

## Research on Publicity of Ethnic Cultural Tourism in the Wuling Mountain Area From the Perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of economic globalization, the exchange between China and other countries is increasingly frequent; the publicity of ethnic culture tourism is becoming more and more important. The Wuling Mountain area includes 71 counties (cities and districts) in the border area of Hubei province, Hunan province, Chongqing province and Guizhou province. Its long history and profound culture, beautiful natural environment and rich ethnic customs make tourism industry gradually become the pillar industry. How to enhance the ability of the publicity of the Wuling Mountain ethnic culture becomes the key issue to be considered. For a long time, the development and promotion of ethnic culture tourism involves economic, social, geographical and cultural factors, but ignoring language and other social semiotics. However, according to Halliday, culture as a set of semiotic systems, a set of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate. In order to better explore the project of "Publicity of ethnic culture tourism of the Wuling Mountain area", this thesis analyzes publicity of ethnic culture tourism from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics and its Multimodal Discourse Analysis so as to improve the ability of its publicity.

### Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is the study of the relationship between language and its functions in social settings, developed by British linguist M.A.K. Halliday in the late 1950s and early 1960s, who had been influenced by the work of the Prague School and British linguist J.R. Firth. Halliday took the notion of system from J. R. Firth, and then developed "Scale and Category Grammar", "Systemic Grammar", "Functional Grammar", "Systemic Functional Linguistics", "Social Semiotics" to "Applicable Linguistics Theory". For Halliday, language as social semiotic, it means interpreting language within a sociocultural context, in which the culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms, as an information system (Halliday 1978:2). Hence, a major tenet in SFL is that meaning is made and can only be interpreted in context. Halliday points out that language not only reflect social reality, but also shapes the perception of social reality. Therefore, language as a resource for meaning, is one of the social semiotic system, but there are other sign systems also involved in construing and constructing social reality.

A social reality (or a 'culture') is itself an edifice of meanings--a semiotic construct. Language is one of the semiotic systems that constitute a culture; one that is distinctive in that it also serves as an encoding system for many of the others, like art forms such as painting, sculpture, music and so forth, and other modes of cultural behaviour, such as modes of exchange, modes of dress, structures of the family, and so forth. [Halliday, 1978: 2].

Michael Halliday's social semiotic theory (Halliday 1978; van Leeuwen 2005) lays the foundation for 'multimodality' and 'multimodal analysis'. Following Halliday and Hasan's (1985) conception of culture as sets of interrelated semiotic systems, the meanings of individual semiotic choices are derived in relation to semiotic configurations in discourse, society and culture which themselves are multimodal in nature (O' Halloran, Tan & E, 2014). Halliday emphasizes that "language does not passively reflect reality; language actively creates reality" (Halliday 1990). SFL is concerned with the functional meanings of semiotic resources in society which provides the basis for the development of SFL into Applicable Linguistics and Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

Applicable Linguistics is designed to solve problems that arise in using language in communities around the world, involving both reflection and action (Halliday 1985).

## 1. Applicability of Systemic Functional Linguistics

The development of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has roughly gone through five stages: Syntactic or Grammatical theory, Systemic Grammar, Functional Grammar, Social Semiotic, and Applicable Linguistics (Tan & Huang 2020). SFL is regarded as both general and Applicable Linguistics. It is regarded as a general linguistics because of the study of universal rules of language with a strong theoretical nature. It is Applicable linguistics because it is a linguistics with the purpose in solving practical problems (Halliday 2009). It is pointed out that SFL is “a problem-oriented theory”, which is designed to help identify and solve problems from outside. The problems are often not those faced by linguists, but by those who engage in or are interested in language since language plays a key role in their community and society (Huang 2017). In 1972, Halliday was interviewed by Parret (1974) and he pointed out that there were two fundamental problems in the study of human language: one is about language itself, which was an internal problem. The other is about the use of language in society, which was external. In other words, the intrinsic problem focus on the formation, development and change of human language which are studied in SFL as general linguistics; the external problems are about the social and cultural constraints of language, including language and society, language and culture etc. The “applicability” of SFL is to arouse the sense of responsibility of linguists to solve the problems in language use in society.

