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Linguistic Manifestations in the Commercialisation of Japanese Animation and Comics

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Abstract. In today's economic climate, capitalism is a central ideology that governs the market world. And

this is no exception in the contemporary Japanese animation and comics (anime and manga) industry. Animators and artists have to evolve to meet the demands of the audience who are becoming more intellectually complex. To satisfy these needs, animators and artists have to use more sophisticated linguistic

means. Fairclough's (1995) who uses Foucault's (1993) order of discourse refers to the ordered sets of discourse practices found in social domains, that is, the nexus of practices representing different discourses.

For instance, in contemporary anime and manga, storylines may use multiple discourses, such as historical

discourse (to refer to past events) and musical discourse (to build tension in the stories). This research examines the textual and intertextual use of historical discourse in two anime and manga titles, 'Zipang' and

'Rurouni Kenshin' using Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework. This paper is part of larger study which focuses on five anime and manga titles as well as five types of discourses and their textual manifestations.

Keywords: comics, animation, anime, manga, textual, intertextuality, discourse, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

The comic industry in today's world is highly commercialised (Wo, Lou and Hyun-hee, n.d.).

This is

evident in the Japanese animation and comics (henceforth, 'anime' and 'manga' respectively) industry.

Today, they have become multi-million dollar industries (Whitehead, 2004, p. 123; Wong, 2006).

The anime

and manga industry is popular not only in Japan, but world over, as it has reached out to different speech

communities through translated languages and dubbings (Whitehead, 2004; Schodt, 1996).

According to an

article on the Wall Street Journal, the anime market for the United States alone is "worth approximately

\$4.35 billion" as of 2007 (Bosker, Aug 31, 2007). Given the economic importance of anime and manga in

contemporary culture, this research examines the textual and intertextual use of historical discourse in two

particular anime and manga titles, *Zipang* and *Rurouni Kenshin* using Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework.

Fairclough (1995) argues that in capitalist societies, products use various types of discourse to make profit

gains. In other words, the combination of discourses are used to increase sales and consumption of anime and manga.

2. Fairclough (1995): Discourse and Intertextuality

Fairclough (1995, p. 132) provides two main categories of discourse. One is the use of language as a social practise, in other words, how a society would use language to achieve its ideological goals. For instance, a consumerist society would use sex and persuasive words to sell ideas. The second, as a way of signifying experience from a particular perspective. Examples of this include medical discourse, scientific discourse, academic discourse and legal discourse. 'Discourse' in this research refers to the second definition.

In the construction of a text, different discourses are constantly mixed, and Fairclough (1995) points out that the use of different discourses aims to attract and persuade consumers of the 'texts' to pay for a certain product. The use of different and diverse genres in a text results in 'interdiscursivity'. For instance, a lawyer may use scientific discourse to appear objective and interrogative discourse to elicit answers from accused in the courtroom.

In each type of discourse, there are various textual manifestations that reflect specific types of discourses.

Using the same example, a lawyer would use sentence structures like, 'Evidence shows that the victim's stomach was poisoned with a chemical compound' and 'Do you agree with this assessment?' to reflect scientific and interrogative discourses respectively.

When there are more than two textual elements in a discourse, they form an 'intertextual' relationship

(Fairclough, 1995). Kristiva (1986, p. 39) who introduced the term, explains that intertextuality is the

insertion of an older text to authenticate and create the credibility of the newer text. In this context, history

refers to other 'older' texts which have been adopted to create new text that are authoritative, trustworthy or

credible (van Dijk, 1995, p. 4). In the case of anime and manga, intertextuality is used to boost credibility of a

storyline and characters to make the stories more convincing and realistic.

3. Similarities and Differences between Anime and Manga

'Anime' and 'manga' are Japanese words which have been accepted into the English lexicon¹.

The

former stands for cartoon and animation. In Japan, anime refers to all animation regardless of the genre, style,

or nation of origin. However, outside of Japan, anime refers specifically to Japanese animations (Anime

News Network, n.d.a). In Japan, 'manga' refers to all forms of comics, regardless of origin but elsewhere,

manga specifically refers to Japanese comics (ibid.). In any case, manga and anime are difficult to distinguish in terms of their storyline contents because anime are typically adapted and based on manga (Whitehead, 2004, p 124-125). In fact, it is said that the Japanese anime industry is “a spin-off of the manga industry” and most anime are “based on already existing and successful manga” (Anime News Network, n.d.b).

