

Visual Communication across Cultures

A study of visual semiotics in Japanese and British advertiments

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Abstract

In this paper, I question the notion that "The Visual" is a culturally transparent means of communication. I will be demonstrating how different cultures (Japan and Britain) use the resources of visual communication in ways that relate to their specific underlying value systems. In order to show this I draw on advertisements from both countries and use the visual grammar developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). By analysing the forms that the advertisements take: the semiotic structure of the images, rather than their content, it is possible to find differences that relate to the specific cultural locations of the advertisements. [sic! //Hans] I hope that by doing this, it becomes clear how all the representations of a culture are dependent on that culture and that inter-cultural communication is tied to deep-seated values rather than free floating.

keywords: Culturally conditioned visual communication, visual grammar, underlying value systems, spatial semiotic systems.

INTRODUCTION

1 The purpose of this paper.

In this paper, I question the notion that "The Visual" is a culturally transparent means of communication (Neurath, 1937, 1948). I will be demonstrating how different cultures (Japanese and British) use the resources of visual communication, in ways that are related to their specific underlying value systems. In order to show this I draw on advertisements from both countries and use the visual grammar developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1990, 1996).

By analysing the forms (*visual syntax*) that the advertisements take: the semiotic structure of the images, with less emphasis on their content (*visual lexis*), it is possible to find systematic differences that relate to the specific locations of the advertisements in a given social cultural context.

I hope that by doing this, it becomes clear how visual representations are dependent on a specific culture and that intercultural communication can be deeply conditioned by the degree of understanding of visual semiotics as a cultural code.

2 Theoretical framework and descriptive categories for the discussion of data

I will discuss my data with reference to Halliday's (1978, 1985) notion of three metafunctions in human communication, which are later applied by Kress and van Leeuwen (1990, 1996) for the analysis of visual images. They are (quote from Kress and van Leeuwen 1996):

1) The Ideational metafunction

the ability of semiotic systems to represent objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system or in the semiotic system of culture (Ibid:45).

2) The Interpersonal metafunction

the ability of semiotic system to project the relations between the producer of that sign or complex sign, and the receiver/reproducer of that sign, that is to project a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented (Ibid:41).

3) The Textual metafunction

the ability of the semiotic system to form texts, where complexes of signs cohere both internally and with the context in and for which they were

produced and different Compositional arrangements which allow the realization of different textual meanings (Ibid:41).

Descriptive categories

As one realisation of the Ideational metafunction, I will draw attention to the directionality that visual images create or embody within them: what I call *visual directionality*.

With respect to the Textual metafunction, I will examine the way in which visual space is used in terms of distribution of meaning. In other words, I will focus on what visual elements appear in what part of visual space with what kind of meaning.

Figure 1 Use of space and information values (from Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:208)

In this paper, I will deal with one type of textual composition: Left/Right. This category will be used to explore value distribution in each spatial domain: which represented participant with what kind of meaning appears in which part of visual space in advertising texts. With its starting point in the framework by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), which deals exclusively with Western visual representations, I will examine how far their framework can be applied and consider the cultural specificity of the distribution of values in spatial dimensions. (Figure 1)

The textual composition of Left and Right will be considered, first of all, based on the proposition in Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), in relation to the structure of information value in English speech, 'Given' and 'New'. 'Given', in English speech, marks a point of departure of certain propositions, which is followed by 'New' information, which forms the nucleus part of the message. 'Given' is something already known and 'New' is something to be found out, something 'at issue'. Kress and van Leeuwen propose that, according to Western visual semiotic, the meaning of 'Given' and 'New' are distributed in the visual domain of Left and Right, respectively.

I will also draw attention to the way in which visual representations construct the relationship between what is depicted in the text and the viewer: social interactions, by looking at (and applying) formal structures in visual images. I will explore to what extent the choice and use of specific formal structure creates a particular type of interaction between represented participants and the viewer.

Demand

Contact

Offer

Intimate/ Personal

Interactive Social Distance Social

meanings Impersonal

Horizontal Involvement

Attitude Angles Detachment

Viewer power

Vertical Equal

Angles Representation

power

Figure 2 The systems of interactive meanings (based on Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:154)

Finally, I will outline descriptive categories, by which represented participants manifest a relationship with interactive participants (the viewer). I will call these categories *interactive markers* (originally proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen 1996): They are *Contact*, *Social Distance* and *Attitude*. (Figure 2)

The system of *Contact*

It is possible for represented participants to involve the viewer in a certain (imaginary) *action*: This is termed as an "image act" (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). An Image act can be realised by a certain action, with which a represented participant is depicted. For example, an image of a woman who is holding a glass of wine towards the viewer, smiling, can be said to engage in an image act, in that she is represented to be inviting the viewer to take part

in the action: accepting the glass of wine. As one of the formal categories which provides the medium through which represented participants can interact with the viewer, there is eye contact between the two parties. This is *Contact*.

