding innovative strategies of the international transmission. This study conducts a multimodal discourse analysis(MDA) of the cultural tourism promotional film Hubei, in Chu Color, which aims to promote Hubei as the world-renowned cultural tourism destination by Hubei Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism. The theoretical framework is based on the systemic-functional linguistics, Kress & Leeuwen's the grammar of visual design and Zhang Delu's framework for MDA. Accordingly, this analytical framework is proposed for the analysis of various modalities and related relationships in the cultural tourism promotional films. The analysis is carried out from four dimensions: culture, context, content and expression. It explores how the promotional film presents the image of Hubei as a world-renowned cultural tourism destination in the international transmission, thereby offering insights for the local cultural tourism to go global.

Keywords: cultural tourism promotional films, Hubei, in Chu Color, multimodal discourse analysis, international transmission

1. Introduction

In April 2026, the Hubei Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism released its new promotional film *Hubei, in Chu Color*, also known as Hubei cultural tourism's "Five Ones". The video was firstly released at the promotion event of "Zhiyin Hubei" during the 14th Macao International Tourism (Industry) Expo, presenting the charm of Hubei to the world as a world-renowned cultural tourism destination [1, 2]. Cultural tourism promotional films utilize various social semantics including dynamic images, voice-overs, music and subtitles to construct the image of tourist destinations. Integrating cultural and tourism landmarks with multiple modalities, the film serves as an ideal research target for analyzing the multimodal discourse which refers to the communication conducted by applying multiple senses, such as vision, audition and tactility, and through different semiotic resources, such as languages, images, sounds and actions [3]. Here, the multiple modalities are aerial photography, close-up shots, voice-over narration, background music, and Chinese-English bilingual subtitles. Multimodality allows for more complex expressions of ideas and emotions, and can enhance the overall effectiveness of communication. Current studies lack the multimodal analysis on the promotion of local culture and tourism, especially on cultural

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tourism promotional films framed as world-renowned tourist destinations. Taking this promotional film: *Hubei, in Chu Color* as the research target and adopting a multimodal analytical framework, this paper analyzes from four dimensions systematically: culture, context, content and expression.

2. Research design

2.1. Research questions

The distinctive feature of the cultural tourism promotional films lies in their adoption of various social semiotics, including background music, dynamic footage, over-voice and bilingual subtitles. These modes endow the promotional films a target for MDA. The 2025 Hubei Cultural and Tourism Development Conference announced the initiative to develop Hubei into a world-renowned cultural tourism destination. In the following year, Hubei cultural tourism promotional film *Hubei, in Chu Color*was officially released. From five aspects, this promotional film portrays Hubei respectively as a picturesque painting, a historical and cultural tome, an inspiring revolutionary poem, an ecological garden, and a connecting bridge linking the world [1]. With the coordination of Chinese over-voice, Chinese-and-English subtitles, and visual image mode, audience can not only grasp the promotional information, but also fully perceive the meaning potential, thereby comprehensively understanding the cultural tourism destination. The research focuses on two questions:

(1) How to analyze different modalities in the promotional film *Hubei, in Chu Color*?

(2) How do different modalities jointly interact with each other to establish Hubei's cultural tourism image?

2.2. Analytical framework

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) originates from systemic functional linguistics (SFL). It inherits SFL's core assumptions that linguistic is a combination of social semiotic and meaning potential, and that non-linguistic semiotic can also generate meaning. What's more, Halliday holds that multimodal discourse contains three metafunctions, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. The metafunction consists of the phonological system and the transitivity system, which includes material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process [4]. As for the multimodal discourse analysis framework, Zhang constructed a four-dimension analytical framework: culture, context, content and expression [3].

The first two dimensions are derived from SFL. The cultural dimension lays a solid foundation for the contextual dimension, which defines communication conventions, forms and techniques. The cultural dimension mainly reflects the ideology, which should be taken into account in international transmission. Cultural differences pose huge difficulty for the cultural tourism promotional films where many social semiotic modes such as images, subtitles and symbols can be adopted to deliver the original information.

