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从概念整合理论和关联理论互补的视角研究图文关系:
以微信公众号标题为例

**A Complementary Perspective of Conceptual Blending
Theory and Relevance Theory on Text-image Relation: with
Examples of Headlines in WeChat Public Accounts**

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Abstract

The combination of text and image has had a long history. New ways of combination brought by the development of technology and society require a fresh way of studying the relation between text and image. Theoretical development, specifically, Cognitive Linguistics, meets the requirement.

As a cognition-oriented multimodality study, this thesis delves into two interdependent research questions: First, what is the relation between text and image of headlines in discourse like WeChat public accounts? Second, how can we analyze the meaning construction in headlines combined with text and image from the perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) and Relevance Theory (RT)?

Employing the method of qualitative analysis and complemented by interview to give empirical evidence, the thesis will first argue that the text-image headline belongs to ostensive-inferential communication, and thus assume text and image are optimally relevant, or trying to be so if they fail, according to RT. Then results from interview will be used to testify the assumption.

We revisit the advantages and disadvantages of CBT and RT, and then analyze the similarities and differences of these two theories. The advantages of each make it possible to extend them to other modes than verbal communication only, and the disadvantages imply their need for development instead of being employed directly. The similarities and differences are two sides of the same coin and lay the basis for cautious complementation, and such complementation, as can be seen in the thesis, is helpful for the improvement of each.

After arguing the broader application of CBT and RT and their complementarity, this thesis builds a tentative interpretative and meaning construction cognitive model in the framework of CBT complemented by RT to illustrate meaning construction in the text and image of headlines. This model will be used to examine the examples of headlines from *People's Daily* public account, an authoritative and representative

public account.

The argument that text and image are (trying to be) optimally relevant represents the nature of text and image relation with the cognitive perspective. The interpretative and meaning construction cognitive model combining CBT and RT is not only contributive to the understanding on the meaning of text-image combination, but facilitates the development of these two theories. Based on those theoretical analysis and case studies, we suggest a better way of combining text and image headlines of WeChat public accounts, which is also enlightening to similar social and informative application in practice.

There are two innovations in this study: 1) it takes an initiative in applying two complementary theories to analyze the text-image relation of in an emergent discourse, i.e., headlines of WeChat public accounts; 2) it furthers the study on CBT and RT and their complementarity.

Key words: Conceptual Blending Theory; Relevance Theory; complementarity; text-image relation; headline of WeChat public accounts

摘要

图文结合由来已久。随着科技和社会的发展,新兴图文结合方式要求我们从新的角度去研究图与文的关系。相关的理论,尤其是认知语言学的发展,正迎合了这种需求。

作为以认知为导向的多模态研究,本文主要探讨两个相关问题:第一,在微信公众号等类似的话语中,标题的图文关系是什么?第二,从概念整合理论和关联理论结合的视角,我们如何分析标题中图文意义的建构?

在定性分析的研究方法之上,结合访谈的实证方法以作补充,本文将首先论述图文标题属于明示-推理的交际行为,由此根据关联理论,认为该性质表明图文关系为(或尝试获得)最佳关联,并在此基础上以访谈结论佐证该观点。

在分别论述了概念整合理论和关联理论的优缺点之后,本文分析了二者的统一性和差异性。二者的优势表明两种理论均可拓展到除口语交际之外的其他模态的交流;二者的缺点则表明两者都需要发展,而不能直接运用;二者的统一性和差异性实为一个问题的两个方面,二者可以谨慎结合,这种结合可以发展两种理论以弥补各自的不足。

在阐述了概念整合理论和关联理论具有更广的适用范围和它们的互补性之后,本文以概念整合理论为框架,结合关联理论的补充,提出标题图文意义解读建构认知模型,并以权威、具有代表性的人民日报微信公众号中的标题图文为例进行分析。

认知视角表明,图文关系的本质就是建立二者之间的最佳关联。基于概念整合理论和关联理论的互补提出的意义解读建构认知模型不仅有助于对图文结合意义的理解,也促进了这两种理论的发展。基于理论的分析 and 实例研究,我们为微信公众号的图文关系结合实践提供了建议,对其他类似的社交、资讯客户端也有启发。

本研究的创新之处主要有两点:第一,首次运用两个互补的理论就一个新兴话语领域,即微信公众号,来研究图文关系;第二,进一步促进了概念整合理论和关联理论及其互补性的研究。

