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Newspaper Subjectivity from Multimodal Perspectives

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Introduction

As an increasing number of newspaper reports these days carry multi-modal features with a great many visuals, such as photographs, graphs, charts, more conveyed messages in the medium have to be visually processed. In this trend, the role of readers as information receivers has shifted from that of readers to readers / viewers, without their notice because of the generality of the text. This phenomenon of multi-modality in news reports is noticeable, but research that focuses on the nature of the multi-modal medium and how it affects readers / viewers has just begun (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985, p.32).

In this project I argue for the need to examine how the secondary mode (visuals) in newspaper reports functions and affects the overall nature of the medium, and what interpersonal relationship such text is trying to establish with readers. In this information age, a considerable amount of information people are exposed to has multi-modal structures, and as new technologies appear on the marketplace and quickly blend into people's daily lives, literacy requirements change (Luke, 2000). Acquiring necessary "multi-modal literacy" (Unsworth, 2001) to take critical viewpoints toward the information not only in the linguistic mode but also in other modes is then very important. In the case of multi-modal newspaper articles, different from verbal reports, the visuals in the medium are basically the products of text producers' or news company's choices, and, with the salience, they are able to play a dominant role in deciding the medium's nature.

Therefore, the aim of this project is to show the overall nature of newspaper reports as multimodal texts influenced by visual "orientation" and to re-examine the stereotype that a newspaper is an "objective" medium. My discussion is based on the



visual analysis of newspaper photographs and social conventions in the medium. Then, in addition to this point, I also discuss the latent influence such multi-modal texts exercises on readers / viewers. In this project, I take a *Systematic Functional* approach, established by Halliday, to the argument about the objectivity or subjectivity of newspaper reports. Before the methodology section of my research, I will briefly introduce theoretical backgrounds to clarify my analytical points.

Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) was advocated by Halliday. He takes a sociolinguistic view toward language and considers language as one of social sign systems (modes) created by interaction among people, with which they exchange and transmit shared value and knowledge both synchronically and diachronically (Halliday). He argues that culture is a composite of such various sign systems and language should be analyzed from this functional semiotic perspective.

SFG's functional approach to various social modes including language is characterized as three perspectives known as "meta-functions": *Ideational*, *Interpersonal*, and *Textual*. The Ideational meta-function represents the contents of human experience provided by mode-specific lexico-grammar, and in the linguistic mode, propositional messages, such as 'who did what to whom,' as well as circumstantial information, are all expressed in this meta-function. The Interpersonal meta-function emphasizes the interactive aspects of communication realized by social modes. In this meta-function, people use modes as various functioning devices, with which they *inform*, *question*, *order*, *offer*, or *express* their ideas. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) call the Ideational meta-function "language as reflection," and the Interpersonal meta-function "language as action." The textual meta-function, in addition to modal channel selection (written or spoken), deals with the information structures in propositional messages and controls the syntagmatic choices in them. In SFG, people select modes containing these three meta-functions, and with them, they send messages and get things done in an appropriate way.

When people read a newspaper, they receive information basically from two modes, linguistic and visual. If a newspaper report is an objective medium, the less manifestation of the interpersonal meta-function and more focus on ideational meta-



function should be one of the characteristics shared and expressed in the two modes. In SFG, it is natural to consider that all the propositions realized in texts basically contain both ideational and interpersonal factors. Accordingly, what determines the overall nature of texts is not the ‘absolute’ but the ‘relative’ focus on either mode. I define the “subjectivity” of newspaper reports in this project as the ‘relatively’ explicit manifestation of interpersonal meta-function, where the text producers try to form interactive relationship with readers / viewers or express their personal comment or judgment.

Newspaper Objectivity

Generally speaking, newspaper reports are considered to be objective, and people believe this nature of the medium is one of the factors that have made them establish a certain genre in their society. In such a stereotype, the “objectivity” in newspaper implies that the producers of texts send information to the readers only in the light of truth or as its primary source. Accordingly, in newspaper reports, the explicit display of the producers’ subjective perspectives or their active postures to form an interactive relationship with readers is avoided. In other words, newspaper reports bear responsibility as an information mediator that avoids being conspicuous, and the selected modes in the texts are expected to realize such an objective nature.

