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The Representation of Motherhood and Maternity in Japan and the UK
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1. Introduction

The paper will focus on the way in which the images of motherhood and maternity issues are represented in the printed media in Japan in the UK with particular reference to the issue of cross-modal communication. The present research began with the general hypothesis on the relationship between one mode of communication to another in the meaning making process, more specifically, the hypothesis that the kind of message commonly visually conveyed in one culture might not be the case in another. It should therefore be worth exploring to what extent the choice of semiotic mode(s) for a particular meaning making mechanism varies across different cultures. Another aspect that this paper attempts to demonstrate is that the distribution of 'functional load' between different modes of communication can actually reflect characteristics of underlying semiosis, which is a system that supposedly governs the overall working of distribution of semiotic modes in a given culture.

This paper will primarily examine the representation of pregnant women in both Japanese and British examples in order to see how the concept of pregnancy and childbirth is realized in the forms of visual images and in words. The textual analyses of the data will make use of a theoretical framework of visual semiotics, where each 'item', whether it is writing or visual images, which is represented in the text (the depicted items are called as 'represented participant' to borrow Kress and Van Leeuwen's term) is treated as a 'motivated sign'; they are made, reconstructed and also reinforced within certain socio-cultural context.

To examine selected examples, I will specifically draw attention to who and what is/are absent/present in the visual discourse of pregnancy and childbirth. The general tendency on the literatures around pregnancy and childbirth is that in Japanese examples, father figures are less explicitly visualised compared to that in British counterparts, which can be seen as one of the reflections of gender relations in each culture. Another point that I would like to draw attention to is the 'medium' in which visual images are represented; for example, if certain actions are shown in the form of photographs or cartoon images, the question arises as to what the difference in the selection of medium *can* actually signifies in terms of its socio-cultural conditioning. Use of photographs of mother and child seem to be more ubiquitous in the British examples than in Japanese equivalents. The question can be raised as to if there is any hard and fast 'rules' that govern the way the visual and language constitute the overall meaning and to what extent it is culturally specific or universal.

As is mentioned above, the paper is going to look at the way in which the images of pregnancy are represented in the media texts in Japan in the UK. The subjectivity of pregnant women should become an issue here: what does it mean to be pregnant? What does it mean to be a mother-to-be? How are pregnant women perceived in the framework of given socio-cultural environment? Are there any differences and similarities in the way of representation of the whole issue of being 'pregnant' between Japanese and British media? I would like to discuss one set of examples (that are both taken from pregnancy magazines called *Mother and Baby* in the UK and *Baby-Mo* in Japan).

In relation to the general hypothesis, which proposes that the kind of message commonly visually conveyed in one culture might not be the case in another, the question arises as to which semiotic mode represents what aspect of meaning factors

(or message) within the given context where the texts ‘come into being’. In the case of issues around pregnancy, maternity and childbirth in particular, which involve some personal, private and somewhat ‘sensitive’ subject-matters, the use of media should be crucial. In other words, my hypothesis was *how* the issue is represented using what kind of media can lead to different meaning making process and the meaning making process is nothing but a reflection of some political and ideological stance towards the given issues within the culture. The points that I would like to draw attention to here are the representations of pregnant women in relation to 1) authoritative figures (such as medical experts); 2) men; 3) peer group of pregnant women. In relation to the first point, Van Leeuwen points out as one of the factors in ‘the anatomy of discourse (2005:104), using the term ‘letigiminations’. The research attempted by Dingwall et al (1981) also recognized the significance of figures of authority that surround pregnant women and mothers, which led on to the assumption that the presence of those authoritative figures naturally position women in a certain socio-cultural environment.

Another aspect that this paper attempts to demonstrate is that the distribution of ‘functional load’ between different modes of communication can actually reflect characteristics of underlying semiosis in a given culture. In other words, it is important first to recognize that language and visual images, two different modes of communication, are assigned with different kinds of roles in any piece of texts (heavily depending on the genre of the text) and to consider or re-consider what language (in the form of writing, in particular) does or says and what visual images are representing in what manner can shed the light on some aspect of cultural stance towards the given issue.

