On German National Image Self-Shaping from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis—A Case Study of German Chancellor Scholz's Tweets

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Abstract. Multimodality is a major trend in the current discourse world. Multimodal discourse analysis focuses on the co-construction of different symbolic resources and the internal rules of each mode, which enriches the perspective of traditional discourse research. On the international political stage, national propaganda windows also actively use multimodal means to shape their ideologies and national images. This thesis, based on the three metafunctions of language and visual grammar theory, makes a multimodal analysis of German Chancellor Scholz's tweets posted in the second half of 2022, to explore Germany's process of shaping its national image on social media platforms. The German government uses a rich symbolic system to design discursive expressions, establishing a national image to the world that proactively assumes the responsibility of global governance, wholeheartedly defends the core interests of the people, and strictly defends the traditional value order.

Keywords: multimodality; three metafunctions of language; visual grammar; German national image; Scholz tweets.

1. Introduction

With the continuous progress of technology and the increasing prosperity of social life, symbols such as pictures, sounds, colors and actions play an increasingly important role in interpersonal communication and meaning construction. The language-centered single-modality research is not enough to meet the needs of the times. Multimodal discourse analysis breaks the shackles of a single linguistic modality and focuses on the synergy of multiple symbolic resources, largely overcoming the limitations of traditional discourse analysis.

To date, many considerable researches on multimodal discourse analysis has been carried out in China. Among them, there are theoretical reviews on the origin and development of multimodality, theoretical foundation and research methods, such as Li Zhanzi (2003), Zhu Yongsheng (2007), Hu Zhuanglin (2007), Zhang Delu (2009), and Dai Shulan (2013). There are also application-oriented discussions on multimodality, which mainly focus on foreign language teaching applications, static thematic graphics (advertisements, movie posters, magazine covers) and dynamic video works (documentaries, movies).

National image "is the expression and symbol of national strength and national spirit, the centralized embodiment of comprehensive national power, and the most important intangible asset of a country" (Guan Wenhu, 2000). Nowadays, shaping a good national image and enhancing the international status of the country have become the primary task of foreign relations of all countries. For example, Liu Li (2011) and Liu Xia (2014) interpreted the construction of Germany's image in German foreign magazines and government declarations respectively, while Zhang Meng et al. (2015) revealed the tendency of Chinese mainstream media to portray Germany's image. The above research results are inspiring for interpreting the German national image and studying foreign communication strategies, but they do not involve the emerging digital fields such as social media, and lack a comprehensive and in-depth discussion of the ideas of German image construction from a multimodal perspective.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Three metafunctions of language

Systematic functional linguistics, founded by the famous British linguist M.A.K. Halliday, focuses on the intrinsic relationship between language and human social life, and is concerned with the practical use of language. Therefore, it appears widely in interdisciplinary studies. Halliday divided the metafunction of language into three types, namely, ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions (Halliday, 1985). Among them, the ideational function refers to language's expression of people's various experiences in the real world (including the inner world). The interpersonal function expresses the speaker's identity, status, attitude, motivation, and his inferences about things, and is the participatory function of language that realizes the interactive relationship between interlocutors through tone, mood, and personification. The textual functions, whose function is to organize language components into discourse, mainly consists of three subsystems, namely the theme system, the information system and the cohesion system (Hu, Zhu, Y. S., and Zhang, D. L., 1989).

2.2. Visual Grammar

Based on Hanley's systematic functional grammar, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996/2006, 2001) proposed a theory of visual grammar that extends the three major meta-functions to the domain of nonverbal signs, which are interpreted in images as representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning.

They believe that the representation meaning is divided into narrative representation and concept representation, and the difference between them lies in the presence or absence of "vector". The interactive meaning expresses the relationship between the reproduction participant (the person, place, or event depicted in the image) and the interactive participant (the viewer of the image), mainly through the four elements of contact, social distance, attitude, and mood. The compositional meaning is mainly reflected as a layout, the overall impression made on the viewer by the interaction of visual elements, including three aspects: information value, salience and framing.