In 2005, *The Japan Times* (2005, p.17) expressed its ideas about the objectivity of newspaper reports by stating, “The primary purpose of a newspaper is to send facts as they are. Therefore, it is improper to force reporters’ personal feelings and opinions, or to help the government or other authorities to advertise their ideologies.”

The relative objectivity of news reports suggested by the statement of this news company can be exemplified in the analysis on the mono-modal (linguistic) level.

First, Halliday and Matthiessen introduced what is called *Mood System* realized in the linguistic mode (p. 135). Under the system, they mention three basic sentence structures (*declarative, interrogative, and imperative*) as *Mood Types* that determine the basic speech functions of a sentence. For example, ‘interrogatives’ and ‘imperatives’ reflect text producers’ desire to interact with audiences by questioning or ordering, establishing communication on a ‘two-way’ basis. In contrast, the choice of ‘declaratives’ defines the purpose of the communication as just sending information. In newspaper reports,



therefore, the unmarked Mood Type is not interrogatives or imperatives, and the medium shows the avoidance to establish interpersonal relationship with readers by employing declarative structures.

Second, the objectivity of news reports is verified by the avoidance of such linguistic features as auxiliary verbs, adverbs, or adjectives that reflect the reporters' involvement toward the value of the reported events. Third, the avoidance of using a second person pronoun "you" referring to the readers as well as a first person pronoun "I," "we" referring to the reporters themselves is a common practice. Fourth, choosing "neutral" reporting verbs, such as "say" or "ask," in the case of sending information from primary sources is also an important issue in the medium.

All these linguistic features in newspaper reports show that the focus in the text is on sending information (ideational meta-function), not on forming interpersonal relationship with readers (interpersonal meta-function). Therefore, as long as the analysis of the medium's objectivity / subjectivity is done only on the mono-modal (linguistic) level, there is, more or less, rationality in the argument that news reports are an 'objective' medium.

Visual Grammar

In the Systemic Functional approach, the people who share same cultural backgrounds use various social modes, expecting that they, whether linguistic or visual, fundamentally have similar, not completely the same, meaning-making systems. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) applied the theory of SFG to visual analysis and exemplified the systematic configurations of visual lexes. In this project, I conducted a visual analysis of newspaper photographs, based on their ideas, and focused on the degree to which the interpersonal meta-function is realized.

Method

Analyzed Data

The first analyzed datum (see Appendix 1) is a newspaper article from the *International Herald Tribune* that appeared in *The Asahi Shimbun* on March 11, 2005 (p.3). This article is about the Chinese government's action to protect farmers' land rights and to spend more money on irrigation.



The second datum (see Appendix 2) is a newspaper photograph that was attached to an article that appeared in *The Japan Times* on February 13, 2005 (p.3). This article reports the Pakistani government's relief operation for the people who became the victims of torrential rains in the southwest of Pakistan.

Procedures

The analysis in this project consists of three parts. The first part is a visual analysis, where a news report photograph (see Appendix 1) is analyzed in terms of "Interactive Visual Meanings" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) in order to clarify what 'speech role' the photograph carries and what 'attitudes' the text producer expresses in it. The points to be analyzed here are fourfold: *Speech Function*, *Social Distance*, *Involvement*, and *Power Relation* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

The second part is a cohesion analysis between the two modes (verbal and visual). In this part, I compare the visual and the linguistic modes, which share the same space and make the multi-modal text cohesive. First, I analyze the cohesion between the two modes in terms of interpersonal meta-function (interpersonal attitudes). Next, I analyze the cohesion from the standpoint of ideational meta-function (lexical cohesion), where I begin with a comparison between the visual and the verbal part, and then shift the comparison to the visual with its attached caption. The aim of this part is, by taking different perspectives, to cross-validate the results of the first part and re-confirm the subjectivity of the multi-modal news report's photograph.

