

## Multimodal Metaphorical Language Use in Talk Show

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### Abstract

Multimodal metaphor analysis breaks the boundaries between the literal words and the other modes and has them combined to get better utterance interpretation. It successfully takes metaphorical language use into consideration. Multimodal metaphorical language use analysis is positioned as the most effective approach to figure out the underlying meanings. Taking all the related influencing factors or modes into consideration, this paper formulates a framework to analyze the metaphorical language use in Talk Show performance. It shows the great importance of finding out the interrelated connections among images, gestures, and language itself. Multimodal metaphorical language use shows its priority by laying a powerful foundation for more precise utterance interpretation.

**Key words:** Multimodal; Metaphorical language use; Talk show

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language, an essential tool to deliver messages, can take on many forms, such as verbal, non-verbal, and written. In daily face-to-face communication, no matter what the setting is, the interlocutors may receive the information from the following channels: vision, auditory,

and sometimes tactile. It is widely accepted that the information, in most circumstances, is transferred by verbal communication, together with paralanguage like gestures and facial expressions. Verbal expressions have close connections with gesture and context, both of which are essential for language comprehension (Ibáñez, et al, 2011). Under the circumstance, only analyzing the utterance itself can lead to unsatisfying results. Forceville (2007) points out that using either verbal metaphor or pictorial metaphor alone is a monomodal metaphor because the target and the source are positioned in the same mode, and conceptual metaphor theory will fail to evaluate non-verbal manifestation comprehensively. Therefore, there is one thriving trend of extending discourse analysis (DA) into multimodal discourse analysis (MDA). Multimodal metaphorical language use, whose conceptualization process is continuous with multiple modes representations being contained, is believed to have taken a salient part in this developing field (Ladilova, 2020).

The new researching methodology takes conceptual metaphor into consideration, which can guarantee the comprehensive interpretation for the utterance use and figure out the relationships among interlocutors (Hu, 2012; Zhao, 2004). Metaphor analysis can bring sound, pictures, and other sensors into consideration to avoid incomplete analysis. It does not only target the unconventional use of a certain expression but also brings the context-dependent results into consideration, which are emerged from multimodal elements composition (El Refaie, 2003). One illuminating point is that metaphor is not an exclusive attribute of language and multimodal analysis will thus take on the facilitating role to identify the differences and commonalities among potential modes (Forceville, 2002). It indicates that metaphorical language use sometimes can be more effective in achieving certain purposes. Analysis conducted from this perspective will reveal more possibilities for utterance interpretation.

From the discussions above, it can be concluded that previous researches mainly stress the importance of multimodal metaphor analysis instead of focusing on actual language use which is essentially multimodal. The attention of previous analysis is mostly attached to written form, such as animated cartoons, advertisements, and news reports. Verbal interaction or face-to-face communication is indeed needed more evaluation, where the received messages rely more on auditory and vision compared with written materials. The approach is also capable of providing cognition supports to the interpretation of correlated modes and can make a great contribution to revealing the conversational and textural implicature. Talk show can be taken as one of the ideal data sources to conduct multimodal metaphorical language use analysis researches.

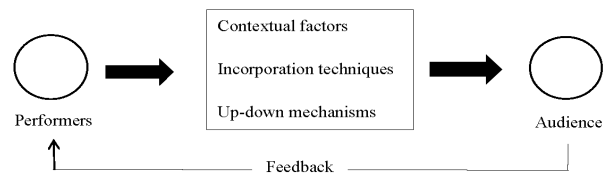
## 2. A MULTIMODAL METAPHORICAL UTTERANCE PROCESSING FRAMEWORK

As the comedy form becomes more and more popular among the public, it is essential to figure out the reasons why the audience can successfully detect the humor clues and accept the criticism without being annoyed. Talk show itself is an art of being offensive. Its main content may aim to attack others' weak points or to figure out some unsatisfying phenomena in society. If the utterance being used in the performance is analyzed separately, it can be found that most of them have violated conversational principles, such as politeness principles. It is clear that the whole performance is represented in a relatively alleviated way to neutralize the aggressive expressions. That can be counted as the main reason why the audience still enjoys this kind of comedy instead of feeling annoyed is that the performers will continuously deliver the message in a multimodal approach, such as using body language and facial expressions, to accompany their verbal utterances.

Talk show is believed to have one conceptualization process that can find theoretical footholds in multimodal metaphor analysis, which embraces both written materials and spoken utterance. To analyze the multimodal metaphorical language use, it can be conducted by taking three modes into consideration, including facial expressions, contextual utterance, and the accompanying body language. Metalingual functions have laid down solid foundation for semiotic interpretation, and talk show can be taken as a great example for successful interpersonal interactions.