The three metafunctions of language focus on the ideational features of words and language, while visual grammar theory emphasizes the arrangement and combination rules of visual elements, which are interrelated and complementary in multimodal studies. For the study of the national self-image in Scholz's tweets, the three metafunctions of language can be used to effectively interpret the discursive strategies of shaping the nation's image in the tweets; the visual grammar theory can be used to analyze the representation and arrangement of visual elements in the tweets, so as to explore their significance to the construction of national image. Combining the results of both analyses is conducive to exploring the interplay between words and images, and thus gaining a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying the self-shaping of national images in Scholz's tweets.

3. Multimodal discourse analysis of Scholz's tweets

In recent years, social media has become increasingly popular. Twitter, as one of the world's largest social media platforms, has provided a new type of position for countries to conduct political propaganda and public diplomacy. Many countries, including China, have opened Twitter accounts to allow outsiders to instantly learn about their important policies, social situations, history and culture through their heads of state, political party representatives, department heads and press offices. Chancellor Scholz became the first German Chancellor to open a personal Twitter account in February 2022. By the end of 2022, Scholz had posted 583 tweets and accumulated nearly 700,000 followers, making him an important window into Germany's foreign relations. Scholz's tweets are the expression of important government issues in the emerging propaganda arena of social media, and are of great value for both multimodal discourse analysis and the construction of a national image in the digital age.

In this thesis, the original tweets of @Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz are manually crawled as a sample, and the period is from July 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022. The reasons for choosing this period are as follows: 1. The year 2022 is the opening year of the new German federal government. The Ukrainian crisis, the energy crisis and the intensified division of public opinion cause the German government to face internal and external difficulties in the second half of the year and face a "turning point" (Mao Xiaohong, 2022). 2. Using Scholz's recent tweets as a corpus, we can effectively present the latest situation in Germany and thus improve the reliability of our findings.

In the following, multimodal discourse analysis was conducted on the collected tweets. In the textual analysis, this thesis took 91 short tweets as the research object and interpret their discourse strategies with the help of UAM Corpus Tool. In the image analysis, this thesis focused on 151 pictures used in tweets to analyze their visual information transmission. In this process, the multimodal discourse characteristics of the tweets and their adaptation to the Twitter communication environment would be summarized, and Scholz's means of constructing a positive national image on social media platforms would be explored.

3.1. Discourse Analysis of the Text

3.1.1 Ideational Function

The "transitivity" is the most important part of the ideational function, and the material system consists of six different processes: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential processes. The results of the materiality analysis of the sample are as follows:

Table 1. Transitivity analysis of the sample

Transitivity	Material processes	Mental processes	Verbal process	Relational process	Behavioral process	Existential process	Total
Quantity	262	40	11	46	0	3	362
Percentage	72.4%	11.0%	3.0%	12.7%	0.0%	0.8%	100%

The material process mainly indicates the process of doing something. As can be seen from Table 1, material process verbs occur most frequently, with 262 occurrences (72.4%), e.g:

(1) Wir werden die Energiekosten in den Griff bekommen.

(2) Wir wollen die internationale Zusammenarbeit stärken, um uns Putins Krieg und den Folgen entgegenzustellen.

Due to the limited length of social media texts, Scholz's tweets make use of material process verbs that express "to do something" and are presented in compact clauses, enabling users to quickly capture information, understand "what the government has done" and clarify the government's recent achievements and plans. For example, sentence (1) emphasizes the control of energy expenditure and sentence (2) advocates international cooperation to resist Russia. The German government's desire to work together with European countries and actively participate in global governance has been demonstrated to the international community, showing Germany's vigor and commitment and its image as a responsible power.

Relational process reflects the relationship between things, and is divided into two categories: "attribution" and "identification". As can be seen from Table 1, relational process verbs appear 46 times, accounting for 12.7% of the total, e.g:

(3) Schweden **ist** für mich ein enger Partner und Freund in der EU.

