

Visual Analysis of Magazine Covers

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to look into ways in which modes are chosen if signs are produced for interpretation and presentation of theories and meanings. Magazine is a complex collection of signs that can be extensively decoded and analyzed by different factors. The most spectacular components are documentary photos, manipulated images and portrait photos. According to the results, many processes (action, symbolic, reaction, and analytical processes), and strategies (e.g. top vs. bottom strategies and margin vs. center), modality modification and color differentiation, are required in representing and interpreting concepts and meanings in this type of discourse. The discourse analysis used here is accomplished based on Halliday's model of functional-systematic grammar (1976, 2004), which uses three meta functions to describe different communicational modes.

Keywords: Meta functions, Covers magazines, Multimodal discourse analysis, Representational meaning

1. Introduction

1.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis, in simple terms, is the study of language use. Although there are countless approaches to discourse analysis, all recognize that language is inherently social, and that the way people communicate with one another – through words, action, gestures or other displays of opinion or identity – is influenced by the specific social context of any given moment. Stockl (2004) declares that multimodality has been hardly mono-modal and it remains a constant though underrated theme in communication. It is believed that texts have been multimodal all along and mono modal texts are an exception and not the norm although little is known of the interaction of multiple modes and their organization in texts. This is echoed by Eckrammer (2004) who writes that the image and language modes have never excluded each other but have always interweaved to form a whole semantic texture in texts. This means that both modes never develop their meaning separately and the meaning of one mode is tied to that of another mode.

1.2 Visual Communication

The important role of images in current newspapers, magazines, public relations materials, advertisements and various kinds of books cannot be disregarded. (Kress & Van Luween, 2006). These media involve a complex interplay of written text, images and other graphic elements that combine into visual designs by means of layouts. Analyses of multimodal texts that give prominence to the written word and denigrate the emergence of visual media as if images constitute a semiotic mode inferior to written language are called into question. K & VL (2006) take issue with Barthes' (1977) view that the meanings of images are always related to and in a sense dependent on a verbal text. They dispute the argument that images alone are 'too polysemous to arrive at a definite meaning and that consequently language must come to the rescue. K& VL find that this distinction fails to recognize that the visual component of a text is an independently organized and structured message, connected to the written component, but not necessarily dependent on it. For them (K&VL, 2006) the verbal and visual modes represent two sets of meaning that are 'neither fully conflated, nor entirely opposed'.

1.3 Visual Grammar

Systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) views language as a form of social action, as social semiotics, combining lexis, grammar, semantics and context. According to Halliday, language is functional, semantic, contextual and semiotic. (Halliday, 1978, p. 16). As a matter of fact, language is multifunctional because every time we say something or we construct an image we produce three different types of meaning simultaneously: ideational, interpersonal and textual. These three strands of meaning are referred to as metafunctions, which characterize the semantic nature of language. One of the most important insights in SFL, besides the theoretical view that we simultaneously enact these three types of meaning, is that these meanings are directly associated to the three variables of the context of situation. Thus, ideational meanings relate to field, interpersonal to tenor, and textual to mode. In visual

grammar, these different kinds of meanings correspond to the following terms:

Ideational → representational

Interpersonal → Interactional

Textual → compositional

1.3.1 Ideational Metafunction

Ideational metafunction provides grammatical resources at clause rank to construe the inner and outer experience or 'goings-on' of the word, as the domain of functions and meanings of the world through the systems of transitivity. Ideational deals with the way our language experience is expressed. The relationship between the functions and what is contained in it is expressed in this type of function (Eggins, 2004, Kress 1976). The following can be categorized as the ideational choices which are used for the creation of meaning and interpretation

1.3.1.1 Narrative Representation

Each time the participant is linked through a vector, it is assumed that they perform an act unitedly. Narrative representation or Conceptual representation, has to do with the representation of the participants based on structure, category or meaning.

The following are the subdivisions of narrative representatives:

- **Reactional Process:** This occurs whenever a vector shows how a relationship among

Participants is viewed toward the direction of one or several participants. In reactional process, we can use the term “reactor” in place of “actor” and “phenomenon in place of “goal”. Reactor is a human being, an animal or a creator with visible eyes with distinct pupil because it is a participant which looks at the phenomenon.

