Patriotism in Literacy Teaching in China: A Multimodal Analysis

XIA Jinping[a],*

[a]PhD candidate, School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University, China.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

This article examines how the cultural value of patriotism is construed through examining multimodal texts in Chinese language textbooks that are used in China elementary schools nationwide. More specifically, within the framework of Systemic-Functional Linguistics, I analyze how do lexical and grammatical choices model experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings of the selected patriotic written text. By adopting Systemic-Functional informed visual grammar, this article then investigates how images model material reality, viewer/ image relations and compositional meanings. Finally this study studies how visual and verbal modes being deployed to manifest the ideology of patriotism. This article also demonstrates that through deploying multiple semiotic resources in the Chinese language textbooks, the Chinese dominant cultural knowledge could be constructed and imparted to students more efficiently.

Key words: Patriotism; Multimodal discourse analysis; Systemic functional grammar

INTRODUCTION

Since the reform and opening-up policy was implemented in the late 1970s, China opened its door to the outside world and set itself on a path to become a member of the world. After nearly thirty years' reform, the market-oriented economy has been introduced into China, which has produced rapid economic growth. It also marked the Chinese Communist Party's intention to integrate into the global economy. Accordingly, Chinese literacy curriculum and school management has to be reshaped and reconstructed in this free market economy and the globalization tide. In Ngok and Kwong's words, Chinese literacy education has veered toward a way of 'decentralization' and 'marketization'. Decentralization means that the central government relinquishes control to the local governments, educational principles can be adjusted to local conditions and more and more private organizations are encouraged to participate in operating schools (Ngok & Kwong, 2003).

However, Chinese education system is still a socialist one, the one that aims to provide better service for the socialist modernization (Central Committee of Communist Party of China and the State Council, 1993). Although Chinese government decentralizes its control on finance and management of education, it has strict control over the content of curricula and textbook. Textbooks are believed to play critical roles in transferring dominant group's ideology and imparting the knowledge that are approved by the dominant group, as Apple (1999, p.62) says, 'the dominant groups in economic, political and cultural spheres attempt to control what counts as legitimate knowledge and perspectives in school for their own interests'. Among those cultural values, patriotism is the one of the most important values that the Chinese Communist Party emphases. According to Zhao (1998), after the 'Tiananmen Incident' (the one that might be regarded as the collapse of old official ideology), patriotism (or nationalism) was rediscovered and endorsed by Deng Xiaoping and his successors. Deng found that patriotism 'remained the one bedrock of political belief shared by most Chinese people in spite of the rapid decay of Communist official ideology' (Zhao, 1998, p.289).

How does the visual and verbal modes being chosen by editors of Chinese language textbooks reflect ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings of the texts? How does the value of patriotism being imparted to child readers through multimodal textbooks? In the following sections of this study, after introducing the research framework and data, I will discuss the two questions in detail.

1. A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Since 1994, Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter, SFL) has moved from marginal to mainstream model for language in the world and has occupied senior positions in linguistics department in many universities worldwide. It also informs many applied linguistics and TESOL in many countries (Eggins, 1994). SFL is a comprehensive theory in the sense that 'it is concerned with language in its entirety, so that whatever is said about one aspect is to be understood always with reference to the total picture' (Halliday & Mattiessen, 2004, p.19). This comprehensiveness interprets language in terms of its coherence with the contexts, which sees language as an evolved system. These are the reasons why I choose SFL as analyzing tool for the written texts.

Halliday proposes a metafunctional hypothesis of SFL that all languages are organized around three main meanings, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunction. 'The ideational metafunction is the one that concerned with representation, it also represents semiosis itself and the roles represented by' (Halliday, 1978/2001, p.21). In other words, language can be used to talk about the external world as well as inner world—our feelings, consciousness, thoughts etc. The interpersonal metafunction enables people to use language to exchange information with others, to influence other people's attitudes, to maintain relationships with others or to express their own opinions and attitudes. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, pp.30-31), 'language is always also: enacting our personal and social relationships with the other people around us. This is language as action; we call it the interpersonal metafunction'. The textual metafunction is about the creation of texture, that is, combines ideational and interpersonal meanings to be expressed as meaningful text relevant to its context.

'Language as social semiotic' is the other major principle of SFL, which reveals connection between meaning-making processes and the relevant sociocultural context. The social-semiotic theory tries to interpret 'the shifts, the irregularities, the disharmonies and the tensions that characterize human interaction and social processes' (Halliday, 1978, p.126).