(4) Verlässlichkeit und Vertrauen - diese beiden Werte spielen in der deutschen und chinesischen Kultur eine wichtige Rolle.

Given the large and widespread social media user base, Scholz's tweets use relationship process verbs like "identify" to express a positive view of diplomatic relations with other countries in order to show the world that Germany is inclusive and open. In sentence (3), for example, Scholz expresses his affirmation of Sweden's EU status, and in sentence (4), Scholz argues that trust is an important

guarantee for bilateral relations between Germany and China, reflecting Germany's political idea of seeking a win-win situation. While sending positive signals to the target countries and seeking consensus on cooperation, Scholz also expresses Germany's attitude of "good neighborliness" to the world, demonstrating the image of a neighborly and friendly country.

Mental process represents "feeling", "reaction" and "cognition" and other mental activities. As can be seen from Table 1, mental process verbs are also used for a large number of times, totaling 40 times, e.g:

(5) Ich wünsche Ihnen einen besinnlichen Advent, eine Zeit der Hoffnung und Zuversicht.

(6) Danke für den herzlichen Empfang in Singapur!

As a virtual online space, Twitter is less official and gives the characters more room to express their emotional discourse. In Scholz's tweets, verbs such as wünschen and danken, which express "feeling" and "reaction", and verbs such as ü For example, in sentence (5) Scholz conveys his sincere condolences and wishes for the Ukrainian children, and in sentence (6) Scholz expresses his pleasure at the meeting. By using such psychological verbs, Scholz demonstrates the desire to establish friendly diplomatic relations with other countries and his country's warm humanitarian concern, which complements the serious theme of war and further deepens Germany's image as a neighboring power.

3.1.2 Interpersonal Function

The interpersonal function has three main systems: person, tone, and mood.

Table 2. Personal use distribution of the sample

Person	First person	Second person	Third person	Total
Quantity	173	12	24	209
Percentage	82.8%	5.7%	11.5%	100%

In terms of the use of person, Table 2 shows that Scholz uses the first person "ich" and "wir" most frequently, accounting for 82.8% of the total, e.g:

(1) Ich bin überzeugt: Wir werden aus dieser Krise stärker hervorgehen, als wir hineingegangen sind.

(2) Wir sind ein Land, das für viele ein Land der Hoffnung ist.

(3) Wir lassen niemanden alleine.

Since the first person has a strong appeal and power of influence, using the first person can evoke a common experience and universal values to achieve a good interaction with users. For example, sentence (7) uses "ich" as an explicit subject, indicating that Scholz not only promotes the initiative at the governmental level, but also makes a personal commitment, demonstrating his high level of political literacy and establishing an image of a pro-people leader. Sentences (8) and (9) use "wir " as the subject. On the one hand, they emphasize Germany as a unified political entity to give domestic confidence. On the other hand, they express the appeal of cooperation with the international community, which virtually narrows the distance with other countries, establishes the discourse basis of seeking common ground while reserving differences (Zhou Fanfan, 2018), and implies the image of a united country.

Table 3. Tone distribution of the sample

Type of tones	Declarative tone	Skeptical tone	Imperative tone	Exclamatory tone	Total
Quantity	248	4	0	23	275
Percentage	90.2%	1.4%	0%	8.4%	100%

As can be seen from Table 3, in addition to the declarative mood, which accounts for the highest proportion, the exclamatory mood is also the type of mood that Scholz focuses on, appearing 23 times in total, accounting for 8.4% of the total, e.g:

(4) Ihr Einsatz für Menschen in Not verdient großen Respekt!

(5) Das war ein mitreißendes Turnier und ganz Deutschland ist stolz auf dieses Team!

Emotional involvement is similar to appealing to sensibility, which can create strong emotional resonance in participants (Dong, Yuanyuan, and Tian, Chen, 2018). Scholz actively exploits the "emotional properties" of social media, using a more attractive exclamation tone to infect and guide the audience and deepen their impressions of the tweets. In his tweets, Scholz uses words that express emotions such as "thanks", "respect" and "blessings". For example, sentence (10) conveys respect for the German workers, while sentence (11) highly praises the excellent performance of the women's football team, which embodies an egalitarian and personal attitude of dialogue and presents a more dynamic image of the country to the world.