- **Actional Process:** Here, the actor is assigned to a player which the vector is attracted to it. Part of the mentioned vector could possibly be created by the actor itself or part of the actor.
- **Mental and Speech Process:**
- This is the type of process that is seen in some caricatures in which the picture of the speaker to a thought or speech is linked and connected in a definite frame.

1.3.1.2 Conceptual Representation

According to the above write up, visual representative maybe conceptual or narrative. In conceptual representation, players are staged according to their general and fixed characteristics such as structure, meaning or class, while in narrative representative, change processes and place shifting, overt and actions are represented. The following are the three

major processes:

- **Analytical process:** In this process, a part- to- whole structure is applied. Also, it has two types of participants. One group has the role of possessive attribute and the other has the role of carrier (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001).
- **Symbolic Process:** In this process, the concept of participant or identity is presented. It involves two participants so that another participant would be defined base on participant which its concept or identity is defined. The concept with natural concept or identity is called symbolic attribute. A participant is called carrier if the is only one participant in a symbolic process which is represented via a different way. A process with two participants is known as symbolic attributive process while the process with only one participant is known as suggestive symbolic process (ibid, p. 105).
- **Classification Process:** This process links the participants with a kind of relationship.
- At least, a group of participants are subordinate in this process, and the other participant is called super ordinate (Watson and Hill, 1980)

1.3.2 Interactional Malfunction

The relationship between the producer and receiver of signs should be reflected by each semiotic mode; a definite social relationship among the producer, receiver, and topic should be presented by each communicational mode. According to ideational malfunction, communicational modes is being created by a series of selections so as to represent interactional relationships.

- **Modality:** In determining the actual value of pictures, different degrees of differentiation, color saturation, the depth of representation, color vacillation and brightness, and contextualization are influenced. As a sign of modality, color is evaluated based on three criteria:
 - ✓ **Color differentiation:** Differentiation is the scale that runs from monochrome to the use of a maximally varied palette, and its very diversity or exuberance is one of its key semiotic affordances, as is the restraint involved in its opposite, lack of differentiation This has to do with large and diverse domain of colors between two colors that are easily recognizable (Thompson and Davenport, 1982).
 - ✓ **Color saturation:** This is the scale from the most intensely saturated or „pure“ manifestations of a colour to its softest, most „pale“ or „pastel“, or dull and dark manifestations, and, ultimately, to complete de-saturation, to black and white. Its key affordance lies in its ability to express emotive „temperatures“, kinds of affect. It is the scale that runs from maximum intensity of feeling to maximally subdued, maximally toned down, indeed neutralized feeling this is a criterion shows changes in color saturation which occurs from a full saturation to its

disappearance (black or white mode).

✓ A picture's level of brightness reaches its optimum with different degrees of brightness and on the other hand, minimum level comes into occurrence with two degrees of brightness i.e. Light and heavy grey or black and white. Brightness also causes contrast and it can make low or high the amount of contrast which can be created in this way. The difference between the darkest and brightest part may be very high or very low in a picture (black and white). With the above treatment concludes that modality is created by complex relations among different characteristics referred above.

1.3.3 Textual Metafunction

There is also a textual meaning in each language event. It is important to note that the requirement for making a relationship our previous speech with what we are expressing is undisputable, so the language role is important besides other metafunctions in the ordering of information and thought (Eggins, 2004, p. 12; Kadman, 2001. pp. 200- 203). Furthermore, in creating systematic modes and disciplined patterns with meaningful semiotic texts, language textual metafunction has an important role.

2. Method

This study considers using linguistics theory for this purpose and examines the cover page of different magazines .The emphasis will be on magazines which are substantially different from each other in relation to their content and various social, economical and political perspectives. So it deals with the study of multimodal discourse analysis of magazines published in Iran. A lot of magazines are published in Iran weekly, monthly, quarterly etc. Nevertheless, out of the few new magazines in Iran, the weekly magazines can be listed as follows; Javanane Emrooz, Hamshahri Javan, Etelaate Haftegi, and Monthly Hamshari Diplomatic magazines. I tried to collect 227 issues of these magazines were prepared using library archives references of sales centers. 30 issues were selected which were not like the cover designing view. These magazine's cover designs were looked into according to theories of semiotics, pragmatic and linguistic. This analysis was also done based on Halliday's three meta functions which were renamed by Van Leeuwen and Kress (2006). For describing different communicational modes for this type of grammar.