When analyzing the utterance used in the talk show, it is far from enough by considering the language structure independently. The interlocutors will combine diversified semiotic modes in one text or discourse in which the metaphors are interwoven to achieve certain communicative purposes or express illocutionary force

(Elvira Sperandio, 2020). Chui (2011) states that the conceptualization process in communication implies the focus of the speaker, which is understood together with the use of metaphorical gestures with the horizontal or vertical movement standing for different meanings. Conventional metaphors have already been internalized into one community's mental world, so detailed interpretations are always being ignored when encountering outsiders (Ji & Chen, 2007). That's why it is essential to bring a metaphorical approach into MDA to analyze talk shows and uncover the underlying mechanism for intention delivering. The framework below aims to clarify the influencing factors in the metaphorical mechanism and visualize the dynamic multimodal interaction relations.



The framework consists of three parts: interlocutors from both sides, the metaphorical information processing techniques, and the dynamic information exchanging between the two parts. Speakers' performance may include three kinds of independent but non-exclusive metaphorical language use, all of which aim to precisely facilitate information transfer. Multimodal means that their output does not only include the verbal utterance but also refers to other modes related to speakers. Therefore, the output of the performer may have to go through the three metaphorical techniques listed above first, and then the processed information will be delivered to the audience as input. When receiving the information, hearers will give the corresponding feedback, as it is shown in the solid line, to remind the speaker whether their intentions are received successfully or not.

Unconventional language usages can be decoded through the contextual factors approach. It can interpret these unexpected correlations among diversified elements, which can only be understood by the audience with enough background knowledge. Only the clues are detected and accepted can the audience provide positive feedback to the performer. For the analysis below, nonverbal expressions will be interpreted with the assistance of orientational metaphor, especially incorporation techniques and up-down mechanism, to disclose the delivered messages and find the emotional reactions.

## 3. DATA ANALYSIS

The data used below is collected from the video clips of the latest season of the TV show called Roast. This show provides a comprehensive representation of the gestures, facial expressions, and verbal language use of

the performers. Multimodal metaphorical language use will be analyzed to figure out the underlying reasons for the popularity of this show.

### 3.1 Contextual Factors for Utterance Interpretation

Alyousef (2016) finds out dynamic relations between visual resources and the texts by exploring the thematic choices contained in reports and concludes that the combination is cohesion-targeted. However, the focus on sentence structure cannot fully explore the functions of language. To understand the underlying meanings behind the utterance, sometimes the contextual factors are also important for the audience to decode the information. The cross-space mappings are conducted within the experience-related domains which will be altered with the foreground changing instead of relying on the physical activity solely (Boroditsky & Ramscar, 2002). It implies that metaphorical analysis of utterance or relative representations should also be multimodal. However, connections between mental cognition with other sensors receive insufficient attention, which unavoidably set blocks on utterance analysis. The following part will show the importance of the pause of speaking and the contextual background.

As an offensive art, the performers tend to take one's previous experiences as the data source. Therefore, the audience should be equipped with background knowledge to interpret the utterance. In the following part, several examples will be illustrated to verify the importance of contextual factors.

Example 1 ①女人 ②垃圾 ③扔一下 ④求你了

If ② ③ ④ are taken as a group and ① is the subject of the whole sentence, it can be translated as 'Miss, could you please dump the trash?' However, to reveal its true meaning, one previous performance should be recalled. A female comedian once has claimed that some men are just ordinary but being ignorant. She tends to complain about the scornful attitude held by some men toward women. The ② part used by the male comedian here becomes a pun. He puts ① ② together aiming to deliver an intention to attack women in the first place and then speaks out ③④ to form a turning point of the whole meaning. The flexible use of word meaning creates humor and makes a strong counterattack of the previous comments without hurting the interpersonal relationship.

Example 2 说脱口秀的应该是斯文人，哦对了，你已经不是斯文的人了。

The sentence can be translated as 'The stand-up comedian should have been a gentle person. Oh right, you no longer belong to Siwen'. In the Chinese sentence above, the former 'siwen' means gentle and the latter 'siwen' represents a person. The homophonic relation here should be interpreted with the background knowledge of the target person. The name in the utterance refers to the ex-wife of the target person, who is taken as the main role in the comedian's performance. The two performers are

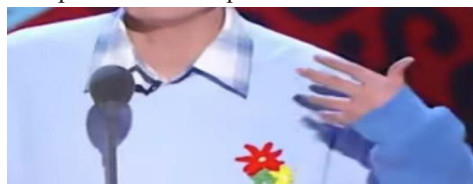
having a competition of who can get more support from the audience. The speaker here using 'should have been gentle' means that his competitor's performance is so attractive and powerful. It is a kind of accomplishment. To make his performance interesting, the performer uses the homophonic word in the utterance which indicates his counterpart's failed marriage. Talking about personal privacy is not polite in a normal situation, but the compliment and homophonic use reduce the offensiveness of the utterance.

Example 3 演唱的版权姐买了，但姐不唱，姐播放给你听。

If the sentence is translated into English, its main idea is that the copyright of the song is bought but it is not for singing but playing only. This kind of behavior seems ridiculous because the copyright often costs an amount of money to obtain. The performer says this to get interaction with the singer who was once found to do lip-synch in a show. To receive the message successfully, the audience should be familiar with the events happening in the entertainment circle in the first place. In the original sentence, the performer didn't use "I" directly but using a personal pronoun instead. The pronoun indicates that the speaker puts herself in a higher position, which shows an arrogant image of the singer. The negative representation makes the whole utterance more offensive but also more interesting. The performer makes eye contact with the singer while performing, aiming to establish a mutual understanding relationship.