In the third part, I examine another news report photograph (see Appendix 2) in terms of visual 'realism.' In this part, I discuss whether the newspaper photograph is actually representing the 'real' world, namely, human's exact visual perceptions.

Visual Analysis

Interactive Visual Meanings

Speech Function

Just as the Mood System in the linguistic mode determines the basic speech functions by categorizing sentences into declaratives, interrogatives, or imperatives, visual speech functions are characterized by the presence or absence of 'eye gazing' in the represented participants in visuals. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), the speech



functions, allowed in Visual Grammar, are either "demand" or "offer." If a vector by eye-gazing appears in a visual, it implies that the represented participants are addressing the viewers with a visual "YOU," 'demanding' viewers' attention.

On the other hand, if there is no eye-gaze in a visual, the realized speech function is interpreted as an 'offer.' In this case, the represented participants have no intention to be actively involved with the viewers, and the roles of the represented participants are confined to "items of information" or "specimens in a display case" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.124).

Judging from this categorization, the speech function realized in the photograph (see Appendix 1) is 'demand.' In this photograph, the most salient represented participant (a little child) addresses the viewers and 'demands' responses from them with her eye-gaze. The child's eyes imply that the demand should be considered seriously.

Social Distance

Social distance is a set of boundaries that determines the appropriate physical and psychological space between communicative participants. The second perspective of the analysis is about the social distance that the text producer wants to create between the represented participants in a visual and the viewers. According to Visual Grammar, imaginary social distance by visuals is determined by the depicted size of the represented participants in picture frames, categorized as, for example, a *close-up*, *medium shot*, and *long shot*, and so on (Kress & van Leeuwen). Then, each category implies the degree of interpersonal involvement.

In the photograph (see Appendix 1), the most salient represented participant (a child) is seen from the head to the waist. Considering the depicted size, the imaginary social distance is from a *close* to *medium* shot, where the implied social relationship is *intimate*, *friendly*, and *personal*. With this close social distance, the photograph creates an atmosphere in which the viewers feel a sense of intimacy with the child. Furthermore, this feeling is enhanced by the facial expression that viewers can recognize in such a close range.

Involvement

The degree of viewers' involvement into a certain topic in a visual is affected by the



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“horizontal” angles made by the represented participants in visuals. In visual grammar, the frontal angles of the represented participants require viewers’ direct involvement, while the oblique angles of them cause the opposite effect, viewers’ ‘detachment.’ In the photograph (see Appendix 1), even though the frontal plane of the viewers is not completely parallel to that of the child, the frontal angle by the child’s face creates an effect that attracts viewers into the depicted event.

Power Relation

“Vertical” angles created by represented participants can symbolize ‘power relationship’ between them and viewers. If the represented participants in a visual are depicted from a high angle, it implies that they have more power, higher status, than viewers, while they are depicted from a low angle, the opposite effect occurs. Then, if they are at the eye level of viewers, this means that there is no power difference between the two parties. According to this definition, because the represented participant (the child) is seen at the eye level of viewers, the power relation realized in the photograph (see Appendix 1) is ‘equal.’ However, considering that as the visual participant is a small child, the photographer needed to lower his or her body to take this picture, this vertical angle in the picture creates stronger effects than normal equal angles.

Multimodal Cohesion

There are several types of multimodal texts, and in each text, the co-occurring modes have a reason to share the same space. The “synergistic” nature of such modes that creates various semantic relationships in a text is known as *Intersemiotic Complementarity* (Royce, 1999). In Intersemiotic Complementarity, the co-evolving relationship among different modes in the same text is made explicit by considering the orientations of SFG’s meta-functions.

Interpersonal Level

From the visual analysis above, the speech function in the photograph (see Appendix 1) is ‘demand,’ which can be understood as an interrogative sentence under Mood System in the linguistic mode. However, as is often the case with news report articles, the verbal part of this text (see Appendix 1) consists only of ‘declaratives.’ From this fact, it is clear



that, while the visual emphasizes interaction with viewers (interpersonal meta-function), the focus of the verbal part is on sending information (ideational meta-function) without forming an active interaction with readers.