Contact has two kinds of realisations: *Demand* and *Offer*. The former interactive meaning is realised when a represented participant has eye contact with the viewer; such as a represented participant looking at or smiling at the viewer. The latter type of interaction is realised when a represented participant has no direct eye contact with the viewer and the represented participant presents him/her/itself to be 'looked at' by the viewer, that is, "it 'offers' the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case" (Ibid:124).

The system of *Social Distance*

The 'distance' between represented participants and the viewer also indicates the relationship between them. This forms the system of *Social Distance: Intimate/Personal, Social and Impersonal*. Represented participants who/which are depicted with *Personal* distance can allow the viewer to be positioned relatively closer to them, than the ones with *Social* distance. Hall (1964) calls them "Silent assumptions in social communication" in Disorders of communication 42:41-55 (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996:131):

Intimate distance ----- the head and face only

Close personal distance ----- the head and shoulders

Far personal distance ----- from the waist up

Close social distance ----- the whole figure

Far social distance ----- the whole figure with space around it

Public distance ----- the torso of at least four or five people

The manipulation of *Social Distance* is a realisation of the Interpersonal relationship between the represented participants and the 'world' they represent and the viewer. In this way, the distance of depicted participants from the viewer is one of the materialisations (material realisations) of social interaction in a given context.

The system of *Attitude*

Apart from *Contact* and *Social Distance*, represented participants can be coded with another type of interactive meaning: *Attitude* of represented participants towards the viewer, or that of the given advertisement itself towards the addressee of the advertisement. What I mean by *Attitude* of represented participants includes the degree of involvement (how far a given participant is depicted to have possible involvement with the viewer and what it implies), which is realised by a *horizontal angle* and the power relationship between the participants and the viewer realised by the use of a *vertical angle* participants in the sense that it can place represented participants either 'close' or 'away' from the viewer's standpoint. But here I use the word 'attitude' in a specific meaning that implies the degree of involvement and power relationship between represented participants and the viewer.

The degree of 'involvement' can be coded by angles from which represented participants are depicted. Represented participants can be photographed either with *Frontal* angle or *Oblique* angle. If a represented participant is depicted with the former type of perspective, the viewer is given a full dimension of the participant: this participants have an interactive meaning of *involvement*. *Oblique* angle, on the other hand, gives a sense of *detachment* in relation to the viewer position, in that oblique perspectives of represented participants restrict what can be seen by the viewer, in comparison to what the *Frontal* angle allows.

Power relationships between represented participants and the viewer can be manifested by the manipulation of another type of angle: vertical angles. For example, if a represented participant is photographed or represented from a high angle, this would allow the viewer of the text to 'look down on' them. If they are taken from a low angle, by contrast, the viewer is positioned where it looks as though represented participants are looking down on the viewer. To use Kress and van Leeuwen's terms, the former realises *Viewer power* and the latter manifests *Representation power*, between the two of which is *Equal power*.

'Visual directionality', 'Use of space' and 'Social interactions' thus work as descriptive categories that allows documentation of given texts from the perspectives of three metafunctions of communication. In this paper, more notably, these three aspects are going to be dealt with from a cross-cultural perspective. That is, to compare the way in which Japanese and British visual representations realise these metafunctions through formal categories of 'Visual directionality', 'Use of space' and 'Social interactions'. Figure 3 shows the three metafunctions in relation to analytical/descriptive categories that I am going to use in this paper.

Metafunction	Analytical/descriptive categories of visual syntax
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The Ideational metafunction	Visual Directionality
The Textual metafunction	Use of Space Positioning of represented participants in relation to the Information Values of Given and New Left ----- Right
The Interpersonal metafunction	Social Interactions <i>Demand</i> Contact ----- <i>Offer</i> <i>Intimate</i> Social Distance ----- <i>Social</i> <i>Impersonal</i> <i>Frontal</i> Horizontal Attitude ----- <i>Oblique</i> <i>Viewer power</i> Vertical <i>Equal power</i> <i>Representation power</i>

Figure 3 Analytical/descriptive categories of visual syntax

3 Writing systems

Language, when it is *written*, as opposed to when it is spoken, is realised as a physical and graphic substance in a given space. In this sense, language can be treated as a *visual entity*. Thus when one looks at an advertisement which consists of both visual images and verbal captions, both elements (regardless of the type of medium: visual or verbal) come into the viewer’s eye as a visual entity, as a block of visual material and a block of language as text.

