

# Multimodal Research on Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play

## -- Taking “Stealing Celetil Herb” as an Example

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### Abstract

As a local opera, Huanxian Daoqing shadow play is an important national intangible cultural heritage. Huanxian Daoqing shadow play contains performance, action, color and other elements. It is a comprehensive art with typical multimodal characteristics. However, up to now, no multimodal perspective has been found in the translation studies of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play. Based on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s visual grammar, a discourse analysis and translation strategy research on the typical track of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play “stealing celetil grass” from the perspective of representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning are made in this paper, which provides a new idea for the text interpretation of local opera and would be a basis for later translation practice.

### Keywords

Huanxian Daoqing shadow play; Multimodality; Translation strategy.

## 1. Introduction

The folk culture in Northwest China is very old and long, rich and brilliant, which is an important part of Chinese civilization. Because of the vast land and numerous nationalities in Northwest China, there are many regional characteristics in cultural inheritance. In Northwest China, most of the folk arts are grounded and colorful, which is an important boost for the spiritual world of the region [1]. Among many folk cultures in Northwest China, Huanxian Daoqing shadow play of Gansu Province is an important representation. It is loved by farmers for thousands of years and becomes an artistic display of farming culture [2]. Shadow play contains rich national values, and it also meets the new needs of the times in artistic expression. It can build an important bridge between the masses and the nature, play a good role as a link, enrich the spiritual world of rural people, and provide them with a wide range of entertainment space. In 2006, it was listed in the first batch of representative works of intangible cultural heritage in China, and has performed abroad on behalf of China’s intangible cultural heritage for over 15 times.

## 2. Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play

Huanxian county is located in the northwest of Qingyang. Daoqing originated from Taoism and is related to Taoist music. Daoqing shadow play is a form of drama performance based on Taoist thought. It has two main branches, poetic praise and Qupai style, Huanxian Daoqing shadow play belongs to Qupai style, it originated from traditional Chinese folk art---Yugu Daoqing[3]. In the process of development, it has absorbed the local characteristics of Huanxian County, combined with the traditional shadow play art and Daoqing, and formed the Huanxian Daoqing shadow play under the background of the culture of Loess Plateau.

Huanxian Daoqing shadow play is a native traditional art in Gansu Province. It combines the characteristics of local folk songs and Shaanxi shadow play, including performance, action, color, literature and other elements, and is a comprehensive art. Huanxian Daoqing shadow play combines a variety of art forms, such as Mongolian folk music, to express the twists and turns of historical events in the elaborate shadow play props, and has become an indispensable art expression form in various local folk cultural activities. In terms of its form and nature, it is a propaganda means of Taoism and has become one of the cultural treasures of modern folk art [4].

Huanxian Daoqing shadow play is a comprehensive art, which is composed of literature, music, dance, performance, make-up, clothing, brickwork and other elements. It has the characteristics of multi-mode and multi-symbol system. In recent years, scholars focus on the cross-cultural communication of elite culture and classic literary works. Few people pay attention to folk culture, especially the research on shadow play has been stagnant for a long period of time, and the research on Huanxian Daoqing shadow play is relatively small [5]. Scholars mainly focus on the repertoire transmission, protection and development, the research on its multimodality and translation strategy has not been involved. Based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual image grammar, in this paper the author makes a textual analysis of the typical track of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play "stealing fairy grass" and studies the corresponding translation strategies, so as to better guide the translation practice of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play.

