

Research on Bullet Screen Discourse from the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis — A Case Study of *Heaven Official's Blessing* on Bilibili.com

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Abstract

Based on corpus linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, under Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model, this paper studies bullet screens in the first episode of the first season of *Heaven Official's Blessing* from description, interpretation and explanation.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, Fairclough's three-dimensional model, bullet screens, *Heaven Official's Blessing*

1. Introduction

With the rise of video apps such as TikTok, Bilibili and Kuaishou, the bullet screen, as a new and shared way of interaction, has been booming rapidly. Compared with traditional videos, it has brought revolutionary influence and profound significance. Apps like Bilibili, Youku and Tik Tok, start to provide a platform for their users to express their feelings and suggestions with each other through bullet screens. Recently, Bilibili has been gradually crowded with teenagers fond of anime, forming their own unique otaku culture. Among all the anime, *Heaven Official's Blessing* has been warmly discussed by such teenagers.

Focusing on the first episode of the first season of *Heaven Official's Blessing*, this study uses Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model to analyze the corpus and explore the ideological

issues behind it. Combined with the social and cultural context, the possible causes of ideological differences are explained. The research takes Bilibili, a short video software of daily life, as the entry point to discuss the current bullet screen culture and ideology, which can help improve readers' critical awareness of anime bullet screen discourse, deepen readers' understanding of the otaku culture as well as make them take the responsibility of actively participating in the construction of the otaku culture.

2. Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a useful interdisciplinary tool for cross-cultural research of news discourse. It studies the relationship between discourse and social structure from a critical perspective. In recent years, as a new research field in linguistics, Critical Discourse

Analysis mainly includes Critical Discourse Analysis based on systemic functional linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis based on corpus, and Critical Discourse Analysis based on cognitive linguistics, all of which aim to analyze how discourse is produced and how discourse serves social structures and power relations. In general, CDA creates its own theoretical paradigm based on the concept of systemic functional linguistics, aiming at analyzing the relationship between language, power and ideology and revealing how discourse originates from and serves social structure and power relations (Xin & Gao, 2013).

The study of Critical Discourse Analysis in China began at the end of the 20th century. At that time, Liao (1999) combed the discourse analysis methods proposed by Fowler et al. in *Language and Control* and formally introduced the concept of discourse analysis to China. Ji (2001) claimed that systematic functional grammar analysis, interweaving discourse genre analysis and discourse historical background analysis have their respective focuses but complement each other, which makes CDA an important supplement to traditional social and cultural analysis and turn it into a kind of social action to promote the progress of human society. Li & Liu (2008) through reviewing mainstream Critical Discourse Analysis methods, compared and analyzed their differences and similarities, finally proposing that these two categories of Critical Discourse Analysis can be integrated and learn from each other.

With the gradual improvement and development of Critical Discourse Analysis, news, as a kind of mass media discourse, has gradually become the interest of Critical Discourse Analysis. Wang (2003) took the news of the September 11 attacks as an analytical corpus, used transitivity to make a quantitative analysis of news discourse, and revealed the implicit ideology behind the news. Huang (2008) uses CDA to make a comparative analysis of the reported discourse in news texts and the textual and pragmatic functions of their translations, which mainly focuses on how the original news reporter and translator respectively use the reported discourse to express their own views and ideologies. Zeng (2009) analyzed Obama's presidential election speech from three aspects: personal pronouns, modality and discourse, and explored how he constructed his image of a new generation of American leaders who are

committed to "reform".

At the same time, empirical researches based on the combination of Critical Discourse Analysis and multidisciplinary methods has emerged in China. Xie (2010) constructed a discourse analysis framework adapted to the Chinese context of English classes through Critical Discourse Analysis. Wang (2010) revealed the ideology of middle-class housewives in the United States through the analysis of the conflict discourse in *Desperate Housewives*. Zhou (2010) revealed how cosmetics advertising English influences, misleads and persuades consumers to adopt consumption behaviors through the analysis of cosmetics advertising language. Wang (2011) took *Kung Fu Panda* as the research material and proposed that children's discourse is also influenced by ideology, which further enriched the theory of CDA and broadened its research field, and also opened up a whole new field of research on children's world ideology.

With the development of information technology, many forms of social media emerge in an endless stream. As a new network social mode, the bullet screen has attracted wide attention of scholars. As a type of discourse, the bullet screen is usually a way of online communication between Internet users. Discourse expression is often closely related to the content of the program, integrating the users' comprehensive evaluation of the characters, plot and other aspects in the video programs. Therefore, bullet screen discourse will be mixed with multi-dimensional emotion, attitude and position expression, so that participants can achieve a communicative interaction purpose. At the same time, with the rise of video websites and apps, the language form of bullet screens has also attracted wide attention from linguists.