The visual, whether as image or as a block of language has semantic impact at that initial level: the viewer goes on to read the visual and recognise the linguistic meaning of the verbal captions. At the next level of analysis, the visual and the verbal are each treated in terms of their own ‘semantics’, the semantics of the visual as image and semantics of the verbal as linguistic message.

In Figure 4, I distinguished two kinds of visual directionality: i) that realised by visual images (*‘pictorial directionality’*) and ii) that realised by language (*‘scriptorial directionality’*).

The mode of realization

visually represented participants

(visual images)---> pictorial

Visual directionality-----**verbally represented participants****(printed language)---> scriptorial****Figure 4** Types of visual directionality

The historical complexity of the Japanese system of writing makes it necessary to discuss it in relation to the Ideational, the Textual and the Interpersonal metafunction. I focus on two aspects in relation to the Japanese system of writing: that of choices in *writing directions* and that of *writing units*.

First, the range of writing directions available in Japanese are these: whereas English has a single way of writing: in rows; and from left to right, horizontally, with the rows ordered from top to bottom, using the letters of the Roman alphabets. Japanese has two choices of writing direction : *horizontally* in rows and *vertically* in columns. I call the former type *horizontal writing* and the latter *vertical writing*.

The horizontal writing proceeds in rows and from left to right as English, which creates the visual directionality of left to right. Vertical writing is written from top to bottom and each column proceeds from right to left. Horizontal writing creates the visual directionality of left to right (as an individual row), which guides the viewer's reading direction from top to bottom as a sequence of rows. Vertical writing creates the visual directionality of top to bottom (as an individual column), and also produces the viewer's reading direction from right to left as a sequence of columns.

In Japanese writing, horizontal and vertical writing forms can be juxtaposed within a single text. The use of multiple writing directions gives a text multiple visual directionality at the level of scriptorial directionality.

Vertical writing is the older form of writing in Japanese, and consequently, can embody a sense of 'traditionality'. It can be used therefore as a signifier to imply Japanese 'authenticity' or 'indigeneity' as opposed to that suggested by the horizontal way of writing, which suggests a western influence in the modern history of Japan: a sense of 'Westernness' that is at the same time that of 'modernity'. This type of writing is preferred among post-war generations, who are more strongly influenced by western cultures than older generations (Haarmann:1986).

The choice of writing direction serves three metafunctions: the Ideational, the Textual and the Interpersonal. For example, the writing direction may suggest a dynamic vectorial process, which is the Ideational metafunction. The choice between vertical and horizontal writing also realises a sense of 'traditionality' or 'modernity' and 'Westernisation', which is related to the Interpersonal metafunction. The particular choice of writing direction can guide a viewer's readings of the directionality of a page as a whole, or direct reading in certain ways: this serves the Textual metafunction.

Second, the Japanese system has a choice of several types of *writing units*: the Interpersonal metafunction. Japanese writing makes use of characters (*kanji*) and two kinds of syllabaries called *kana*: *hiragana* and *katakana*. Each of the *kana* consists of fifty-four letters. Two types of *kanas* serve distinctive purposes: *hiragana*, which makes use of round, curved lines in its shapes, serves grammatical purposes in sentences: it is used for items such as articles and auxiliaries. *Katakana*, on the other hand, is characterised by its angular shapes; it is often used to write foreign words.

This characteristic of the Japanese writing system allows a number of choices for linguistic representation, in terms of 'channels of realisation'. For example, it is possible to write a sentence using either *hiragana* or *katakana* alone or as a combination of two of them (*hiragana* and *katakana*) together with *kanji* (Chinese characters), depending on the type of writing.

The relative proportion of *kanji* used within a piece of writing (either at the sentence level or passage level) is one of the factors that realises the degree of formality. Formal writing has a higher proportion of *kanji*. The use of *kanji* is therefore closely related to the genre of writing. Legal documents, for instance, have a higher proportion of *kanji* than other types of writing, such as personal letters and children's writing.

Children start learning to write using only *hiragana* and *katakana*, and the more advanced the level of writing, the greater proportion of *kanjis* he or she can mix with these *kanas*. In the usual writing of Japanese adults, both *kanji* and *kana* are mixed. If the writing consists only of *kana*, it gives the text a sense of 'unaccomplished' or 'childish' writing, in comparison with standard, 'accepted', or 'adult-like' writing style.