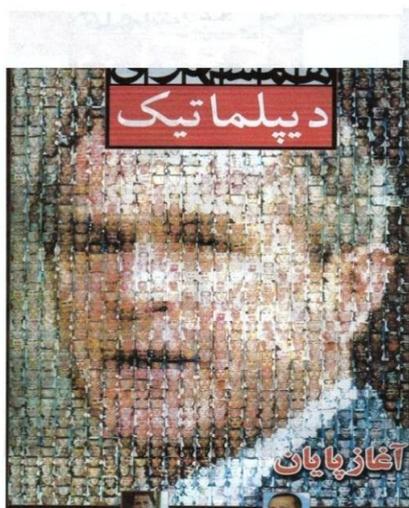
3. Discussion

There are three important elements in this section, which are used to analyze the cover of magazines. These include documentary photos, portrait photos and manipulated pictures.

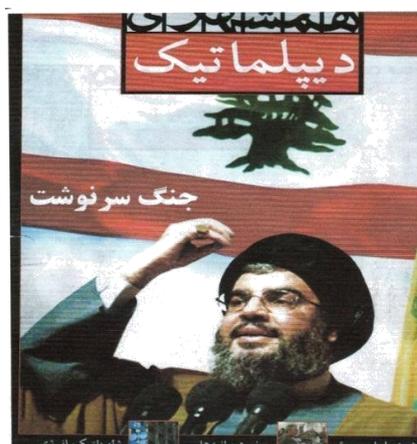
3.1 Portrait Photo

This has a kind of equivocalness in every context. As a matter of fact, portrait photos look real and natural for viewers; nevertheless, every one of these pictures has hidden signs, ambiguous and deep concepts. This equivocalness depends on the fact that there are correct signs on the pictures, equivocal and deep concepts. To the hidden meaning of portrait pictures to be elucidated, it is imperative to first all define ways of interpreting the pictures. We will

start this section with picture **No.1**. The picture of the former president of America, George W. Bush. This picture tells us about the killed soldiers of the US Army in Iraq and the pressure mounted by the president in war, not minding the casualties and protests of the American citizens. The magazine cover designer shows intimate relationship between him and the viewers, and his hostility to them. On the other hand, he had a rethink of the unending consequence. We saw in the picture the divide of the viewers, if picture **No.2** which has political distance is compared with it, the difference between the both (two pictures) is better identified. The second with close distance picture shows Hassan Nasrollah, the Lebanese leader of Hezbollah. The picture mood is the significant difference between the two pictures. The first picture depicts “offer” while the second picture depicts “demand” as if he wants to satisfy the viewers by persuasion while the first picture depicts offering mood giving the viewers the opportunity to pick apart the participants represented.



No. 1



No. 2

As we know that a different degree of “modality” displays the discrepancies between the players in the pictures. The participant in the first picture has a higher modality than the second picture. In the first example, almost all details of the players face such as specks, wrinkles, and shades are shown, whereas, in the second example, there are a less details and a milder brightness in the player’s face. The negative character of the USA president, in first picture has been shown by higher modality, whereas, the second picture shows a more pleasant face with some shortcomings globally has been taken away as shown.

The equivalence of the first and second pictures reveals the player in the second picture as a more successful character with minute defects has been constituted, making, the player in the second picture a political leader with many negative points has been exemplified.

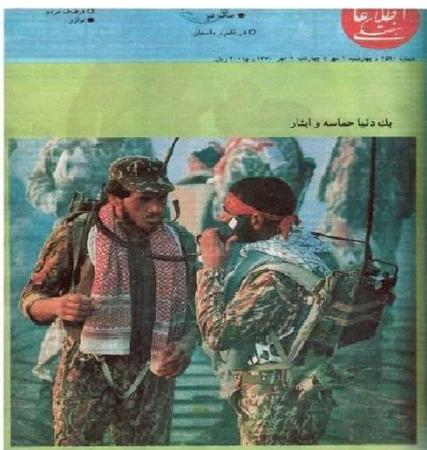
A high difference between the two political leaders is that looking at the face of the American president, you will see the American soldiers who have lost their lives in Iraq war, and emblematically, their death is due to wrong policies of the American president. Meanwhile, Hassan Nasrollah’s look with a right angle to a distant point can be decoded as his confidence to his selected way.