### 3. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory

Multimodal text refers to the text using two or more symbol modes. In multimodal text, language, hearing, vision and other symbolic resources are interdependent and inseparable, forming a coherent whole[6]. One of the earliest researchers of multimodal discourse analysis is R. Barthes in *Rhetoric of the Image* of 1977, he discussed the interaction between image and language in the sense expression; Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen studied not only the theoretical construction of multimodality, but also the multimodal phenomena in mathematical discourse, Royce, T. (2002) studied the complementation of different symbols in multimodal discourse and the synergy of multimodality in second language teaching. In 2003, multimodal discourse analysis was first studied in China, in which, the author introduces Kress's multimodal image analysis framework in detail, and points out the significance of multimodal discourse research in linguistics and language education. Since then, some researchers have constructed new analysis indicators and models on the basis of overseas research. So far, the research of multimodal discourse is still in the initial stage, few books have been published, and only a small number of papers have been published. Among them, Hu Zhuanglin's "multimodalization in social semiotics research" (2007) discusses the differences between multimodal semiotics and multimedia semiotics, and introduces computational semiotics, which has the dual characteristics of media and mode, and he points out that the cultivation of multimodal reading ability should be paid attention to when human beings enter the age of multimodal social semiotics. Other studies include Li Zhanzi's (2013) study of multimodal discourse with the theory of systemic functional linguistics. Zhang Delu's analytical framework is divided into four levels: cultural level, context level, content level and expression level. In recent years, multimodal discourse analysis theory has been mainly applied to TV advertisements, photographs and movie posters, such as Lei Rong and Qin Xiugui (2015).

In the book *Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design* of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in 1996, the framework of visual grammar in multimodal discourse analysis is constructed, which is also the most influential research achievement in the field of visual symbols [7]. Based on the framework, a wealth of visual symbols could be studied, from children's graffiti to textbook illustrations, from photography magazines to painting art, and

even three-dimensional forms such as sculpture and toys. In 2006, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen added discussions on animation and color, images, web images, and visual communication in the future. Based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, this theoretical framework could be used for analyzing visual modality, which provides a theoretical basis and practical analysis method for readers to study visual symbols. This framework extends Halliday's three pure functions of language, namely conceptual function, interpersonal function and textual function, to the visual symbol system, and correspondingly creates representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning to analyze visual images.

Visual grammar discourse analysis breaks the original one-dimensional barrier of understanding which only uses text information to convey meaning. It holds that in interpersonal communication, vision sense also participates in the process of meaning construction, which is of great significance to the discourse analysis and translation studies of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play. This paper proposes to re-examine the study of drama translation from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis so as to provide new ideas and methods for the translation of drama.

#### 4. Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play Under Visual Grammar

The representational meaning corresponds to the ideational function of functional grammar. According to the different characteristics of visual symbols, Kress and Van Leeuwen divide images into narrative representation and conceptual representation. Narrative representation includes action process, reactive process, speech process and mental process, and conversion process. The representation of concepts includes classification process, analytical process and symbolic process [8]. Interactive meaning is about the relationship between the cartographer, the object in the picture and the viewer, and the attitude of the viewer towards the object in the picture. It consists of three elements: contact, social distance and attitude. Compositional meaning corresponds to the textual function of functional grammar. Just as the grammar of language determines how words form clauses, sentences and discourses, visual grammar will determine how people, places and things described form visual statements with different degrees of complexity [9]. The compositional meaning can be realized through three elements: information value, salience and viewfinder.

To a large extent, shadow play has something in common with traditional opera, both of which point to stage performance. Huanxian shadow play writers use language as the medium and performance as the way to stimulate the audiences' imagination and feelings. The libretto fully shows the relationship between the character and the event, and the plot and conflict are deduced between the lines. Huanxian shadow play has following features: language and literature are used for performance, performance has freehand brushwork, and the combination of singing and acting is outstanding, which determines that Huanxian shadow play transmits a large amount of information in terms of vision and has rich visual mode. Taking the classic play "stealing celestial herbs" as an example, this paper focuses on the meaning of the play constructed by visual mode and its enlightenment on the translation strategy of Huanxian shadow play.

Stealing celestial herbs is based on the legend of Leifeng Pagoda written by Fang Chengpei in Qing Dynasty [10]. It mainly tells the story of Bai Suzhen stealing fairy grass for Xu Xian. Fahai, a monk of Jinshan Temple, resents Xu Xian's happy marriage with Bai Suzhen and warns Xu Xian that Bai Suzhen is changed by snake demon. During the Dragon Boat Festival, Xu Xian obeyed Fahai's advice and persuaded Bai to drink realgar wine. Bai Suzhen showed her true shape, and Xu Xian was scared to death. Bai Suzhen sneaks into Kunlun Mountain and steals Ganoderma lucidum herb, which is stopped by crane and deer immortals. Bai Suzhen is

defeated. Just at this time, the Antarctic fairy gives Ganoderma lucidum to save Xu Xian out of sympathy.