### 3.2 Incorporation Techniques in Utterance Interpretation

While doing their performance, the stand-up comedians will use gestures to strengthen the correspondence between themselves and the audience. Most performers will take the advantage of the upper part of their body to make some movement. Each person can be imagined as an entity and the exit or entrance allowance is both illuminated by the body language, which mainly refers to the hand or arm activities. To achieve the purpose of being funny, the first thing that the performers need to be done is to strike a chord with the audience about what he or they is going to say. The comedian may use the word 'we' and at the same time, he will make the palm toward himself and move the hand from far to near (shown in Example 4). The audience can be categorized as one target and what the performer aims to do is to include the target within the community he aims to form. It is a vivid example of the incorporation technique.



Example 4 'We' hand movement

Talk show delivers its intentions through verbal utterance without the facilitating of written materials. The abstract definitions contained in it sometimes are difficult to seize or understand. Therefore, the comedian uses gestures to make the meaning representation more precise and concrete. Like it is shown in Example 5, the combination of two entities is presented by the opposite direction movement of two hands, and a circle is formed to indicate the successful accomplishment. Each hand represents one thing that has been mentioned in his performance.



**Example 5 Gesture for combination**

Generally speaking, to mitigate the offensiveness of the performance, the comedian tends to combine two or more unexpected things to distract the audience from the utterance itself. The correlations are abnormal in daily life, but by using gestures the audience will unconsciously accept the unexpected connections established in performance. The comedian makes a comparison between the three-point shot in basketball with the films whose grades are only 3. But it is the unreasonable correlation that creates humor and at the same time satirizes the low quality in the film industry. The circle formed by two hands indicates that the new entity is creative and reasonable. Therefore, there is one shared entity or definition between the two groups, which can shorten their distance and finally let them become one harmonious community.

### 3.3 Up-Down Mechanisms in Utterance Interpretation

The interlocutors in communication will take on various facial expressions to show their attitude. The kind of metaphorical use has already rooted in semiotic representation, conventionally or unconventionally. The screenshot being utilized here can also be considered as an image, whose interactional meaning equals the interpersonal function in functional grammar (Wu & Zhong, 2014). The performers flexibly take the advantage of facial expressions to achieve the expected effects.

Talk show performers tend to keep smiling or hold the mouth up action during their whole performance (shown in Example 6). There will always be a contradiction between their smiling face and their aggressive or

impolite utterance. If the utterance is extracted from the context to interpret, conflicts may be unavoidable. When the hearers are calm, their emotions can be pictured as a horizontal line. According to the orientation metaphor, HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN, the full line indicates the arising tendency of emotion and the dotted line refers to the passive emotional response. Smiling is the mouth-up action. It can render the hearer or the audience the feeling of being friendly and happy, which can effectively shorten the distance among people or eliminate the power discrepancy. Therefore, even though the performers are on the stage, the audience may view them as their friends, whose relationships are equal. The aggressive or offensive words are decoded as a kind of humorous complaining.



**Example 6 Mouth Up Action**

It should be notified that most performers will take on the kind of facial expression while performing. There may be some little differences of to what extent they smile due to their habits. But it will not affect the metaphorical meanings behind the smile. Compared with the smiling face, gestures can also be used to represent the implied up-down metaphorical intentions.

The performer may also take the advantage of this model to strengthen the correlations. The inner relations of this model can be imagined as being equipped with one hierarchical judging mechanism shown in Example 7. The figure movement is evaluated in the bottom-up model, the emotion performer wants to deliver is criticism and his attitude is undoubtedly negative. He is talking about one injustice event the guest has met. Though the utterance he says is amusing, the real purpose is to dispose of the truth of one thing. To make the guest feel supportive, he uses this kind of gesture or figure movement to stress his detestation of the unfaithful fact indirectly. Therefore, emotional correspondence is established between the audience and the guest. That's why the offensive sentences do not infuriate the guest but make them laugh or delight instead.



**Example 7 Negative attitude held by the downward movement**

The three parts above reveal the fact that utterance cannot be analyzed independently. There are so many influencing factors that can facilitate utterance generation

and interpretation. In the whole conversational process, the modal is also dynamic. It is widely accepted that verbal expressions, under most circumstances, need to be accompanied by various sensors to achieve different purposes under different situations.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be told that there are many underestimated connecting points among images, gestures, and language itself. Utterance, no matter metaphorical or not, aims to achieve a certain purpose. The examples listed above take related metaphorical language use into consideration and find out that the guiding methodologies in analyzing utterance and other semiotic resources are complementary instead of contradicting. A higher requirement is attached to multimodal metaphor analysis. It indicates that a mature theoretical framework is needed instead of being restricted within the other linguistic frameworks. The illuminating point is that among all theoretical needs, the metaphorical processing mechanism shows its priority.

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