The Wuling mountain area includes 71 counties (city, district) of Hubei Province, Hunan Province, Chongqing and Guizhou Province, with one third of population are minority groups. People there are in poverty with high poverty incidence, so the area is the major battlefield for poverty alleviation in China. It is much harder to achieve sustainable development for traditional industries in this region. However, beautiful natural environment, profound ethnic customs and long history enable tourism industry gradually to the pillar industries. It is imperative to enhance the ability of publicity of ethnic culture and improve the level of tourism promotion. The premise is to deeply understand the ethnic culture of the Wuling Mountain area. Halliday explains that linguistics is a “kind of semiotics” because language is viewed as “one among a number of systems of meaning that, taken all together, constitute human culture” (Halliday 1985: 4). Therefore, to better understand culture, we should know the meaning potential of language and other modes of meaning. It is required that linguistics should shoulder the responsibilities. Since SFL is a problem-oriented Applicable Linguistics, we can explore the project of the publicity of ethnic tourism culture from it. Halliday proposed that discourse analysis could be used to solve problems, and that discourse analysis was an important part of SFL rather than the application of theory (Halliday 2008). As in SFL, language as a social semiotic means “interpreting language within a sociocultural context. Hence, meaning is made and can only be interpreted in context.

## 2. Context Theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics

Context plays an important role in Systemic Functional Language (SFL). Halliday, by referring to the viewpoint of anthropologist Malinowski (1923), divided context into two categories: context of culture and context of situation (Halliday & Hasan 1989). According to Halliday, situational context is an instance of cultural context (Halliday 2007), and composed of three variables: the field of discourse refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place, realized by experiential meanings; the tenor of discourse refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles, realized by interpersonal meanings; the mode of discourse refers to what part the language is playing, realized by textual meanings (Halliday 1985 1989: 6). The three variables establish relation between the text and the context of situation. According to Martin, social context is also modeled through register and genre (Martin 1992, 2002; Martin and White 2005). Register theory indicates the influence of three key variables on the way language is used in context; they are field, tenor, and mode. In addition, the three Register variables

are realized by metafunctions. The theory of context reflect the social orientation of Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Text interpretation is restricted by social, historical and cultural context, situational context and linguistic context(Lv & Chen 2020). Cultural context and situational context should also be taken into account in the publicity of ethnic cultural tourism. With the rapid economic and social development, the longing for a better life is an expectation for all people. They are not just satisfied with food and warmth, but also long for happiness. Travel is becoming more and more popular. People want to experience different cultures and appreciate the beauty of nature. The tourism of the Wuling Mountain area is famous for its natural scenery and profound ethnic culture. In addition, targeted poverty reduction is the strategic orientation of the development of poverty alleviation in China since the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Therefore, the tourism of the Wuling Mountain area has caught great attention and plays an key role in poverty alleviation. The government there has issued several policies in order to promote and develop tourism. On the other hand, the rapid development of new media has brought such new opportunities that the beautiful scenery and colorful ethnic customs no longer hidden in the distant mountains, it has a variety of channels and medium to display itself, such as “Short Video”, Weibo and so on. Besides considering economic and social development, religious and cultural context, regional development plan, when we promote some specific scenic spots or cultural activities, situational context including field, tenor and mode should be considered, such as the features of specific scenic spots, the target tourists, the medium of publicity. In cultural tourism promotion in the Wuling mountain area, the modern new media are becoming the main medium, because they can show the natural scenery and folk customs vividly. The tourists in Hunan and its neighboring provinces like Chongqing, even in Guangdong-Hongkong-Macao Greater Bay Area are the target visitors.

### 3. Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis

With the social and economic development, the integration of 5G technology and new media, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data and other technologies have greatly changed the way of publicity of cultural tourism. The publicity of cultural tourism is not limited to words and traditional newspaper or magazine. Based on the social semiotics and problem orientation, SFL has laid the foundation of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) are concerned with the “grammatics” of semiotic resources, which involves formulating the systems of meaning in order to understand the functions of different semiotic resources and the meanings which arise when semiotic choices combine in multimodal phenomena over space and time (O’Halloran &Lim 2014). Based on SFL, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is a discourse analysis method that combines written language with non-verbal symbols such as images and sounds to analyze the semiotic system and discourse meaning composed of various sign systems from an overall perspective, so as to better explain the communication and interaction in human communication. Multimodal Discourse includes but is not limited to text, image, sound, video, animation, chart, color and other symbol systems, including visual, auditory, tactile and other sensory modes.