Inspired by the socialization process of SFL, many linguists adopt and extend the SF model to theorize other semiotic systems and apply those theories into practice. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) for instance, theorize the well-known grammar of image in order to provide a socially based theory of visual-representation. Their Systemic-Functional informed visual grammar will be adopted as a tool to analyze images in the Chinese language textbooks. Follow Halliday, the social semiotic of visual communication see images as resources to represent the meaning, to interact between participants, and to realize coherence between different semiotic resources. Kress and van Leeuwen use three slightly different terminologies: Representational, Interactive and Compositional to replace ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunction of SFL. Representation involves two types of structures: narrative structure and conceptual structure. The former shows the participants in the picture are doing something to each other, the latter represents the participants based on their 'generalized, stable and timeless essence' (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.59). There are four types of process within the category of narrative representation, i.e. actional (a participant or an actor, from which the vector emanates); transactional (the vector is formed by an eyeline, by the direction of the glance of the reactors); narrative (include the speech process and the mental process, which can be recognized by speech balloons and thought bubbles); conversional (the change of state of the participants, the goal of one action process is the actor of the other process). As I have introduced before, unlike narrative process, the conceptual process is about stable meaning or being, which involves three types of process in terms of class, structure and symbolic meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Classificational process can be an overt or covert taxonomy, in which one participant plays the role of subordinate while the other participant the role of superordinate. Analytical process shows how participants are related through a part-whole structure. Symbolic process can be further subdivided into two: symbolic attributive and symbolic suggestive. There are two co-related participants in symbolic attributive, while there is only one participant in symbolic suggestive.

Visual communication can have the function of creating and maintaining relationship between the represented participants and the viewer, this is the second meaning proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen. They identify three factors in realizing interactive meanings: contact, social distance and attitude. Based on Halliday's (1994) work of speech functions, Kress and van Leeuwen design two terms in visual communication: Demand and Offer. When the represented participants demand, they gazes at the viewer and demand the viewer 'enter some kind of imaginary relation' with them. When offer, the participants offer some kind of information to the viewers.

Social distance is the second dimension of interaction, which depict how far the viewers from the represented participants. The participants show only the face or head to show very intimate relationship with the viewer, this is the extreme close-up shot; when participants show the

head and the shoulders, which implies close relationship, this is the close-up shot; the medium close shot shows participants around at the waist that suggest a kind of far personal distance; medium long shot shows the whole figure that expresses close social distance; Long shot suggest an impersonal relation because the represented participants occupy half height of the frame. In the very long shot, any figures in the image are longer and bigger than human figure to show little connection.

Attitude is the third dimension in the visual interaction, which expresses a point of view, a specific angle or perspective. Besides gaze and size of frame I talked about in the above, the selection of perspective can also show the relationship between participants and viewers. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p.109), An image can have either a Frontal or an Oblique angle. The frontal angle projects a relation of involvement, oblique detachment and strange. Vertical angle signifies the power relations between the viewers and the participants. In the vertical direction, high angle viewer power, eye-eye angle equality, and low angle participant power.

Composition is the third dimension in visual communication, which integrates representational and interactive factors into a meaningful whole through three systems: information value, salience and framing (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, pp.176-177). Information value is realized through the placement of different visual elements. For instance, the 'Left-Right' placement produces 'Given-New' information. Along the vertical axis, the 'Top-Bottom' placement posits 'Ideal-Real' information. The center composition put the important information in the center surrounded by less important information in an image.

The second factor in composition is salience, it deal with how the figures in the image can be more eye catching. There are several elements that make an element salient, such as size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast, overlap, foregrounding etc. Framing is the third key elements in composition that is about using framing devices such as lines, empty spaces to separate or connect elements.

2. RATIONALE OF DATA SELECTION

Chinese language textbooks or *yuwen* textbooks have been edited and published under strict censorship of the Chinese Ministry of Education. They imbue literacy goals of *Compulsory Education Yuwen Curriculum Standard* that is promulgated by the Ministry of Education. There are three stages in elementary school *yuwen* curriculum. Each stage has specific requests for students in terms of reading, writing and speaking. In stage one (from grade one to two), students are required to read 1600 characters and write around 800 characters; speak fluent *putonghua* (mandarin) and participate in activities in community and campus. In stage two (grade three to four), students are required to be able to master around 1600 characters, read 2500 common characters, write simple letters, notes etc. and speak clearly in *Putonghua*. In stage three (grade five to six), students should know around 2500 characters, recognize 3000 characters. Besides, they should also master corresponding writing and reading skills.