The physical appearance of these three writing systems has significant implications in terms of the Interpersonal metafunction of visual semiosis. Compared with *kana*, *kanji* has a higher density of visual elements on the page. Consequently, writing with a higher proportion of *kanji* is *visually* more dense than texts with a lower proportion of *kanji*. Given that the use of *kanji* is one marker of formality, the visual density created by the choice of writing systems is another semiotic feature contributing to the degree of formality. This, again leads to one aspect of realization of textual genre. Writing with a higher visual density means for users of the Japanese language, a high degree of formality, which serves the Interpersonal metafunction. Therefore, in Japanese, the degree of formality in writing can be manifested 'visually' by the choice and combination of these three writing methods.

4. Textual analysis and discussion

4.1 Visual directionality (The Ideational metafunction)

In this section, I will look at two sets of Japanese and British examples. The first set is Plates 1 and 2.

Plate 1 (Japanese) Plate 2 (British)

Both examples are a public sign for 'exit', which make use of a type of visual images called *isotype*. The isotype is a system established by the Viennese philosopher and social scientist Otto von Neurath (1937, 1948). It is a system where modified and simplified visual images are used to convey information to the general public. Von Neurath believed this system to be universally communicative, as opposed to the opacity of verbal language, which he viewed as "a disfiguring medium for knowledge" in that "its structure and vocabulary fail to be a consistent, logical model of objects and relations in the physical world" (Lupton 1989:145).

Lupton (Ibid) argues that, in order to "provide a universal bridge between language and nature", the isotype has to be reduced to an abstract representation, while sustaining the 'vocabulary', which is done at the cost of weakening the relationship between the image and the actual object. Another aspect of the isotype that makes it "universally acceptable" is as Lupton states, its *consistency*. The isotype can visualise the same concept across cultures. For example, to realise the concept 'exit', it is possible to use similar visual images regardless of the context in which they are used. The question arises here: can isotype representation be completely culturally neutral?

Plate 1 and Plate 2 show Japanese and British isotypes, respectively, which indicate the presence of an exit. Both of them realise the same meaning ("*exit this way*"), but they are realised with different visual directionality. In the case of Plate 1, the orientation of the image of the human figure is to the left, while in Plate 2, the orientation of the represented participant is in the opposite direction. If, as von Neurath suggested, the isotype provides universality in the manifestation of visual information, the question arises regarding this difference in visual directionality: how can this difference in visual directionality be explained?

It is this feature which makes the isotype a useful starting point. As a sign, it is meant to be universal, yet its spatial orientation differs in the two cultures. My hypothesis is that the lexical aspects (the lexical content) are independently variable in relation to spatial orientation, and that the latter realises deep cultural configurations of the visual semiotic. Spatial orientation, right to left, or left to right, creates, implicitly, an indication of directionality.

Plate 3 is an opening advertising campaign of *Keikyu Department Store*, in Yokohama, Japan. The human represented participants, in the middle band of the text, are depicted as though they were rushing towards the left. This creates the pictorial visual directionality of right to left. The possible implication of this directionality is that people (the human represented participants) are hurrying, running to something worthwhile, which is expected to be somewhere to the left. 'Something worthwhile' might be the opening of this department store, and this is why these people are in a hurry.

Plate 3 *Keikyu Department Store* advertisement

Plate 4 is another Japanese example in which a represented participant realises the visual directionality of right to left. This is an advertisement from *Sumitomo Bank*, for its instant loan service. There is a cartoon image of a black bear, which is walking towards the left, creating the visual directionality of right to left. Next to the cartoon bear is a verbal caption, which says, "Sumitomo card is always on my side and that's definitely something that I can rely on".

The cartoon bear is represented to be doing the *right* ('sensible') action; now that the cartoon bear has this card, the message is that, he is heading in the 'right', 'forward', or 'positive' direction, in the sense that he can rely on this loan service, even in an emergency. It can be argued therefore that the visual directionality of right to left (which is realised by the image of cartoon character) manifests 'positive' values in the context of this Japanese advertisement.

Plate 4 *Sumitomo Bank* advertisement

Plate 5 and 6 are poster advertisements taken from the *Evening Standard* newspaper. (Plate 6 is my drawing of the original advertising poster.) They make use of visual directionality with a 'negative' or 'backward' implication, in order to make the 'positive' and 'forward' direction stand out. In other words, these advertisements attempt to make a selling point from giving represented participants the visual directionality with 'negative' implications,

Plate 5 *Evening Standard* advertisement

Plate 6 *Evening Standard* advertisement

(Abstract representation of the original)

The copy in Plate 5 reads, "*Looking for something better suited to your talents?*", with a cartoon image of an elephant with glasses and a tie, with a smug expression on its face, followed by a man with a sulky-looking face, carrying a shovel and a bucket. This is a symbolic representation of a boss and his subordinate at work, where the

latter is pushed around by the former; a work environment which is far from satisfactory on the part of the subordinate. The man, who is behind the boss, realises the visual directionality of right to left.