Table 4. Modality distribution of the sample

Determinative modal words		Example sentences
High value	müssen	(1) Der schreckliche Raketeneinschlag in Polen **muss** sorgfältig untersucht werden. (2) Wir **müssen** uns schon heute auf zukünftige Pandemien vorbereiten.
Medium value	sollen wollen mögen möchten	(3) Die NATO **sollte** beim Schutz der kritischen Infrastruktur im Meer mehr Aufgaben übernehmen, darin sind sich Jens Stoltenberg und ich einig.
Low value	können dürfen	(4) Was Gipfel-Treffen wie G7 oder die Konzertierte Aktion bringen **können**, erkläre ich in der neuen Folge Kanzler Kompakt .

In terms of the use of modals, it can be learned from Table 4 that the modals in Scholz's tweets are characterized by diversity. According to statistics, Scholz uses the most high-value modal words, appearing 12 times, and the median and low-value modal words appear 9 and 10 times respectively.

In his tweets, Scholz is flexible in his choice of modals. For example, in sentence (13), Scholz uses the high-value modal "müssen" to emphasize the importance and necessity of preparing for the epidemic and to call on the public to move forward, expressing a strong political intention. In sentence (14), Scholz uses the medium-value modal "sollen" to emphasize NATO's responsibility in protecting the infrastructure, which is more acceptable to the public than "müssen". In sentence (15), Scholz prefers to use the low-value modal "können" to describe his daily affairs in order to create a more

relaxed and interactive atmosphere. The use of different modals reflects the flexibility of Scholz's PR activities and highlights the image of the German state as a good governance.

3.1.3 Textual Function

Textual function refers to the relationship between the linguistic expression discourse and the context, as well as the function of the internal organization of the discourse, which is mainly reflected by the subject position system (Zhang Delu, 2011:1). The thematic system of every sentence is composed of theme and rheme. As the starting point of discourse, theme is the main information conveyed by the sentence, while the rheme is a statement of the theme. The analysis of the thematic system helps us understand the focus of the discourse and uncover the ideas and intentions behind the discourse.

Table 5. Thematic type distribution of the sample

Type of themes	Unmarked theme	Marked theme	Total
Quantity	239	36	275
Percentage	86.9%	13.1%	100%

When the theme of a clause is also the subject of a clause, such a theme is called "unmarked subject", while if the subject is not the subject of a clause, it is "marked subject" (Hu, J., Zhu, Y., & Zhang, D., 1989). As shown in Table 5, marked themes are rarely found in Scholz's tweets, and most of the sentences are in normal order, e.g:

(1) Einbürgerung braucht bessere Regeln. Da geht es um Respekt und natürlich um unseren Wohlstand.

(2) Kinder haben Rechte - diese sollen im Grundgesetz verankert werden.

(3) Das Bürgergeld kommt! Diese Reform ist ein Meilenstein der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland.

Scholz used traditional unmarked thematic sentences, namely subject-leading sentences, to highlight the main information value of sentences, so that people can see at a clear sight, and improve the efficiency of communication with the public. In sentence (16), for example, he affirms the need for better naturalization administration. In sentence (17), he emphasizes the legal rights that children should have. In sentence (18), he declares the imperative of citizenship allowance reform. The tweets are concise and to the point, avoiding key messages being lost in the mass of data. This rigorous style of writing allows for a more logical structure of the message and creates an orderly, traditional image of the state.

3.2. Discourse Analysis of the Image

3.2.1 Representational Meaning

According to the characteristics of representation, images can be divided into two categories: "narrative" and "conceptual" images. The image of narrative representation have vectors formed by strong diagonal lines, which express the process of action and event change, and are divided into action processes (body or tool contact constitutes a vector), reaction processes (eye contact constitutes a vector), and speech and mental processes (speech bubbles or thought bubbles constitute a vector). There is no vector in the concept representation image, but it conveys the attributes, categories and meanings of the image participants. According to statistics, there are 147 narrated reconstructed images in the sample, accounting for 97.4% of the total.