Specifically, this research will examine the representation of mother-to-be, that is, the way in which the concept of pregnancy is visualized in the articles in maternity magazines both in the UK and Japan (as is mentioned above). The textual analyses of the data makes use of a theoretical framework of so-called visual (social) semiotics, where each item represented is treated as a motivated sign; they are made and remade within a socio-cultural context (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, Van Leeuwen, 1995)

I would like first of all reconsider the role of language that is ‘embedded’ along with visual images before examining the role of visual images themselves. Second, the actual texts are discussed in terms of visualization and choice of modes in relation to the message conveyed. In particular, I draw attention to who is absent/present in the visual discourse of maternity. The tendency is that in Japanese examples, father figures are more absent than in the British ones and it can be seen as a reflection of gender relations in a culture. Another point to note is the form in which visual images are represented; for example, if certain actions are shown as photographs or cartoon images and what the difference in this choice signifies. The use of photographs of mother and child seem to be more ubiquitous in the British examples than in Japan. The question arises as to if there is any hard and fast ‘rules’ that govern the way the visual and language constitute the overall meaning.

I will then like to conclude the paper with suggestions of the further potential of this research, namely, to explore other types of visual (and verbal) representations as a manifestation of underlying cultural value systems. Among them is the representation of ‘aging’. It can be hypothesized that visual images can take on the functional load that represent what is not culturally encouraged to be expressed in words, as is the case with maternity-related literatures.

2. Theoretical background

A number of researches have been done in the area of representation of women in relation to their body images across different disciplines such as sociology, cultural studies and art history. How subjectivity of women is represented can be observed through various modes of communication and exploring visual representations is one of the strongest and most assuring ways of approaching given 'texts'. In particular, literature on pregnancy and childbirth are often 'multi-modal', which consist of more than one mode of communication. That is, it is not only words but also visual images and other textual elements that convey the meaning and construct the overall message.

Analyzing representation of pregnancy and childbirth would therefore require multiple perspectives from which texts are to be looked at. When the issue of pregnancy and childbirth is considered, it is inevitable to address the meaning of bodies, that is, the meaning of women's bodies and that in relation to babies. In other words, the physicality of bodies as entities becomes an issue. However, the paper takes the stance that is perhaps best represented by Foucault's (1973) concept of body, which considers body not so much as a physical entity but body being significantly signified with its historically specific conditioning. Twigg (2006) emphasizes the significance of socio-cultural (rather than physical) aspect of body in her study of representation of aging and health in relation to the issue of body.

Other sociological research specifically in the field of pregnancy and childbirth include Dingwall et al (1991) and Mochida and Tanabe (2003). The former argues that there is a significant difference between the way in which motherhood ('who is a mother to a baby?') is represented in Japanese and British literatures and

they put the difference down on the difference in social attitudes towards gender roles, what women are supposed to do in the family context. One of the notable points in their research is that they traced the childishness in the representation of Japanese mothers compared to British counterpart and this tendency can be viewed in relation to other textual genres involving Japanese women. Mochida and Tanabe's study takes the stance of diachronic approach to the issue of the representation of pregnant women in particular in relation to social environment since Meiji era that begins the end of the 19th century in Japan. The role of men as husbands are focused here and it is pointed out that husband used to not only just participate but also to play an important role as a mediator between medical experts and pregnant women. Who is involved in pregnancy and childbirth leads on to the issue of authority.

It is often the case that literatures on pregnancy and childbirth make use of more than one mode of communication, which is called 'multimodal texts'. The status of language (writing) in multimodal texts is sometimes secondary to visuals and it is essential to have an analytical framework for both language and visual images as a unity for meaning making. This paper will base textual analyses on social semiotic approach (Hodge and Kress, 1986; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Van Leeuwen, 2005), which essentially focuses not only on what is represented but also, more importantly perhaps, *how* things are represented.

The social semiotic approach, which the current research will make use of initially originates in Halliday's concept on language (1985), which to sum up communication through language consist of three main domains (Ideational, Textual, Interpersonal) and these 'metafunction' in language is always at work to convey certain messages in any kind of text. It was Kress and Van Leeuwen's work (1996) that applied this notion of three metafunctions (the Ideational function, the Textual

function, the Interpersonal function) into the reading of visual images in the consideration and development of their 'grammar of visual design'. The Ideational function is concerned with 'the semiotic function of constructing representations of what is going on in the world' (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 278), the Textual function with the semiotic function of creating texts, complexes of signs which cohere both internally with each other and externally with the context in and for which they are produced' (ibid: 288) and the Interpersonal with 'the semiotic function of constituting communicative interactions (ibid: 279). These three levels of message are going to be taken up along with actual discussion of the data.