**Table 1.** Detailed Analysis of the Sentences of “Stealing Celestial Herbs” under Visual Grammar

Number	Sentences	Detailed Analysis under Visual Grammar
1	Celestial Lingchih Herb is a priceless treasure, It can keep fit by balancing Yin and Yang.	Representational Meaning: narrative representation Interactive Meaning: providing information, objectivity Compositional Meaning: focal length highlighting
2	It can make pills and endure life. Following Jade Emperor’s order, I am guarding this precious herb.	Representational Meaning: verbal and psychological process of narrative representation, Interactive Meaning: providing information, the middle of social distance, and subjectivity Compositional Meaning: the central edge of information value
3	My master asked me to keep guard over the Celestial herbs on this magic rock. Now I have seen an evil wind. Some evil spirits are bound to come and steal the herbs. Let me wait here.	Representational Meaning: verbal and psychological process of narrative representation Interactive meaning: providing information, subjectivity Compositional meaning: central edge of the information value, and strengthening the relevance
4	On the Longevity Hill grow many exotic flowers and rare herbs. White clouds are seeing drifting outside the cavity.	Representational Meaning: narrative representation Interactive meaning: providing information, more subjective Compositional meaning: the information value belongs to the left and right division, focal length highlighting, and relevance in framing.
5	It is really a quiet and tasteful fairyland. Seeing the boy sitting elegantly on the rock, let me explain my purpose politely first.	Representational Meaning: verbal and psychological process of narrative representation Interactive meaning: providing information, close-up in social distance, and subjectivity Compositional meaning: upper and lower division, the focal length highlighting, and the relevance in framing
6	On the Longevity Hill grow many exotic flowers and rare herbs. White clouds are seeing drifting outside the cavity.	Representational Meaning: narrative representation Interactive meaning: providing information, and subjectivity Compositional meaning: the left and right division, focal length highlighting, and the relevance in framing
7	It is really a quiet and tasteful fairyland. Seeing the boy sitting elegantly on the rock, let me explain my purpose politely first.	Representational Meaning: narrative representation Interactive meaning: providing information, and subjectivity Compositional meaning: the left and right division, focal length highlighting, and the relevance in framing

Based on the framework of visual grammar, this paper tries to explain the visual modal meaning of “stealing fairy grass” sentence by sentence by using the research method of multimodal discourse analysis, and analyzes the representational, interactive and compositional meanings of sentences in it. The translation by Zhengxue Du in the book of *A Handbook of Interpretation and Translation* in 2016 is used in the following analysis [10]. The detailed analysis are shown in Table 1.

Celestial Lingchih Herb is a priceless treasure, It can keep fit by balancing Yin and Yang.

This sentence introduces the value and function of Lingchih herb. It exaggerates that Lingchih herb can regulate the body's Yin and Yang. After the balance of Yin and Yang, the body's resistance will naturally improve, so as to achieve the effect of treatment and prevention of disease. Therefore, Lingchih herb has high medical value, which is called priceless treasure. This sentence centers around Lingchih herb, it belongs to the process of narrative representation in the sense of visual grammar. From the perspective of interactive meaning, it provides the readers with the function and value of Lingchih herb, and the attitude is objective. In terms of compositional meaning, the focus is on Lingchih herb, which belongs to focal length highlighting. It can make pills and endure life. Following Jade Emperor's order, I am guarding this precious herb.

This sentence is said by Crane Boy to himself. Although the sentence uses the form of question, it actually conveys the positive meaning. He is thinking that Lingchih herb can cure and prevent diseases and prolong life. When he was ordered to take care of such precious things, he would not dare to be slack. In terms of visual grammar, it belongs to the verbal and psychological process of narrative representation; in interactive meaning, it provides information, the middle of social distance, and subjectivity in attitude; in compositional meaning, it belongs to the central edge of information value, and gradually strengthens the connection between “I” and Lingchih herb.

