

THE REPRESENTATION OF KINSHIP AND RACE IN INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

In this essay we attempt to study the kinship and race factor in the images of English language teaching books (Four Corners (2)– American English File (2)– Interchange (2)) based on visual social semiotics according to Halliday's Functional linguistics and clearly followed by Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006 (1996). The main goal of this research is to analyze English language teaching books widely and to investigate their different discourse, social and cultural outputs and investigating the role of images in this intercultural discourse work, cultural differences and their reflection in English language teaching textbooks, ideological outputs of images and modality in the images of mentioned textbooks are the minor goals of this research. This research has been done in Iran, Tehran, Islamic Azad university-science and research branch- faculty of language and literature, department of linguistics. It seems images of English language teaching books to non-English language speakers lack kinship and race partiality but this research concluded that these books have racial approach and they picture ideal English society for their audiences who are EFL learners and for this purpose they use pictorial and discourse semiotic tricks. There are 1140 images in these three mentioned books. We have studied all these images totally. The methodology of this research is descriptive and analytical.

Keywords: *Visual Social Semiotics, Kinship and Race, Representational Meaning, Interactive Meaning, Compositional Meaning*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays English language teaching books to non-English speakers are highly multi-modal. They use visual and written texts beside each other. But what do the images of these books suggest? They apparently help us learn English language more easily. But it seems that they represent the patterns of a culture and dominant discursal structure in that culture.

They continuously picture English language society. But how do they do this? In this essay by analyzing three images of above-mentioned books we attempt to find an appropriate answer for this question. Our study is based on Halliday's Functional linguistics and clearly followed by Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006 (1996) in which images are studied in three levels: representational, interactive and compositional meaning. This essay is an attempt at investigating this question:

How kinship and race are represented in the images of mentioned books? In relation to the above question, there is this hypothesis: It seems that the images of the English language teaching books to non-English language speakers attempt to show an atmosphere which lacks kinship and race partiality. But this research shows that there are kinship and race partiality in the images of these books.

Metafunction

The concept of metafunction has been taken from Halliday. The three metafunctions that he has named them are ideational, interpersonal and textual. These three metafunctions are not limited to written and spoken texts (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

They are used in all semiotic modes. These three metafunctions are considered for images in visual social semiotics. Kress and Van Leeuwen have used representational, interactive and compositional meanings instead of ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions respectively.

Research Article

Critical Linguistics

Critical linguistics insists that all representation is mediated, molded by the value- systems that are ingrained in the medium (language in this case) used for representation; it challenges common sense by pointing out that something could have been represented some other way, with a very different significance.

This is not, in fact, simply a question of ‘distortion’ or ‘bias’: there is not necessarily any true reality that can be unveiled by critical practice. There are simply varying representations.

Criticism aims to render transparent what had previously been hidden, and in doing so it initiates a process of self-reflection, in individuals or groups, designed to achieve liberation from the domination of past constraints (Connerton, 1976).

Representational Meaning

“There are two types of participants involved in every semiotic act, interactive and represented participants.

The former are the participants in the act of communication- the participants who speak and listen or write and read, make images or view them, whereas the latter are the participants who constitute the subject matter of communication; that is the people, place, and things represented in and by speech, writing or image, the participants about whom or which we are speaking or writing or producing images” (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

In the representational meaning level, images have narrative or conceptual structure. In narrative processes there is a vector.

Vector connects the participants to each other. When participants are connected by a vector, they are presented as doing something to or for each other.

“When a narrative visual proposition has two participants, one is the Actor, the other the Goal. The Actor is the participant from which the vector emanates, or which itself, in whole or in part, forms the vector. Actor is the one who does the deed.

Goal is the one to whom the deed is done.

“When images or diagrams have only one participant, this participant is usually an Actor. The resulting structure we call non-transactional. The action in a non-transactional action process has no Goal. The non-transactional process is therefore analogous to the intransitive verb in language (the verb that does not take an object)” (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

When the vector is formed by an eyeline, by the direction of the glance of one or more of the represented participants, the process is relational, and we will speak not of Actors, but of Reactors, and not of Goals, but of Phenomena.

The Reactor, the participant who does the looking, must necessarily be humans, or a human-like animal- a creature with visible eyes that has distinct pupils, and capable of facial expression.

The Phenomenon is the participant at whom or which the Reactor is looking (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

Conceptual images can be classification, analytical or symbolic.

Classification processes relate participants to each other in terms of taxonomy: at least one set of participants will play the role of subordinates with respect to at least one other participant, the super ordinate. Analytical processes relate participants in terms of a part-whole structure. They involve two kinds of participants: one Carrier (the whole) and any number of Possessive Attributes (the parts). Symbolic processes are about what a participant means or is.