That this is a depiction of an unwanted situation, or that this is not how it ought to be, is being formally shown by this directionality of right to left (realised by 'the man in trouble') as something 'negative'. In other words, in the context of British advertisements, an unwanted and negative sense is realised by the visual directionality of right to left. This 'negative' visual directionality of right to left is based on the 'forward' and 'positive' directionality of left to right.

A similar message in terms of the implication of visual directionality is conveyed in the other example, Plate 6. This is an image of a boy on a skateboard, facing towards the left. In fact, the verbal copy reinforces this point: "*Are you going in the right direction?*", making an explicit point that the boy is *not* going in the right direction. Here as with Plate 5, a sense of 'negativeness' is visually expressed by the use of the visual directionality of right to left.

In this way, the visual representation of visual directionality which is read as 'negative' in Plate 5 and 6 sheds light on what is 'forward' and 'positive' directionality in the context of British advertisements. The visual directionality of right to left, which implies a negative sense in the context of British advertisements, would have realised a different meaning in the context of Japanese advertisements: where the visual directionality of right to left manifests a sense of 'positiveness', in Japan both participants (a man trailing behind an elephant as his boss, a boy on the skateboard) are *already* in the *right* direction. Both Plate 5 and Plate 6 prove that visual directionality is not merely a formal property, which is given to represented participants, but realises the core meaning of the advertising message.

Summary of 4.1

I have focused on one aspect of the Ideational metafunction: visual directionality as processes embodied in represented participants. Examples that I have dealt with so far have suggested that the visual directionality of right to left is prominent in Japanese visual representations, while British examples have a tendency to realise the visual directionality of left to right. Each directionality correlates with the scriptorial directionality of its language, the traditional way of writing Japanese and that of English.

This correlation between scriptorial directionality and pictorial directionality could be explained by an assumption that both Japanese and English writing systems are realisations of the underlying spatial semiosis of each culture. In other words, given that language is one of many semiotic modes which are involved in human communication, it may be possible to postulate that directionality of language (writing) is governed by an underlying spatial semiosis, which also governs the visual mode.

The difference of the prominent directionality between Japanese and British examples indicates each culture has a different (and separate) underlying spatial semiotic system, which influences and determines the existing semiotic modes in use in that culture. It may be said that the visual directionality of right to left is one manifestation of the underlying spatial semiotic system of Japanese culture, while the directionality of left to right is rooted in a different spatial semiotic system, which is characteristic of Anglophone cultures. Figure 5 is an abstract representation of underlying spatial semiosis of each culture.

Visual mode Writing Visual mode Writing

(Japanese) (English)

Japanese spatial semiotics British spatial semiotics

Figure 5 Underlying spatial semiotic systems

Given that each culture has a specific underlying spatial semiotic system, it follows that the difference in visual directionality between Japanese and British examples is not merely a formal distinction. Formal structure, like visual directionality, can itself manifest cultural implications. The differences in visual directionality are culturally *motivated*. In other words, visual directionality embodies the cultural metaphor of direction.

4.2 Use of Space (The Textual metafunction)

First of all, I will focus on the way in which the Left/Right part of textual space realises meaning. I will begin with a set of Japanese and British advertisements (Plates 7 and 8, respectively). Plate 7 advertises a male hairpiece, which appeared in the Japanese magazine *Spa*. The main copy reads, "*Ours is just different. You can rely on Svenson even on holiday*". There are two photographs above the lead copy, both of which show a family of three (who appear to be on holiday; there is a suitcase, on which a little girl is sitting and the man is carrying a travel bag on his shoulder). These two photographs indicate the difference in the man's hair: in the left photograph, the man is represented as having hair, while the other photograph on the right shows him bald.

Plate 8 is an advertisement for cosmetic surgery by *The Pountney Clinic*, which is taken from the British women's magazine *Cosmopolitan*. It shows photographs of part of the bodies of a patient who went through cosmetic surgery with this clinic. For example, the photograph on the top left side shows two states of a woman's nose; the image on the left hand side shows a woman with her nose (before surgery) and the other image shows the same woman with her operated nose (after surgery). These sets of images have in common that the left side image is a depiction of a supposedly problematic situation, which can be improved, they suggest, to achieve a better state.

