A Review of Research on Multimodal Metaphors in Different Genres

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Abstract— *This paper reviews the research on the application of multimodal metaphors in major genres such as advertisements, comics and movies, as well as emerging genres such as documentaries, posters and operas. It is found that the importance of multimodal metaphor research has become more and more prominent in the academic field, and the expansion of the scope of genres studied has not only enriched the application of metaphor theory, but also provided new perspectives and tools for cultural communication and international image building. Finally, this paper discusses the problems existing in the current research on multimodal metaphors in different topics, for example, the current research often faces the problem of small sample capacity, which limits the wide applicability and depth of the research results, and many of the studies still remain in the stage of superficial application analysis of theories, failing to dig deeper into the deeper mechanism and complexity of the interaction between multimodal metaphors and audiences, and puts forward suggestions for the future research.*

Keywords— *multimodal metaphors; advertising; movies; comics*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of multimodal metaphors has become an increasing focus of attention in the academic field. In 1996, the publication of the work *Pictorial metaphor in advertising* marked a key turning point in the study of multimodal metaphors. In this work, Forceville (1996) provided an in-depth analysis of nonverbal images and constructed a theoretical framework for analyzing image metaphors. Subsequently, in 2009, Forceville and Urios-Aparisi published *Multimodal Metaphors*, which further broadened the research horizons by systematically exploring cases of multimodal metaphors in a variety of domains such as advertisements, movies, and comics (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). Since then, the field of multimodal metaphor research has been expanding, involving an increasing number of types of research genres.

Currently, Han Yanfang (2024) has reviewed the developmental history of multimodal metaphor research from the perspective of the

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developmental background of multimodal metaphor research, and reviewed the latest progress in its theory, methodology, and research genres. Although the study mentions the diversity of modalities and genres in its exploration of genres, it fails to provide an in-depth categorized review of the current status of the major research genres and other newer genres. In view of this, this paper starts from the study of multimodal metaphors in different genres, systematically reviews the current research status of each genre, and puts forward corresponding development suggestions, aiming to provide clear ideas and directions for future research.

II. RESEARCH ON THE APPLICATION OF MULTIMODAL METAPHORS IN DIFFERENT GENRES

2.1 Research on multimodal metaphors in major genres

2.1.1 Advertising

Among many genres of communication, advertising occupies a central position with its remarkable attractiveness, and the diversity of its forms is remarkable, including static print ads, dynamic TV and online ads, as well as commercials and public service ads. Currently, scholars are trying to identify the specific features of multimodal metaphors and their salience in various types of advertisements, with a special focus on how advertisements affect viewers' cognition and emotions through multimodal metaphors.

In terms of public service advertisements, scholars Hu Fang and Liu Shimeng (2018) studied the multimodal metaphor representation and the cognitive construction of meaning in public service advertisements for protecting water resources. They found that the dynamic narrative,

vividness and universality of multimodal metaphors make the advertisements more informative and leave the audience with a more intuitive and deep impression, thus achieving better public welfare publicity effects.

In the field of commercial advertising, foreign scholar Paula Pérez Sobrino (2016) conducted the first large-scale study of a multimodal corpus containing 210 commercial advertisements to explore the distribution of multimodal metaphors and metonymy in advertisements and their impact on the conceptual complexity of advertisements, so as to analyze how they affect the communication of brand messages to the audience. Domestic scholars Chen Min and Sun Weiwei (2018), on the other hand, analyzed TV advertisements of L'ORÉAL men's and women's skincare product between 2011 and 2015, outlining the multimodal metaphorical scenes and their usage characteristics that constructed these advertisements, and exploring how to convey the product usage characteristics to the viewers through these scenes.

In addition to the above studies on single advertising genres, some scholars have also conducted comparative studies on multi-genre advertisements. For example, Cheng Jintao and Liu Shisheng (2021) used a qualitative research method to explore the interaction mechanism of multimodal metaphor, metonymy and narrative in advertisements across time and genres by analyzing print advertisements of American ICT companies and video advertisements of Huawei cell phones. This cross-genre approach provides a new perspective for understanding the complexity of multimodal metaphors in advertising.