Following Halliday’s SFL, the systems are organized according to the functions (called “metafunctions”) which the resources serve in society (e.g. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014; Martin & Rose 2007). Therefore, the Systemic Functional Linguistics metafunction hypothesis is accepted in multimodal discourse analysis, thinking that other semiotic systems are similar with language system with ideational function, interpersonal function and discourse function. In addition, influenced by the context theory of SFL, the meaning interpretation of multimodal discourses is constrained by context. MDA has been developed into “system function semiotics” by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001, 2006), “the multimodal interaction analysis” by Norris (2004), “corpus linguistics multimodal discourse analysis” by Baldry, A.P. & Thibault, P.J. (2006, 2008) , and the multi-modal metaphor theory by Charles Forceville (1996, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2017).

This paper points out Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis(SF-MDA) can greatly

help publicity of ethnic culture in the Wuling mountain area in terms of two aspects. Culture as a set of semiotic systems, a set of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate (Halliday 1978). First, in order to better understand culture, we should explore it from different semiotic systems and their interactions. Second, with the help of new media platform, we can integrate semiotic systems and broaden the publicity channels from the perspective of SF-MDA.

#### 4. Application of the Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis in Publicity of Ethnic Cultural Tourism in the Wuling Area

In the promotion of the Wuling mountain ethnic tourism culture, the first problem to be solved is to deeply understand the cultural connotation of the Wuling Mountain. As mentioned above, culture as a set of semiotic systems, a set of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate (Halliday 1978), among which the language system is an important and special system. To interpret the connotation of The Tujia and Miao cultures in the Wuling Mountain area, we need to consider the role of language, music, clothing and other semiotic systems. By using the theory of SF-MDA, culture can be analyzed from the modes of vision, hearing, taste and so on, for example, in the Wuling Mountain area, the Tujia ethnic epic “Tima Song”, “Miao Ancient Folksong”, “Tujia Hand-waving Dance”, “Maogusi of Tujia Minority”, “Tujia Brocade”, “Miao Painting” and “Miao Embroidery” as carrier of Tujia and Miao ethnic culture. They should be deeply analyzed to further promote the inheritance, protection and dissemination of Tujia and Miao ethnic culture. Secondly, the publicity of cultural tourism cannot be separated from cultural and situational context. An effective publicity of cultural tourism can not only convey the cultural connotation of tourist attractions, but also attract a large number of tourists and produce economic and social effects. The following part will discuss the research procedures of publicity of ethnic culture tourism in the Wuling Mountain area from the perspective of SF-MDA.

##### 4.1 Collecting and Sorting Data

First we should collect some data, the specific forms of ethnic culture which are the important carrier of culture. For example, the data of specific forms of Tujia and Miao ethnic culture in the Wuling Mountain area includes material culture (such as Bronze pillars in Xizhou, Qinjian in Liye, ancient architectural complex in Pushi, etc.) and nonmaterial culture (folk literature, traditional music, traditional art, etc.). According to the visual, auditory, taste and other modes, as well as color, image, action, sound and other symbols, the scientific classification of corpus.

**Table 1.** Ethnic Cultural Statistics in XiangXi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture from multimodal perspectives

Mode	Symbols	Cultural forms of Miao and Tujia Minority in West Hunan
Single Mode: Vision	Color Image Space	Tujia brocade, Miao Painting, Miao Silver Ornaments, Miao Embroidery, Ruins of Laosicheng, Miao costumes, Miao Embroidery, Miao Printing and Dyeing, Strips of Qin, Bronze Column at Xizhou, Ancient Architecture group in Luxi County, Longshan County Laoche Ancient architecture group and others
Single Mode: Hearing	Music words	Tima Song, The Wedding Lament of Tujia Nationality, Folk Song, Ancient Folk Song, Beating Symbols of Tujia Nationality, Tujia Dongdong Quine, Tujia Ethnic Group's folksong, Chenhe High Cavity and so on
Single Mode: Taste	Sour Spicy Sweet	Miao Sour Fish, Miao Sour Soup, Tujia Youbaba, Xiangxi bacon and so on
Multi-modes	Music Action Character Costumes	Tujia Hand-waving Dance, Drum Dance of Miao Minority in West Hunan, Maogusi of Tujia Minority, Tima Song, Wedding Lament of Tujia Minority, Ancient Folk Song, Tujia Yea, Autumn Festival of Miao, Si Yue Ba festival and so on