Adding to the above discussion, one of the striking strategies found by photographers like Edward Eistakhin is the symbolic features of portrait photos and Aidacar which was used in projecting it by applying the secondary elements that, are related to the subject of the picture. For example, Aida car has shown the photo of Jan pol sartor with many books and notes in front of him. In this picture, half of sarter face is in darkness. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), this symbolic process strategy is used for expressing image ideational concept. Shelves and the books around are symbolic attributes that adds more meanings to carrier and has been represented via “symbolic representative process”. In news magazines, this process is displayed very well which enables the news magazine to cover and differ from “symbolic process.

This is no vector in this picture and so, for concept realization, the narrative process has not been applied. Most of these pictures have a low modality because they are de-conceptualized. It’s either that their background is non-influential or that it has been removed. Despite the fact that the pictures are analytical, they meet ideational and interactional functions.

It also makes a kind of relationship between viewers and them. Furthermore, the identity of the participants is revealed and by so doing, its representing function is realized.

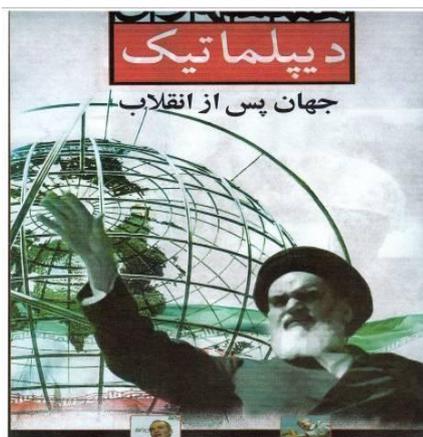
The effect of these pictures is the social identity of the participant. The mentioned social identities could be realized by their (possessive attributive of carriers). For example, the players in the picture **No.3** are two Basij warriors (volunteer militant). The possessive attribute of participants are the head band, radio, wireless, uniform, boot (Basij around his neck and a symbolic clothes). The addition or omission of some of these imputes can change the identity of the players. Example: the omission of head band and chafiye changes their identity from Basij to soldier.



No. 3



No. 4



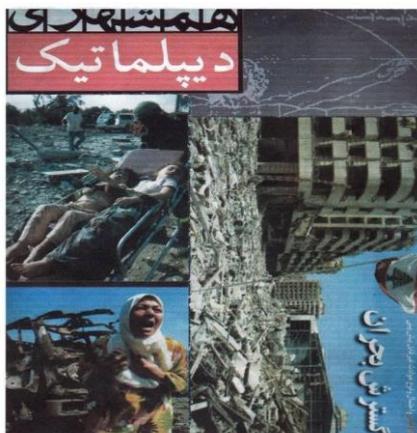
No.5

Taking a critical look at the picture **No.4**, two basketball players are participants wearing sport clothes seen on the logo of basket federation. The two possessive attributes of these carriers (participants are sport clothes and logo). Looking at the pictures **No.5** and **No.2**, beard, Ammame and Aba (clothes worn by Islam cleric) are participant's possessive attribute. "Possessive attributes" can be referred to as cloths and the appearance of these carriers without which their social identity remain indefinite. Portrait, which is one of the usual elements of news magazine covers, was investigated. Again, it is horizontal angle emphasis is worth mentioning. It is also an angle demarcating the participants and the readers of the magazines pictures. Looking at the picture **No.1** we can see that the viewer has the feeling of separation between him or her and the participant because the horizontal angle is acute. Definite angle is used by photo producers to produce present news magazine images.

In summary, we are aware that different visual processes and interactional concepts in pictures are used in knowing the identity of the people and emblematic and significant meanings hidden in them. Other types of pictures (documentary pictures) are analyzed in the next section, and these are used less for participant's identity and more for recording historical events.

3.2 Documentary Photos

Document in our society has to do with official letters. So, it (document and evidence) cannot be doubted rather they should be accepted as pure fact. Sitting an example with picture **No. 6**, shows a picture taken in recent wars between Israel and Lebanon.