The comparison between the two modes in terms of ‘level of involvement’ also ends up with poor matching. Theoretically speaking, the realization of active involvement by the visual can be substituted in the linguistic mode by sentences that begin with the second person pronoun “you.” However, the sentences in the verbal part (see Appendix 1) never use pronouns that make interactive participants visible.

Ideational Level

If I define that multi-modal lexical cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1985) represents the compatibility of the two modes in their functional orientations, this photograph shows contradictions. In the photograph (see Appendix 1), the primary represented participant is a small child, but, strangely, this participant in the visual is not mentioned in the verbal counterpart at all. In this case, the lexical *collocations*, such as ‘education,’ ‘school fees,’ ‘education system,’ ‘rural students,’ or ‘14 million students,’ represent the existence of the cohesive ties between the visual and the verbal parts, but the strength of the cohesion is weak, compared with those realized by lexical direct ‘*repetitions*.’

Next, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) apply “Identifying Relational Process” to explain the relationship between a newspaper photograph and its caption. According to their idea, the caption under a news report photograph has an identifying purpose that facilitates and guides the visual interpretation.

The caption attached to the photograph (see Appendix 1) consists of two parts as written below:

1. A little girl at a farmers’ market in Beijing.
2. China plans to abolish agricultural taxes.

Even though the first one is not a complete sentence, it represents the visual proposition faithfully because the most salient represented participant in the photograph is realized as the “Theme” in it. However, the connection between the second sentence and this visual is not clear. Even though one word in the sentence, ‘agricultural,’ is related to the background in the visual, the relationship between them is not so strong. The cohesion between the two captions also gives an impression that they belong to completely



different stories even though they are lexically tied with “repetition” and “collocation,” such as ‘Beijing’ and ‘China,’ and ‘farmers’ and ‘agricultural.’

Visual Realism

When people communicate, they depend on the “reliability” or “truth” of messages. However, in SFG, these concepts are not considered to have an absolute value but, rather, vary according to the “Coding Orientation” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.168). Coding Orientation is a kind of precondition in which people judge something as *real* or *unreal*, or, *true* or *false*, depending on the specific purpose of the mode. Normally, people communicate and express their opinions or judgments under decided coding orientations, placing them somewhere in the continuum between *positive* and *negative*, or, *good* and *bad*. These degrees are collectively known as “Modality,” and “any modality (unless it is reported as coming from someone else) is a sign that somehow the speaker is expressing a personal view rather than objective facts” (Thompson, 1996, p.73). In the visual communication, what determines the modality is color, context, detail, depth, and light (Unsworth, 2001, p.99)

Considering the coding orientation that news report photographs should carry, if the visuals are defined as *objective, photo-naturalistic* coding orientation should be selected as its “unmarked” realization. In this orientation, the image created by 35mm color photography has the highest (truest) modality because it gives viewers an image closest to what they actually see and experience.

However, examining the photograph (see Appendix 2) from this perspective, the visual representation is not ‘naturalistic’ even though the choice of monochrome photography in this case is due to the company’s decision and it does not lead to modality deterioration. The picture shows overall delineation of detailed features, and this representation creates an impression that the represented participants in this picture are detached from the ‘real world’. Furthermore, the “topical theme” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) in the caption is de-focused and depicted as a small and distant object in this photograph. As a result, added with the effect of illumination, this visual seems to be artistic rather than informational.

From the visual analysis of a photograph (see Appendix 1) in terms of Interactive Visual Meanings, the photograph functions to draw viewers’ attention. In the



visual, the most salient represented participant is imaginarily talking to viewers with eye-gazing, which is enhanced by the visually represented ‘close’ social distance as well as the visual effects from both the horizontal and vertical angles.

Next, from the cohesive analyses between a visual (see Appendix 1) and its verbal counterpart, differences in their functional orientations appeared. In this multimodal text, while the visual element focuses on the interpersonal relationship with viewers in the realization of speech function and the level of involvement, the verbal element does not show such an explicit attitude of involvement.

