

The Discourse-Historical Approach of Identity Construction in Corporate Promotional Videos for External Publicity Image

Xiaodong Wang^{1*}, Jing Yu²

¹Northeast Agricultural University, Harbin 150001, Heilongjiang Province, China

²Zhuanghe Dexian School, Dalian 116499, Liaoning Province, China

*Corresponding author: Xiaodong Wang, 993062460@qq.com

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Abstract: Corporate identity construction of external publicity image is an important part of the development of enterprises. Based on Wodak's discourse-historical approach, this study takes the text of COFCO's English promotional video as the research object, analyzes the corporate brand image, media image, organizational image, and environmental image constructed by the enterprises from three steps: linguistic expression, discourse strategy, and theme to provide references for Chinese enterprises to enhance their international influence.

Keywords: Corporate promotional videos; External publicity image; Discourse-historical approach

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1. Introduction

Corporate identity is a powerful means of shaping corporate image ^[1], and successful corporate identity construction is crucial to the development of enterprises. Taking the discourse of China National Cereals, Oils and Foodstuffs Corporation (COFCO)'s English promotional video as the research object, and integrating Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA) ^[2], which is different from previous critical discourse analysis methods, DHA is oriented to social philosophy and aims to analyze the positive self-representations and negative other representations in the discourse, thereby revealing the discursive construction of in-groups and out-groups, clarifying the attitudinal tendencies and real intentions in the discourse, and explaining the attitudinal tendencies and real intentions in the discourse ^[3]. The discourse-historical approach mainly consists of three steps: linguistic expressions, discourse strategies, and themes. The forms of linguistic expression with vocabulary, grammar, and other linguistic elements are the basis of the discourse-historical approach, the discourse strategies such as the way of the exposition and the means of argumentation used are the core of the approach, and the theme in relation to the author's point of view, the historical background, the social environment, and other aspects is the sublimation of the discourse-historical approach. The following article aims to study how the linguistic expression, discourse strategy, and theme of the text reflect the identity

construction of external publicity images in corporate promotional videos.

2. Linguistic expressions of the text

With the help of the ELAN 6.4 video coding tool, the author transcribes the text of the video material, which consists of 868 words and 41 sentences, and calculates the average sentence length to be 20.58 words, and sentences exceeding or equal to 21 words are referred to as long sentences in this study, while sentences less than or equal to 20 words are referred to as short sentences. In addition to function words, the statistics of the high-frequency vocabulary of COFCO’s corporate videos are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Statistics of high-frequency words in COFCO’s promotional video

Word list	Frequency	Proportion (%)
COFCO	29	3.341
We	16	1.843
China	14	1.613
Grain	10	1.152
Food	9	1.037
Products	9	1.037
Largest	8	0.922
Trading	8	0.922
One	7	0.806
Capital	6	0.691
...
Total	868	100%

2.1. Vocabulary selection of the text

The statistics show that high-frequency content words appearing in **Table 1** are “COFCO, we, China, grain, food, products, largest, trading...” and so on. In the promotional video, “COFCO” appears 29 times, mostly introducing COFCO’s 18 subsidiaries, such as COFCO Trading, COFCO Oils & Oilseeds, COFCO Grains & Cereals, and other subsidiaries. It shows the strong strength of COFCO, with many subsidiaries, each performing its duties, and jointly helping the development of COFCO. The word “largest” appears 8 times, often appearing as “the largest agro-products processing enterprise; the largest grain trading enterprise; the largest rice-processing traders” to illustrate that COFCO not only has a wide range of business but also achieves excellent results in its field. In addition, “grain” appears 10 times, such as “grain trader, grain production, grain import...”; “food” appears 9 times, such as “food safety, food promotion, food ingredient...” In the promotional video, terms related to “grain” and “food” are mentioned, highlighting the brand characteristics of COFCO.