Meanwhile, a few scholars have also focused on the identification methods of multimodal metaphors in advertisements. For example,

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Charles Forceville (2024), a foreign scholar, focuses on how to identify and interpret visual and multimodal metaphors in commercial advertisements and feature films, points out the limitations of the FILMIP method, and emphasizes that the identification and interpretation of metaphors should be based on relevance rather than inconsistency.

In conclusion, the current research on multimodal metaphors in advertising involves a rich variety of advertising genres, and these studies not only enhance our understanding of advertising communication mechanisms, but also provide theoretical support and guidance for advertising creation and communication practices. However, there are still some problems, such as the lack of consideration of cultural differences, the research on multimodal metaphors is often limited to specific cultures or regions, and there is a lack of cross-cultural comparative analysis, which restricts the understanding of the universality and specificity of advertising metaphors. In the future, it can be strengthened toward the following points. First, cross-cultural comparative studies can be strengthened to explore the use and effects of multimodal metaphors in different cultural contexts in order to enhance the global adaptability of advertising. Second, long-term studies can be conducted to track the long-term effects of multimodal metaphors on audience perceptions and emotions, and how they shape brand and product images. By addressing existing shortcomings and looking ahead to future research directions, the understanding of multimodal metaphors in advertising can be further deepened to provide more effective strategies and methods for advertising practice.

2.1.2 Comics

The study of comics in multimodal metaphors has also become a widely explored topic. In the current academic field, comics studies mainly include political comics, news comics, and other types of comics. Although the comics selected by scholars relate to different themes and backgrounds, most of them strive to identify the metaphors in cartoons to reveal the meanings behind the metaphors, such as ideologies and political positions, and to explore how cartoons can reflect and shape the public's views on social and political events through multimodal metaphors.

In the study of political comics, Zhao Xufeng and Wu Yuxin (2024) selected the energy crisis political comic as an object, and analyzed how the creators consciously used cognitive tools for multi-dimensional interactions in the multimodal metaphorical scenario of "health and disease" to construct cognitive evaluations of the roles and relationships of the energy crisis and its related actors. In addition, they also analyzed the discourse strategies and socio-pragmatic functions behind the metaphorical scenes, explored how the comics reflected and shaped the public's perception of the energy crisis as a socio-political event through the multimodal metaphors, and revealed the role of comics in transmitting ideological and political stances. In another study, Ma Tinghui and Gao Yuan (2020) took the trade war between China and the United States as the background of their research and selected 100 American political comics with the theme of trade war. They revealed the ideologies and political stances behind the metaphors in these comics from both social and cognitive perspectives.

In the field of news comics, Chen Sunfu (2022) analyzes 104 news comics on "China-US relations" to explain the construction mechanism of metaphors and metonymy in these multimodal

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discourse pieces, to further clarify the attitude of the domestic mainstream news media towards China-US relations, and to reveal how news cartoons can convey information and shape the public's perception of China-US relations to the readers through multimodal metaphors. It reveals how news comics convey information to readers through multimodal metaphors, shaping the public's cognition and perception of the important sociopolitical event of China-US relations.

For the mainstream American comic book genre-superhero comics, foreign scholars Neil Cohn et al (2017) conducted an in-depth analysis. He analyzed the visual and linguistic features in American superhero comics, explored these features explored how these features work together to express multimodal metaphors, and found that the narrative structure in superhero comics has gradually shifted from text-based to visually-based over time, and that this shift has enabled such comics to more effectively convey deep social and political messages to readers. This study somewhat complements the research of foreign scholars Miloš Tasić and Dušan Stamenković (2015), who studied multimodal metaphors in numerous comics published by mainstream and independent publishers in the U.S. In addition to finding that comics are dominated through image dominance, text-dominant and complementary types of multimodal metaphors to convey information to readers, but also pointed out that mainstream American comics (mainly superhero comics) were found to have fewer multimodal metaphors due to their realism, and the way they were presented so that the metaphorical content was mostly conveyed through text.

