

The Peasant Identity in ZHAO's Comic Sketches in the Perspective of Multi-modality Theory

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In recent years, the research on identity has brought about a great importance in sociolinguistic research. However, the research on the construction of peasant identity in comic sketches or in real life is rare. The topic of this research is "The Peasant Identity in ZHAO's Comic Sketches in the Perspective of Multi-modality Theory", which is for the purpose to explore the construction of ZHAO's peasant identity in his performances. This paper takes both quantitative and qualitative research methods and the data for the research are collected from ZHAO's comic sketches in the Spring Festival Gala. Based on the multi-modality theory and for the purpose to find how peasant identity is constructed in his comic sketches, the research finds that ZHAO's peasant identity in his comic sketches could be constructed through the language, body language, costumes and stage design modalities, which are revealed in detail in section "Research Results". In addition, this research also achieves the fact that people could use different kinds of semiotics to communicate with each other in real life, and benefits us with a pretty new understanding of peasant emotion and peasant identity in China. What is more, it enables us to perceive that language cannot only reflect people's life, their social activities, but also reveal people's social identity.

Keywords: multi-modality, peasant identity, comic sketches, body language

Introduction

Language is the primary tool which we do things with. People could know you by what you speak, what you behave, and what you wear, all of which will reveal who you are, namely your identity. "Identity really matters in that it is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 11). As for sociolinguistics, identity is an important research area. Yet, among the identity researches, the one on peasant identity in comic sketches is rarely seen. Thus, this paper intends to make the research on identity in this area, which will focus on the topic of "The Peasant Identity in ZHAO's Comic Sketches in the Perspective of Multi-modality Theory". The research data are based on the famous, humorous actor—ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches.

ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches are enjoyed by people of different ages and genders in China. His comic sketches are dynamic discourse that can be analyzed in terms of multi-modality, which will serve as the basic theory for this research. As the saying goes that you are what you say, therefore, the language used in ZHAO's

comic sketches could reveal his peasant identity.

To sum up, this study sees ZHAO's comic sketch as a dynamic multi-modality discourse in terms of the semiotic system, take different semiotics such as language, body language, costume, stage design as various modalities for the research. The main research problem is how ZHAO's peasant identity in his comic sketches could be constructed with the help of language, body language, costume and stage design modalities. What is more, we wish this research would enable us to have a better understanding that language cannot only reflect people's life, their social activities, but also reveal people's social identity.

Literature Review

In this section, we will review the previous studies concerned mainly as the following aspects: the multi-modality theory, peasant identity in comic sketches, and body language for the necessity of this research. Simultaneously, the research problems will be put forward together with the hypothesis and the significance of this research.

Multi-modality Theory

Ever since the 1990s, multimodal discourse analysis has entered a new stage of development in the West (XIN, 2008). The multi-modality theory has come into scholars' vision as a new area. This was a transfer from traditional discourse analysis, put forward by Zelling Harris (1964). The function of modality theory exists in that meaning could be realized by different modalities (Halliday, 1994). That is to say in the process of meaning generation, each modality (whether it is utterances, written language, visual image, sound, or music) can be regarded as a separate meaning generating resource. And according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), "Multimodal discourse analysis referred to a kind of phenomenon which auditory, visual, tactual sense, etc, are utilized for communicating by the diverse ways and symbolic resources" (p. 2). And its goal is to analyze various semiotic modes in a text or communicative event, to integrate and correlate the representational, interactive and textual meanings achieved by these different factors so as to analyze how they work mutually to create a unified text or a communicative event.

One contributor of the research on multi-modality is Professor ZHU Yong-sheng. He put it that "modality, deriving from mode, is the channel or media that people use for communication, including language, images, colors, music and gestures, etc." (ZHU, 2007, p. 83). Professor ZHANG De-lu (2009) said that "multi-modal discourse refers to the phenomena that fulfill the purpose of communication through the use of such sensory as auditory, visual, and tactile and others by various means of communication and symbolic resources of language, images, sounds, movements, etc." (p. 24).

Considering all the above views, we could share a brief working definition of multi-modal discourse. It is the text or discourse achieved by the common encoding of different semiotic systems, such as language (whether it is written or oral), image, body language, sound, music, costume style, color, and their relative variations. Therefore, the multi-modality will serve as the basic theory to guide this research.

Body Language

Through years of development, it has been found that daily language usage is often accompanied by non-linguistic factors, such as body languages, tones, music, image, and so on. At present body language is

mainly classified into four aspects: body posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye movements.

Ever since the 1970s, body language research has become a new interdisciplinary subject. Recent studies have shown that about one third human thoughts and feelings are expressed by body language. Body language is a set of visual symbols performed by human body so as to express their emotion and meaning (G. ZHOU and X. LI, 1997). YANG (2009) also put that paralanguage in the broad sense consists of not only paralanguage itself but also body language. It refers to the fact that body language is a non-verbal meaning expressing modality.

