A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Advertisements-Based on Visual Grammar

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ABSTRACT

In addition to words, the symbols, colors, sculptures, photographs, music, etc. are also frequently employed by participants to express themselves in communication. Advertising is closely related to sounds, colors, picture animations and other symbols. This paper aims to present how semiotics acts effectively to realize the real business purpose to reflect the unique significance of the multimodal discourse analysis. Based on Visual Grammar, this paper analyzes the 2014 Brazil World Cup advertisements from the perspective of representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning, this research means to prove that different modes within an advertisement depend on each other and have an interdependent relationship. And these relationships have different roles in different contexts.

Keywords: Advertisement, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Visual Grammar, World Cup.

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1. Introduction

With the development of science and media, more and more advertisements come to people's life. In order to attract the attention of the viewers, the business companies choose simpler signs to express their notion of the brand. And other semiotic resources besides language begin to be used more frequently and widely. The World Cup belongs to people all over the world which is held every four year. There is no doubt that it can attract the attention of the whole world, and then its language of advertisements will also be special.

Based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar, Kress and Van Leeuwen propose the theory of Visual Grammar believing that every semiotic system has the ability to project the social relations between the receivers and the speakers (1996). Lim (2004) proposes that the society is full of various semiotic

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1 This paper is funded by “Teaching Reform Project of NCEPU (No. 2014JG103) and “Scheme for Master Teacher Cultivation (No. GJ2014004).
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resources, which create the significance by the cooperation of signs. **Badry (2000)** discusses the attributes and functions of scientific technologies, such as individual computer, mobile and so on. **Kress and Van (2001)** propose that “The so-called modes include visuals, gestures and actions, form the social resource modal in the use of process just like the language, therefore, the semiotic resources always have social meaning. **Royce (2001)** studies the complementary of different semiotics in multimodal discourse and the cooperation in the second language teaching. **O’Halloran (2004)** also studies the modes in a multimodal discourse, and interprets how these modes act together to reflect its significance according to systemic functional grammar. **Nouri and Shahidy (2004)** pay their attention to the study of the effect of PPT, in which they discuss the relevance of the theory of professor and the memory of students, and draw a conclusion that the PPT class can help the students improve their memory and have a good grade. **Lim Fei (2007)** analyzes the interactions of verbal parts or static parts between their corresponding culture and context. Chinese linguist Li Zhanzi is the first person who introduces this theory into China in 2003.

Those studies above have made a great contribution to the knowledge of the multimodal discourse analysis and have a further enrichment to multimodal discourse analysis theory. However, a multimodal analysis of World Cup advertisements has never been done previously. This paper will study World Cup advertisements based on Visual Grammar to explain how representative, interactive and compositional meanings are realized in World Cup advertisements by proposing a framework of multimodal discourse analysis of advertisements.

2. **An analysis of the world cup advertisements**

2.1 **Imagination and representational meaning**

There are six core ideas containing in Systemic-Functional Grammar, and meta-functional idea is one of them. It consists of three parts as follows: ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. The representational function looks like the ideational function in visual grammar, and it is transformed from the systemic functional linguistics. As we all know, experience function and logic function consist of ideational function, the language between them is the expression of subject things and object things. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, representational meaning refers to the relationship acted between participants, things, animation settings and viewers. Seeing the picture will inspire the speaker’s imagination.

See the picture below. When people feel happy or excited, they will buy easily this drink to celebrate. From the back of the participant, we can find that the designer chooses the young people as the center of this picture, which will easily arouse the people’ desire to join in this activity. The representation meaning can be expressed by the action process of the young participant in the picture, and its location is usually the most prominent, which can be shown by the size, contrast, color, and distance. From the location of the participants, whose back gives us a feeling of imagination, at least we can know they are happy at this moment. From the color and the spilled coca, we can analyze that the coca drink gives them a feeling of happiness and sharing the success of the victory. When the actions are linked to the spilled drinks it can stimulate the desire of drinking.

And thus, the speaker speaks out its endorsement of the product to achieve a coherent discourse, form a logical relationship to promote the product sales volume. All of these are achieved by two processes: narrative process and conceptual process to realize the meaning representation.