关键词 概念整合理论 关联理论 互补 图文关系 微信公众号标题

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This introductory chapter consists of three sections: the purpose and value of this study which includes the research questions, the research method and the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Purpose and value of this study

With the development of technology, the medium of our daily communication has evolved incessantly. Specifically, people no longer have to contact with each other face to face or by writing or calling, instead, they can get connected or informed through social networking applications, like Facebook, Twitter, Weibo and WeChat, in the era of smart phones. Take WeChat as example. According to “The 2016 Report on the Influence of WeChat” by Penguin Intelligence and Institute of Industry and Planning of China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT), by February, 2016, there were 650 million active users every month, 60% of them logging in WeChat ten times a day and 36% of them doing that more than 30 times, which means that WeChat has already become the major means for people to get contacted and informed. The channel of people reading news information has accordingly been changed -- compared with printed newspapers, mobile news and information applications, like NetEase (网易资讯), Phoenix News Media (凤凰资讯) and Toutiao (今日头条), are preferred. According to EnfoDesk (易观智库)^[1], an authoritative platform providing data collecting and analyzing service, up to December, 2014, the ratios of mobile public penetration^[2] of news information and social networking were 41.4% and 68.4% respectively. These statistics indicate that mobile applications like the above have been the most important media to meet users’

^[1] <http://www.analysys.cn/>

^[2] Subscription penetration reflects the occupancy of specific samples. The calculation formula is: the ratio of subscription penetration = the number of users of targeted application / the number of users of particular range of application * 100%. For example, the occupancy of news information users in the whole mobile network is 41.4%, which means that among all users in the mobile network, there are 41.4% users reading news information.

needs for information and communication.

According to the above data, it is beyond question that mobile applications have become an important part of our life. As the main channel for people getting news information and communicating with others, those applications undoubtedly reflect main features of people's on-line communication, and thus studies on them can further our understanding on various modes of communication. One of those features is the combination of text and image.

Text and image are two important modes in human communication, and the combination of them has had a long history. Nowadays when the Internet and mobile phones go widely around the world, text-image combination is almost everywhere, including the headlines of those application updates.



Fig 1.1 Screenshots of text and image combination in various media

Notes: Screenshot (a) is the printed paper of *China Daily*; (b), (c) and (d) are screenshots of headlines from updates in Phoenix application, NetEase application and *People's Daily* public account in WeChat application. (d-1) is the body part of the front headline of (d).

As shown in Fig 1.1, screenshot (a) shows a printed discourse from *China Daily* newspaper; (b), (c) and (d) are screenshots of headlines from applications in smartphone; (d-1) is the screenshot of corresponding passage to the headline in screenshot (d). Comparing the printed discourse and those applications in terms of the composition of text and image, we can find that almost all necessary components of a complete news, including titles, pictures, captions and body part, are on the same page, while those online especially headlines and the body part, are laid out on different pages. For instance, readers cannot read (d-1) without seeing the front headline of (d) at first. Therefore, headlines of those applications play a more important role in attracting readers to read the body part among the assembled updates than that of printed discourse. Besides, mobile phone features that text and image can be composed together for headlines; in contrast, in the printed papers, usually only texts can be used as titles due to their limited space.

The sources of screenshot (b), (c) are Phoenix application, NetEase application respectively, which are basically news information applications, while (d) is from WeChat which is primarily taken as a social networking application. News information application mainly offers readers the latest news and information while for social networking application WeChat, social networking used to be the main goal. However, there is a trend nowadays that social networking application gradually shares the role of news information provider. In WeChat, the public accounts play such a role, which we will introduce in some detail in 4.1.

Despite the difference in function, headlines of two kinds of application updates are similar and consist of text and image. Take the comparison between public accounts of WeChat and Phoenix application for instance. Headlines of both are presented in two layouts: for the layout at the top, the text is right below the image; for the lower layout, text and image are put in the same line except for the difference

between right and left. Besides, as we can see, the images in the screenshots are mostly static, and there are no diagrams.

Public accounts of WeChat are varied in functions, including news information offering, advertising, reading materials offering, personal sharing etc. (see 4.1), from which we can see public accounts include main functions of other news information-based mobile applications like NetEase, Phoenix and Sohu, etc. In other words, the study on public accounts can be more comprehensive, and thus this paper takes it as the objective of study.