The contextual dimension includes field, tenor and mode. Firstly, filed means the ongoing events, including the nature and features of social activities and discussed topics. Tenor refers to communicators and related interpersonal relationships. And mode denotes linguistic functions and styles in communication [3]. Hence, verbal and visual context should adapt with properly added or omitted background information, like history and culture.

At the same time, the content dimension consists of discursive meaning and form levels. Three metafunctions of language, ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings, are included in the discursive meaning level. Diverse modes, such as text, image and other multiple modes, jointly

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convey discourse meaning at the form level. One mode can increase or decrease information conveyed by others, which distinguishes the complementarity and non-complementarity relations of multiple modes [3]. Complementarity means one semiotic supplements another to fully convey the discourse meaning and enhance audience comprehension, which dominates modes in international transmission of cultural tourism promotional films. Visuals alone can't fully express connotations, demanding coordination of language and sound. What's more, subtitles and over-voices fill information gaps when visuals are insufficient. Hence, the MDA framework can examine the relationship among linguistic, image, sound and other modes in the cultural tourism promotional films from these four dimensions.

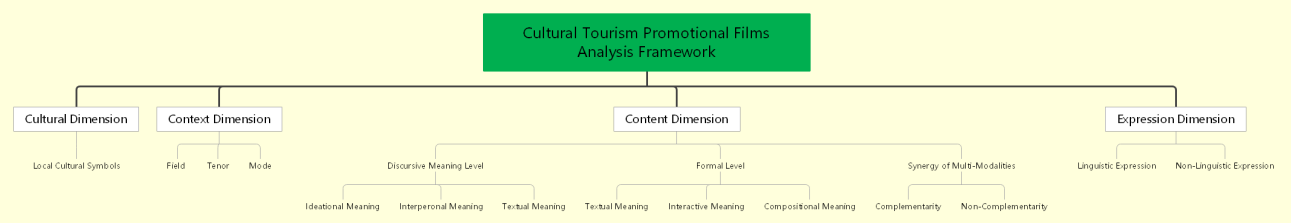

Figure 1. Cultural tourism promotional films analysis framework

3. Multimodal discourse analysis of *Hubei, in Chu Color*

3.1. Cultural dimension

The Cultural dimension is embodied in the systematic multimodal encoding of Hubei's Chu culture symbols. Focusing on the "Five Ones" narrative framework, this promotion film presents Hubei's tangible cultural landmarks, like the Roof of Central China Shennongjia, Wudang Mountains, Enshi Grand Canyon, as well as the intangible cultural connotations represented by Chu poetry, Taoist philosophy, and regional folk customs, through the coordination of visual, auditory, and linguistic modalities [1]. For example, the Yellow Crane Tower, one of the three great towers south of the Yangtze River, holds a thousand years of poetic culture and stands as en emblem of nostalgic longing. However, it may be considered as an ancient architecture for international audiences. Therefore, the visual image of the Yellow Crane Tower is added with the poetic over-voice and English subtitles "Hear the jade flute of white clouds and yellow cranes" in the film to compensate for the loss of implicit cultural information. In the international transmission, the local Hubei culture can be converted into perceivable experiences which international audiences can understand.

In the international transmission, culture-specific concepts and unique history lack corresponding expressions and may cause misunderstanding in the cultural tourism films. The integrated color and culture is subject to cultural disparities. For example, the Chinese concept of 红色历史（red history denotes China's revolutionary history. However, Western audiences may fail to associate this connotation and may even evoke associations of blood and danger. Therefore, the translator adopted domestication strategy in the English subtitle "its revolutionary legacy everlasting" [1], featuring the visual mode of a little paying homage to revolutionary martyr Shi Yang.

3.2. Contextual dimension

As the major register variable of this dimension, field refers to the topics discussed in the promotional film [5]. The discourse scope is divided into five thematic layers to reflect the core connotations of Hubei's cultural tourism: the natural landscape represented by "Hubei is a stunning

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painting", the historical culture covering Chu cultural heritage, Qu Yuan's poetry, Red Cliff of the Three Kingdoms, the revolutionary history represented by "Hubei is a tome of depth", the ecological agriculture highlighting the reputation of "the province of a thousand lakes", and the transportation and opening-up represented by "Hubei is a bridge to the world" [1].