4. Research Sources and Methodology

Two anime and manga titles are referred to in this study: *Zipang* and *Rurouni Kenshin*. *Zipang* (lit. ‘Land of the Rising Sun’) is a story about the crew of a Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) Arleigh Burke class warship that mysteriously time warped back into the days of the Second World War. The crew tries to avoid meddling with history for fear they might alter the future, but their existence is acknowledged by the warring Imperial Japanese and American forces. *Rurouni Kenshin* (also called ‘*Samurai X*’) refers to a story of a wandering swordsman named Kenshin Himura who tries to atone for his sins of being an assassin for the *Ishin-Shishi* (a historically real anti-Tokugawa Shogunate group) in the last days of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Kenshin finds no peace because his enemies seek to kill him.

Table 1: Anime and manga list for analysis²

Anime/

Manga

Genre Target

audience

Some interdiscursive

elements (discourse)

Some intertextual elements

(examples)

Zipang Drama, Historical,
Military, Science Fiction

Teenagers

History World War II

Rurouni

Kenshin

Adventure, Comedy,

Drama, Fantasy,

Historical, Romance,

Shounen

Teenagers,

Mature

History Early days of the Meiji

Restoration

To study the types of discourses and textual elements in *Zipang* and *Rurouni Kenshin*, Figure 1 shows

Fairclough’s (1995) framework of analysis.

¹ Online Oxford Dictionary website: <http://www.askoxford.com>

² Information acquired from the Anime News Network website <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com>

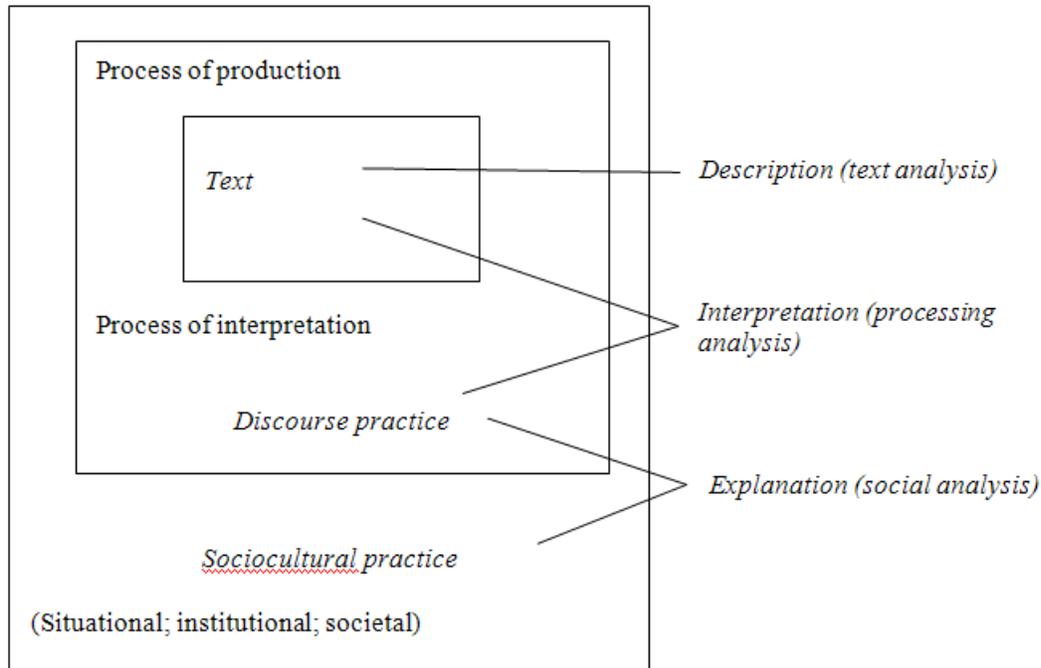


Fig. 1: Fairclough's 3-Dimensional framework of analysis

The 'sociocultural practices' level refers to the 'sociological' explanation of the society or institution (e.g. ideology). In this research, sociocultural practice refers to the consumer culture and the practices of exporting anime and manga as monetary and cultural commodities. 'Discourse practices' refers to the production, dissemination and distribution of texts, and this level serves as the median point for the 'sociocultural practices' and 'textual practices' levels. The types of discourses (e.g. historical discourse, etc.) used to construct the text falls in this level. The 'textual level' is the level that is the manifestation of the 'discourse practices'. Examples include types of clothes worn, historical referencing common at that time, etc.

5. Analysis: Textual and Intertextual Elements in Historical Discourse

Because discursive elements can possibly be very large and almost inexhaustible, a number of discursive elements have been identified for analysis, and they are, historical discourse (chronological events, historical items, historical individuals) and sociopolitical discourse (organisation and administration of society). Both discourses are realised through textual references. In this research, 'history' refers to actual events that happened in the past. In this paper, historical discourse is realised through three types of references: (i) actual historical events, (ii) reference to items of

historical value, and (iii) reference to real people. Examples of these references are textual practices.