Meanwhile, Chinese language textbook is an undeniably useful tool to impart ideologies, values, cultures and morality of the Chinese Communist Party. It also occupies the most fundamental and important status in nine-year compulsory education in China. As the *Compulsory Education Yuwen Curriculum Standard* states,

> Yuwen subject cultivates students' ability in using language, improves their comprehensive quality, and lays solid foundation for learning other subjects. In the meantime, it lays a foundation for students to form right world view, life view, cultural values, good character and healthy personality, lays a foundation for students' overall and lifelong development. *Yuwen* subject has an indispensable advantage in teaching students to inherit Chinese traditional cultures and revolutionary tradition, enhance the cultural identity and strengthen the national cohesion. (My translation).

This article chooses data from first six Chinese language textbooks (from grade one to three) published by People's Education Press, which is currently used around the China.

3. A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF A PATRIOTIC TEXT

There are three texts that describe the value of patriotism in a direct sense in the first six Chinese language textbooks. They are: text 11 book 1 ('How I want to go and see'), text 10 book 2 ('Beijing'), text 26 book 6 ('One national flag'). I choose text 11 in book 1 as analyzing data in this study since it was the first text in the 1999 version of Chinese language Book 1. It was originally written:

> I am a Chinese.
> I love national flag—the five star red flag.

Then in the 2002 version, this text was moved into the exercises in the text 11,. The other text that now replaces it is as follows:

> **How I want to go and see**
> Mom tells me,
> Follow a crooked road,
> I can walk out of the mountain,
> In the far away Beijing city,
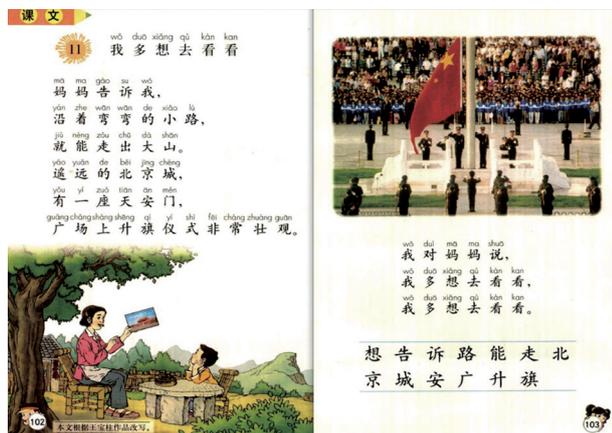> There is a Tian an men,
> The flag-raising ceremony is very spectacular.
> I tell mom,
> How I want to go and see,
> How I want to go and see.
> (Text 11, book 1. pp.102－103.)

This text is structured in four blocks. On the left block, the written text is placed on left top part that is presented as Given and Ideal. The picture is placed in the bottom to signify the New and Real. This Real shows a real life situation in Chinese countryside. On the right block, the picture on the top right is positioned as Given and Ideal scene of solemn flag-raising ceremony, which signifies a true wish to go to see flag-raising ceremony in Beijing. To be more specific, the left image expresses a narrative process because narrative process means that two represented participants are doing something to each other. The Mother tells a story about Tiananmen Square (the icon of the capital) to her son by holding a picture of Tiananmen Square. Meanwhile, there is a vector emanates from the eyeline of the boy, which is a transitive narrative image expressing reactional process, since the vector is formed by an eyeline between the son (reactor) and his mother (phenomenon). The mother, the son and the Tiananmen Square picture are placed in full figure, which demonstrates a medium long shot, illustrating a normal social relation between the representational participants and the viewers. The mother raises her hands with the Tiananmen Square picture, which is placed in the middle of the whole left picture. It not only attracts the mother and son's attention but also the viewers' attention. Further, it signifies a salient value because it is placed in the middle of the left picture among many margins, such as the mother, the son, the tree, far-away mountains.

The picture of Tiananmen Square is in a long shot that is thought of as a distant place where people desire to visit.

Grammatical structure of language could reflect its context through situational variables: field, tenor and mode. The meaning dimension associated with field is of ideational meaning, with tenor is interpersonal meaning and with mode is textual meaning. Ideational meaning is realized by the transitivity, the structure of which consists of processes, participants and circumstances. In this written text, there are five kinds of process types (Table 1).

Table 1
Processes Types in Written Text

Transitivity choice	Numbers
Material	1
Mental	2
Relational	1
Verbal	2
Existential	1

Tenor is realized in interpersonal meaning and is construed through the Mood and Modality system. Table 2 is a mood analysis of this written text. From Table 2, it is clear that all of the clauses in this written text are placed as Subject precedes the Finites, which suggests giving information to the young readers, and they form the declarative clauses.