All in all, these studies demonstrate the unique role of comics as a multimodal discourse in communicating complex social and political issues. However, as with research on advertising genres, there are still some limitations in the existing research on comics, such as the lack of audience analysis, and the lack of exploration of the comics creator factor for the construction of metaphoric interpretations and educational applications of comics metaphors. In the future, audience research can be strengthened by conducting more studies on how audiences interpret comic book metaphors, including cross-age and cross-cultural studies, in order to understand the social acceptance and influence of comic book metaphors. In addition to this, explore the application of comics in education, such as language learning, history education and cultural understanding, and how comics metaphors can be utilized to enhance learning. Once again in-depth interviews and research can also be conducted with comics creators to understand their motivations, sources of inspiration and self-awareness of metaphor use, which can help to understand metaphors in comics in a more comprehensive way.

2.1.3 Movies

In the field of multimodal metaphor research, movies, as a core genre, have attracted extensive attention from international and domestic scholars. While there are differences in the focus and perspective of the current research on multimodal metaphor in movies, most of them have explored how to enhance the audience's interpretation and understanding of the movie through multimodal metaphor.

For example, foreign scholar Rohdin (2009) focuses on the role of film technology in guiding the interpretation of metaphors, and his study mainly focuses on the role of film technology in multimodal metaphors, revealing how technical

means such as parallel editing, superimposition, editing and camera angles are carefully designed to guide the audience's interpretation and understanding of metaphors. This suggests that the movie provides the audience with clues and frameworks for understanding the metaphor through the skillful arrangement of technical aspects. In contrast to Rohdin, Kappelhoff and Müller (2011) emphasized the foundational role of the audience's sensory experience in the construction of metaphors. The study, on the other hand, takes a sensory experience perspective and argues that multimodal metaphors are based on the dynamic nature of sensory experience. They found that watching expressive actions in movies triggers the same sensory experience in the viewer as the expressive actions of the body accompanying speech, and this experience provides an "embodied" basis for the construction of metaphors, emphasizing the importance of the viewer's sensory involvement and emotional experience in watching a movie for the understanding of metaphors. The study by Urena Gomez-Moreno and Jose Manuel (2017) further expands the perspective of multimodal metaphors by combining the principles of psycho-cinematography with multimodal metaphors and expressive movement models to explore the process by which moviegoers construct metaphorical meanings within the dynamics of time. This study not only focuses on how viewers gradually understand metaphors during the viewing process, but also emphasizes the role of psycho-cinematics in complementing and enriching the study of multimodal metaphors in areas such as visual attention allocation, eye-movement fixation, motion and image-frame perception, and the mental activities behind emotional and narrative experiences.

In terms of domestic research, Wang Jin and Pan Lei (2020) provided a detailed interpretation of multimodal metaphors in the film *Joker*, analyzing the use of linguistic modal metaphors in the film, such as persona metaphors and diary metaphors, and found that the use of these metaphors significantly enhanced the audience's cognitive ability and emotional experience of the film. Duan Rongjuan and Li Xin (2019), on the other hand, analyzed the sci-film *The Wandering Earth* in four dimensions: metaphorical narrative, multiple symbols, imaginative world, and imaginative transcendence, on the basis of exploring the four basic hierarchical structures of multimodal metaphors and their philosophical connotations. Their research shows how the movie embodies the philosophical thinking of science fiction movies through multimodal metaphors, so that the audience can smoothly enter into the world of imagery, perceive the transcendence of meaning, and deeply interpret the oriental philosophy of the movie. These studies have not only enriched the connotation of multimodal metaphors, but also provided new perspectives and analytical frameworks for understanding the complex meanings in movies.

In conclusion, in the comparison of domestic and international studies in this genre, domestic scholars are mostly case studies, with a small sample capacity, and only selected a certain film to analyze the multimodal metaphors in it, etc. In the future, the use and function of multimodal metaphors in different movie genres (e.g. comedy, tragedy, sci-fi, horror, etc.) can be explored at the same time, as well as how they shape the styles and audience experiences of different movies. In addition to this, the study of multilevel metaphors can be strengthened by analyzing in depth the interaction of metaphors at multiple levels in the

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film, such as visual, auditory, and narrative, and how they work together to construct the meaning of the film. Through in-depth research in these directions, the complexity and diversity of multimodal metaphors in movies can be more comprehensively understood, as well as their role in cultural communication and audience experience. This can not only promote the development of film theory, but also provide new perspectives and tools for film creation and criticism.