Interactive Meaning

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) have extended Holliday’s theory of speech functions to images. Images can also either offer or demand. This is realized by the system of gaze. The gaze demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her (ibid.122). By participant’s eye lines, connect the participants with the viewer. Contact is established, even if it is only on an imaginary level. If such a look is not, the image is an ‘offer’. It then offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006). “There is a second dimension to the interactive meaning of images, related to the size of frame, to the choice between close

Research Article

up, medium-shot, long-shot and so on. The choice of distance can suggest different relations between represented participants and viewers. The close shot (close up) shows heads and shoulders of the subject and the very close shot (extreme close-up, big close-up) anything less than that. The medium close shot cuts off the subject approximately at the waist. The medium shot shows the full figure knees. The medium long shot shows the full figure. In the long shot the human figure occupies about half the height of the frame and the very long shot is anything wider than that” (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

Horizontal angle is a function of the relation between the frontal plane of the image-producer and the frontal plane of the represented participants. The two can either be parallel, aligned with one another, or from one angle, diverge from one another (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

Textbooks of film appreciation never fail to mention camera height as an important means of expression in cinematography. A high angle makes the subject look small and insignificant; a low angle makes it look imposing and awesome. Low angles generally give an impression of superiority and triumph. High angles tend to diminish the individual, to flatten him morally by reducing him to ground level (Martin, 1968).

Compositional Meaning

Composition relates the representational and interactive meanings of the image to each other through three interrelated systems:

Informative Value: The placement of participants that relate them to each other and to the viewer endows them with the specific informational value attached to the various zones of the image: left and right, top and bottom, centre and margin.

Saliency: The elements (participants as well as representational and interactive syntagms) are made to attract the viewer’s attention to different degrees, as realized by such factors as placement in the foreground or background, relative size, contrasts in tonal value (or color), different in sharpness, etc.

Framing: The presence or absence of framing devices disconnects or connects elements of the image, signifying that they belong or do not belong together in some sense (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

The elements placed on the left are presented as given, the elements placed on the right as new. For something to be given means that is presented as something the viewer already knows, as a familiar and agreed upon point of departure for the message. For something to be new means that it is presented as something which is not yet known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon by the viewer, hence as something to which the viewer must pay special attention (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

If in a visual composition, some of the constituent elements are placed in the upper part, and other different elements in the lower part of the picture space or the page, then what has been placed on the top is presented as the Ideal, and what has been at the bottom is put forward as the Real (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

For something to be presented as Centre means that is presented as the nucleus of the information to which all the other elements are in some sense subservient. The margins are these ancillary, dependent elements (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

Modality

One of the crucial issues in communication is the question of the reliability of messages. Is what we see or hear true, factual, real, or it is a lie, a fiction, something outside reality? We routinely attach more credibility to some kinds of messages than to others.

The credibility of newspapers for instance, rests on the knowledge that photographs do not lie and that reports are more reliable than stories. Unfortunately we also know that while the camera may not lie – or not much, at any rate- those who use it and its images can and do (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

Research Article

Kinship and Race in Narrative Structure

A Pair work Match the phrases in columns A and B to make statements about yourself. Then take turns reading your sentences and giving short responses.

- | A | B |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. I don't like | a. talking on a cell phone. |
| 2. I'm not very good at | b. working with a group or team. |
| 3. I'm good at | c. solving other people's problems. |
| 4. I hate | d. sitting in long meetings. |
| 5. I can't stand | e. commuting by bicycle. |
| 6. I'm interested in | f. eating lunch out every day. |
| 7. I don't mind | g. managing my time. |
| 8. I enjoy | h. learning foreign languages. |

A: I don't like commuting by bicycle.
B: Neither do I.

B Group work Complete the phrases in column A with your own information. Then take turns reading your statements. Ask questions to get more information.



Figure 1
(Interchange 2, P. 65)