My master asked me to keep guard over the Celestial herbs on this magic rock. Now I have seen an evil wind. Some evil spirits are bound to come and steal the herbs. Let me wait here.

Crane Boy meditates on a sacred rock and is ordered to guard the Lingchih herb. Suddenly, a gust of wind blows. Crane Boy infers that the wind indicates that a monster is going to steal the Lingchih herb, so he is ready to wait for the monster here and defend the Lingchih herb to the death. In terms of visual grammar, this sentence belongs to the verbal and psychological process of narrative representation. In the interactive meaning, he wants to tell the audience about his inference and guess according to the change of the environment, and the attitude is subjective. In compositional meaning, it belongs to the central edge of the information value, focuses on the change of the environment, and strengthens the relevance in the scene.

On the Longevity Hill grow many exotic flowers and rare herbs. White clouds are seeing drifting outside the cavity.

Bai Suzhen came to Longevity Hill to pick up Lingchih herb. Originally, she only heard that there were many strange flowers and plants in the hill. Now after seeing them with her own eyes, she thought the white clouds floating outside the cave. This sentence belongs to the process of narrative representation in terms of visual grammar. In interactive meaning, telling the audience about the geographical environment and personal subjective feelings of Longevity Hill belongs to providing information. In the middle of social distance, the attitude is more subjective. In compositional meaning, the information value belongs to the left and right division, focal length highlighting, and the relevance in framing.

It is really a quiet and tasteful fairyland. Seeing the boy sitting elegantly on the rock, let me explain my purpose politely first.

This is what Bai Suzhen saw, heard and felt after she came to Longevity Hill. She thinks that Longevity Hill really deserves its reputation. The environment is elegant, just like a paradise in

the world. Seeing the Crane Boy meditating on the sacred stone, she thinks the boy's temperament is extraordinary. The representational meaning of this sentence is the verbal and psychological process of narrative representation. In interactive meaning, telling the audience about Bai Suzhen's main feelings about Longevity Hill and Crane Boy belongs to providing information, close-up in social distance, and subjectivity in attitude. In compositional meaning, the information value belongs to the upper and lower division, the focal length highlighting, and the relevance in framing.

## 5. Translation Strategies of Huanxian Daoqing Shadow Play from A Multimodal Perspective

Huanxian Daoqing shadow play belongs to appreciation art, language load rich visual modal information, conveys representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning. The translation is not only a kind of text translation, but also requires the translator to excavate the visual modal information in combination with the visual grammar, comprehensively consider, make reasonable choices, and convey it in an appropriate form in their translation. Based on Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal visual grammar framework, this paper analyzes "stealing celestial herb", a classic piece of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play, and concludes that the visual modal information conveyed by the translator in the translation mainly includes the behavior process in representational meaning, the modality in interactive meaning and the information value, highlighting mode and scene in compositional meaning. The visual symbols of translation involve action, scenery, color, quantity, visual allusions and so on.

The representational meaning is mainly marked as action. Huanxian Daoqing shadow play pays equal attention to singing and acting, which is mainly expressed through the action of the characters in the visual mode. The interactive meaning of images is mainly marked as modality, and the saturation, discrimination and coordination of colors are common symbols. The description of color in drama often makes the language vivid, and the color mark in the language is easier to recognize than other visual symbols. The compositional meaning of an image is mainly marked as the information value, the selection of images and the way of highlighting, including the layout of information value, the number of images, the angle of selection, the cultural connotation of the image, and whether the foreground processing is done by means of color and angle. The images selected in Huanxian Daoqing shadow play are mostly loaded with cultural connotations, so translators should pay attention to excavate them in the original works. The foregrounding part is the significance of the play.

## 6. Summary

According to the characteristics of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play in terms of language and action, this study uses the theory and research results of multimodal discourse analysis, and refers to Gunther Kress and Theo van's visual grammar framework, this paper makes a discourse analysis of the representative work of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play "stealing celestial herb", and analyzes the representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning of a song sentence by sentence. It holds that the translation process of Huanxian Daoqing shadow play is not only a kind of text translation, but also requires the translator to excavate the visual modal information by combining with visual grammar.

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