Tenor refers to the emotional tone in *Hubei, in Chu Color* which is friendly and culturally confident. The Chinese over-voice adopts a poetic and proud tone and the tenor context of the English translation conforms to the equal and infectious tone of international cultural tourism communication, while retaining the cultural confidence. At the same time, the mode refers to the linguistic style in the promotional film. The mode of the Chinese over-voice adopts a linguistic style of classical poetry and modern prose, like using parallelism and a sense of rhythm in *Hubei, in Chu Color* [1].

3.3. Content dimension

3.3.1. Discursive meaning level

In SFL, the ideational meaning explains human experiences of the world and establishes logical-semantic relations between clauses which includes the transitivity system and phonological system. The transitivity system consists of six categories of processes: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process [4].. In the promotional film, the ideational meaning is mainly realized through relational processes, which clearly define the attributes of Hubei's cultural tourism resources. In the table 1, the Chinese and English subtitles show a high degree of consistency in the transitivity system, which reflects the narrative strategy of definition and interpretation in this promotional film.

Table 1. Transitivity system in *Hubei, in Chu Color*

No.	Chinese Subtitle	English Translation	Semantic Processes
1	湖北是一幅美丽的画。	Hubei is a stunning painting.	
2	湖北是一本厚重的书。	Hubei is a tome of depth.	
3	湖北是一首激昂的诗。	Hubei is a poem of passion.	relational processes
4	湖北是一座丰饶的园。	Hubei is a garden of abundance.	
5	湖北是一架通达的桥。	Hubei is a bridge to the world.	

Through sentence pattern and tone adjustment, the interpersonal meaning constructs an image of grand narrative. Most of the sentence patterns are declarative sentences, which provide the audiences with an authoritative and objective information of Hubei's cultural tourism resources. And it establishes the credibility and professionalism of this video, which conforms to the expression of international cultural tourism promotion. However, the interpersonal function of language enables people to interact with others and maintain interpersonal relationships [4], so other sentence patterns and invitational expressions are suggested to enhance interactivity of this promotional film.

The textual meaning constructs a logical and coherent narrative system mainly through thematic-rhematic structures [4]. In the table 2, the cultural tourism destination image of Hubei is decomposed into perceptible scenic spots, seasonal flowers and local culture through thematic shifts.

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Table 2. Thematic-rhematic structures in *Hubei, in Chu Color*

Thematic structure	Theme	Rheme
specific cultural symbols	Wudang mountains	embrace the Daoist way of harmony with nature
time/space/scene framework	In Hubei	cherry blossoms in spring, lotus in summer, osmanthus in autumn and plum blossoms in winter
core metaphors	Hubei is a tome of depth	steeped in history and rich in culture

3.3.2. Formal level

The formal level concerns forms and their interrelationships. Forms are classified into linguistic form, visual form, sensory form, and auditory form. The interrelationships between these four types of forms are complementary and non-complementary [3]. In the cultural tourism promotional films, the analysis mainly focuses on visual form and the relations with other forms [6].

The representational meaning of visual form is composed of narrative representation and conceptual representation. Vector serves as the key sign of narrative images and conceptual images. Conceptual images fills the entire promotional film. Conceptual representation can be further divided into the classification process, the analytical process and the symbolic process [7]. In the classification process, the figure 2 presents five attributes of Hubei's cultural tourism resources which are natural, cultural, revolutionary, ecological and modernized, corresponding to the "Five Ones" narrative frame. In the analytical process, Wuchang fish, hot dry noodles, and Enshi Yulu Green Tea serve as parts which belongs to the whole, which symbolizes the local specialties of Hubei. In the symbolic process, the figure 3 shows a a little girl in red holding a red pinwheel is paying homage to the heroes memorial monument, symbolizing the everlasting revolutionary spirit.