![Figure 1: Coca Cola Advertisement in World Cup.](image)

Narrative process is a statement of actions and things shown in the unstable settings, and it is shown by speech mode. The action process involves the notion of action, “persons who are moving” and “the
object of action”. Animation shows action mode. They are unstable and easily changed in the background of careful arrangement.

From the above picture, the action process contains the spilled drink, the participants who are moving and the coca cola. These elements show the action process. The participants who are moving are the two young men, and their actions testify the energy and happiness they have. Their back to the viewers and their actions build a vector. Superficially, it seems like there are no viewers to make a reaction to them, and their gestures have nothing to do with this advertisement. However, every action must have the receivers. In this picture, the potential audiences mean the receivers, even if they didn’t take actions to the viewers. That is to say, the viewers receive this advertisement by a potential aspect. For example, look at this image as follows:

There is a reaction process. The number 9 is still the participant who is playing football. He will turn his eyes into the right front of the football, which is not far from him. The represented participant in the center of this advertisement put his eyes into the right direction of the football. If the process of his behavior is to reflect the direction of the football in front, his reaction process located accurately with his attention. That is to say, the analysis of the reaction process is helpful to the participants in the course of the action, which are the main body and the two kinds of reproduction process.

Simply speaking, it is more stable for the conceptual process which is a concrete meaning, and it shows its classification, construction and significance by text mode. Conceptual process contains classification process and analytical process, and from the two processes, viewers start their association to experience by themselves with the work of Kress and Van (1996). The difference between them is whether the vector exists in them or not. Narrative process contains it but the other is not. Therefore, their true distinction depends on the direction of the viewers.

In that picture, participant in analytical process belongs to the part and overall relationship. Logically, the relationship of the part and the overall is another description, which means that a group of participants are subject to the other participants.

In this picture, another representational meaning embodies in the environment. We can judge that it is a regional environment by the contrast or distance of the foreground and background. The represented participant is playing the football. The represented participant is closed to the viewers, and it belongs to the foreground. And if the represented participant is very far from the audiences, it belongs to the background. Therefore, the represented participant, object, size and the clarity are the main reference factors. From this picture, we can get that Number 9 is very close to the viewers, and his figure is very big and clear in this picture, so the represented participant belongs to foreground. And other audiences behind him belong to background.

In contrast, the outstanding participant in the picture is in the center position and in the front row. What’s more, the area that he is standing is larger than other factors. Furthermore, this picture almost shows the whole face or figure of the represented participant who locates in the center position. As for the other participants, seats, and field is very far from the audiences. And these factors reflect the background because of their clarity and location. Thus, the foreground and background of the regional environment are combined together to reflect the representational environment. In general, the representational meaning is just a functional description of the product. In order to leave a good impression to the viewers, the representational meaning plays a very important role to propagate its product. If the advertisements we can see in the TV just have a statement but no pictures, no voice, and no style, all of us maybe ignore them easily.
Take this advertisement for example. This advertisement is a good combination of football and coca, and its screen design surrounded by many cocas and players. In this advertisement, we can see that the designer put the football as a high position, and put the players in the middle, the below is the drink of coca. It means that if football player wants to beat the other team, they need drink a bottle of coca, which gives the player more power and more confidence. Football match in the World Cup is very important to all over the world, and this advertisement must make a prominence of them. Therefore, they put the football into the top position, which shows the key word of this advertisement. Furthermore, they put the players in the heart of this advertisements, it shows that players in the field plays a very important role who determines the failure or success in this match. Therefore, they put their coca into the low position to propagate their products, which is the basic material thing. And this is their true destination. All of them together show the basic theme of expression, and this advertisement of settings, coca, football, and sky are acted together to express its representational meaning. All of these pictures and current situation can evoke the viewer's attention to join the passion of the fans cheering, and the desire of drinking. By this, it increases the value of the product, and shows its representational meaning.

As shown above, the ‘play’ behind the players is the excitement of football. Based on the experience of human activities, the coca caused the audience's desire, and led the audience's imagination to buy. Look at this picture as follows:

From the comprehensive effect, there are several characteristics embodied in this picture. Firstly, the objects as being the main factors is significant in the picture, which is embodied by the foreground, size, brightness, color, and signs; the broad football field leaves the viewers a kind of imagination. The cup uses yellow to show the honor and the playground uses green to show cool, they act to evoke the players to use this space to seek the honor. And the seats imply that the audiences are looking forward to their success.