No.6

The main topic that has been selected by the photographer to represent this event is “woman”. Woman has a symbolic importance in this picture. A strong emotional context has been created by the photographer in placing this woman beside debris burnt car. This picture does not only convey fear and devastation in war, rather it conveys exposure and scourge of guiltless children and women. The elementary rural clothes of women show that she is of the poor. The cause of women’s anxiousness according to the viewer is linked with the right angle which creates a feeling of logical relationship between the participants and the viewers. On one side (right side) Lebanon flag shows its emblematic meaning via emphatic actuated process. Flag is the emblem of freedom and independence of a society. A flag raised and presented beside the war devastation indoctrinates the viewer’s independence with or without mortality and financial loss. The left side of the picture shows “new information.” And the right shows “old information”. Thus, even if the onslaught paves way to building devastation (right side), the worst disaster is injury made to the defenseless citizens (left side). Hence, the photographer shows the background that creates a right angle view highlighting the participants and the participant increase modality with the natural colors in the background. Consequently, the documentary photos lead to the sensitivity of the viewer making a kind of sympathy between the viewers and participants and sometimes, causes the modification of the viewer’s point of view to the politicians.

They are also motivated to help participants. In picture **No.6**, women are symbolic participants who are also symbols of the Lebanon women’s war or others. The viewer’s emotion may be aroused by the symbolic attribute. Generally, documentary pictures can be referred to as strong manifest of occurring events all over the world especially when the pictures in the newspaper are published or the cover of the news magazines inform the spectators of the real status of the events happening. Pictures with high modality do have high effect on the viewers. Hence, different moods of photos are being represented by documentary photos in a way that we can generalize these moods in the same topic in wild range. The poor, ignorance insufficiency of the rulers is shown by the photographers.

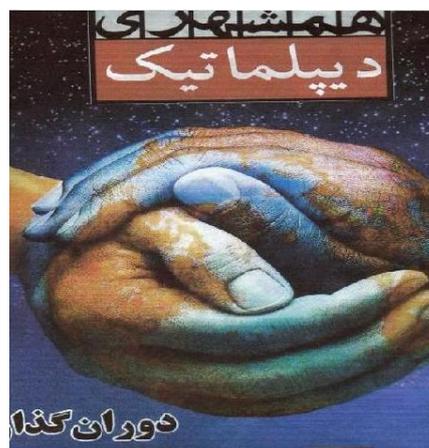
3.3 Manipulated Images

The pictures taken from the middle of the last century onward was not just limited to the real

world but appeared in abstract pictures of which natural pictures and real world pictures were viewed as insufficient artificial events, and is essential to carryout proper investigation on the reasons behind each event (Hollis, 1997: pp47-93; 2002: pp. 214-231). Picture **No.7** shows the picture *construction* by the use of collage. Several pictures came out from this picture because the maker of the picture produced cartoon characters of his childhood, which on the other hand has been influential in his character and thought transformation above or around the pictures.



No.7

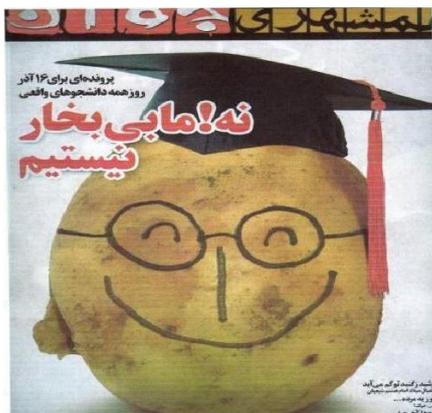


No.8

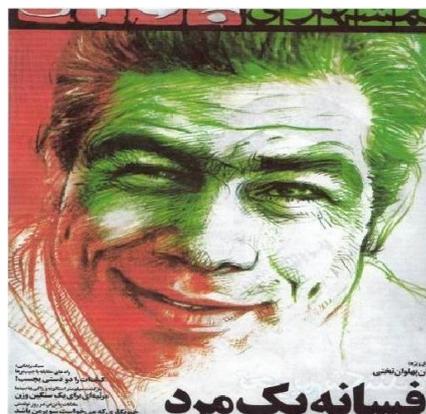
Here, there are three major processes; the first is classification process in which all characters are subordinate of “Travel to Dreamland” (his childhood cartoons). The second is the analytical process, in which every participant is represented. More also, they carry possessive attribute (size, color and clothes) change of the identity can be caused by the removing these attributes from each participants causing a change in their identity. On his thought, the ropes on the representational participant’s face are symbol of the cartoon’s effect on his thought. This ropes separating him from others by setting up this participant. The picture’s detailed high quality has powerful interactional meaning. The third process interferes in the meaning of the production and is known as “action process”. Action process enables each cartoon to have an active role and the representational person also has role of the target. The “transactional structure” observed is unidirectional because only one unidirectional vector can be drawn from the cartoon’s side to the person’s side. One always wants to attract the viewer’s attention by magnifying this picture.