3. Textual analysis

This section will focus on the actual 'textual data', which are the articles in pregnancy and childbirth magazines. The Japanese example is an article taken from *Pre-Mo* (February issue, 2007) while the British equivalent is taken from *Mother and Baby* (July issue, 2007). The circulation of the former is 62,000 and the latter 72,000 (as of July 2007). Both magazines deal with various issues around pregnancy and childbirth, such as things that pregnant women have to bear in mind, and what to be expected when babies are born. What they have in common is that they make a lot of visual materials including photographs and illustrations in full colours. Proportion of the language and visual images varies depending on the nature of the articles but by and large, it is safe to say that both 'texts' are heavily visually orientated. The question is that *how, in what way* the given text is visually orientated. I would like to take up the issue of functional load that is distributed between language and visual images in the textual analysis to follow.

3.1. Overall tone

The first and general impression that the text gives away to the reader is strikingly different; in other words, the two texts have different kind of textual orientation. In the British example, there is an image of (supposedly pregnant) woman, who is depicted in a relaxed manner, reading a book. The general atmosphere is off everyday life, as if she was on holiday. On the other hand, in the Japanese example, the text consists of many kinds of categories, that is, it has not only the images of (pregnant) women but also some bar chart and other diagram. On the whole, it can be said that the British example is something to be looked at (before coming on to read small prints) while the Japanese one is something to be streamed into certain kind of reading, that is, it cannot be just overlooked by flipping the page; the presence of solid information (such as chart and tables) does not allow the reader just to flip over the pages. It has to be noted that the impression that the text gives at the first glance can carry significant meaning in terms of the interactive aspect between the reader and the text, which will be focused on in the section 3.5.

3.2. Who/What are represented participants in the text?

The choice of represented participants (what is/are depicted in the given texts) has great impact on the general overall impression of the text. In this section, I need to pay a close look at what are represented in each text. The most notable difference between two versions is that the British one is given a context in which the image is depicted ('off everyday life' or something similar to that) whereas the represented items are void of specific context, in other words, they are 'displayed' as entities in the textual space. What does this mean? In the British one, the single image of a pregnant woman, who appears to be engaged in reading in a relaxed manner, is

enough to give out the message, which is not explicitly described in words, ‘Just relax and enjoy yourself being pregnant’.

In the Japanese counterpart, on the other hand, the combination of various items that are represented (such as a group photograph of pregnant women, a photo of medical doctor, a flow chart that explains what to be done and to be expected) gives rise to an impression of samples or specimen of what are required to know as a pregnant woman. It is seemingly objective ‘objective’ and serves a role as information provider as opposed to image provider. In other words, the message that is put forward in the British example is an abstract image (at least to begin with as long as visual images are concerned) but in the Japanese example, it is both language and visual images that have taken on the role of provider of specific and practical information.

3.3. What is going on? (the Ideational function)

The British example seems to take a stance of ‘casual viewing’ and the message in words convey casual, informal and chatting-like tone in its style, as if *they* are talking to the reader (the interaction between the text and prospective reader will be discussed in section 3.5.). The text appears to be addressing to the reader directly, which implies certain expectation of readership- that is to lead to what it means to be pregnant. The primary tone of message here is a suggestions-*why not doing X?* It is interesting to note, in the Japanese counterpart, that the subject matter of the text is more or less an *instruction* based on seemingly ‘statistics’.

3.4. Composition of the Texts (the Textual function)

This section focuses on the way in which the text is structured, namely the composition of the text in relation to the distribution of meaning. In both texts, there are visual images along with language (words) but the way they are arranged matters here. In the British example, the words are ‘superimposed’ on the image of a pregnant woman, which has a strong sense of centrality. The woman being in the centre of focus, namely, is possible to read the arrangement as an formal indication of a woman being as the centre figure of pregnancy and birth. Indeed, there is a copy that reads ‘Your pregnancy’ (italic by the writer) on the top right hand side corner of the text. In terms of the reading direction, although the items are numbered from 1 to 15, it does not restrict the way in which the text is to be read but the numbers appear to be serving as a casual labeling of each item. The text is structured to be read from left to right as the number goes up and there is a sense of equality between each item, with the same amount of information given and with the same pattern, the content is followed by the lead-like phrase (or sentence).