Table 6. Representational meaning distribution of the sample

Representational meaning	Narrative representation	Concept representation	Total
Quantity	147	4	151
Percentage	97.4%	2.6%	100%



Figure 1. They smile and gaze at each other



Figure 2. The hands operate the steering wheel

After further analysis, it was found that the reaction process appears most frequently in the narrative representation images. For example, in Figure 1, Scholz and French President Macron smile and gaze at each other, indicating that the conversation went very well and positively suggesting the friendly relationship between Germany and France. Scholz conveys different political themes through the use of gaze with different meanings such as mild, firm and serious, which enriches the narrative meaning. The action process often accompanies the reaction process. For example, in Figure 2, Scholz's left and right hands operate the steering wheel to form two vectors, the engineer holds the handrail inside the car to form a vector, and the gazes of Scholz, the engineer and the journalists form multiple vectors, concentrating on the narrative theme of Scholz's personal work and reaching out to the masses. The action process and reaction process complement each other, making the narrative theme clearer and enhancing the storytelling of the image.

The extensive use of narrative images helps Scholz to further emphasize his own practical actions, while the alternating use of reaction and action processes enhances the narrative effect, attracting the attention of users and deepening the public's understanding of Germany's courageous and committed image.

3.2.2 Interactive Meaning

In social media images, the reproducing participants of the interactive meaning are the people in the images, and the interactive participants are the social media users. Since this thesis mainly focuses on Scholz's multi-modal model of national image shaping, this section only analyzes Twitter images (128 in total) with Scholz as the main participant, and explores their interactive significance from the perspectives of social distance, attitude and modality.

The establishment of social distance depends on the different distances of the shots (close-up, close up, distance) and the main division scales are: close proximity, personal proximity, personal distance, social proximity, social distance and public distance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:131). An assessment of the social distance of Scholz's tweeted images revealed that the images contained the majority of close-up shots, accounting for 75.8% of the total.

Table 7. Shot distance distribution of the samples

Shot distance	Close-up	Close up	Distance	Total
Quantity	5	97	26	128
Percentage	3.9%	75.8%	20.3%	100%



Figure 3. the shoulders and head of the person



Figure 4. the upper body and the whole body

In his tweets, Scholz mostly uses close ups, for example, Figure 3 only captures the shoulders and head of the person, which is a personal close up, delicately portraying Scholz's seriousness when listening to the meeting. Figure 4 captures the upper body of Scholz and the whole body of others, which is a social close up, vividly showing the event of Scholz's visit to his staff. In the context of globalization and informationization, the term "national boundaries" has been relatively weakened, and cross-culturalism and diversity have become the characteristics of the times (Liu Li, 2011). By presenting a large number of close-up images, Scholz helps to dilute the sense of alienation in social media space and to bring the public closer, thus enhancing the emotional communication with users. This visual strategy is precisely in line with German multiculturalism, creating an image of a country that is tolerant and open, seeking common ground while reserving differences.

Attitudes are mainly represented by the perspective. Kress et al. believed that the overlooking perspective indicates that the image viewer was in a dominant position, the horizontal perspective shows that there was an equal interpersonal relationship between the image viewer and the reproducing participant, and the upward perspective means that the reproducing participant played a dominant role. After analyzing the samples, it is found that most of the images are shot at the level of the eye, while a few are shot at the level of the eye or the top of the eye. The results are as follows:

Table 8. Shooting perspective distribution of the sample

Shooting perspective	Upward	Horizontal	Overlook	Total
Quantity	18	99	11	128
Percentage	14.1%	77.3%	8.6%	100%



Figure 5. The horizontal perspective



Figure 6. The partially overlook view

Germany, the prototype of the "Zivilmacht" (civilized state), is more multilateral and broadly cooperative (Maull, 1992; Senghaas, 1997), and Scholz's choice of perspective for the pictures is a good example of this attitude. By using a horizontal perspective (e.g., Figure 5), it facilitates the establishment of an equal social relationship with the user and establishes an image of a personable leader. This is complemented by a partially overlook view (Figure 6), which lowers one's status and puts the viewer in the dominant position, making it easier to integrate into the happy picture. With this simple perspective strategy, Scholz sends a signal of peace and friendship to the world, deepening Germany's national image of mutual respect and harmony with other countries, which is also in line with the contemporary world trend of peace, development and cooperation.