The example of collage which has to do with picture **No.8**, deals with the analytical process and classification. Each hand shows one part of the globe. On the other hand, it is a possessive attribute from the classification process. The globe can also be a “super-ordinate” and the seas land as subordinate.

The picture **No.9** is also an example of collage. Here a potato with a graduation hat expresses some meanings through symbolic process. The hat is a symbol of generation while the student has the role of “carrier”. With the help of entities, the designer has produced a symbolic picture with some minor changes as can be from the picture.



No. 9



No. 10

The picture **No. 10** is a typical example of artificial pictures. This is the fusion of two analytical and symbolic processes, white, red and green colors are in the same group with symbolic process which depicts the Iranian flag. The possessive attribute is shown for each of the three colors of the world champion Mr. Takhti.

Adding to collage, in media, montage is widespread. Montage changes the picture's message like collage through surprise amplification. An in-depth pictorial ability of message is done in relation with components and exaggerations. The montage technique applied by its designer has built a political cartoon, social satire or caricature. These producers intend to pick out a difference and the society's dominant political power.

The picture **No.11** denotes Iranian movie stars. They show flying on 100\$ bill. Despite the fact that there is no consideration on their faces detail, the message conveyed by the picture expressed clearly with significant in montage. This picture refers to high wages of this group of society ironically. A group between ordinary people and movies stars is as a result of the wages. Their flying in the sky depicts a large gap to social classes. The producer shows the differences by highlighting of participants among these stars.



No. 11

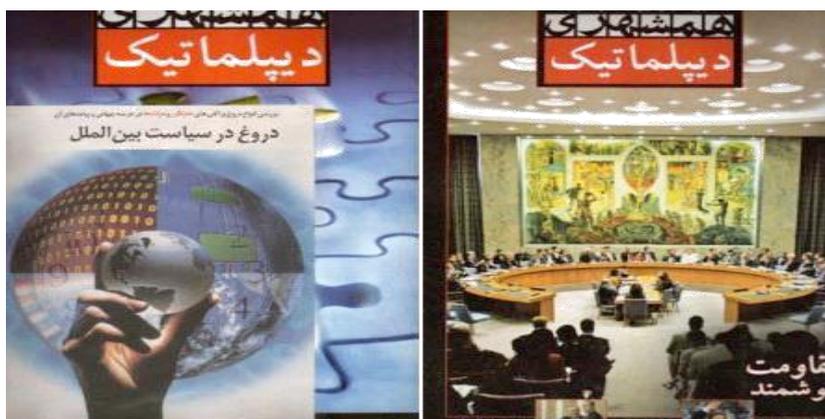
The components of words in magazine covers are mostly coordinated by pitting colors beside each other (Barthes, 1997: pp. 189- 203)

3. Conclusion

In the cover of these magazines, concepts and meanings represent through ideational, interactional and textual metafunction. Each one of these metafunctions fulfilled via different processes. They are as follow:

A: Processes: the frequency of occurrence which is observed in magazines covers reveal that some processes are used more than others. For example, symbolic attributive in the design **1, 3, 5, 6**, and analytical process in designs **1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10** are observed, whereas classification process is seen just in design 6. Other processes which are existed here are as follow, action process (17%) and reaction (8%).

B: Strategies: out of the strategies which are used in magazine covers are observed, one can refer to cases like increasing or decreasing the quality of the picture (16%), changes in the view of the picture (38%) and changes in the position of pictures and words (46%). The designer has used these strategies to make a picture more or less salient. As an example, designs **7** and **8** have the highest natural quality while design **2** has less quality. In design **12**, the designer by making an acute horizontal angel causes “separateness” of representational participant from others. In designs **7** and **13**, the designer by putting participant in different positions, represents concepts like “ideational” or “real” and “old information”, or “new information”. Therefore, it can be said that these strategies represent not only concepts, but interactional behavior of representational participants like horizontal and vertical angels is possible. In pictures of magazines, which were investigated in this study, horizontal changes (90%) had the maximum frequency verses vertical changes (10%). The change in view has not been used in any picture.



No.12

No.13

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