In the Japanese case, on the other hand, there is a clash of the directionality (in which the text is to be read). The head copy (which is placed in the centre of the text takes up considerable amount of space) is written horizontally from left to right, which gives a directionality of right to left, while the arrow in the chart at the bottom runs from right to left. This chart that shows the general flow of matters to be noted during the pregnancy is located in the domain of Real, which according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) signifies more practical and specific information (as opposed to something abstract and conceptual, Ideal) that pregnant women are supposed to follow and observe. Unlike the British case, there is no explicit sense of centrality in this text but it is interesting to note the distribution of the meaning in left (the domain of New) and right (the domain of Given). What does this arrangement imply in

relation to the message? In the domain of New, there is a photograph of a male medical doctor with his title and affiliation. New domain signifies what is literally 'new', something to be newly discovered and manifests the focal point of the text. In the domain of Given, there is a group photograph of pregnant women, who are depicted to be addressing to the doctor asking 'We are wondering what the stable period is all about?' It is in the domain of New, where all new information is placed and in the domain of Given, women on the right are represented as 'something taken that we already know and taken for granted' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996: 187). It is the domain of the right where the information that both readers and represented women are seeking for, in other words, something worthwhile to know, while the information on the right hand side (which is written vertically) are general statements before moving on to actual information to be noted.

3.5. How the text interacts with the reader (the Interpersonal function)

What is represented and how text is represented in itself manifests certain kind of relationship between the producer of the text and the reader. How the given text creates readership in relation to what is conveyed, how the text interacts with the reader of the text, is the final aspect of the textual signification that I would like to consider in the two examples. First of all, I would like to focus on what Kress and van Leeuwen called the aspect of 'social interaction' (with reference to perspectives in which certain visual items are represented).

In the British example, the image of pregnant woman is represented with the equal perspective in relation to the reader. The message that is possibly implied here is that here is a woman who is expecting a baby just like *you* (who are now reading this article). The focus is the very woman who is pregnant, and it is *your* pregnancy

and *we* (non specific figure of authority but it is easy to assume that it implies the producer of the text including some other experts in the field. Still, it is not as clearly presented as in the Japanese text, where there is a clear indication that information provided there comes from a medical expert; namely, there is a presence of authority as opposed to lay people, including pregnant women. The message is that *we* (making good use of authority of the medical expert) are providing you with some useful information that pregnant women ought to know.

In terms of the visual perspective, the women in the Japanese example are represented with high angle, which signifies ‘viewer power’, that is to place the viewer to ‘look down on’ the women in the text. It should be noted that there is an image (photograph) of another pregnant woman, who is seen as practicing giving a model baby a bath, is also represented with the same kind of perspective: the viewer power. What does this imply in relation to the subjectivity of pregnant women in this text? It may be said that they are placed in a ‘lower’ status and they are the ones who need to seek for advice from experts. The perspective is indicating their (rather) passive status (as opposed to individually oriented and independent as was seen in the British equivalent) up to a point. It is also interesting that the photograph of the medical doctor placed on the right hand page is depicted with a low angle: the ‘represented participant power’ to use Kress and van Leeuwen’s term. This is a message that does not surface in the level of lexis but that is rather embedded in the level of visual semiotic. Together with linguistic message that reads ‘Well, we are wondering what the stable period is like?’ which indicates that they are in the dark with regards to some matters on pregnancy and childbirth, the composition (visual syntax) is reinforcing its message by keeping the women’s position as if being looked down on.

In this way, different texts seem to construct different kinds of readership and its relationship with the producer of the texts. Another manifestation of the interaction between the reader and the producer of the text is seen on the editorial. In the British example, there is a photograph of the editor with her two small children along with the written message. It is highly personalized and the emphasis is on the fact that the editor of the magazine is sharing the 'same' or similar position (as mother of two) as that of the reader. The message is that I have two children myself and I know what it is like to bringing up children, which would essentially create certain degree of credibility and trustworthiness among the readers.