This functional discrepancy also appeared in the lexical cohesion in the text. The most salient represented participant in the picture is not treated as the primary participant in the verbal part. Also, the level of the lexical cohesion between the photograph and its caption is weak.

In the end, the subjective nature in another news report photograph (see Appendix 2) was made explicit in the analysis of its modality manifestation. This analysis exemplified that the visual does not realize the objective truth by detaching itself from ‘naturalistic’ coding orientation. With the indistinct outlines, the semantically important participants in the news lose their status in the visual.

Social Implications of News Photographs

The issue about where and how to arrange articles in a certain page is very important for newspaper companies, and in the case of a multimodal news report, competition for space between the visual part and verbal part always happens. I argue therefore that visual selection in a newspaper is a direct reflection of the perspectives of the text producer or the newspaper company. The focus of visual text analyses normally has been on the *syntagmatic* choices “within” the texts. However, this project considers the *paradigmatic* choices by text producers “in their text-making process” (photographic choices).

Newspaper companies are, basically, not allowed to have subjective choices in their linguistic realization, but they do have freedom in selecting photographs attached to verbal reports. Accordingly, in the choice of the photographs, semantically important visual elements, such as represented participants, process, and circumstances, are all under text producers’ discretion. In other words, “while the camera does not lie, or not



much, at any rate, those who use it and its images can and do” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.159). From these perspectives, I argue several points about the rationality in selecting newspaper photographs that emphasize different functional orientations from the verbal counterparts.

First, in their daily lives, people carry plural social roles. When they interact with others, one of the social roles that determine their “subject positions” (Fairclough, 1989) is unconsciously selected. For example, a middle-aged woman carries the subject position as a mother in front of her child, but she shifts her position to a wife in front of her husband. In the same way, the child in this photograph functions as a switching device accompanied by the eye-gaze and innocent facial expression. With these attributes, the viewers of this ‘interactional’ type photograph are unconsciously controlled and select their subject positions as “adult listeners.” Then, as adults, they feel obligated to take care of the child and are forced to take the next step, buying the newspaper to know more about the situation around the child.

Second, by placing in visuals ‘small,’ ‘weak,’ or ‘fragile’ represented participants, such as a child, woman, or elderly people, text producers can exaggerate the seriousness or the gravity of reported events. People judge the size of an object in the comparison with the object next to it (Dondis, 1973, p.56)

This effect is commonly observed in newspaper visuals when they report mass demonstrations, natural disasters, or authoritarianism. With this photograph (see Appendix 1), the action of the Chinese authority against the small child appears ‘relatively’ big, strong, and even violent.

Social modes, linguistic or visual, can be effective and valid measures of communication only when the participants understand the realized meaning-making systems. Therefore, the functional contradictions or lesser degrees of cohesion between the modes that I found in this project are valid and meaningful only to those who can interpret the ‘incoherent’ as ‘coherent.’ In that sense, the readers / viewers of the photograph analyzed in the first part (see Appendix 1) interpret the semantic relationship between the visual and its caption as follows: “China plans to abolish agricultural taxes. Who is most affected by such a “great” wave? Maybe, the weak people like this child. The child’s future is insecure. Can China really create a bright future for her?”



Semantic Organization and the Reading Path

Various authentic print-based texts have unique textual patterns, in which “individual segments of texts combined to form the logical structure of the whole and to form certain characteristic patterns” (McCarthy, 1991, p.155). Generally speaking, the logical and semantic relationships among segments in a newspaper report can be labeled as “elaboration,” where the following information expands the previous information by restating, specifying in greater detail, or exemplifying (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.376).

This unique structure has developed because “time efficiency” is the dominant factor in determining news reports’ text organization. In other words, under normal circumstances, newspaper readers have no intention to read until the end in each article (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p.11). They usually stop reading at the point where they “feel” they have received enough information, and they move on to another article. To such readers, newspapers have to adjust the level of elaboration and present the news in multi-layer structures. Accordingly, those readers who do not have enough time for the reading can end up receiving only superficial information in the article, though this type of reading is widely accepted.