Secondly, the overall environment is outstanding; it contains the foreground and the background. In this advertisement, the dark horse and the World Cup belong to the foreground, which embodies the theme of this picture. And the seats and field belongs to the background, which are very far from the viewers. These factors combined to stand out the significance of this picture.

Thirdly, the symbolic meanings are associated with the traditional ideas, which is easy to understand by people. In this picture, the text “Who is the biggest dark horse in the World Cup” is outstanding in the whole advertisement. “Who is the biggest dark horse in the World Cup”— Traditionally, “dark horse” originally refers to a horse that is unwelcome by all the people in the match, but it makes a great achievement in the final match as unexpected winner. From then on, the term “dark horse” gradually refers to a young man or a company will stand out in the near future. In this advertisement, the designer chooses the dark horse as a marked sign in order to show its potential power in future. What’s more, the dark horse is also a metaphor of match. It represents the power, energy and vigor of the competitors. In this picture, the text “Who is the biggest dark horse in the World Cup” is located in the center of the whole image. “China mobile communications” at the top-left corner helps the reader to understand the potential meaning of this text. That is to say, “China mobile communications” and “dark horse” combined together to reflect the potential power of this company. We can get its symbolic significance by analytical process.
A multimodal discourse analysis of advertisements...

In fact, these features suggest the symbolic significance in many aspects. Although it appears in the image to show the power of the company, it is always free from the plot. It connected the theme of World Cup together to express its unique competence by the brightness and the location of the foreground, which is associated with representational meaning. Take this advertisement for example:

From the perspective of narrative process, this picture adopts players’ hands as a theme of this advertisement. It implies a strong strength of people, and expresses the players in the World Cup cooperated together to seek victory. And players will pull themselves together to overcome every difficulty in their battle. When the audiences get this information by sound, they can sense, memorize and imagine their experience, and this process is the results of the audiences observe the outside world and experience the life.

In terms of analytical process, in this advertisement, players create a shape of football by hands, making the audiences to imagine something. The brain is the basic product of producing opinion.

The two processes shows the action modality by utterances and text, the audiences get the outside information by listening the utterances, and process the physical information by the brain to contract the useful things.

And then, by the process of classification, the audiences will easily start from their experience. Generally, they can make the knowledgeable information become conceptual information by processing and generalizing the information so that make the concept into semiotics. Thus, the representational meaning in advertisement can be realized by the process of narrative, analytical and classification.

2.2 Position and interactive meaning

The interactive meaning is similar to the interpersonal function in visual grammar, and it is transformed from the systemic functional linguistics. According to the interpersonal function, it holds that the language is the action of social people doing some meaningful things. It contains three aspects as follows: contact, social distance, and attitudes.

The designer must put the shared information into the advertisements, it is necessary for the speaker and the listener to communicate in the voiceless, if so, the boss will easily get his profit and persuade people to believe his products is better than other products in the same level. Contact includes the direct contact and indirect contact. And direct contact just tells information to the audience by eye contact, while the latter means tells information by other ways.

In this picture, eight football stars stand together to cheer with their victory, who are surrounded by the Pepsi. The digital letter ”8” is a fortunate letter in China, it means “a wish for making a fortune”, therefore, the designer choose 8 football stars to participate this advertisement. The viewers are attracted by their cheering or the eye contact and guided them to think it over this drink, which is a representative drink of victory, evoked the viewers’ desire to buy it. It is a very important meaning to show the value of the product. Thanks to the objects need represented by some semiotics, so the designer must put the shared information into the advertisements, it is necessary for the speaker and the listener to communicate in the voiceless.
Utterances belong to the certain text, which are the sentences that can be listened and seen. In this advertisement, the audiences observe from the participant’s eyes, they will be easy to gain their identity, just like a heart-beating time by themselves. The participants and the audiences can face to face by eye communication, which can put the audience and the participants together so that it can strengthen the power of this advertisement. And in this advertisement, the designer put the public person as the presented participant, it strengthens the attraction of the audiences on the one hand, and on the other hand, it has a certain effect to the world people.