In the **representational meaning** level, figure 1 is narrative. It is performative. The participant of the image is commuting by bicycle. Although in reality the Whites ride the bicycle too, but in these books they drive, they use public transportation for commuting or going to university. They complain about traffic and not finding parking spaces. It is clear that the multiplicity of the vehicles causes traffic and it also causes people not to find spaces for parking. Because the Whites are always driving or using public transportation in these books, they are always complaining about pollution too. Sometimes one part of an airport is pictured in the images of these books which show that the Whites travel by airplane too. Sometimes learning driving is pictured which again shows the importance of driving. This black person's clothes are not special clothes for cycling. He is commuting. In the written text of this multimodal text, the word "I" is repeated. The approach which is shown by these (I)s is a negative approach. For example, I don't like....., I'm not very good at....., I hate....., I can't stand....., I don't mind.....and I don't like commuting by bicycle. Because of all these negative cases, we see a black person. This image has narrative non-transactional structure. The black person is Actor, the path on which he moves is vector but his destination (the Goal) is not clear. The represented participants of this image are this person's clothes and his bag, bicycle, trees and etc. His clothes show that his cycling is not for recreation but as it is observed in this image and it is mentioned in two parts of the written text, he is commuting by bicycle. Nobody accompanies him. His cycling shows that as if the Blacks are accustomed to physical activity and they cannot abandon it. Figure 1 shows that although the Black's current situation is better than the past, it means not only they did not have right to study in the past but also they had to do hard jobs, but nowadays they can study and do official and light jobs.

In the **interactive meaning** level, this image is a demand because the person who is in its frame is looking at the viewers. He has contact with them. So he is interactive participant. The distance of this image is medium shot and it has horizontal angle. Because of this it creates the sense of similarity and equivalence between this black person and the viewers.

When we study the **compositional meaning** of figure 1, we observe that in this multimodal text, the written text is on the left. So it is given information and the visual text is on the right and hence it is new information. A frame separates visual text from the written text because their subjects are different from each other. Only in two parts (e. commuting by bicycle and I don't like commuting by bicycle.) visual and written texts are related to each other. Since the visual text is colorful and bright, it is salient.

Finally, we should notify that since this image is a color photo, its **modality** is so high. The image-producer by the choice of this kind of modality is stating that everything which is perceived and seen in it is pure reality. The subject of this image which is transportation is the reason for its high modality. Transportation is a tangible subject. At least in the mentioned books, the images in which the Whites are cycling are paintings or caricatures. Paintings and caricatures have low modality. They change their

Research Article

subject into a fiction or dream. By the help of this kind of modality, the image-producer indirectly states that in reality the Whites drive to work or they use public transportation. They never commute by bicycle. Only in one case in the written and not in the visual text of these books a woman states that she hates commuting by bus. So she has saved her money to buy a bicycle. She is commuting by bicycle now. So she feels happier and healthier. Even this case connotatively states that this woman is cycling just for being healthy and happy. Her cycling does not have any other reasons.

Kinship and Race in Conceptual Structures



The Amazing Race
the U.S.
Pairs race one another around
the world. The winners receive a
million dollars.

Figure 2
(Four Corners 2, P. 63)

From **representational meaning** viewpoint, the image has conceptual structure and it shows successful athletes who have won the races. These athletes do not do anything. They are fixed. They have posed. Conceptual images can be analytical, classification or symbolic. This image has symbolic usage. Its participants are the symbol of successful people. In this photo people of different races without any discrimination are beside each other. The conceptual usage of this image is this: “If you deserve group activity, you will be successful.” The buildings, grasses and people’s clothes are represented participants. The three important factors of contact, distance and point of view are studied in **interactive meaning**. As it is observed, the people inside the frame of the image are so intimate with each other. There is no distance among them. All of them are happy. They are laughing. They are looking at the viewers and they are interacting with them. So they are interactive participants and this image is a demand image. All the people in the image are well-dressed. They are satisfied with being beside each other. The message of this image is this: “Attract other cultures and participate in athletic and other activities with each other. Your complexion is not important anymore. Everybody who does his best can be successful. Since all people’s figure plus distant spaces have occupied the frame of this image, it is long shot. The image has horizontal angle so it creates the sense of similarity and equivalence among the athletes and the viewers. The viewers feel that these athletes are like themselves. The image-producer and hence, willy- nilly, the viewers are involved with the participants of this photo. Because people are foregrounded and the buildings are in the background, the people and not the buildings are salient. People are very important in this image. The buildings are not the subject of this photo. They are not that much important. The subject of this photo is showing people of different races next to each other. People of different races are in the same frame in this image which shows the Whites and the Blacks are in intimate relation.

From **compositional meaning** viewpoint, in this multimodal text, the visual text is above the written text so it is Ideal and the written text which is below the visual text, is Real. It explains the visual text. This photo shows the happiness which is the result of victory. This image is a color photo, it is bright, compared to the written text it is bigger; it appears first, so it is salient. A frame separates these two texts from each other and from the outside world, but this frame is so weak. So there is minimum separation between them. Both visual and written texts point to one thing (racing and winning). The separation of the inside world of the image from the outside world is weak too. In the manner that the viewer can imagine

Research Article

himself in the photo and beside its participants. He can imagine that one day like these people, he can be successful.