Setting out from the social semiotic point of view, we believe that as semiotic resources, body language, images, colors, sounds, or movements can be regarded as various types of semiotic systems and can also be called multimodalities, all of which play a role in meaning making. Taking body language as an example, more studies have been found on such aspects: body language research in cross-cultural communication (XU & RUAN, 2000), teachers' body language on classes (P. ZHOU, 2006), cultural implication of body language (W. LI, 2009), and so on. Yet, the research about body language in comic sketches is still rare, and this leaves the necessity for us to do in this research.

Peasant Identity in ZHAO's Comic Sketches

Identity is a more complicated or abstracted concept. Hereby, we would like to review over what is identity, then move to peasant identity and other related studies, etc.

Identity. Identity became a cultural cliché and a technical term in social and psychological analysis in the early 1980s (Andrew, Weigert, S. Teitge, & D. W. Teitge, 1986). Identity itself is not static but dynamic; it keeps pace with the development of the society. When talking about identity, there are different interpretations, such as Jenkins (2008) put it that "identity is the human capacity—rooted in language—to know 'who's who, and hence what's what. Identities are labels, patterned ways of speaking, thinking and feeling" (p. 4). ZHANG Jing (2006) put it that "identity denotes the status of social members in the society" (pp. 4-5). Most people's impression of identity is generally the traditional concept, which is possessed with rank, status, privileges, and other modern means. Again, Richard Jenkins (2008) said that "the notion of identity involves two criteria of comparison between persons or things: similarity and difference" (p. 16).

The reviews above reveal that identity refers to people's interpretation and construction of the individual experience and social status in particular cultural context. This tells that all identity resides in a specific society, without society there would be no such a thing called identity, and identity is also known as social identity.

As for other studies concerning identity or status are: "The Construction of Language in Gender Status" (X. ZHANG, 2007), "On Identity Construction and Its Motivation in Verbal Communication" (YUAN & FANG, 2008), and etc.. Yet, there is hardly any research about the construction of peasant identity, to say nothing from the perspective of multi-modality theory in the discourse of comic sketches. This leaves another necessity for us to do in this research.

ZHAO's Peasant Identity. The word peasant in China can be traced back to the Warring States Period. In ancient Chinese, it is more a word of occupation than a word of identity. In ancient times, peasants refer to those who have been long engaged in agricultural activities. However, in the modern society of China, the word peasant has transformed from some occupation to a kind of identity, namely this word refers those who have registered permanent residence in rural area.

At present, when we mention “peasant”, it usually denotes not only an occupation but also a social rank, a kind of identity, a type of living conditions, a kind of community and social organization, a cultural pattern, and so on. It is obvious that, “peasant” in China is still largely an identity concept rather than a career concept. In this regard, we start the research about peasant identity through the particular discourse of ZHAO's comic sketches. The purpose is to find how ZHAO's peasant identity is constructed through different modalities, such as in language, body language, and costume and stage design.

ZHAO Ben-shan is considered as one of the greatest actors in the circle of comic sketches, thus there is no doubt that many studies were focused on his performance, such as follows: the ideological pattern analysis (QIN, 2005), the civilian of ZHAO's comic sketches (HE, 2007, p. 32), language art analysis (Z. ZHANG & CHEN, 2007), northeast dialect (WANG, 2010), and so on. Thus, this leaves some gap of peasant identity construction for us to fill in this research.

Comic Sketches. In the broad sense, sketches contain much extensive content. It is usually regarded as a type of writing as long as it has elegant fun, possessed with special rhythm and interest, worthy of being appreciated. In the narrow sense, a sketch in the performing circle is a short art form of speech, which is a performance of a single actor or a group of actors, acted by way of the actor's body and language performance so as to display a relatively simple, amusing, or artistic image.

In China, comic sketches usually reflect small subjects, small events of the grassroots and the ordinary; describe the well-being of this world, the world in its real sense. It is close to life with moderate exaggeration, filled with typical event in real life and full of witty remarks. Among the comic sketches, ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketch is regarded as the most popular in the Spring Festival Gala. Therefore, it is worthy for the research in this paper.

The Problems, Hypothesis, and Significance of the Research

Based on the previous review, we can get some basic ideas about multi-modalities of body language, comic sketches and identity. The main research problems for this research are as follows:

- (1) How can comic sketches be regarded as multi-modal discourses in terms of the modalities of language, body language, costume and stage design?
- (2) How can ZHAO's peasant identity in his comic sketches of the Spring Festival Gala be constructed with the help of language, body language, costume and stage design modalities?

Correspondingly, the hypothesis of this research is that ZHAO Ben-shan's peasant identity in his comic sketches could be constructed with the help of language, body language, costume and stage design modalities.

As for the significance of this research, we wish this research could reach the following: Based on the theory of multi-modality, we can gain an insight into the nature of language so as to reveal the theoretical importance of the research. We wish to find that ZHAO's peasant identity in his comic sketches could be constructed through the language, body language, costumes and stage design modalities. We also wish to reveal the fact that people could use different kinds of semiotics to communicate with each other. What is more, it enables us to perceive that language cannot only reflect people's life, their social activities, but also reveal people's social identity. There is no doubt that this research is trying to reveal peasant discourse power in ZHAO's comic sketches, and could benefit us to have a pretty new understanding of peasant emotion and peasant identity in China.