## 4.2 Interpretation Publicity of Ethnic Culture Tourism in the Wuling Mountain Area from the Perspective of SF-MDA

The languages of Tujia and Miao ethnic groups are without writing form, and their unique and splendid national culture is inherited through language, image, music, actions and other symbol systems. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the importance of semiotic systems such as images, music, gestures and so on. On the one hand, we should explore the meaning potential of different semiotic systems, describe the instantiation process of meaning potential, and analyze their interactions. During the process of interpretation of the ethnic cultural connotation in the Wuling Mountain area, attention should be paid to the context analysis. The selection of semiotics is restricted by the cultural context and the situational context. An in-depth understanding of the historical background, religious belief and ecological environment of the Wuling Mountain area is the premise for us to interpret the cultural connotation. The understanding of the ethnic cultural connotation of the Wuling Mountain area is the foundation for the publicity.

“Mysterious Xiangxi” is one of the famous brand of publicity of ethnic culture tourism in the Wuling Mountain area. The mystery of Xiangxi is hidden in songs, such as “Tima Song of Tujia Minority”, “Ancient Folk Song of Miao Minority”, “Beating Symbols of Tujia Minority”, “Chenhe High Cavity”, in paintings, “Tujia Brocade” and “Miao Painting”, as for dances, such as “Tujia Hand-waving Dance” etc. In addition, the specific cultural carrier also needed to interpreted by Multimodal Discourse Analysis, for example, “Tima Song”. “Tima Song” is a narrative epic that combines the lyrics and songs sung in Tujia language during the ritual ceremony of Tujia in order to pray for blessing and eliminate disasters. As a living fossil of the grammatical features of Tujia language, it has been listed in the protection list of national intangible cultural heritage. To understand “Tima Song”, one needs to take reference to the meaning potential of semiotic system such as music, languages and images and analyze their interaction effect. In addition, it is imperative to understand the context of history and culture etc., such as the the philosophy and thinking, religious belief of Tujia Ethnic Minority. In this way, the interpretation of the ethnic tourism culture can be more comprehensive and systematic.

## 4.3 Ways of Publicity of Ethnic Cultural Tourism in the Wuling Mountain Area from the Perspective of SF-MDA

Ethnic culture is an important part of the soft power of Chinese culture, and its publicity is an important content of culture development in China. On one hand, it's conducive to better understanding ethnic culture, and on the other hand, it's useful to promote tourism and contribute the prosperous development of minority areas. Under the premise of understanding the connotation of ethnic culture, the publicity of ethnic cultural tourism can also explored from the theory of SF-MDA. The publicity of ethnic tourism culture should not be restricted by the single mode of traditional media, but should fully use modern Internet and new media technology. First, to integrate different semiotic systems, and use different medium to present cultural connotation vividly and fully. It is well known that content is king in the publicity, therefore, topic selection and content design greatly influence the validity. Thus, the publicity of ethnic culture in the Wuling Mountain area, contents should be the primary concern and reflect the core value of ethnic tourism culture, such as the ecological view of harmonious and sustainable development of Tujia and Miao nationality, being hardworking and simple and so on. Second, the integration of different semiotic systems to be more innovative.

With the emergence of the new media era, culture can be communicated not just through multi-modes like vision, hearing and smell, and through different semiotics such as images, music, language and costume, but also by integrating different modes and semiotics such as We Chat, Short Video and Virtual Simulation etc. With the help of social media, the interaction with viewers enhance the validity of the publicity. For example, “Web celebrity” Shilinjiao in Shibaodong village in west Hunan promotes the culture of the Wuling mountain area by shooting short videos and live broadcast, which made the specialty in west Hunan more popular. In short, considering cultural context, like the social and economic development, religious culture, the specific situational context,

like the target tourists, with the help of new media, the publicity with different semiotic systems by different platforms is becoming the new trend.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the problem orientation, Systemic Functional Linguistics is not confined to the syntactic theory, function theory, the social semiotics, it also develops toward multimodal discourse analysis and the ecological theory of discourse analysis in order to constantly solve the internal language problems and external problems associated with the language use. From the perspective of systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis, the publicity of ethnic tourism culture can be improved by better understanding ethnic cultural connotation and integrating different social semiotics systems. Especially, with the integration of 5G technology and new media, the popularization and application of artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data and other technologies have changed the publicity greatly. New media platforms can be used effectively to promote ethnic tourism culture from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis, by optimizing the content of ethnic tourism culture, with innovative mode of communication in order to improve the soft power of ethnic minority cultures and promote the development of ethnic minority areas.

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