Plate 7 (Japanese) Plate 8 (British)

Plates 7 and 8 indicate that the visual image in both advertisements realises temporal process of 'before' and 'after'. In the case of Plate 7, there is a temporal process of 'before' using a *Svenson* hairpiece and 'after' using the product. Images in Plate 8 indicate 'before' cosmetic surgery and 'after' the surgery. In other words, a set of two images manifests two stages: a problematic situation and a situation where the problem has been solved.

I would like to note however that these two advertisements have a different positioning of these two stages ('before' and 'after'): the Japanese example has its problematic situation ('before' stage) on the right and the improved situation ('after' stage) on the left. The British example, by contrast, realises the former in the left and the latter in the right.

Summary of 4.2

In terms of information value of Given and New, the Japanese text realises Given in the right and New in the left, while the British text manifests Given in the left and New in the right. Given in both texts suggests a *status quo*, the situation that is 'already there' or the point of departure, which leads to the New, something that is newly gained, or something that is worth paying attention to. A framework (distribution of values in visual domain) proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) can be applied to the British example, but not to the Japanese one. My assumption here is that Japanese visual representations tend to allow the realization of Given in the right and New in the left, which is different from that of British visual representations. Figure 6 shows an abstract representation of Given/New distribution of Japanese and British examples.

Figure 6 Given/New distribution of Japanese and British examples

4.3 Social Interactions (The Interpersonal metafunction)

This section will focus on the way in which visual representations manifest the relationship between represented participants and the viewer; 'social interactions' between them. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) draw their examples of Western visual representations from school textbooks, a poster and paintings as well as advertisements, to which they apply the system of *Contact*, *Social Distance* and *Attitude* and through which they consider the notion of *modality*: they are concerned with the way in which visual syntax (or formal structures) construct the relationship between represented participants and the viewer, and the 'world' of visual representations in relation to the viewer in everyday life.

Given that, the present section will compare Interpersonal meaning making between Japanese and British advertising texts. It can be assumed, from what has been discussed in section 4.2, that advertising texts from the two different cultures manifest Interpersonal functions in different ways. I will draw attention to how the systems of *Contact*, *Social Distance* and *Attitude* are realised in the sample given texts, and what the systematic differences, if any, can suggest or reveal about underlying Japanese and British semiotic systems.

I will use two sets of Japanese and British examples, which are campaigns for the same products, which cross the cultural boundaries of Japan and Britain. The first set of examples is an advertisement for hair care products, called *Organics* and the second set of examples is taken from a Japanese and British campaign for the *De Beers Diamond Ring*. On a general level, in both cases, there is a similarity in the style of advertisements, in the sense that both Japanese and British examples use the same type of represented participants and in a similar layout. However, I would like to explore whether there is any cultural specificness in the way these represented participants are engaged in meaning making in the Interpersonal dimension. I will start with the analysis of human represented participants in the texts; and follow this with a discussion around the representation of non-human represented participants.

Example 1 Organics

Plates 9 and 10 show a Japanese and a British advertisement for *Organics*, respectively. Plate 9 is taken from the Japanese women's magazine *With*, and Plate 10 is from the British women's magazine *Marie Claire*. Both advertisements appeared at approximately the same time (June 1996), and they are both two-page spreads.

Plate 9 *Organics* advertisement (Japanese)

Plate 10 *Organics* advertisement (British)

In the case of the Japanese example, there is a Japanese-looking woman with long straight dark hair, which reaches down to her chest. She is wearing a multi-coloured dress. She has make-up on, with red nail varnish on her left hand, which is resting on her chest. In the British example, there is an image of a Western woman, with long wavy hair,

which is 'standing up on end'. She has a touch of make-up and is photographed with a mid shot: her body is shown down to her shoulders.

Example 2 De Beers Diamond Ring

Plates 11 and 12 are a Japanese and a British advertisement for the *De Beers Diamond Ring*, respectively. The former is taken from the Japanese women's magazine *With*, and the latter appeared in the British women's magazine *Cosmopolitan*. As in the previous examples (Plates 9 and 10), these advertisements were released at around the same time (in November and December 1997).

The types of represented participants they include are similar in both examples: there is one female represented participant against a dark background. In the Japanese example, the woman is depicted clasping her hands in front of her face. The British woman in Plate 12 shows her left hand over the lower part of her face. Both have an image of the advertised product as non-human participants: a diamond ring (in Plate 11) and images of diamond stones (in Plates 11 and 12), although they are placed in different parts of the text.