Table 2
Mood Analysis in the Patriotic Text

Clause	Mood	Speech function
How I want to go and see	Declarative	Statement
Mom tells me	Declarative	Statement
Follow a crooked road, I can walk out of the mountain	Declarative	Statement
In the far away Beijing city, there is a Tian an men	Declarative	Statement
The flag-raising ceremony is very spectacular	Declarative	Statement
I tell mom	Declarative	Statement
How I want to go and see	Declarative	Statement
How I want to go and see	Declarative	Statement

The theme of a clause represents the starting point of a message and what the clause is about. In this written text, the theme and rheme analysis is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3
Theme and Rheme Analysis

Clause	Theme	Rheme
How I want to go and see	How	I want to go and see
Mom tells me	Mom	Tells me
Follow a crooked road, I can walk out of the mountain	Follow a crooked road	I can walk out of the mountain
In the far away Beijing city, there is a Tian an men	In the far away Beijing city	there is a Tian an men
The flag-raising ceremony is very spectacular	The flag-raising ceremony	is very spectacular
I tell mom	I	tell mom
How I want to go and see	How	I want to go and see
How I want to go and see	How	I want to go and see

4. A SUMMARY OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXT CONSTRUED BY VISUAL AND VERBAL MODES

From the above visual analysis, it is clear that editors of the Chinese language textbook illustrate the value of patriotism directly through the picture of Tianmen Square—the symbol of the political center, the icon of the capital Beijing. In the Tiananmen Square, Mao Zedong announced solemnly "Chinese people are now standing up" in 1949. And it is also a place where anniversary celebrations held. The mother tells a story to her son with the picture of Tiananmen Square is not a simple story telling, but a narration of national and cultural identity. It is from this center that the story of patriotism is told. Mountains, roads and a corner of a house surround the setting of storytelling, which represents a common living situation in Chinese countryside in order to intrigue resonance of young readers. The picture of flag-raising ceremony is also a recount of social identity. The five-star red flag is the national flag of People's Republic of China that stands for China. Flag-raising ceremony is a legitimate and solemn moment not only in special holidays but also in every early morning at Tiananmen Square.

The linguistic analysis in the last section shows that the ideational, interpersonal and textual systems of grammar could reflect social context of the patriotic text. Field can be represented through linguistic features such as process types. In this written text, there are five types of process, namely material, mental, relational, existential and verbal. The selection of verbal and mental process suggests that editors of the textbooks aim to teach young learners to learn the how to express their feelings through words, and to learn external world through both the material and relational process.

As Bowcher (2001, p.209) says, the contextual features of tenor are: 'nature of the participants, status, degree of contact, social distance, affect, and situational/ social roles (permanent and temporary)'. In this text, participants are mom and son. The social status of mother represents a storyteller, a life guider of her son, while the son acts as a listener. The declarative mood in the lexical and grammatical selection shows an intimate relationship between mother and son, which represents the normal common Chinese family relationship.

The context construed through the choices in the grammar of textual meaning made in this written text can be examined by the theme and rheme. The theme usually contains given information and the rheme the new (Ghadessy, 1999). Through the analyses of this Given-New textual meaning, it helps us to know how the writer of this patriotic text indicates his/her point of departure, leading readers to what the clause aims to say and what the focus of the clause.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the way in which Chinese patriotism has been constructed through visual and linguistic choices in Chinese language textbooks and it reveals that systemic functional grammar and visual grammar could be used in the Chinese literacy education context. The Chinese term for patriotism is *aiguozhuyi* (爱国主义), which means love the country literarily. More specifically, it means 'a proletarian world outlook -- a Marxist rather than bourgeois democracy; representing the interests of the proletariat and the laboring people; and relating patriotism with internationalism and care for the proletariat around the world' (Moral Education Department of MOE, 1993, p.102, my translation). Chinese patriotism is a state-centric or state-led nationalism, Chinese people are educated to be loyal to the interests of the state and be prepared to serve the country selflessly (Zhao, 1998).

REFERENCES

Apple, M. W. (1999). *Power, meaning and identity: Essays in critical education studies*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Bowcher, W. L. (2001). *Play-by-play on radio: An enquiry into some relations between language and context*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Liverpool.

Compulsory education yuwen curriculum standard. (2013, June 7). From http://www.pep.com.cn/xiaoyu/

Eggins, S. (1994). *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics*. London: Printer.

Ghadessy, M. (Ed.). (1999). *Text and context in functional linguistics*. John Benjamins Publishing.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed.). London: Arnold. YL.

Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images*. London and New York: Routledge.

Nogk, K. L., & Kwong, J. L. (2003). Globalisation and educational reconstructional in China. In Mok, J. K., & Welsh, A. (Eds.) *Globalization and educational reconstructuring in the Asia Pacific Region (*pp.160-188). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zhao, S. S. (1998). A state-led nationalism: The patriotic education campaign in post-Tian'anmen China. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *3*(3), 287-302.