This picture treats the Pepsi drink as the setting, which means that passion needs drink, needs Pepsi. If you want to celebrate the victory, the drink of Pepsi is necessary for all the people in the world. Superficially, it strengthens the effect of World Cup. But it implies the potential products by other ways naturally. Simply speaking, it looks like an advertisement instantaneously but it belongs to a carefully purpose of the business. And by eye contact, the viewers are attracted by these settings, and they are brought by another field to think it over this product. So the business just tells the potential information by other ways to show the indirect contact.

As for the social distance, according to the position of taking photos of the represented participants, it contains two parts as follows: far and nearly.

Take this advertisement for example. We can apply the two parts into the analysis of the advertisements. To analyze the advertisement from two parts is a very important method. If the represented participants are far from the viewers, there always must have other things together will show to the viewers. Generally speaking, if the represented participant is near to the viewers, he or she must be a representative in a certain area.

If the designers put the represented person away from the audiences or the location of the subjective participant is very far from the audience, it will form different effect.

In this advertisement, the designers put the nine public players into one advertisement, and put them into a high position, it implies the participants have a strong background, and arouse the public to image. Their unique gestures, sweet smiles and rich facial expression can draw the consumer’s attention so that the designers can get their real destination. Look at this advertisement as follows:

Thanks to the effect of the visual communication, the audience can easily get the effect from image. From the perspective of the audiences, this advertisement looks very close to the audiences, but on the other hand, it seems that they are very far from the audiences. By studying the advertisements carefully, it can help to create a relation between the audiences and the speakers.

In the first place, the public participants give the audience their back, which makes the audience far from the super football star. And then the audience will pay their attention to other place in this advertisement, which is another participant who is faced by us.

His serious expression gives the audiences a kind of brave spirit, and next procession he will try his best to beat every enemy to seek success. Therefore, different perspectives from the audience will produce different results. All in all, the social distance can be realized by these two parts.
Therefore, different perspectives give the audiences different feelings. The pictures in advertisements are always linked to the human beings by their mind and psychological activities. It is necessary to analyze the potential meaning in an advertisement, so that we can study the images and text by a scientific way.

Attitude contains participant, picture and color. If the designer chooses the participants who are very famous in the heart of people, and he or she is a representative person who is positive in some fields, the boss will easily get his profit and persuade people to believe that his products are better than other products in the same level. In this advertisement, on the behalf of Messi who is a world football champion joined the team to express the spirit of team. Messi who is a representative football champion stands in the middle of others, and they are cheering for victory. They can use their rich facial expressions, confidence and sweet smiles to draw the viewer’s attention to achieve the boss’s purpose.

Look at this picture as follows: the unique characteristic of the super football star will be much better than other person. They represent a new power and positive spirit to the public. Therefore, it is easier to persuade the audiences to join them.

The brightness of the picture is the main factor. The designer should choose the attracting picture to grasp the audience. The color of the advertisement belongs to subjectivity, which is also important to the whole effect. The designer applies all the sense to show the true part or the potential part in an advertisement.

Let’s take this picture for example, what we can see in the picture, and what we think there are in the picture and what's the meaning of this picture that the designer wants to express. This is the study that we can explore. If the audiences look at them from the perspective of the white color, it looks like a cup. However, if the audiences look at them from the perspective of the black color, it shows that two people are looking at each other face to face. By comparing, we can find the different design in this picture.

In this picture the striking slogan is “To tank Pepsi, You have to beat me!” This slogan means “to Pepsi cans, you have to win me!” The wording contains a provocation but they are specific to the winner of a taste of it, the use of attempting to really urge people to buy Pepsi in various activities to celebrate the victory of the current in order to achieve real business intentions.

The screen symbols modal effective integration of resources generated by the pictures, colors, text, and two male action stars, handsome screen layout design to express implied meaning through efficient allocation of resources into a unified symbolic resources — Pepsi, to issue a common multimodal communication behaviors, stimulate language exists implication, in order to achieve a strong influence in the world, with a certain appeal. Participant’s behavior by verbal action effectively stimulates the viewer feedback, so to achieve the interactive meaning of words through interactive force.
2.3 Signs and compositional meaning

The compositional meaning is similar to the textual function in systemic functional grammar, and it is transformed from the systemic functional linguistics. It studies the language in use, and it put the language and the context together to make the speaker say only the words that are related to the field of the context in order to get its purpose.