In the promotional video, “China” appears 14 times, “products” appears 9 times, and “trading” appears 8 times, such as “...connected key logistics nodes in six continents with a trading capacity that doubles the amount of China’s grain import...; ...connect our overseas trading advantages with China’s domestic logistics, processing and distribution networks...; ...engaged in the trading and logistics of major agro-products and is a main channel for grain import...” “China”, “trade” and “products” are mentioned many times in the video, reflecting that COFCO not only focuses on national development but also focuses on developing international

trade and expanding international influence.

2.2. Syntactic features of text

Syntactic features are the target of syntactic research at the sentence level, which is carried out in terms of sentence length, sentence type, and voice of the text in the videos.

In terms of sentence length, the analysis mainly focuses on long sentences and short sentences. Statistics show that there are 22 long sentences and 19 short sentences. In the text modality, the number of long sentences is more than short sentences, and long sentences use more attributives and adverbials, so they are more accurate and rigorous, and the short sentences have fewer words, and they are generally more concise and direct, but are not conducive to the expression of complex semantic contents. The different expressive effects of long and short sentences produce different pragmatic effects.

Example 1: In China, we are the largest agro-products processing enterprise that has established a network integrating plantation and breeding warehousing and logistics, trading and processing, and upstream and downstream distribution.

Example 2: We are also engaged in the food, financial, and real estate property sectors.

The promotional video often uses long sentences and utilizes the principle of pragmatic efficiency. **Example 1** conveys the most information with the least amount of text, making its expression more detailed, rigorous, and professional. In terms of sentence types, according to the communicative function of sentences, they can be divided into declarative sentences, interrogative sentences, imperative sentences, and exclamatory sentences. In the promotional video, declarative sentences are used throughout, mostly in declarative language. **Example 2** states COFCO's main business and future vision.

Example 3: COFCO Feed provides breeders with high-quality, and safe feed products as well as one-stop solutions.

In terms of voice, voice is a verb form that expresses the active or passive relationship between subjects and predicates. The voice in English grammar is divided into active voice and passive voice. The active voice usually indicates that the subject of a sentence is the actor, while the passive voice is often used to emphasize the behavior or outcome of an event. In the promotional video, the active voice of discourse occupies the primary position, with clear and powerful expression. **Example 3** emphasizes that the COFCO, as the agent, fully utilizes its subjective initiative.

3. Discourse strategies of the text

3.1. Nominative strategy

Nominative strategy refers to how to name and refer to the elements involved in social activities, including people, objects, phenomena, behaviors, etc. Through the means of naming, participants in social activities are distinguished as in-groups and out-groups, thereby constructing and reproducing the whole social activity^[4].

Example 4: COFCO Corporation has deeply advanced reforms, to be a state-owned capital investment company and set up 18 specialized subsidiaries.

First of all, in the promotional video, the enterprise is often referred to by its official name COFCO, mainly COFCO Corporation, COFCO International, COFCO Trading, COFCO Sugar, and other subsidiaries to deepen the brand impression and highlight the strength of the enterprise, and build an authoritative external publicity identity.

Example 5: We connect our overseas trading advantages with China's domestic logistics, processing, and distribution networks.

In the promotional video, the enterprise is also referred to by the personal pronoun *we*, which places the enterprise and the audience as a whole (**Example 5**), narrows the distance between the company and the audience, and constructs a friendly external publicity identity.

3.2. Predicational strategy

Predicational strategy, a fundamental aspect of discourse analysis, refers to the use of positive or negative evaluative words in the predicative components of discourse to assign positive or negative characteristics and attributes to participants in social activities (including people, objects, phenomena, etc.) [4]. Predication strategy is a crucial aspect of how we understand and interpret social interactions. It involves the careful selection of vocabulary to describe and categorize individuals or entities within a given context. The choice of words, whether positive or negative, can significantly shape how we perceive and evaluate these participants in social activities.

Example 6: We have expanded our presence in the world's major grain production countries.

Example 7: We conduct various forms of cooperation with countries along the "Belt and Road."

In the promotional video, COFCO mostly adopts positive predicates, such as "expand, conduct, build, connect, advance, optimize, provide, offer, engage, etc." to reflect the actions taken by COFCO, highlighting the enterprise's progressive external publicity identity. Understanding the predicational strategy allows a better understanding of social interactions and the ways in which language is used to shape COFCO's opinions and beliefs in the promotional video.