Intertextuality is realised when the textual elements 'interact' with each other to create credibility and

realism. *Zipang* and *Rurouni Kenshin* make interesting case studies because the script writers have to

interweave historical accounts events with fiction.

The script writer for *Zipang*, Kaiji Kawaguchi includes numerous real-life references to historical accounts of the Pacific War naval warfare and the Second World War, such as the Battle of Midway in June

1942, the occupation of Malaya (today known as Malaysia) and Singapore by Japanese forces during World

War 2, and the take over of the island of Guadalcanal by American forces. *Zipang* also has a canonised

fictional event which shows the destroyer, *Mirai* sinking the USS Wasp with a Tomahawk missile on

September 15, 1942 (in real accounts, the USS Wasp was sunk by Japanese torpedoes).

In Episode 5 of anime version of *Zipang*, a rescued Imperial naval officer whose plane was shot down in

the Pacific Ocean was granted access to the historical archive in the *Mirai's* library database.

There, he

discovers (factual) historical details of the future which include Adolf Hitler's suicide, the loss of 100,000

civilian lives in the battle of Okinawa, the sinking of the grand battleships, *Yamato* and *Mushashi*, and the

establishment of the *Kamikaze* (suicide plane squads) and *Kaiten* (suicide human torpedoes) by the IJN

(Imperial Japanese Navy) in the last years of the war.

In *Rurouni Kenshin*, the script writer, Nobuhiro Watsuki draws on numerous references to factual historically-based sociopolitical accounts of the Meiji Restoration eras including the resistant activities of an

armed and revolutionary anti-Tokugawa Shogunate group called the *Ishin-Shishi* (c.f. Gluck, 1978), the

Shinsengumi, formed in 1863 by the Tokugawa Shogunate as a special police force, and the murder of

Okubo Toshimichi on May 14, 1878 (in the canonised version, Okubo was murdered by one of Kenshin's

enemies).

Zipang and *Rurouni Kenshin* also have references to items of historical value that complement the historical timelines of the anime and manga stories. In *Zipang*, items of that era, such as non-rocket aircraft

fighter aircrafts, World War II Japanese and American issued military uniforms, gears and weapons, coal

powered trains in Malaya and Singapore, the United States aircraft carrier USS Wasp and the battleship

Yamato, were included to create historical credibility to the World War II naval conflicts.

In *Rurouni Kenshin*, historical artifacts which reflect the days of the Meiji Restoration period include

clothes (e.g. Kimono, Yukata and Hakama), Japanese swords, katanas and early war gun-powered rifles,

wooden buildings occupied by commoners and horse carriages as common land transportation.

References to real people (or historical figures) are also strategies used by anime and manga writers to create a sense of historical relativism. It is perhaps interesting to note that despite the presence of individuals bearing names of real people in the anime and manga, these individuals only have supporting roles in the story. In *Rurouni Kenshin* for example, there are inclusions of historically real individuals such as Katsura Kogoro (1833-1877), one of the leaders of the *Ishin-Shishi* (Craig, 1961), and Okita Soji (1840s-1868), squad leader and master swordsman of the *Shinsengumi* (Mori, 1999; Yamamura, 1978.), whom Kenshin fought with. Okubo Toshimichi (1830-1878), an influential Japanese statesman who introduced socioeconomic and political changes in the early days of the Meiji Restoration, sought Kenshin's help to stop a dangerous assassin, but he was murdered before Kenshin could give his reply. In short, these rank titles form the textual practices of sociopolitical discourse.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The research reveals that the contemporary anime and manga titles studied have rich textual and intertextual elements in a historical discourse. Referring to the analysis, an illustration of the nature of *Rurouni Kenshin* and *Zipang* is shown in Figure 2.

Rurouni Kenshin Zipang

Historical

discourse

Historical

discourse

Reference to actual historical

events, items of historical

value & real people

Discourse

practices

Anime and

manga titles

Reference to actual historical

events, items of historical

value & real people

Textual

practices

Fig. 2: Some of the discursive and intertextual elements in *Rurouni Kenshin* and *Zipang*

Figure 2 does not cover every form of discourse and textual practices of the anime and manga titles. In

fact, it is perhaps not an overstatement to say that the discourses and textual practices are inexhaustible for

any given anime and manga title. The use of multiple textual and intertextual elements in a discourse also

suggests that anime and manga script writers are using more and more complex textual elements to attract

and appeal to consumers due to growing competition for audience interest. Alternatively, this may also

suggest that viewers are becoming more intelligent and inquisitive.

Given the complexity of textual elements, anime and manga writers have to research their themes in a very thorough manner to produce complex storylines and themes which are not only credible, but also appealing and profound. Without the use of these textual elements, anime and manga would most likely be bland, making it hard for writers to sell their stories.

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