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# Multisemiotic analysis of Russian women politicians' photographs: A study of the Interactive Meanings and Gender Inequality

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## Résumé

Culture and ideology have an influence on photograph's perception and its perception is very important to photos' producers. Photograph's role in cultural/ideological/political affairs will likely grow as internet, TV, 3D, virtual reality continues to increase in importance. Despite some competition with video streaming, photographs still play a foundational role in any communication process and we still know a little about viewer's perception. Our research tries to expand the understanding of photograph's role by focusing on the area how interactive meaning of Russian women politicians' photographs is created and a received by audiences.

In the current report, we will present an experimental study of the interactive meanings on a sample of the Russian women politicians' photographs. "The interactive meanings are visually encoded in ways that rest on competencies shared by producers and viewers" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006: 115, see also Van Leeuwen, T., & Caldas-Coulthard, C.R. 2004, Van Leeuwen, T. 2005, 2006, 2008a, b, 2009a, b, 2011a, b, 2013a, b, 2014, Van Leeuwen, T., Djonov, E., & O'Halloran, K.L. 2013). The photographs' interactive meanings may contribute to partial changing of the viewers' opinion not only about the images but to some extent also about their ideology. In order to know why one photograph is preferred to another, we need necessarily to understand and take into account not only producers' but also viewers' intentions and interpretations.

Although the interactive meaning is a common conception of interaction for many social sciences, in systemic functional linguistics (SFL) it has often been characterized as being related to the Interpersonal metafunction (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014: 30). The SFL approach shares the overriding assumption that "We use language to make sense of our experience, and to carry out our interactions with other people. This means that the grammar has to interface with what goes on outside language: with the happenings and conditions of the world, and with the social processes we engage in. But at the same time it has to organize the construal of experience, and the enactment of social processes, so that they can be transformed into wording" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014: 25).

Thus, this report is driven by an urge to offer and illustrate the Kress and Van Leeuwen multisemiotic theory's application to the analysis of politicians' photographs within the context of study involving Russian participants. The novelty of the contribution is both in the

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experimental method used to apply the theoretical model and in the data. From a theoretical point of view, the novelty of the paper to some extent lies in the attempt to apply Systemic Functional Multisemiotic Theory, a Western model, to non-Western perceptions of Russian women politicians' photographs as non-Western data. Although Kress and Van Leeuwen express some concerns of possibilities of the application of their theory to non-western cultures (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006:3, it can be argued that a combination of this multisemiotic model adapted to cultural differences with sociological content analysis may prove useful in the analysis of the data. Following methods in sociological content analysis, the present experimental study is designed taking into account standardization procedures and inter-rater reliability, in order to obtain reliable information on the similarities and differences in the perception of the data across two cultures (see e.g. Yadov, 2007).

The data comes from 150 photographs of the Russian women politicians and 150 photographs of the Russian men politicians. 300 photographs were specifically chosen by the author in order to be acceptable for coding. The study was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, authors encoded the full photograph corpus according to interpersonal metafunction's codes based on the Kress and Van Leeuwen's Systemic Functional Linguistics for images and chose 12 photographs of political leaders (6 men and 6 women). In the second stage, the group of Russian informants evaluated facial expressions on these photographs and answered to the questions. The results show that Russians have tendency to discriminate the women facial expressions and offer them humiliating statements. To some extent, it is a problem a presentation of women in photos because the women in the photograph are presented with other angles than men.