The reading path that readers form when they view a multimodal newspaper also needs discussion. The reason for the wide use of visuals in news reports and commercial advertisement is that they are salient. Their salience is determined by several factors, such as relative size, centrality, human figures, and strong colors (Unsworth, 2001, p.111). Visual information has an advantage in drawing viewers’ attention by appealing to their emotions and feelings directly as a psychophysical force (Dondis, 1973, p.22).

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p.219), ‘salience’ creates reading paths in a text. According to the degree of salience, the readers / viewers move their eyes basically from the most salient elements to the less salient ones. Therefore, in addition to the normal eye-movement, from top to bottom, newspaper readers / viewers move their eyes, according to the effect of visual salience, from the most salient parts in news reports (headlines or photographs) to less salient parts (verbal elements) when they read / view newspapers. This means that in the process, the readers / viewers have more chances to be exposed to visuals than verbal parts when they encounter multi-modal



newspaper articles.

From the argument in this part, I argue that the readers / viewers of multimodal newspaper articles generally take the same route in their eye-movement, from the visual to the verbal, and if they stop reading the verbal part in the middle, the relative impression of the visual becomes stronger. Therefore, in the analysis of this type of multimodal texts in terms of functional orientations, only comparison between visual and verbal modes is not enough. Social conventions should also be considered as another factor.

Newspaper Subjectivity

In a multi-modal newspaper, text producers are able to give the visual and the verbal modes different functional focuses. While the focus of the verbal mode is on sending information objectively (ideational meta-function) and keeps the stance as an objective medium, the visuals are able to function to form an active interpersonal relationship with the unknown viewers, enforcing text producers' subjective judgment in their realization. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the visual subjectivity in news reports varies, depending on news companies' visual selection, or the degree of elaboration to which readers are exposed, I argue that multimodal newspaper reports diminish their social position as an objective mediator with the strong perceptual influence of attached visuals. Accordingly, if people maintain a stereotype that newspaper reports are an objective medium even in a multimodal composition, it is inaccurate and they can misjudge the truth. Even if photographs reflect the 'real' world, the people who make use of them can manipulate the visual messages.

According to SFG, all the propositions realized by modes have a unique balance of focus among ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions, determining the overall nature of texts. In that sense, even verbal elements in news reports can involve a certain degree of interpersonal factors, but in this project, I want to exemplify the explicit manifestation of interpersonal meta-function in the visual mode that affects the texts' nature. It would be difficult to make definite conclusions about the degree of the objectivity or the subjectivity of newspaper reports, but if it is possible to observe the relatively high degrees of subjectivity in the multi-modal texts, then I claim that the text is subjective and my discussion is adequate.



Furthermore, about the functional contradictions revealed in this project between the two modes in news reports, I argue that this is one of the unique characteristics in multi-modal newspapers. Newspapers are not just a medium that reports news as a social intermediate, but also they exist as one of commercial products. Along with the function to send information objectively, the function to attract consumers, so as to have them actually buy the ‘product’ in the end, is necessary. With more people exposed to messages conveyed from various sources of media, often keeping pace with the progress of high technology, it is important even for a newspaper to ‘evolve’ to appeal to readers. For this purpose, it is not surprising that newspapers make use of visuals and the subjectivity in them as a tool to survive in competition with other newspapers and even with other news media.

Conclusion

Newspapers enjoy wide prevalence in a modern society. Everyday, people receive news through this medium, believing the ‘truthfulness’ of the reported events. However, as was revealed in this project, a newspaper does not always emphasize the objectivity of reported events. With multimodality, it can and does manipulate reported news for interactional purposes.

Normally, people are not conscious of the textual conventions of a newspaper, such as registers, genres, or mode functions. When they become accustomed to a certain type of text over a long time, they accept the textual conventions as they are and forget to take objective viewpoints toward what they see. However, this longitudinal process makes people unconscious not only of the textual configuration but also of the medium’s “hidden power to function ideologically” (Fairclough, 1989, p.27). Behind the one-way communication, newspapers are forcing a text producer’s ideologies on readers / viewers in an unconscious process.