At present, there are relatively few researches on bullet screens by Western scholars. This may be because mainstream video sharing platforms in the West, such as YouTube, do not use bullet screens. The intrinsic reason is that Eastern and Western languages belong to ideographic system and phonetic system respectively. As we all know, bullet screens are accurately presented by multiple symbols, which are more suitable for ideographic language and text (Jiang, 2022). Therefore, as an ideographic language and text, Chinese is more suitable for this kind of research. With the rapid development of China's mainstream video sharing platforms, such as Bilibili and TikTok, bullet screens have

gradually become a new form of communication for video users. This also provides a steady stream of corpus for the study of Critical Discourse Analysis of bullet screens. Zhou (2015), starting from analyzing the micro-structure of bullet screens, analyzed bullet screens in terms of wording style, grammatical features and common expressions and the core of youth subculture, and then explored the organization rules of these discourses adopted in the construction of youth subculture. In order to study the popularity of network broadcast from the perspective of discourse analysis, Zhao (2018) analyzed the narrative discourse, visual rhetoric and interactive discourse of network broadcast by taking the newly emerged food broadcast room in the era of wide-broadcast as an example. Fu & Cui (2019) took advertisements by using video with bullet screens as the object, analyzed the advertising text, discourse practice and social practice of these advertisements, explained the power relations, social structure and cultural factors behind them, which provided new ideas for enterprises to innovate advertising forms through online platforms and realize low-cost and cost-effective network marketing. Zhang (2021) took the text of *Houlang* and the bullet screens of it as the object, conducted linguistic analysis from four aspects: lexical choice, tone, modality expression and metaphor, and concluded that the two have obvious differences in the discourse construction of youth identity, showing completely opposite image positioning. Jiang (2022) conducted discourse analysis of

bullet screens with both nonlinear and fragmented features, which not only broke through the previous model of Critical Discourse Analysis with whole discourse as the object, but also enriched and expanded the corpus categories of CDA.

To sum up, CDA has become one of the most important research theories in China. It can not only be used to reveal the ideology and power game behind the discourse, but also to explain various social phenomena and analyze different cultural identities. Moreover, as a new media discourse bred by digital media technology, bullet screens provide a new direction for the interaction and integration of CDA and sociolinguistics. At present, the study of CDA in China only focuses on the analysis of news reports, and there is little CDA of bullet screens. Dong (2023) analyzed the bullet screens of a short knowledge video on Bilibili and discussed the characteristics of the audience embodied in the bullet screen and the new power relation in the knowledge interaction. There are only a few studies that take youth culture and otaku culture as the objects. Therefore, this paper will take this group as the object, aiming to further study the ideology and otaku culture of Chinese youth.

3. Methodology

3.1 Types of Bullet Screens in *Heaven Official's Blessing*

According to the different functions of bullet screens, the bullet screens in this episode are mainly divided into the following type.

Table 1. Type and frequency of bullet screens

Time of appearance \ Type	1-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35
Communicative type	127	379	680	542	312	247	429
War-orient type							
Recommendation type	36						
Popularization of science type	4		4	26	17		59
Word filling type							
Etiquette type	325						8
Plot revealing type	1	24	189	2	10	11	35
Complaint type	25	407	537	531	270	198	537

As shown in this table, the communicative bullet screens appear most frequently during the

process. Although the viewers of the video are spatially separated, the appearance of bullet

screens can tell them that there are people watching the same anime with them now, which provide a strong sense of belonging and presence for them. Therefore, the bullet screen is a carnival of a group of people. In the virtual interactive environment created by bullet screens, the majority of viewers can freely express their feelings and interact with others without any hesitation.

Second, the recommendation type only appears at the beginning. This is mainly because the video viewers have a strong desire to share in the process of repeatedly watching, hoping to share such good animation to more like-minded people. Therefore, they will choose to release such bullet screens at the beginning of the video to express their recognition of this animation and seek others sharing the same feelings.

In addition, ceremonial bullet screens only appear at the beginning and in the end to express the viewer's gratitude to all the staffs. For example, words like "Thank you, all the staffs." shown in Figure 1.