Compositional meaning is a whole expression of advertising discourse, which can be shown in the screen of TV or anything else. Its meaning is combined by other resources to express the whole significance. In order to get the connections between the speakers and the audiences, it is necessary to realize the whole effect of producing meaning. Kress & van Leeuwen proposed that the compositional meaning contains information value, salience and framing. In their framework, as for the information value, which contains settings, theme and semiotic. It is a value of the various factors in the picture to get their unique value. The role of any element in the overall role is determined by if it is placed on the left or right, middle or edge, or image space above or below.

From the background music and picture, we can imagine the related product. And in terms of the theme, we can judge from its prominence in the scene. As for the semiotic, we can understand its meaning in a certain area. Take this advertisement for example, its analysis as follows:

As we all know, any element in the overall role is determined by the place of the left or right, middle or edge, or image space above or below.

From the perspective of information value, which includes background, subject content and sign. This advertisement is structured by the vertical angle, in which the main elements are the represented participant, football and the sign “√”.

In this advertisement, the designer chooses black screen as the background to highlight the colorful one. Furthermore, in terms of its subject content, the top part shows the real purpose of the designer—Nike, which is famous for their clothes. In this picture, the role of the represented participant who wears these clothes in the whole role plays a key role by the location of the middle. At last, the sign “√” of this advertisement offer people a feeling of impression to buy the same clothes. And the verbal discourse “Final competition” is also a potential origin and competence, with the sign “√” linked together as a top part offers the theme of this advertisement.

Actually, in this picture, football as the lower part plays the ideal role, while the true part “√” shows the real information. In other ways, we can also analyze the advertisement by horizontal angle. The different presented participants stand in different gestures and they have different height, which offers new information in the advertisement—people can wear their brand clothes regardless of being fat, short and thin. That is to say, their clothes are fit for every person who has different sizes. The picture on the top part offers the new sign “√”, which belongs to the main theme in this advertisement. Players with different figures in the middle and the football below are shown in this picture, which are presented and have a certain information value in the advertisement. Look at this picture as follows:

In the perspective of its settings, a large number of audiences are important element in this advertisement. In the perspective of its theme, Nike “Kick out the legend”, and the word “legend” on behalf of the future, energy and spirit. It gives the audiences an illusion to the future, great hope for
tomorrow.

In the perspective of its semiotic, the outstanding sign of this “√” means Nike, and their clothes are marked by this semiotic, which means a victory, people who are wearing their clothing means that every day is a new beginning, every day is a new self. The sign “√” shows the person who is seeking for success, happy and confidence.

In order to attract the audience’s different attention to a different extent, the term salience is used. The salience of this advertisement is the represented participant C Luo, who is a best player in European, his gestures key information stands in the center of this picture offers the audience imagination. It shows that the participant will make a great action at a crucial moment; His facial expression, animation and gestures give a feeling of outbreak to audience, and the expected eyes with the feeling of hope to success. All of these can cause the viewers to have the desire to buy the same clothes.

Meanwhile, compared with the verbal action of the presented participant, the static background of this picture also gives the audience a feeling of holding their breath to wait the moment of victory. The verbal action and the static setting enhance the visual impression of the audiences. In order to get its intentional purpose, in this advertisement, the text of “Kick out the legend” on the left can enhance its meaning, and draw the attention of the audiences.

It is shown by segmentation lines for framing to link to the factors of picture. Take this advertisement for example as follows.

Every country in this picture has the same size, which shows that every country in the world has equal statue. This designer promotes the friendship and cooperation of various countries on the one hand, and on the other hand, it highlights the 2014 World Cup's prospective. All of these flags connects together to show the big unity of the world.

Furthermore, the order of the flags is classified in alphabetical order, which reflects the fairness of the countries. Look at this advertisement as follows:

In terms of the background of this advertisement, there are many players in this picture, but we cannot know them because of the distance of the audience and the participants. However, they also play a key role in this picture.

From the point of the clothes that the participants wear, we can know they belong to a football team. On behalf of the energy, power, and confidence, they give the audiences a feeling of the positive energy to seek success.