Plate 11 (Japanese) Plate 12 (British)

The system of Contact

First of all, I would like to focus on the system of *Contact* in the first set of examples (*Example 1* hereafter: the *Organics* advertisements) Plates 9 and 10. The human represented participant in Plate 9 is not engaged in eye contact with the viewer: the *Offer Contact*. She is looking down slightly, while the female participant in Plate 10 is depicted with eye contact, smiling at the viewer: *Demand Contact*. It can be said that the former is engaged in a 'passive' interaction and the latter is in an 'active' interaction, because the *Offer Contact* in the Japanese looking woman makes herself 'to be looked at', without any direct contact with the viewer and the *Demand Contact* in the British woman is highly interactive with the viewer through eye contact.

With respect to the second set of examples (*Example 2* hereafter: *De Beers* diamond ring advertisements), the Japanese model in Plate 11 has *Offer Contact*, without any direct eye contact with the viewer represented; she is depicted as looking down, while 'smiling'. This Japanese model therefore interacts with the viewer with a formal marker of *Offer*, which is accompanied by the lexis 'smiling'. The British model in Plate 12, on the other hand, is represented with *Demand Contact* in that she has direct eye contact with the viewer; more precisely, the interactive meaning is created which consists of a formal realisation of *Demand Contact* and a lexical feature 'smiling'. Although both are smiling, the degree of the smile is different between the two examples: the Japanese model is more 'subtly' smiling than the British model, who presents an 'explicit' or 'wide' smile.

I now consider what this choice of *Contact* types (*Offer* in the Japanese examples in Plates 9 and 11, *Demand* in the British examples in Plates 10 and 12) might be suggesting about the cultures of Japan and Britain, in relation to the depiction of women, given that culturally and socially accepted or determined values can be encoded in the choice of interactive markers. The use of *Offer* in the Japanese examples might be read as a manifestation of what Japanese women are 'expected to be like' in Japanese society, that is, they are something that is passive and to be 'looked at', or 'visually appreciated'. In other words, the interactive meaning *Offer Contact* can realise a culturally accepted image of women. With respect to the British examples (Plates 10 and 12), the *Demand Contact* in the female participants represents them as more *actively interactive* in relation to the viewer, compared to their Japanese counterparts. It might follow, therefore, that the *Demand* type of *Contact* is realising a 'culturally favoured' image of women in British society.

The system of Social Distance

I now focus on interactive meanings realised by the system of *Social Distance*. In the case of *Example 1* (Plate 9 and 10), the Japanese model is photographed with a longer shot than the British model. The former shows her body 'from upper waist up' (a mid shot), which creates *Far personal distance* and the latter is photographed in the manner that reveals the head and shoulders (a close up), which realises *Close personal distance*. In other words, the formal representation of 'a close up' functions as a signifier of 'closer' distance between the represented participant and the viewer than that of 'a mid shot'. The Japanese model in Plate 9 has a greater *Social Distance* from the viewer than the British one in Plate 10. The type of *Social Distance* the British model is engaged in locates the viewer in a closer position in relation to her, while the Japanese models are shown at a greater distance from the viewer.

In the case of *Example 2* (Plates 11 and 12), both the Japanese and the British participants are shown at the same distance from the viewer: only their head and shoulders are shown, which is categorised as *Close personal distance*. This might imply therefore, these participants (both Japanese and British models) are represented as someone who is 'close to' the viewer, in other words, a sense of personal relation between the participants and the viewer is created. The representation of the participants in a relatively close proximity to the viewer can convey the message 'it could happen to you [the viewer]' or 'it could be you'.

Just as the choice of *Contact* can represent the cultural value systems of Japan and Britain, it may be argued that the system of *Social Distance* also encodes cultural specificity in value systems. Here I will particularly note the difference in the realisation of the type of *Social Distance* between the two texts in *Example 1* (Plate 9 and 10), on the grounds that the difference in the choice of *Social Distance* each human participant is represented with might be interpreted in relation to accepted social distance in each culture. The Japanese participant (Plate 9) represented with

greater distance from the viewer can be a representation of the accepted social distance in Japanese culture, where people tend to maintain greater social distance to each other in public, in comparison to that in British culture.

The system of Attitude

Regarding the system of *Attitude* in *Example 1*, the Japanese female model in Plate 9 is photographed from a lower angle, which realises *Representation power*. The British model (Plate 10) is photographed with *Equal power*. The former angle from which the represented participant is depicted makes them slightly 'looking down on' the viewer, in other words, the *Representation power* angle positions the viewer so as to 'look up to' the represented participants. The latter type of angle: *Equal power* locates the viewer at the same level with that of the viewer.