Research Methods

This section mainly deals with such matters as research methods, the research subject and data collection as well.

Research Methods

Talking about the research method, we will take both the qualitative and quantitative methods in this research for the purpose to make our research more scientific, reliable, and valid. As to the methods, ZHANG Ting-guo and HAO Shu-zhuang (2008) put that “qualitative method is inductive, it can reveal the nature of object by analyzing its data; quantitative method can show the relations of concerned factors and make the results more reliable” (p. 68). These two methods are just like both sides of a coin, which could interact with each other. With the help of these methods, we collect and analyze the data, discuss the causes for the significant findings of the research so as to achieve a desirable purpose of the research.

Research Subject and Data Collection

The research subject of the research is ZHAO Ben-shan's peasant identity in his comic sketches of Spring Festival Gala. The aim of the research is to find different modalities in his comic sketches and how different modalities in comic sketches could help to construct peasant identity. For this purpose, such data are necessary to be collected as his northeast dialect, special body language, particular costume of peasant image and stage designs in his comic Sketches of the Spring Festival Gala.

Totally there are 21 ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches in the Gala show ever since 1990. In this research, the research data are mainly taken from the selected 15 of ZHAO's comic sketches since they are considered to be his most representative stage performances standing for peasant image or peasant identity. Now, we would like to have a simple look at the selected comic sketches diachronically as follows:

(1) 1990: *Blind Date for the Children* 《相亲》 is about two old former lovers going for a blind date for their children, but only to find they are old acquaintances once forced to separate by their parents' consideration of superstition. It reflects the old people's marriage suffering from discrimination.

(2) 1992: *I Want a Home* 《我想有个家》 is the story of divorced people. It shows their wish to have a warm family in search of the other part in their life.

(3) 1995: *Uncle Niu Being Promoted as a Cadre* 《牛大叔提干》 criticizes the local leaders' bureaucracy and their neglect of their duties.

(4) 1996: *Three Whips* 《三鞭子》 deals with an old carriage driver, who was meeting a cadre on the muddy road. This reflects the peasants' great desire of pleading for a good, responsible cadre of the villagers living in mountain areas.

(5) 1997: *Red Sorghum Models* 《红高粱模特队》 criticizes the so-called fashion-show of the arrogant, hypocritical nature of beauty. Simultaneously, it glorifies the real beauty of clothes of farmers.

(6) 1998: *New Year Call* 《拜年》 describes a peasant couple's *New Year Call* at the township head's home with the purpose to keep the operation of the fish pond. It reflects the image of a positive cadre.

(7) 1999: *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* 《昨天, 今天, 明天》 is a program concerning the life of a couple in the rural areas. They talk about the past, the present, and the future, which reveals the great changes of people's lives.

(8) 2000: *Odd Jobs* 《钟点工》 is related to the life of an old peasant who went to the city. He could not enjoy the improved standard of living because he felt lonely and missed his local home after moving to city.

(9) 2003: *Heart Disease* 《心病》 is about the anxiety, worry, and problem of a man after he won a lottery. The countryside doctor tried to cure the man, but only to suffer the same disease when he was told to gain part of the lottery.

(10) 2004: *The Man Sending Water* 《送水工》 is a story of a single mother. She supported her son's study in America by lying to him that she married a second husband, who helped her with her son's education.

(11) 2006: *Tsui's Talk Show* 《小崔说事儿》 still concerns the life of an old peasant couple, Bai Yun and Hei Tu. With the improvement of living standards, the old lady was a bit of more vain than before. The story wishes people to be real and honest.

(12) 2007: *Elaborate Planning* 《策划》 happens in the same couple's house. They told a lie that they had a cock which could lay eggs. It satirizes the cheating deeds in the show and tells people to be honest.

(13) 2008: *The Torch-bearer* 《火炬手》 relates to the option of torch-carrying relay runners of the 2008 Olympic Games. This reflects the new look of the Chinese and our people's warm support to the Olympic Games.

(14) 2009: *Money Is Not the Problem* 《不差钱》 states about the rural residents, who wish to be famous in arts by taking part in the CCTV program "Avenue of Stars". While feasting the TV host BI Fu-jian, a humor story occurs for the sake of money.

(15) 2010: *Donation* 《捐款》 concerns about a peasant's donating money to a poor, single mother family to support her son's study at college. The peasant made a mistake while denoting by carelessly adding one more zero. It glorifies the peasants' social responsibilities in spite of their own humble life.

Furthermore, what should be further stressed is as the following: (1) As for body language, costume and stage design, we will use either pictures or written words of each show to analyze how ZHAO's peasant identity could be built up in his comic sketches based on the multi-modality theory and (2) the scripts of ZHAO's Gala comic sketches are all collected from different webpages. They are corrected by us according to their corresponding videos on the Internet.