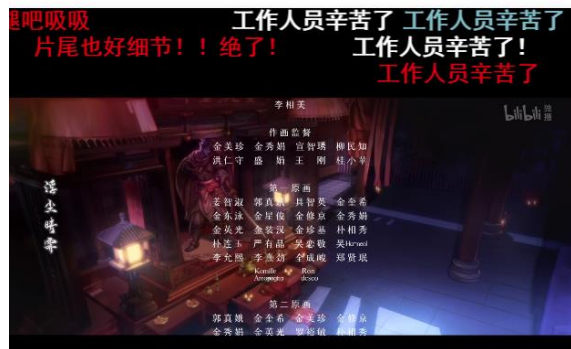


Figure 1. Bullet screens showing gratitude to the staff

At the beginning of the story, bullet screens revealing plots don't appear frequently. That is because revealing the plot at the beginning will be condemned by some first-time viewers. However, with the development of the story, those first-time viewers become more and more confused. Therefore, at that moment, some second-time viewers can't help revealing the plot to solve their confusion and satisfy their curiosity. And this kind of bullet screens reaches its peak at the climax of the plot. For instance, every time Hua Cheng appears, there must be a commotion among viewers. Bullet screen like "I eventually found you, my brother" shown in Figure 2 unconsciously reveals the plot that when he was a child, Hua Cheng was saved by

Xie Lian.

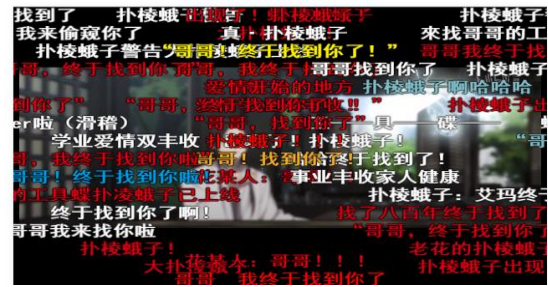


Figure 2. Bullet screen revealing the plot

3.2 Features of Bullet Screens

Based on the above data, it is not difficult to find that the viewers of *Heaven Official's Blessing* tend to be younger. They mainly communicate and make fun of each other, so the language style of their bullet screens tends to be common and normal. Since young people are its mainstream viewers, the language atmosphere of the whole bullet screens is quite active and humorous.

3.2.1 Nonlinearity

Nowadays, video editing technology keeps innovating and gradually breaks through the traditional chronological editing mode. Fantastic interlocking (several seemingly unrelated videos being cut together to create a new story) makes the story more interesting and original. The introduction of bullet screens has changed the viewing habits and thinking mode of the viewers. Therefore, bullet screens become random and fragmented. For instance, there are two God officials called Nan Feng and Fu Yao in this anime. Whenever they appear, bullet screens like “Nanfu battery” shown in figure 3 will appear too. This is because later in the episode, viewers regard them as a quarrelsome but loving couple and try to represent them by a word containing both of their names, which realize the linkage between this anime and reality.



Figure 3. Nanfu battery

3.2.2 Diversity

With the increasing popularity of bullet screens, the social status of bullet screen users becomes more and more extensive, which leads to the diversity of bullet screens. At the same time, users can choose to make crazy jokes online that they would not dare to tell in real life. People are no longer confined to sitting quietly in front of the screen. Expressing themselves freely is the fun and the essence of bullet screens.

Different groups use bullet screens to express themselves, innovating their own ways of language expression, reflecting the diversity of languages. For example, the bullet screen shown in the figure 4 are various, including network buzzword, onomatopoeic word and soliloquy.

In short, abbreviations, modal words, onomatopoeia words and repeat words often used in bullet screens are all relatively direct expressions of feelings and instant feelings.

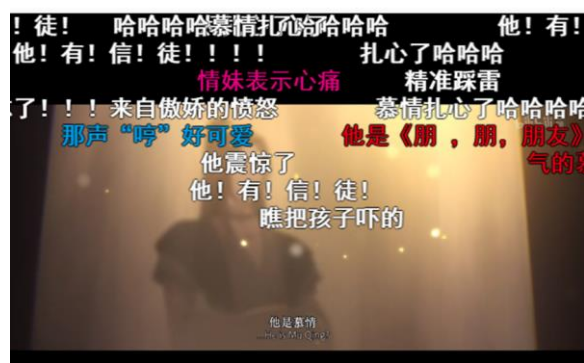


Figure 4. Bullet screens using network buzzword or onomatopoeic words

3.2.3 Colloquialism

Generally speaking, bullet screens posted on the video software are basically some colloquial words or sentences which express their meaning directly and briefly. There are also some interesting sayings and dialect variations. These kinds of colloquial bullet screens provide a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere for the audience, so that everyone can relax physically and mentally.

Some Internet jokes often appear in the text of bullet screens, most of which is colloquial. People use these words to get themselves into groups as quickly as possible. For instance, *send a dog' head emoji by hand* shown in figure 5, which means please don't call me names or hit me. This bullet screen unique in the two-dimensional community allows such users to quickly

integrate into otaku culture.