A brief review on the layout of these mainstream applications demonstrates that the text-image combination is common. In the field of multimodality -- the investigation of diverse modes expression and their combination (Bateman 2014: 6), text-image relation is one of the common research questions. The question can be narrowed down to the text-image relation in headlines in these mobile application updates. We take the text-image headline in public accounts of WeChat as the objective of this study. In those headlines, images are static and there are barely diagrams or tables. For the current purpose, we take “image” as the two-dimension static image that you can physically see, excluding the diagrams or tables.

So far, we have put the first research question forward, that is, what is the relation between text and image in the headlines of WeChat public account articles? The second research question, which is closely connected to the first one but goes deeper, is how is the meaning of text-image headlines constructed? In other words, how do people, including the editor and the author of an article which are collectively called the publishers in this thesis, and the readers, interpret text-image headlines? The joint composition of text and image does not equal text plus image, that is, the meaning of the text-image combination is multiplied. It can be represented by the equation: $1+1>2$. Therefore, the questions that what meanings are multiplied and how they emerge need to be solved when analyzing the interpretation of text-image combination. The reasons why the two research questions are pertinent are as follows: only by knowing the text-image relation can we go further on to study how meaning is constructed by the two modes collectively and find out the mechanism of meaning

construction; when the meaning construction process is understood, we can go back to refine our understanding of text-image relations. In other words, these two research questions are interdependent.

Until now, the theoretical frameworks used to analyze text-image relation have been confined to several theories, like Barthes' text-image theories (c.f., Barthes 1977; 1993), or theories under the influence of Systemic Functional Grammar (c.f., Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; Royce, 2007). However, in Cognitive Linguistics, some theories are getting increasing attention from scholars with their fresh perspective and explanatory power, like Conceptual Blending Theory (henceforth CBT) and Relevance Theory (henceforth RT). This thesis is mainly cognitivist-oriented by following Lakoff and Johnson's (1999: 11) definition of *cognitive*: "the term *cognitive* is used for any kind of mental operation or structure that can be studied in precise terms. [...] memory and attention fall under the *cognitive*. All aspects of thought and language, conscious or unconscious are thus *cognitive*." (emphasis in original) Thus, the theoretical framework aims at unveiling the conscious or unconscious mental operation or structure in text-image communication.

Before proposing theoretical framework of this research, we will revisit CBT and RT in terms of the objective of this thesis, including brief introduction of each and their advantages and disadvantages. And then, we compare and contrast the two theories to lay the basis of their complementarity.

Based on the argument that RT is applicable to multimodal discourse and the central claim of optimal relevance principle of RT, we argue that text and image are (or attempt to be) optimally relevant. And on the basis of the complementarity of CBT and RT, we will put forward a cognitive model illustrating how meaning is constructed and interpreted in text-image headlines.

Analyzing text-image relation from the perspective of RT not only avoids the endless classification of various relations of text and image in different discourses, but also sets an example of employing RT to other modalities rather than verbal communication only, implying the explanatory power of this theory. Besides, as the varieties of text-image discourse in previous studies are restricted to newspaper,

comic books, etc., the study on headlines combined with text and image in WeChat public account serves as a supplement. Furthermore, it is expectable that the complementarity of RT and CBT will be contributive to the development of each.. Above all, the cognitive model based on the complementarity of RT and CBT will allow us to get a deeper understanding of meaning construction process in text-image headline which is instantiated by updates from *People's Daily* official account.

In addition to the theoretical value, since people are involved in the meaning construction and interpretation of the text-image combination, such involvement is directly reflected in their practice, like composing the combination, choosing read or not, etc. Hence, this thesis will prove to be illuminating to the practice of improving those mobile applications,

1.2 Research method

This study takes qualitative analysis as the main research method and quantitative analysis as supplement. Since this paper attempts to find out the relation between text and image and to develop a cognitive model to illustrate the meaning construction and interpretation in the combination of text and image in the headlines of WeChat public account, both research questions need theoretical analysis without prespecified hypothesis or large structured statistics. This means qualitative analysis method plays the main role.

As for the text-image relation, we will analyze it by taking the refined RT as theoretical framework. After revisiting merits and demerits of RT and its application, we argue that it is applicable to multimodal communication instead of merely verbal communication. On such basis, we will compare basic claims of RT on ostensive inferential communication with text, image and text-image headlines, arguing that text-image headline is a kind of ostensive inferential communication, and then get our findings on the relation between text and image. However, it will be more convincing to demonstrate the findings on text-image relation in updates of public accounts. We design an interview by taking samples from an authoritative and representative public

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