Research Results

This section deals with the research results based on the analysis of data from the comic sketches. For the purpose of illustrating peasant identity, we will insert some tables concerning certain contents wherever it is necessary. Finally, we will also come to some suggested findings of this research.

Analysis of Language Modality in ZHAO's Comic Sketches

Comic sketches can be analyzed from different modalities. As the most ordinary research subject, language is no doubt the foremost modality to be studied. Since ZHAO's comic sketches stem from northeast life, the audience can easily recognize the northeast dialect used by players. Compared with Standard Chinese, we could work out some features of northeast dialect. There are three main features in ZHAO's comic sketches in pronunciation, which will be shown in Table 1: (1) pronouncing "r" (Standard Chinese) as "y" (in northeast dialect), (2) omitting, or adding "h" (in northeast dialect), and (3) pronouncing "o" as "e" (in northeast dialect).

Table 1

Sound Features in Northeast Dialect Compared With Standard Chinese

Comic sketches	Pronouncing “r” as “y”	Omitting or adding “h” ¹	Pronouncing “o” as “e”
<i>Blind Date</i>	有内容(yóng), 往下看	雕塑(shù), 回去似(sì)的, 涮涮(suàn), 啥也别说(suō)	让我(wě)这当爹的, 调那破(pè)地方取回不来了
<i>I Want A Home</i>	没家的滋味是火热(yè)水深的	找(zǎo)对象了, 火热水(suǐ)深, 踹(cuài)了, 可以参(chān)考的	这破(pè)嘴的, 我(wě)给, 笑么(mě)
<i>Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow</i>	欺负人(yín), 光荣(yóng)的下岗, 整整容(yóng)	中(zōng)国, 真(zēn)争气, 一场(cāng)大水(suǐ)	那我(wě), 秋波(bē), 手电筒么(mē), 破(pè)船
<i>Odd Job</i>	花钱美容(yóng), 笑容(yóng), 再忍(yěn)	装(zuāng)冰箱, 伤(sāng)自尊, 吃(cī)水果	我(wě)把老年人分成三类, 麦当劳么(mē)
<i>Tsui's Talk show</i>	人(yín)家, 形容(yóng), 貂绒(yóng)	说(suō)你的, 整(zěng), 租(zhū)	摞(luè)书, 说(suē), 再火(huǒ)一把
<i>Elaborating Planning</i>	老年人(yín), 困扰(yǎo)	数(sù)了, 公鸡中(zōng), 告诉(shù)	最后你说在哪呢——狗窝(wē)

In addition, some other sound features can also be found out as the flowing:

In the *Blind Date for Children*: The actor said that “女人面子窄(zǎi)”, which should be pronounced as “窄(zhǎi)” in Standard Chinese.

In *Tsui's Talk Show*: The actor said that “全村都去取(qiǔ)书”, which should be pronounced as “取(qǔ)书” in Standard Chinese.

In many of his comic sketches, it is quite often to hear ZHAO Ben-shan say “干哈(há)呀”, which should be pronounced as “干哈(shá)呀” in Standard Chinese.

There are also some special words and two-part allegorical sayings (歇后语) in ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches, examples are in Table 2.

Table 2

Special Words and Two-Part Allegorical Sayings in Northeast Dialect

Comic sketches	Special words
<i>Blind Date</i>	干打雷没下雨, 不得劲儿。
<i>New Year's Call</i>	瞎猫子去南极——找不着北; 你让潘长江去吻郑海霞——根本就够不着嘴。
<i>Elaborate Planning</i>	饥荒变四万了, “硬菜”, 棉裤腰
<i>Money Is Not the Problem</i>	急头白脸地吃一顿得多少钱, 大爷您真敞亮
<i>Red Sorghum Models</i>	人是衣裳马是鞍, 一看长相二看穿。
<i>Uncle Niue Promoted as a Cadre</i>	整两句儿

The above-mentioned examples show the special features of language in northeast dialect.

Analysis of Body Language Modality in His Comic Sketches

Comic sketches performed on the stage are the shorten forms of daily life. They involve not only language, but also body language, namely non-linguistic semiotics. Body language is a form of mental and physical ability

¹ In the column “omitting or adding ‘h’”, the word pronounced 塑(shù) on the first line should be pronounced as “sù” in Standard Chinese; on the other hand, the word pronounce 诉(shù) in the last line should be pronounced as 诉(sù) in Standard Chinese.

of human non-verbal communication, which consists of body posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye movements. Humans send and interpret such signals almost entirely subconsciously. Body language, as a modality, appears here and there in ZHAO's comic sketches just as the ones listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Body Language in Comic Sketches