Modality is an important component of interactive meaning, referring to the degree of truthfulness or credibility of statements made about the world of concern, and is divided into three categories of high, medium and low values. High affective modalities such as too much color saturation and too much detail can lead to an exaggerated sense of unreality; when saturation is low, we are prone to a sense of nonworldly falsity (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 47-48, 155, 159).



Figure 7. Received by the leaders and people



Figure 8. Mourning the death of elderly man

The analysis shows that Scholz adjusts the colors of the images according to different intentions. For example, Figure 7 shows Scholz being received by the leaders and people of his country, with high mood colors such as red and yellow creating a lively atmosphere, while Figure 8 shows Scholz mourning the death of an elderly man, using low mood colors, with low saturation grays and blacks, to convey the heavy mood of the participants in the image. This shows that Scholz's use of color in his tweets is objective and relevant to the subject matter, avoiding deliberately rendering a certain tone to mislead the public and reflecting Germany's strict, traditional and orderly national image.

3.2.3 Compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning refers to the overall layout of multimodality, including information value, framing, and salience. Information value is achieved through the layout of compositional elements in the image. Salience refers to the visual modality's highlighting of some of the image information with

the role of size, color, foregrounding, and other elements, and framing refers to the use of framing to reflect the presence or absence of image elements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 186-197).

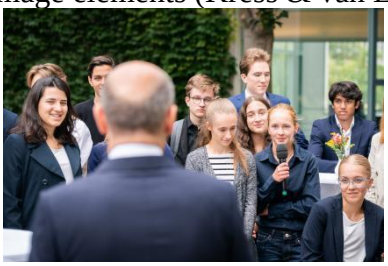


Figure 9. To shift the focus to the girl



Figure 10. To shift the focus to the woman

The most remarkable feature of Scholz's tweets in the sense of composition is the clever combination of foreground and background. For example, Figures 9 and 10 bokeh Scholz's back in the foreground to shift the focus to the girl and woman in the background, which is conducive to the viewing the process of the picture from Scholz's point of view. In this way, Scholz gives the user a shared experience rather than a sense of indifference, deepening Germany's image of respect for other countries and diversity and tolerance. In addition, the bright, warm colors of the tweeted images highlight Germany's optimistic, positive and confident character, allowing users to build up their perception of Germany's national image in salience.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, from a multi-modal perspective, this thesis uses the three metafunctions of language and visual grammar theory to deeply interpret the means of German image construction in German Chancellor Scholz's tweets. In the second half of 2022, under the background of Russia-Ukraine conflict and energy crisis, how to clarify its political position, maintain its international status as a European power and rebuild national confidence is an urgent task for Germany. Using tweets as a powerful weapon, Chancellor Scholz chose a multimodal discourse strategy based on the characteristics of social media to express his clear political demands, namely to maintain the internal unity of EU member states, to comply with the trend of world peace, development and cooperation, and to demonstrate the government's determination to solve the energy crisis for the support of the public. In a rational and moderate manner, he presented Germany's image to the German people and the world as "a responsible and neighborly participant in global governance, a trustworthy actor of solidarity and good governance and a faithful defender of order and tradition". The study of social media communication characteristics and the use of multimodal symbolic resources to develop effective national image building and propaganda strategies in the multimedia environment is a major political issue in the world today. The multimodal discourse analysis of official media articles can not only add typical materials to language and communication research, but also introduce a new perspective for the phenomenon concerned by regional and country studies.

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