Figure 2. Five ones of Hubei

Figure 3. Monument to martyre Shi Yang

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Figure 4. Tourists' smiling faces

In *Hubei, in Chu Color*, the interactive meaning is achieved through contact, social distance and perspective [7]. In the figure 4, close-up shots on tourists' smiling faces at the blooming cherry blossoms in Wuhan University, inviting audiences to come along. Medium shots of Wudang martial arts corresponds to the cultural narrative. And Panoramic shots of the Three Gorges, the forest of Shennongjia and Wuhan's urban skyline, constructing a public communication distance, corresponds to the grand narrative of "Majestic landscapes unfold across Hubei, beneath the boundless Chu sky". Overall, lens language of a frontal horizontal perspective conveys an equal, open and inclusive communication attitude to audiences [1].

In the compositional meaning, the composition of "natural scenery + humanistic architecture+ background music" is adopted to highlight the visual theme. For instance, the ancient architectural complex of Wudang Mountain frames with the surrounding natural mountains or the ecological landscape of the East Lake Greenway frames with Wuhan's urban buildings. The background music is grand and spectacular amplifying the visual shock. Through the framing of nature, humanity and music, the theme of "blessed with natural beauty and cultural richness" is manifested [1].

3.3.3. Synergy of multi-modalities

The synergy of multi-modalities can be complementary or non-complementary. In the complementary category, the visual image and background music presents intuitive sensory experiences, while the linguistic mode supplements the cultural information and connotations in the cultural tourism promotional film. Therefore, the modalities reinforce one another; information interacts to construct a complete meaning. However, in the non-complementary relationship, modalities deliver independent information; the information exists in parallelism, no supplementation or reinforcement [3]. For example, the footage shows people boating on Honghu Lake surrounded by lotus leaves and flowers, the folk song "The Waves of Honghu Lake" is sung live. The auditory modality supplements the visual modality. This is a typical reinforcing complementarity. By contrast, in scenes of folk customs and local delicacies, the linguistic modality shows the names and the ambient sound starts to play. Modalities present separate information, making the video content more varied. This constructs non-complementary relationships.

3.4. Expression dimension

Zhang Delu divides the expression dimension into two components: linguistic expression and non-linguistic expression [3]. In *Hubei, in Chu Color*, the linguistic expression is centered on the frame of "Five Ones", and adopts an international transmission that balances academic authority and audience friendliness. The lexical selection of concrete and perceivable words to describe Hubei's cultural tourism resources. At the same time, the script adopts standardized expressions for the

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cultural concepts, such as Chu Culture, Daoism, 1911 Revolution, which avoids localized culture-loaded words which are hard for international audiences and transmit accurate culture connotations. At the same time, the organization of the discourse is a clear general-particular-general structure, narrating around the five core metaphors of Hubei's cultural tourism resources. The discourse also uses many thematic parallelism, such as sentences of "Hubei is a...", which makes the narrative logic clear and enhance the rhythm [1].

In the non-linguistic expression, the multimodal expression involves visual images, auditory symbols, interpersonal expression and space and scene expression. In the film, lens language and color design constructs the visual symbol expression. Firstly, different lens languages match for different content: panoramic shots for grand natural landscapes, medium shots for folk activities, close-up for intangible heritage handicrafts. The color design of the film is also very impressive: fresh green and blue for the natural ecological landscape, bright red for the revolutionary history and festival atmosphere, and warm gold for the harvest scenes. Secondly, in the auditory symbol expression, the background music and sound match the scenes harmoniously: melodious pure music for natural scenes, classical music for historical scenes, symphonic music for revolutionary sites, and dynamic modern music for modern urban scenes. Thirdly, the actions of the characters in the video, such as Tai Chi performances, Han opera, make the cultural concepts perceptible. At the same time, scene switching and spatial contrast construct the space and scene expression, completing a multi-dimensional image of Hubei [1].

4. Conclusion

Based on the cultural tourism promotional films analysis framework, the study conducts a multimodal discourse analysis of *Hubei, in Chu Color* from cultural dimension, context dimension, content dimension and expression dimension, which jointly complete the construction of Hubei as the world-renowned cultural tourism destination. This analysis enriches the theoretical application system of multimodal discourse analysis in the field of the international transmission of cultural tourism destination. What's more, the study provides a guidance for the production and optimization of cultural tourism promotional films and offers some insights about the effectiveness of international transmission. In the future, the research can expand to empirical research to combine artificial intelligence to construct an evaluation model of multimodal discourse effects in the international transmission.

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