Comic sketches	Speech	Body language
<i>Blind Date</i>	徐老蔫：不让看，看信。 徐老蔫：我没事老梦着你。	walk like an old lady (body posture); swing, foot rubbing (body posture)
<i>Uncle Niue Promoted as a Cadre</i>	牛大叔：…… 改饭馆了咋的？ 牛大叔：这个，啊……	helpless smile, pleading expression (facial expression); speak with gestures like a cadre (body posture)
<i>Three Whips</i>	赵大爷：老少爷们要是知道这件事……	turn around and hold the county mayor's hands (gesture); tend to kneel down (body posture)
<i>Red Sorghum Models</i>	赵队长：一吡吡，二吡吡……	act as if spraying pesticide (body posture)
<i>Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow</i>	黑土：你早说呀，早说早明白了……	put off his shoes and cross his legs as if sitting on heatable brick bed (body posture)
<i>Elaborate Planning</i>	白云：老黑，老伴，出来！快！	come out with a dish in one hand and a towel in another one (body posture)
<i>Donation</i>	钱大爷：这么排，你还是我孙子了呢。	fold his hands and sit on the heatable brick bed (gesture and body posture)

According to Table 3, we can find that ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches are full of body language. In particular contexts, body language helps the language modality with the construction of the text meaning, the emotional and psychological feelings of the players. Further discussion of body language for the construction of peasant identity will be given in next section.

Analysis of Costume Modality in His Comic Sketches

Costumes are special in ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches. He keeps his own dress style on the stage to make his image recognizable. By watching the selected comic sketches videos, we could find what he wears in Table 4.

Table 4

ZHAO's Costume in His Comic Sketch

Comic sketches	Costume
<i>Blind Date</i>	white jacket, old blue cap
<i>I Want a Home</i>	gray casual dress, blue cap, rural hand-made cloth shoes
<i>Uncle Niue's Promoted as a Cadre</i>	gray black casual dress, blue cap, khaki trousers
<i>Three Whips</i>	gray gown, waterproof shoes, a long whip
<i>Red Sorghum Models</i>	khaki casual dress, old blue cap, rural handmade cloth shoes
<i>New Year's Call</i>	blue cotton coat, old style north-east cotton hat, black cotton shoes, a piece of cloth on the waist
<i>Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow</i>	blue casual dress, blue cap, white sports shoes
<i>Odd Job; Heart Disease</i>	blue casual dress, blue cap
<i>Big Buckets of Water Carrier</i>	blue casual dress, blue cap, orange vest as sanitation workers
<i>Tsui's Talk Show</i>	blue casual dress, blue cap, red scarf and black sport shoes
<i>Elaborate Plan</i>	blue casual dress, apron, blue cap, cotton shoes
<i>The Torchbearer</i>	blue casual dress, blue cap, a strap bag
<i>Money Is Not the Problem</i>	blue cotton coat, black cap, blue casual dress
<i>Donation</i>	blue cotton service coat, hairy cotton hat, blue casual dress

Table 5

Costume Frequency in ZHAO Ben-shan's Comic Sketches

Costume	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Blue casual dress, blue cap	10	66.67
Jacket	1	6.67
Gown	1	6.66
Other color dress	3	20
Total	15	100

Based on Table 5, we could see that in most of comic sketches, ZHAO Ben-shan wears casual dress and blue cap, which could be illustrated with pictures in Figure 1.

According to his wearing in comic sketches and in terms of costume modality, we could find ZHAO's peasant identity is clearly constructed in his performance. Therefore, costume plays an important role in construction of a person's identity.

Analysis of Stage Design

The very task of stage design is to create a required special dramatic scene based on the performance. Stage design could provide both a proper culture context and situation context so as to help with the construction of peasant identity. In cultural contexts, such factors as costume, music, and songs could testify the peasant identity of ZHAO Ben-shan in his comic sketches. In situation contexts, such factors as props, the scenery, the dress, and things we could see with our eyes, all of them play a great importance in constructing the peasant identity of ZHAO Ben-shan.

Based on our research, three of the 15 selected comic sketches have the most representative props, sceneries, music, and songs. The stage design in the particular context of each comic sketch reveals the peasant identity of ZHAO Ben-shan. The relevant examples are in Table 6.

Table 6

Examples of Stage Design Showing Rural Elements

Comic sketches	Contents of stage design ²
<i>Three Whips</i>	whip, donkey, shouted chant in the end
<i>New Year Calling</i>	with a basket in the arm, heatable brick bed and a table on it, the song in the end
<i>Donation</i>	a heatable brick bed, a table, countryside household layout

Generally speaking, the four modalities mentioned in this section include plentiful information to reveal the peasant identity of ZHAO Ben-shan, and these modalities work together to construct peasant identity.

Suggested Findings

From the above analysis and the related illustrations in each table, we could come to the suggested finding as follows:

(1) The northeast dialect as a meaning modality has its own features in sound, words, and tones, which is mainly used by peasant in rural areas of the northeast China. These reveal ZHAO Ben-shan's peasant identity in the comic sketches.

² The contents of stage design mentioned in Table 6 serve as some examples of rural elements, which in turn set off ZHAO's peasant identity. This is because these contents are all associated with the rural life of peasants.

(2) Body language is an indispensable, colorful part of human speech. The body language used in his comic sketches strongly shows the player's identity as a peasant.

(3) Most costumes in ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches are casual dress, and his blue cap serves as another feature of being a peasant. Therefore, all of them indicate ZHAO's peasant identity in his comic sketches.