Since figure 2 is a color photo, it has high **modality**. By the choice of high modality for this image, the image-producer indirectly expresses that nowadays people’s complexion is not important for us. If they have merit, they will be successful. Our relationship with these successful people is so friendly. By studying the written text, we perceive that these races are held all over the world. They do not belong to special races, classes or sexes. All the above-mentioned things make the subject of this photo. The image-producer has pictured these subjects by a photo in order to express that they are pure reality and we are not dreaming.

Kinship and Race in Narrative- Conceptual Structures

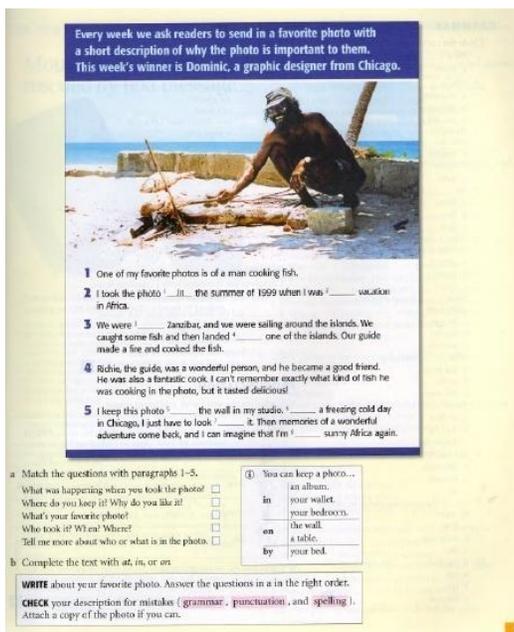


Figure 3
 (American English File 2, P.25)

In the **representational meaning** level, figure 3 has narrative-conceptual structure. The black person in the frame of this image is preparing food. He is Actor. His hand and the wood are Vectors and the fire is Goal. So this image which has both Actor and Goal is transactional. Figure 3 has both interactive and represented participants. The man’s clothes and glasses, wood, fish, fire, sea, stone and etc. are the represented participants. This man is not one of us. He is different from us. We are looking at him. His lifestyle and his residence all show that an alien is pictured in this image. This photo has been taken in 1999. It is somehow new. In spite of this, we see this man as a primitive human. His clothes are not enough in the manner that most of his body is naked. His skin is completely burned in the sun. This image reminds us of the time when there was no science and technology. People were dependent on the nature for surviving. They hunted animals. They provided food of their meat and clothes of their skin. This photo shows one part of the sea. This man has fished. He has prepared a fire. He wants to barbecue this fish and eat it.

When we study the **interactive meaning** of the image, we observe that this man is looking at the viewers. So he is interactive participant and this image is a demand. This black person is making demands. His smile makes intimacy between him and us. It shows that he is satisfied with this lifestyle. His audiences are non-English speakers. He looks at the camera. His glance is a strange one. The point of view of this photo is vertical. It has been taken from above. The photographer and hence, willy-nilly the viewers are

Research Article

looking at this black person from above. Camera height is an important means of expression. High angle shows participants as tiny and insignificant. This image is medium shot.

In the **compositional meaning** level, this text is multimodal. It has been made of a visual text and a written text. The upper written text is colorful. It is boldface. So compared to the lower written text, it is salient. A frame has separated these two written texts from each other and from the visual text. The upper written text has a different frame because its subject is somehow different from the other texts. Every week it asks readers to send in a favorite photo with a short description of why the photo is important to them. Everybody can send a photo which is memorable and lovely for him. Figure 3 is just a sample but the visual text and the lower text have a common subject. So they are in one frame.

The **modality** of figure 3 due to the fact that it is a color photo is very high. The image-producer deliberately has used this kind of modality in order to show that on one hand whatever that is depicted of black Africans in the image, is reality. They are accustomed to this lifestyle. On the other hand the photo wants to show that it is not required all the photos belong to the Whites. A memorable photo is very important not the complexion. In the submitted photos the complexion, race, age, sex and social class is not important. Only photographic techniques and photos themselves are important. Even the photos can portray animals, objects, places and not the people.

Discussion

The images of English language teaching books to non-English speakers repeatedly picture Whites and Blacks together. They tend to show that complexion does not matter. If people have merit, they can be successful. Compared to the past, it is true that nowadays the Whites treat the Blacks differently such that these two groups are working together in different social affairs. But the Blacks don't have any important roles in different areas of industry, technology, medicine, education, and politics and so on in the images of above- mentioned books. Although in reality the Blacks have an important role in these areas, our study showed that English language teaching books to non-English speakers are reluctant to represent the Blacks in these roles. Although these images represent them in conditions of great pride but these situations have been achieved in the areas of sports, music and so on.

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Research Article

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