2.2 Researches on Multimodal Metaphors in Other Genres

In recent years, the scope of multimodal metaphor research has been significantly expanded to cover diverse genres such as documentaries, posters, operas and theme covers. Based on this, this study will briefly review from these four genres briefly. Among these emerging research fields, multimodal metaphor analysis of documentaries is relatively rich and has been studied mainly by domestic scholars, but the sample capacity selected is small, as in the case of film genres. Through in-depth case studies of specific documentaries, researchers have revealed the key role of multimodal metaphors in national image shaping and communication, specifically the image of cultural China, the image of Chinese diplomacy, and the image of China in economic exchanges (Chen Wei, Peng Zijing, 2020; Zhao Yuqian, 2020; Sun Xiaomeng et al.)

Compared to documentaries, although the number of studies on multimodal metaphors in posters and themed covers is relatively small, their research focus is similar to that of documentary studies, mainly focusing on exploring the deeper meanings behind multimodal metaphors and their role in image construction. For posters, for example, Liu Man (2022) selected the poster of

the WeChat public number of the People's Daily, a mainstream media in China, as the research object, and applied the conceptual integration theory and combined it with the analysis of the poster's image composition to examine in depth the types of multimodal metaphors used by the mainstream new media in the poster of epidemic prevention and control, the characteristics of the discourse of epidemic prevention and control, and their roles in the construction of the country's image. Thematic covers such as Liu Yi and Zhang Wenye (2020) utilized the qualitative research software Nvivo12 to conduct a multimodal metaphor analysis of 94 economic thematic covers of Beijing Weekly from 2015-2019, aiming to reveal the types of multimodal metaphors and affective attitudinal tendencies in the graphic information of the covers, and then exploring the national economic image they portrayed.

In the field of opera, multimodal metaphor research is still in the initial exploration stage, and only a few master's thesis have made preliminary attempts. The research in this field needs to be further developed and deepened.

In conclusion, the genre scope of multimodal metaphor research is expanding, and corresponding studies can be further added to these more emerging genres mentioned above, which not only can enrich our understanding of the application of metaphors in different media, but also is of great significance to the shaping and dissemination of various images, such as the image of the country. The study of documentaries shows the important role of multimodal metaphors sound, visual and other modalities in shaping the national image, while the study of posters and thematic covers reveals how the mainstream media construct and disseminate

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specific images through visual rhetoric. Although the study of multimodal metaphors in the field of opera is still in its preliminary stage, its exploration provides new perspectives and possibilities for future research. The development of these studies also shows that multimodal metaphors are not only an object of study in linguistics and semiotics, but also a non-negligible component in the study of cultural communication and international relations. With the advancement of technology and the diversification of media, the study of multimodal metaphors will become more in-depth, and their role in cross-cultural communication and international image building will become more significant. Future research can further explore the diversity and complexity of multimodal metaphors in these genres and how they affect the cognitive and emotional responses of the audience, thus providing deeper insights into cross-cultural communication and international communication.

III. CONCLUSION

The study of multimodal metaphors has become increasingly important in the academic field, and the expansion of the scope of its research genres has not only enriched the application scenarios of metaphor theory, but also provided new perspectives and tools for cultural communication and international image building. From advertisements, comics, movies to documentaries, posters, operas and other diversified genres, the research on multimodal metaphors has been deepening, revealing the uniqueness and complexity of the application of metaphors in different media. From a macro perspective, despite the expanding field of multimodal metaphor research, current studies often face the

problem of small sample capacity, which limits the broad applicability and depth of the findings. In addition, many studies remain at the stage of superficial application and analysis of theories, failing to dig deeper into the deep mechanism and complexity of the interaction between multimodal metaphors and audiences, a situation that leads to the problem of research duplicity. For example, similar research methodologies and theoretical frameworks have been repeatedly applied to different research cases, while innovation and in-depth exploration are lacking. Future research on individual genres can start from in order to expand sample capacity, deepen theoretical applications, innovative research methods, interdisciplinary research, refinement and expansion of theoretical models, educational applications, and creator research. Through these efforts, multimodal metaphor research can be promoted to a deeper level, providing richer and deeper perspectives for understanding and applying multimodal metaphors.

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