(4) From the special stage designs, we could see that many props and sceneries in his comic sketches relate closely to rural life, which help to verify ZHAO's peasant identity in comic sketches.

Above all, language, body language, costume and stage designs express the peasant identity of ZHAO Ben-shan's role in the comic sketches. Further discussions will be offered in next section.

Discussion

In section "Research Results", with the guidance of multi-modality and identity theories, we have analyzed ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches in the Spring Festival Gala from such aspects as language usage in terms of northeast dialect, body language, the costume and stage design. Based on the suggested findings before, in this section we will offer further discussion and illustrate the causes as to how these phenomena could verify the peasant identity of ZHAO Ben-shan in the comic sketches of the Spring Festival Gala.

Peasant Identity Constructed by Language

Simply speaking, our finding (1) tells us that the northeast dialect as a meaning modality reveals ZHAO Ben-shan's peasant identity in the comic sketches. In other words, language could construct a person's identity with the following possible causes.

The relationship between language and identity. In terms of the relationship between language and identity, the result in section "Research Results" could offer us some evidence that language is not only a tool for people to understand the world, but also a product of the society and an integral component of social reality. As XIANG Yu-hua (2009) said that "language is a dynamic form of social practice. It constructs social identities, social relations and people's understanding of the world. Speech, as a specific application form of language, also has a natural function of identity construction" (pp. 188-189). YUAN Zhou-min and FANG Zong-xiang (2008) stated that "according to the social constructivist theory, identity is not a static entity; it is constructed by the society and it achieves itself through communication with others" (p. 56).

Again, in order to complete the identity construction, an individual utilizes relevant behaviors or communication with the hearer to demonstrate the unique self to others. In other words, an individual's self-construction is not a purely individual behavior but a process which includes series of social interaction. That is to say, when language is spoken in specific context, it is regarded as discourse or utterance. Thus, in concrete situations, the speaker's utterances and his communication with hearer could complete the function of identity construction. Therefore, language could construct a person's social identity.

The northeast dialect helps with the construction of peasant identity. According to finding (1), northeast dialect, as a meaning modality with its own features in sound, words, and tones, is mainly used by peasant in rural areas of the northeast China and helps with the construction of ZHAO Ben-shan's peasant identity in the comic sketches. As to the causes for this phenomenon, the following discussion will be helpful for the understanding.

The northeast dialect is one of the variations of language and it includes rhetorical phenomenon and

rhetorical behaviors. Thus, dialect can be analyzed in terms of rhetoric. In linguistics, rhetoric is a high-level phenomenon, which is accomplished by the combination of sound and meaning based on the vocabulary and grammar (QU, 2004, p. 111). Thus, studies can be done upon the sound, meaning, words, and grammar. This goes to the area of sociolinguistics since it studies social problems with the help of linguistic theories.

Hereby, the sound (or pronunciation) and words of northeast dialect in ZHAO's comic sketches will be discussed again so as to illustrate how peasant identity can be constructed through a rhetorical aspect of northeast dialect.

Phonetic rhetoric of northeast dialect. The sound features of a dialect may reflect the character of a nation. As we have pointed out in Table 1, the northeast dialect is featured with pronouncing "r" as "y", "o" as "e", and adding or omission of "h". In addition, some other sound features can also be found out as the following:

In the *Blind Date for Children*: The actor said that "女人面子窄(zǎi)", which should be pronounced as "窄(zhǎi)" in Standard Chinese.

In Tsui's Talk Show: The actor said that "全村都去取(qiǔ)书", which should be pronounced as "取(qǔ)书" in Standard Chinese.

In many of his comic sketches, it is quite often to hear ZHAO Ben-shan say "干哈(há)呀", which should be pronounced as "干哈(shá)呀" in Standard Chinese.

In *Elaborate Planning*: 家里来客(kè)了, 有一动物没(mèi)来. The word "客" should be pronounced as (kè), and the word "没" should be pronounced as "没"(méi) in Standard Chinese.

Compared with Standard Chinese, in the above four examples, the first three are wrong with pronunciation, and the last one is wrong with tones. These features make the northeast sound stiffer and harsher than that of the standard language. Therefore, such features may lead to the rhetoric effect of being straight, hot, humorous, and explosive. They also reveal the real life of the northeast peasant and their typical sound style. These features are formed due to the cruel natural conditions in the cold northeast area, and due to the influence of northern minorities.

