ANLYSYS OF VISUAL METAPHOR

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Abstract: Visual things are one of the most fundamental communication media that also include language, and when it comes to their verbal functions, metaphor is one of the vital vehicles to enrich their meaning. To interpret and check out metaphor by visual language, it’s needed to look into that visual language's organic relationship with surrounding environments.

Key Word: Visual Language, Metaphor, Structurize

1. Purpose

Language, which is the most creative and basic communication system between men, is heavily reliant on figures of speech including metaphor and metonymy due to vocabulary deficiency. And metaphorical phenomena have logically been explained to some extent by linguists and especially by semiologists. Like literary metaphor, metaphor by visual language creates new visual vocabulary and lets observers realize what it intends to say. There are countless visual things in the world, and impressive metaphorical visual expressions can be found almost everywhere directly or indirectly. Therefore, it seems worth doing to look into in which environments and structure metaphor is used in visual language and how it's utilized, and this study is expected to be of use for creating new visual language and interpreting visual image.

2. Method

Metaphor was defined first, and then Peirce's semiotic theory was discussed to find out what its attributes were and how it worked. On that theoretical base, a way to interpret metaphor in visual language, and its effect was examined to suggest how visual metaphor should be employed in the future.

3. Definition and Operation of Visual Metaphor

Aristotle defined metaphor as a figure of speech that converts any particular concept or object into another one, and most dictionaries are dependent on his definition. According to Peirce, a pioneer in American pragmatism and semiotics, sign substitutes for something else that is generated or confined by itself, and what it substitutes for is the very object, and what's conveyed by representaman is meaning. And what comes into one's mind through representaman is interpretant. This triangular structure seems to serve to explain the relationship among metaphor, message sender and its receiver. Table 1 shows how metaphor works by applying Peirce's semiotics. From a viewpoint of visual language, message to be conveyed can be named an object(hereinafter called O), and a process to interpret it through visual language can be named an interpretant(hereinafter called I). And an output created by a designer can be named a representaman(hereinafter called R). Metaphor takes place when a designer, the sender of a message, interprets O, and it is expressed through R. A receiver of the message sees R first, and then reaches the destination O through the route of I. Metaphor is activated in the course of I, and R and O are absolutely different from each other as they are interpreted by extracting similarities from different ideas. As a consequence, there is no equality between O and R.

4. Analysis of Visual Metaphor

A visual Image can communicate with its viewers through correlation among its environments - appearance(visual motif), name and meaning(business). Viewers can gain some clues from them to infer what it means.

Table 2 shows the semantic relationship of visual image to find out the semantic structure of metaphor. The inverted triangle in the middle of the table is visual language and an image to be communicated, and there are appearance(visual motif), name and meaning(business) at each corner of it, which are clues to figure out what the image means. The outside triangles are generated by applying Peirce's semiotics, and metaphor works among them. When this analytic instrument is applied to a trade mark of a specific company, the trade mark to be analyzed can be placed in the center(see Table 3), and there are visual motif, company name and its business in its three angular points.
When the trade mark is analyzed, it’s found that what business the company is engaged in is described metaphorically by one of the company name and visual motive or both of them. Some trade marks include no sign of their companies, and others use metonymy and metaphor together. Companies attempt to communicate with customers by condensing every information on themselves into trade marks in a different fashion.

Take the trade mark of TimeWarner, an American media company (see Table 3). The triangle in the center is the surface of its trade mark. When it is dismantled into company name, business and visual motive, company name is TimeWarner, and it's engaged in media and entertainment business. And its visual motive is a simplified shape that represents an eye and ear. The company metaphorically shows that it does multimedia business to amuse the eyes and ears of viewers and supply information.

In the event of TimeWarner, metaphor takes place only between the visual motive and business, but there could be different types of trade marks that metaphor occurs between two or all the three directions of the triangle.

Table 4 shows a triangular horn, which the three angular points are concentrated into a single point. This also represents the meaning and image of trade mark. Each angular point gathers Is that link company name, business and visual motive with one another, and that describes the nature or philosophy of business. How customers feel about a specific trade mark can be inferred by analyzing the trade mark using this triangular structure, and whether or not communication between them is successful can be determined. It would be possible to see if a particular trade mark works as intended, no matter what it is, by applying this triangular analytic structure.

5. Conclusion

For designers who deal with visual language, metaphor is one of the favorite ways to express their intention, but few efforts have ever been made to structurize it since metaphor is thought to work in a very sensitive and sensible manner. It's attempted in this study to develop a triangular metaphor structure by utilizing Peirce's semiotics in a bid to structurize how visual metaphor works and make it possible to interpret and check out visual language and come up with new ideas. The attempt is expected to pave the way for having a deeper understanding of comprehensive visual language and creating new one.

6. References

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