Even though I cannot deny the indispensable roles of newspapers and the benefits of their multi-modal aspects, the ability to understand visually processed messages in addition to linguistically processed ones is necessary. If people are ignorant of how to evaluate truth from reported events, they have a chance to misinterpret facts and create feelings or judgment based on biased understanding. Visual messages appear vaguer than linguistic information in their functions, but they, nonetheless, influence



information receivers as well as offer important information. Furthermore, in addition to the subjectivity realized in the visual information in a newspaper report, other elements in the medium, such as headlines or the layout of reported events, are also subjective to text producers' choices.

In the end, I focused on the subjectivity of newspaper reports in this project, but there are also other types of multimodal mass media in society, which consist of a combination of different modes. For example, the television uses three modes: linguistic, visual, and sound (linguistic and musical). The radio uses two kinds of sound mode (linguistic and musical). In addition to the fact that each mode has its own ways to realize interpersonal meta-functions separately, when the involved modes interact with one another, they can form a unique synergistic relationship with information receivers, appealing to people's various perceptual organs.

In this 'information age,' people are surrounded by various social modes that send a variety of messages. To make use of these messages wisely, they need to develop "critical multimodal literacies that are necessary for taking an active interpretive role in the societies" (Unsworth, 2001, p.71).



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Michael Reynolds/European Pressphoto Agency

A little girl at a farmers' market in Beijing. China plans to abolish agricultural taxes.

China vows to protect farmers' land rights

From news reports

BEIJING: The agriculture minister on Thursday promised to protect farmers' land rights and spend more on irrigation as China's Communist leaders seek to ease chronic rural poverty, seen as posing their biggest risk of anti-government unrest.

China's grain harvest last year rose by a record 9 percent, but farmers suffer from poor infrastructure and other problems, said Agriculture Minister Du Qinglin.

"There is still a long way for us to go, and an arduous task for us to shoulder," Du said at a news conference held during the annual meeting of China's legislature.

Chinese leaders regard chronic poverty in the vast countryside, home to some 800 million people, as their most pressing problem and worry that rising anger over the problem could lead to political instability.

Complaints that local officials seize farmland for real estate development and other uses with little compensation to farmers are a key source of discontent. Violent protests over such complaints have erupted in areas throughout China.

Chinese farmers cannot own land and instead use it under contracts that last up to 30 years. Despite promises to improve land rights, the government has not said whether it will allow ownership, which would let farmers use the land as collateral for bank loans.

Millions of farmers have no contracts or any other formal claim to land that they might have tended for decades.

The ministry introduced pilot projects last year aimed at arbitrating disputes over land contracts, Du said.

Du promised stricter protections for land and said disputes would be dealt with in a "very appropriate way," but didn't give any details.

Average annual incomes for farmers rose 12 percent last year, but still total just 2,936 yuan, or \$355, per person, according to Du. By contrast, the government says annual incomes in China's booming cities average more than \$1,000 per person.

"Overall productivity has improved significantly," Du said. But, he warned, "we should not be blinded by achievements made."

The central government will allocate \$660 million to 800 major grain-producing counties, which can use the money for education, health care, or science and technology, said Zhu Zhigang, a deputy finance minister who was at the news conference with Du.

Premier Wen Jiabao promised in a nationally broadcast speech at the opening of the legislature on Saturday to eliminate farm taxes by 2006 — a promise repeated Thursday by the Finance Ministry.

China said this week that it would start cutting school fees in rural areas this year in response to growing domestic criticism that the country's education system is corrupt and discriminates against poor, rural students.

The new policy will begin with the removal of fees for 14 million students in the country's poorest counties and will continue until 2007. (AP, NYT)





HINGOLE, Pakistan — Rescuers on Friday survey a bridge that was swept away by floods in southern Pakistan. REUTERS PHOTO

Pakistan floods, avalanches kill over 260

Authorities rush in troops to aid thousands after worst rains in 16 years