The two-part allegorical sayings. Furthermore, some of the northeast sayings may lead to a catchy sound effect, which will produce some rhythm effect in terms of rhetoric. For instance:

In *New Year's Call*: When the couple arrived at the head of the township's house, the wife said "我们衷心祝乡长年年健康, 岁岁平安。" Such blessing words sound pleasant in its rhetorical effect. It immediately reveals the couple's praise of the leader and their pleading. The audience will soon form an image of a peasant couple's cautious and reverent call at the town mayor's. More examples are the follows:

In *Blind Date*: The saying like "干打雷没下雨, 不得劲儿。"

In *Red Sorghum Models*: The saying like "人是衣裳马是鞍, 一看长相二看穿。"

In *Heart Disease*: The saying like "家有房屋千万座, 睡觉就需三尺宽。"

In *New Year's Call*: The saying like "产房传喜讯, 人家生(升)了。"

These examples make a good use of the two-part allegorical sayings, which vividly express ZHAO's being good at speaking. In addition, the last one "产房传喜讯, 人家生(升)了。" vividly conceals his awkwardness, fear, and embarrassment when ZHAO Ben-shan heard on a phone-call that the leader got promotion instead of being dismissed from office.

Rhetoric in words and expressions of the northeast dialect. Special words and expressions could add more

northeast style to the comic sketches, such as “唠嗑” (in *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*) means to chat. This word reflects that in the cold harsh wintertime, peasants living in wild vast areas cannot go out, therefore, they prefer to stay at home chatting with family, friends, or neighbors. Besides, (in *Elaborate Planning*) “饥荒” means debt, “硬菜” means dishes of meat and “棉裤腰” is part of cotton pants used to be worn by peasants in the cold days. These words are typically used in the local areas of northeast China.

More examples as (in *Money is Not the Problem*): “急头白脸地” is to devour like a wolf, “敞亮” means forthright and generous, “脚前脚后” (in *Donation*) means only a short time span, and “整两句儿” (in *Uncle Niue Promoted as a Cadre*) means to say a few words. These words and expressions are typical in northeast dialect, while they can hardly be heard in Putonghua (Standard Chinese). On the one hand, they add more northeast style to the comic sketches. On the other, they make the comic sketch sound humorous, fresh and full of pastoral style.

Language is a kind of social activity for human beings, it can reflect our thinking and tell people who we are, or what we are doing. Therefore, the typical northeast dialect, here and there used in ZHAO's comic sketches in Spring Festival Gala, could not only display the features of the dialect, but also reflect the culture context of northeast China, helping the audience to recognize ZHAO's peasant identity in his comic sketches.

Peasant Identity Constructed by Body Language

Besides language modality discussed above, there is also the non-linguistic semiotics (body language) of meaning construction. That is to say body language, as the other way of meaning expression, can also fulfill identity construction. The following discussion could reveal the causes for finding (2), in section “Research Results”.

According to YUAN Zhou-min and FANG Zong-xiang (2008), “in order to complete his identity construction, an individual utilizes relevant behaviors to communicate with the hearer to demonstrate the unique self to others” (p. 56). In the process of communication, an individual's self-construction is not purely individual behavior but a process which includes series of social interactions. Therefore, we could say that behaviors or body language of the speaker could construct his/her identity.

In ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches, there is a large amount of body language, which could help us understand the players' peasant identity. For example:

In *Three Whips*: 赵大爷：（赶车吆喝）得儿驾，喔……吁……驾！驾！[ZHAO Ben-shan acts as if he is driving a donkey carriage.]

In this play, the old man ZHAO Ben-shan is driving a donkey carriage with a whip in his hand, and shows with the action as if he is on a donkey. Considering the road condition, the donkey, we can see that he is peasant on his way home.

In *Red Sorghum Models*: 赵队长：……提臀是要把药箱卡住，斜视是看清果树……这边喷雾，他的节拍是这样的，吡……，一吡吡，二吡吡……三吡吡……[ZHAO Ben-shan acts as if he is spraying pesticide.]

In this comic sketch, ZHAO Ben-shan does a series of actions of spraying pesticide, fastening the pesticide sprayer, staring aside at the fruit tree, giving pressure with one hand, spaying pesticide with another hand. At the sight of these body languages or actions, we can immediately know the peasant identity of the role.

With the help of the above examples, we know that the above body languages or actions reveal the peasant identity of the player in the comic sketches. Therefore, audiences could recognize one's identity by what she/he is

doing, and body language could help to construct a person's identity.

Peasant Identity Constructed by Costume

According to the finding (3) in section "Research Results", most costumes in ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches are casual dress and blue cap, which indicate ZHAO's peasant identity in his comic sketches. The following discussion will focus on how ZHAO's peasant identity could be constructed by his costume.

Costume or dress may act as a typical symbol to reveal one's identity. Besides, costume has the symbolic function to convey to others such information as social status, occupation, self-confidence, as well as other personality characteristics. Just as Joanne Entwistle (2005) stated that "the clothes we wear can make the expression of identity, and tell others such information as our gender, class, and status" (p. 141).

ZHAO Ben-shan's particular dress style acts as a mark in his performances. This makes the audience recognize him at the first sight of his costumes. In addition, by what he wears the audience may immediately know the peasant role he plays. His usual wearing is the causal blue dress, blue cap, black cotton shoes in most of his comic sketches in the Spring Festival Gala. In some sketches the dress and cap are new while in others they are old and worn. In others, he wears such coats as gown, waterproof boots, and white suit jacket to fit the different contexts. They represent the traditional wearing in north rural area of China. His exaggerated clothing style successfully helps him to fulfill the task for creating different peasant images.