From the players’ gestures, we can judge that they are very happy and cheer in this picture, and they are celebrating the success of this victory. The viewers can easily join in this atmosphere, and share the happiness with the participants together.

From the notable sign, that is the back of the represented participant, we can know the notable sign is the number 10. Furthermore, we know that Meixi is a very famous football player in all over the world, who was born in Argentina and Won the championship in many official matches. He is the pride of the country of Argentina, and nearly every fan likes him because of his extraordinary football skill. Not only does he win the world championship for Argentina, but also win the honor for himself as the best...
player in the world. His creativity and brave can give the people an unbelievable energy and always full of the powerful and the number 10 always represent this famous football star. When the football fun sees the number 10, they will easily think of this famous football star Meixi. The designer put carefully the football players and the unique number 10 together just want to express the cooperation of a team or a country. The represented participant face to face with other football players, in which it shows the represented person have a great value in the football players’ mind. So the notable sign gives the viewers a certain information value by the number 10 player. Therefore, their gestures and the unique number 10 player are outstanding in this picture, which has a crucial significance.

Superficially, this advertisement has nothing to do with the viewers. However, when we analyze this picture carefully by multimodal discourse analysis, we can find it contains more information, and all the elements at least plays very important role in expressing the significance of the modes.

At the same time, in terms of the verbal gesture of the represented participant, we can judge that it is a reaction to the football players. And the represented participant reaction represents a modest and gratitude to the football players cheering. The public football star as a key person stands a key role in people’s heart, and the designer chooses him can convince the viewers.

All in all, the verbal gestures of the players and the reaction of the represented participant represent a kind of vitality. The dynamic background of this advertisement shows a sense of honor, victory and confidence, and these elements delegate a country’s image. It will strengthen the visual impression of a country and attract the interest of this country.

From the above we have analyzed, the information value and the notable sign in this advertisement connect all the factors together to show certain significance, which has a compositional meaning in this advertisement.

Take this advertisement as an example, every country in this picture has the same sign “football”, which is the notable sign in this picture. Generally speaking, the notable sign always imply a key theme in the advertisement. Therefore, there is no doubt that this key elements imply the great value of this picture, and the notable sign “football” shows the theme of the World Cup advertising, which represents the information value through key factors.

In the first place, the designer puts Brasil into the first position to show the place of World Cup is in Brasil in 2014. And then other countries behind Brasil have the same size to express the cooperation of various countries. In the second place, every country has its unique style, such as color, brightness, and the marketable signs. On the one hand, it shows that every country is seeking common grounds while remaining differences. On the other hand, it shows different countries have the same interest while seeking friendship first. In this advertisement, the information value is expressed by the marketable signs. And thus, this picture enhances the key point of this World Cup.

As we have analyzed above, the shared elements connected together to form the frame of the advertisement, it is carefully listed by the designer.

3. Conclusion

Guided by the theory of multimodal discourse analysis and influenced by the systemic functional grammar of Halliday, the writer has set up a new framework of analyzing the classic advertisement. According to the proposed framework, the writer relates the meaning of the modes and their relations together to analyze the classic advertisement in 2014 successfully. The main findings can be
summarized as follows: (1) As for the imagination affected by the representational meaning, the relations of participants and objects can be reflected by analyzing the picture. And the settings can be shown by the size, contrast, color and distance. An advertisement can be expressed by the speech mode and text mode, which embodies the respective process to get the association of the representational meaning. Through analysis, the writer can help the audience have a better understanding of the advertisement. Furthermore, the writer has testified the feasibility of this new analytical framework. (2) In terms of the position depended by the interactive meaning, it includes three parts to finish its whole meaning as follows: location, touch and feelings. According to the distance of far or near, we can easily judge the importance of the objects. When the listeners meet the related objects, it will express the information by many ways. Thus, it can be expressed by the direct and indirect aspect. Thus, it can greatly improve the understanding of the classic advertisement. (3) When it comes to the signs created by the compositional meaning, we can easily find the important information by seeing the notable signs in the picture. The writer puts the background, theme and symbol carefully into an advertisement in order to express the value of the business product. Only if the people see the signs, will they quickly know what they want to express.

In conclusion, this research is meaningful and it is a new potential field to have a further explore and to make a systemic analysis for advertisements.

References


