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Persuasion in American Animated Movie Trailers (2010-2018):

A Study in Multimodal Discourse Analysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of MA Degree in Linguistics

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Abstract

Movie trailers are fundamental promotional tools that companies and studios cannot do without nowadays. Thus, this study attempts to investigate the persuasive means by which movie trailer producers persuade the viewers to watch the promoted films.

To achieve this goal, the researcher conducts a multimodal discourse analysis of nine American animated movie trailers produced between 2010 and 2018 under the adventure category. The promoted films are *Tangled* (2010), *Brave* (2012), *The Croods* (2013), *Big Hero 6* (2014), *How to Train Your Dragon 2* (2014), *Moana* (2016), *Coco* (2017), *The Boss Baby* (2017) and *Incredibles 2* (2018). These animated movie trailers have been chosen owing to the fame and reputation of their producing companies. Moreover, the high box office of the promoted films proves the effectiveness and the persuasiveness of the promotional trailers. This study employs Baldry and Thibault's (2006) multimodal transcription model, Maier's (2006) model, and Cohen's (1998) music model in order to analyze the different modes in the data. These tools of analysis are employed under the persuasion framework of Cockcroft and Cockcroft (2005) as well as van Dijk's (1998, 2006, & 2013) concept of persuasion. The significance of this study stems from its interdisciplinary nature as it integrates approaches to linguistics and cinematography. Moreover, the study depends on the mixed approach. In other words, it is both qualitative and quantitative. It is concluded that the expressive images, the appealing music, and the

touching text all complement each other and harmonize to persuade the viewers to the greatest extent to watch the promoted movie. No sole mode works independently of the others or persuades separately. Moreover, playing on the viewers' emotions is a major strategy employed to achieve high degrees of persuasion.

Keywords: Persuasion, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), Movie Trailers, Music, Emotion

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Full Term
CO	Coding orientation
CP	Camera position
CR	Colour
CS	Close shot
D	Distance
f	Loud
F (in tempo)	Fast
ff	Very loud
HP	Horizontal perspective
LS	Long shot
M	Median
MCS	Medium close shot
MLS	Medium long shot
n	Normal
p	Soft
pp	Very soft
S	Slow
SE	Special effects
T	Time
TR	Transition
VC	Visual collocation
VCS	Very close shot
VF	Visual focus
VLS	Very long shot
VP	Vertical perspective
VS	Visual salience

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Context of the Study

Meaning is an important notion in human life which constitutes the basis of interaction and communication. Language with its words, phrases, and clauses allows people to communicate and understand each other. However, it is not the sole meaning-making resource. An image can be meaningful too. It does not have words or sentences like language, but it does deliver a message. In addition to image, sound is a meaning-making resource. A piece of music or a sound of a protesting mob can be informative. It can tell just like language. Hence, there are several meaning-making resources among which are the verbal mode, the visual mode, and the aural mode.

Multimodal discourse analysis is an approach that investigates the different modes in human communication. It is located within the field of social semiotics which is concerned with how people communicate in certain social contexts. Several data have been investigated and analyzed using multimodal discourse analysis. Print genres such as newspapers, magazines, and graphic novels have been analyzed in terms of image, color, and text. In addition, multimedia such as TV commercials have been analyzed in terms of sound, image, and music as well. It follows that multimodal discourse analysis is not confined to a certain type of data.

Animated movie trailers which are multimodal texts can be analyzed using a multimodal approach. Since this kind of data is mainly produced to persuade the audience to watch the animated movie itself, the way the different modes convey meaning and affect the audience is worthy of investigation.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study stems from its interdisciplinary nature. The study integrates approaches to linguistics and cinematography. The study builds on three main models: Baldry and Thibault (2006), Maier (2006), and Cohen (1998). Baldry and Thibault's (2006) model is employed to analyze the moving image with its different perspectives such as camera movement and distance. Maier's (2006) model builds on Labov's (1972) work which focuses on the concept of evaluation. Maier's model is used to analyze the verbal mode which includes speech and song. Moreover, the evaluative devices are extracted from the three modes through this model. Maier's (2006) model also allows the researcher to divide the trailers into promotional stages in addition to Barnwell (2019) which allows the researcher to divide the trailer into acts. Cohen's (1998) model helps the researcher analyze music and its functions. As for the sound effects, they are transcribed so as to extract the evaluative devices in them. Thus, the different models in the study make it comprehensive.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The present study aims at investigating the generic structure of nine animated movie trailers; examining how meaning is expressed through the visual, aural, and verbal modes in the data under investigation; revealing the ideology of the producer; and finally uncovering how animated movie trailers serve as persuasive structures in multimodal form.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How are the data under investigation generically structured as narratives through Barnwell (2019) and Maier's (2006) model?
2. How does the visual mode in the data contribute to the construction of meaning by means of Baldry and Thibault (2006)?
3. How far does music in particular contribute to the construction of meaning by means of Cohen's (1998) model?
4. How does the verbal mode in the data contribute to the construction of meaning via Maier's (2006) model?
5. What are the visual, aural, and verbal evaluative devices used in the data under investigation by means of Maier's (2006) model?
6. How does the combination of the visual, aural, and verbal modes and the evaluative devices serve the producer's persuasive purpose by means of the frameworks of Cockcroft and Cockcroft (2005) and van Dijk (1998, 2006, & 2013) that are originally used to analyze written texts and not visual ones?

1.5 Data Selection

The data under investigation are nine animated movie trailers. They were downloaded from YouTube in order to be analyzed. The classification of the nine animated movie trailers is clear in Table 1.