Figure 5. Bullet screens with unique jokes

Although bullet screens exist in the form of text, it can be better understood with videos with facial expression, sound and posture. As a result, when watching bullet screens posted on the videos, people do not think about words and logic as they do in writing articles. Instead, they interact with each other in the form of chat, whether appropriate or not, as long as the expression is expressive and can be understood. Certainly, some people merely use bullet screens to liven up the atmosphere and express gratitude to the staff.

3.3 Textual Analysis

3.3.1 Intertextuality

Intertextuality is an important theory in the field of literary and cultural studies. It is a term put forward by French semiotician Julia Kristeva when she translated Bakhtin's "dialogism". Julia Kristeva et al. (2016) proposed that a text will always be related to other texts, whether explicit or implicit and this connection may be reflected in the quoting, imitation, rewriting, parody and other writing techniques of previous texts, or it may be reflected in the absorption and transformation of the entire cultural system and social texts.

Since the bullet screen is a new language form formed by Internet users in the process of surfing the Internet, this new form often refers more directly to the previous network buzzword. For example, "Where dreams begin" is a term used in otaku culture, usually in the first episode of the first season of a well-known anime. Therefore, before this bullet screen appeared on the public screen of *Heaven Official's Blessing*, it has dominated the screen of major famous anime. "The prince 又爰爰 flew up to heaven" is a conventional bullet screen

used in *Heaven Official's Blessing*, which originally appeared in the form of “又” when Xie Lian secondly flew up to heaven. As the number of times increases, “又爻” and “又爻爻” were created by viewers to make fun of Xie Lian.

3.3.2 Parody

Parody is the combination of banter and parody, including both the use of the original text, and banter. The meaning of banter is generally expressed as the adaptation to achieve a humorous effect. Due to the strong entertainment of the network and the arbitrariness of network culture, parody has emerged in an endless stream from the top of the network platform. Most of the parody is in the form of “sad play”. Most of the parody is the adaptation of the classic, paying attention to the similarity in form but ignoring the logical correlation.

Bullet screens were born in Internet culture, which has great randomness and more prominent entertainment characteristics. Therefore, parody is a typical characteristic for bullet screens. For instance, *Mo's ancestral makeup*, which is the common portrait description of the hero in MXTY's novel. For viewers familiar with his, this style of language can be a source of great pleasure. In addition, parody also includes the use of common sayings and ancient poems. For instance, *have the power to destroy the world without losing the heart to sympathize flowers*.

3.4 Discursive and Social Analysis

3.4.1 To Seek a Sense of Shared Existence

The initial requirement of the development of bullet screens is to realize the efficient barrier-free communication and make everyone have a sense of joy and engagement.

People are social animals, therefore, in most cases, we all like to communicate with others, hoping that we can fit into the large group as soon as possible. Interacting with other viewers through bullet screens can give us a strong sense of engagement and interaction. Therefore, when we see opinions that is consistent with what we think in bullet screens, the pleasure of getting recognition and finding a bosom friend is amplified. This is why some people are willing to watch the version again with bullet screens, even though they have already watched ordinary one.

For instance, every time a God official insulted

Xie Lian for not having any followers, Xie Lian's fans would repeat, *he has followers* shown in Figure 6. By expressing their opinions, people not only interacted with viewers, but also characters in this anime. It is in this way that they have a sense of belonging. In other words, they are all believers in compassion.



Figure 6. He has followers

3.4.2 To Satisfy the Desire for Self-Centered Expression

Bullet screens extend the relationships among viewers, solve problems like lack of communication in real life and improve viewers' ability to communicate with others.

People always admire and like people who can accurately get their point. Therefore, people like to use their own language to show their own personality and charm. The change of the mass media makes the audience get unprecedented attention and pay more attention to seeking for self-identity. For instance, *promote themselves, single dog, I speak for myself* are all used to declare their own identity, hoping to arouse the resonance of others. Some of them post this kind of bullet screens to show off their single status while others hope to find like-minded friends or even soulmates.



Figure 7. Bullet screen in search of identity

4. Conclusion

Bullet screens take an active part in the construction of the otaku culture. Nowadays, bullet screens are different from that in the past,

showing characteristics like fragmentation and nonlinearity.

Bullet screens in *Heaven Official's Blessing* can be divided into many categories, all of which show the spiritual core of otaku culture. And the rhetorical devices are most typical of exaggeration, metaphor, personification and euphemism.

The bullet screen is a way for teenagers to express themselves, which imperceptibly promotes the continuous enrichment of cultural forms. Since it appeared, it has been changing with the progress of our society. This embodies the mainstream ideology and value orientation of our society.

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