3.3. Intensification or mitigation strategy

The intensification/mitigation strategy, a crucial aspect of discourse analysis, locates the position of the proposition in the discourse by modifying the illocutionary force of discourse, mainly reflected in the application of modality in the discourse. Modality refers to the speaker's attitude towards the truth value of a proposition or the obligation involved in a command. It encompasses a range of expressions that indicate degrees of certainty, probability, obligation, or willingness. In the context of intensification/mitigation strategy, modality acts as a tool to adjust the assertiveness or softness of a statement.

Example 8: COFCO people will bear in mind their mission, reform with determination, and forge ahead steadily to realize the grand goals and blueprint.

In the promotional video, COFCO mostly adopts the modal verb "will," mainly to express its direction and vision for the next step of work, constructing its innovative external publicity identity. By mastering this strategy, speakers can convey their messages more effectively, adapting their language to suit different contexts and audiences.

4. Themes of the text

4.1. Corporate perspective of COFCO

As a leader in the global food industry, COFCO Corporation continues to enhance its position in the global market through the organic combination of competitive advantages, development strategies, and social responsibilities. Its journey toward global leadership is marked by a blend of innovation, commitment, and forward-thinking that has enabled it to weather the storms of changing market conditions and emerge stronger.

Example 9: As a major international grain trader with a global presence, COFCO Corporation is a state-owned capital investment company...

In the beginning, the image of state-owned enterprises as major international grain traders with global

influence was positioned. In future development, COFCO will continue to play a leading role, contribute to the prosperity of China's food industry, and build a leading external publicity identity.

4.2. Historical background of COFCO

As one of the leading enterprises in China's grain, oil, and food industry, COFCO has a long historical background and profound industry accumulation. COFCO adheres to the business philosophy of "people-oriented, quality first, service first," and continues to innovate and develop, thereby making a greater contribution to the prosperity and development of China's grain, oil, and food industry. The promotional video describes the development of the company.

Example 10: Over the past seven decades, COFCO Corporation has been forging ahead to become the world's first-class grain trader in the new era.

After decades of change and development, COFCO has grown from a single grain and oil enterprise to a multinational enterprise group covering agriculture, food, commercial real estate, finance, and other fields. The country attaches great importance to agriculture, rural areas, and farmers, is committed to promoting agricultural modernization, and provides a good development environment for food enterprises.

4.3. Social environment of COFCO

The social environment of COFCO is a complex and diverse system, involving policy, culture, social customs, and other aspects. Enterprises fully consider these factors and strengthen their own research and development capabilities and quality management, to adapt to the market changes and demand. At the same time, enterprises actively respond to the changes and challenges of the social environment, constantly innovate and develop, and make greater contributions to the development of China's agriculture and food industry. COFCO's development at home and abroad confirms the strong capabilities of Chinese enterprises and the compatibility of Chinese culture.

Example 11: Loyal to the nation and beneficial to the people, build China's own major international grain trader.

At the end of the video, COFCO is presented as a company that is loyal to the country, benefiting the people and creating China's own major international food trade center. It can be seen that COFCO is a producer of high-quality food and a creator of high-quality brands. Internally, COFCO has established its role as a big country enterprise, devoting itself to public welfare and actively contributing to society, and externally, expanding its market share, actively participating in international competition, and establishing a good social image.

5. Conclusion

Through the three steps of the discourse-historical approach, the identity construction of COFCO's English promotional videos for external publicity image is specifically reflected in the construction of external publicity identity that guarantees people's happiness and strengthens the company's brand image; authoritative, friendly, with the whole industry chain publicity identity highlights the corporate media image; progressive and innovative external publicity identity optimize the organizational image of enterprises; the external publicity identity of protecting the environment creates corporate environmental image. As one of the Chinese companies listed in the Fortune Global 500, COFCO's promotional videos have high reference value for building external publicity images, providing references for other companies to establish their corporate image through promotional videos.

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