It seems relevant to refer to the fact that there is no indication of the editor in the same manner in the Japanese example. The absence of the editor's 'voice' in the Japanese example actually signifies as much as the presence of the editor in the British case does. Compared to the British one, here the 'face' of the editor missing, which gives an impression that the magazine is produced by some impersonal figures. The producer (including the editor of course) of the magazine is 'represented' more of an authoritative figure, as opposed to the British editor. It should not overlooked, however, that the fact that British magazine opted for an explicit representation of the editor in a rather domestic and friendly tone in relation to the expected readership can also be another type of manifestation of authoritative figure. It should be safe to argue therefore that absence

3.6 Summary

As has been discussed above, it is notable that the subjectivity of pregnant women in relation to the issue of pregnancy and childbirth is manifested quite differently between Japanese and British examples. One of the questions to ask is

how language and visual images are at work to construct the overall meaning of the texts. There is always a profound meaning hidden behind in the way language and visual images as medium of communication. That is, how meaning (message) is distributed across two different modes of communication: what language says and what visual images say about the given issues.

What is the text about? How the text interacts with the (targeted) reader? How the text is structured and what kind of meaning is attached to it? Even the subject matter being on the same issue, there seems to be a big difference in the choice of its focal point, which is what is placed as the primary aspect of the message.

What is supposed to be culturally 'sensitive' and how it is represented in various media is worth studying because that is where 'neutralized' yet solidly political and ideological stance sneaks. For example, fertility treatments, abnormality in babies, miscarriage, and other problems that are slipped off so-called 'mainstream' discourse about pregnancy and childbirth and the absence of these subject-matters signifies as much as presence of certain information given in the texts.

4. Conclusion

The examples that I have discussed in this paper indicate first of all that the it is not just language but visual mode is a crucial key to represent the subjectivity of pregnant women; *who* pregnant women are in relation to 'others' (such as medical authorities, experts, senior mothers). Also, it has been found that there are some remarkable differences in the way in which concept of being pregnant or being an expecting mother is represented between Japanese and British samples. In short, Japanese example has a stronger tone of authority at present reflected in the textual

function as well as textual composition, whereas the British one has a less tendency to do so.

Another point to note is that what is supposed to be credible and trustworthy seems to be different between two cases: that is, in the Japanese example, it is the word of medical experts, senior mothers who have to be listened to and to be learned a lot of 'useful and relevant' information from in order not to be in trouble. The pregnant woman is not represented as a central figure but as a rather passive figure that is expected to follow whatever suggested and recommended. The British case is different: there is no ostentatious figure of medical experts but the party that is giving some *advice and suggestions* is referred to as 'we'. This 'we' could include medical experts as well as publisher, but it is not explicitly stated as is the case with Japanese counterpart. The question to ask now is what it means to have a top-down direction (or flow) of information about pregnancy and childbirth. It is a realization of power relationship between pregnant women and surrounding figures of authority.

With respect to the choice of medium in which visual images are represented, it is possible to say that there is prominent and notable use of cartoon images in Japanese texts while British counterpart tends to use photographs of women with babies. In other words, this suggests that how the information is conveyed is remarkably different. That is, in Japanese example, it's more visually oriented and a lot of nitty-gritty information is conveyed in visual images (including pie charts, and graphs and so on) while British examples convey the information mainly through language (written information, as something to be read rather than to be looked at), where visual images serve to add background or overall images to go along with what is written, rather than visual images as instructions as is seen in the Japanese case.

Given what has been discussed so far, it seems reasonable to suggest that each culture could more or less determine what is supposed to be visually represented and what is supposed to be expressed in the form of words (writing). Namely, the representation of the (broadly speaking, culturally granted or accepted) 'stance' towards pregnancy and childbirth is ultimately constructed through the use of two different modes of communication. For example, what childbirth means to be on the pregnant woman; it's *your* responsibility but *you* deserve to be content and happy about the whole thing in British text. In the Japanese context, on the other hand, childbirth and pregnancy is something to be 'watched out' and warned for rather than to be enjoyed and looked forward to with a presupposition that women are expected to be in a weak and vulnerable position and to seek for authority advice with highly instructed as if a manual to follow. It is thus interesting to observe that the manipulation of language and of visual images in a given text is nothing but a reflection of political and ideological stance towards the issue in question and re-considering the role of different modes of communication will surely shed light on what has been taken for granted as 'norm' in the given culture and society. It is in this sense crucial to be aware of *how* the information is provided as well as what is represented right in front of the reader or viewer of any multimodal texts.

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