Generally speaking costume is the symbol to embody such factors as occupation, social status, living conditions, and so on, by which identity is also made clear. In order to achieve visual effect, we hereby put some pictures in Figure 1, which might bring visible evidence to verify the peasant identity in his comic sketches.



Figure 1. Pictures of costume in ZHAO's comic sketches.

Figure 1 shows clearly the costumes worn by ZHAO Ben-shan in different plays. We could see that ZHAO's costumes reflect the culture of northeast areas, and reveal the relative lower social status of the figures played by

ZHAO Ben-shan in his comic sketches.

Usually, the ordinary peasants are more liable to be neglected in the society. ZHAO's particular costumes mark the simple personality of the actors. His typical and casual costumes not only create the Chinese peasant image of the culture, but also help to construct the identity of ordinary peasants.

Peasant Identity Constructed by Stage Design

According to the finding (4) in section "Research Results", special stage designs, including props, music, and songs also play some important factors in the construction of peasant identity. Hereby, we would like to further discuss these factors as the following:

Proper stage design is to provide an ideal performance space for actors, attract the audience attention to the show and enables the show to achieve better view effects. Thus, stage design is indispensable in comic sketch show. It functions with props, lights, costumes, and other apparatus to reflect the situation of the script and the vivid personage. Generally speaking, props refer to any décor, both the movable and stable objects in a scene.

In terms of props, it is quite often for us to see the typical heatable brick kang (Chinese bed) and a table on the stage, such as in the comic sketches of "1998: *New Year's Cal*; 2007: *Elaborating Planning*; 2010: *Donation*" (refer to the above pictures). Other props also share the typical styles of the northeast China, such as their houses, their costumes, and so on. Props can provide situation context for the play and make the audience associate with the background of story. These typical props could immediately remind the audiences that these stories happen in the northeast rural areas. They provide the particular situation of northeast rural house layout for the comic sketches, and so as to achieve better performance effects.

Besides, the props in ZHAO's comic sketches present the typical features of northeast rural persons: simple, brave, laborious, honest, and upright, etc.. Most of ZHAO's comic sketches stem from people's ordinary life. The very sight of Duet Performance will remind the audiences of northeast rural life, the character of northeast peasants as well. Other typical props are the fans and handkerchiefs used in the dance of the Duet Performance. They effectively support the construction of peasant identity in the comic sketches.

As for the music and songs, including both lyrics and dance, they fulfill their auxiliary function in ZHAO's comic sketches. Take the comic sketch of *Red Sorghum Models* as example, there is a dance of persons wearing performing clothing like corn and pepper, which demonstrate that these people value highly of the field labor. The music, the lyrics, the dance, and the songs of the play are all about rural life, which help a great deal to testify ZHAO's peasant identity in his comic sketches. Music is a kind of silent language and they could express the imagination in a non-grammar way. In addition, music and art are important parts of human society, which closely relate to our life and social activity. Thus, music and art serve as mirrors of mind in thinking and speaking.

With the help of above discussion, we could see that proper stage design could fulfill the function of assisting with the advance of play performances, construct personage in the show and bring the figures in the show to a salient part. In conclusion, under the guidance of multi-modality theory, the above discussion reveals that ZHAO Ben-shan's peasant identity in his comic sketches could be verified from language, body language, costume and stage design modalities. Besides, through this discussion we could see that a person's identity could be reflected by his/her speech and behaviors as well.

Conclusion

This research starts from taking different semiotics such as language, body language, costume, stage design as various means of meaning presentation. Each semiotic may be regarded as a modality in terms of multi-modality theory. In this research, ZHAO Ben-shan's comic sketches are studied from different modalities with the purpose to find how peasant identity is constructed in his comic sketches of Spring Festival Gala. Again, as mentioned in multi-modality theory, meaning can be realized in different modalities. In this research, we could see that comic sketches also include several modalities which work together to express meaning. More importantly, after arduous and serious analysis over the data collected, we have testified the hypothesis that ZHAO Ben-shan's peasant identity in his comic sketches could be constructed with the help of language, body language, costume and stage design modalities. That is to say, these four modalities can successfully constructed the peasant identity.

Yet, there are more factors could influence a person's identity, such as his/her occupation and social status. Since occupation and status might represent the symbol of identity, what is the relation between them? Identity can be individual and collective. When is the identity individual and when is it collective? Hereby, we suppose these are the questions need further research.

When talking about the significance of this research, in addition to some valuable findings in section "Research Results", this research also reveals the fact that people could use different kinds of semiotics to communicate with each other in terms of multi-modality. It enables us to perceive that language can not only reflect people's life, their social activities, but also reveal people's social identity. There is no doubt that this paper is trying to reveal peasant discourse power in ZHAO's comic sketches, and could benefit us to have a new understanding of peasant emotion and peasant identity in China. What is more, this research applies multi-modality theory to sociolinguistics research, from which we can gain an insight into the nature of language. Therefore, this research is of some academic value and practical significance.

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