In the case of *Example 2*, I would like to note, first of all, the choice of *Frontal* and *Oblique angles* from which the Japanese and the British models are photographed. The British model in Plate 12 is depicted as facing the viewer with full involvement, being 'straight on', which is created by the use of the *Frontal angle* in use. The *Oblique angle* from which the Japanese model is taken makes her appear as if she was facing the viewer at a slight angle, which can imply partial involvement, as opposed to full involvement.

I now focus on what can be derived from the choice of the system of *Attitude*. Regarding *Example 1*, the significance of the difference between *Representation power* in the Japanese example (Plate 9) and the choice of *Equal power* in the British example (Plate 10). The latter type of angle creates a sense of a closer interaction between the represented participants and the viewer, compared to the case of the Japanese example, because the representation of the British model is at equal eye level it gives a sense of greater proximity to the viewer than from the Japanese represented participants, taken from a lower angle. *Representation power* in the Japanese model, by contrast, gives rise to a sense of 'remoteness' and 'aloofness' from the viewer. Also *Representation power* in this Japanese participant allows stronger control (power) as an ideal: literally someone to look up to.

In the case of *Example 2*, the *Oblique angle* from which the Japanese model is photographed (in Plate 11) creates a sense of detachment from the viewer, in comparison to its British counterpart (Plate 12), where the *Frontal angle* enables the participant to be represented as a more closely interactive figure in relation to the viewer.

The difference in the formal realisation of *Attitudinal meanings* between the Japanese and the British examples in *Examples 1* and *2* may have cultural implications, which are specific to each culture. As is the case with the system of *Contact* and *Social Distance*, discussed earlier, the fact that the Japanese and the British model are represented with different meanings of *Attitude* in relation to the viewer might also represent a particular aspect of Japanese and British cultural value systems.

The fact that the Japanese models in Plates 9 and 11 are given *Representation power* while the British models in Plates 10 and 12 are in *Equal power* relation to the viewer suggests that the individual viewer for the Japanese examples is given less power over the represented participants compared to that of the British examples. This might imply one aspect of Japanese cultural value system where a figure of 'authority' (such as a person in an advertisement or the institution they represent) is put before individuals.

The *Oblique angle* from which the Japanese model is taken (in Plate 11) represents these participants as 'distanced' from the viewer. In other words, the formal feature (the use of *Oblique angle*) therefore serves as a signifier of the 'remoteness' of the represented participant from the viewer. This type of interactive meaning of *Attitude* might be serving as a formal manifestation of the Japanese cultural value system, with respect to women's position in society, where women are supposed to be less forward and more subservient.

With respect to the representation of the British cultural value system, a sense of closer interaction created by the choice of the *Frontal angle* with the meaning of *Involvement* can be a reflection of different values, which is related to its representation of the image of women as much more forward and closely interactive figures, in comparison to Japanese women's 'passiveness' and 'remoteness'.

Summary of 4.3

In this section, I have examined two sets of advertisements in order to see how similarly and differently the Japanese and British examples manifest the Interpersonal function: the manifestation of interactive meanings between represented participants and the viewer. Both sets of advertisements (*Examples 1* and *2*) are campaigns for the same product: advertisements that cross the cultural boundaries of Japan and Britain.

Across the two sets of examples, the Japanese and the British advertisements consist of similar lexical items, in terms of the type of represented participants in use. For example, in the case of *Example 1*, both the Japanese and the British texts show the image of a female participant in a similar background, together with images of the products. The Japanese and the British campaign for the *De Beers Diamond Ring* have a similar organisation of what is represented in that each has an image of a female model, who is wearing a diamond ring, placed against a plain background.

It is the level of formal or syntactical realisation that differentiates the Japanese examples (Plates 9 and 11) and the British examples (Plates 10 and 12), in terms of interactive meaning making between the represented participants

and the viewer. Most notably, as far as the examples I have dealt with in this section are concerned, the Japanese model and the British model are represented in a different system of interactive markers, which gives rise to different interactive meanings between them.

In the case of both *Examples 1* and *2*, it can be pointed out that the Japanese models tend to be depicted with a sense of 'passiveness', looking away from the viewer, and the British models are, by contrast, represented as more 'active' and 'forward' figures. The choice of one interactive marker instead of another realises this tendency. For example, the Japanese models both in Plate 9 and 11 are engaged in the *Offer Contact*, without direct eye contact with the viewer, while their British counterparts are shown with *Demand Contact*, which allows the viewer direct contact with the participant.

The different choice of horizontal and vertical angles from which each participant is shot can also be attributed to different realisations of interactive meanings: the *Oblique angle* from which the photograph of the Japanese model in Plate 11 is taken makes her appear less involved with the viewer, in comparison to its British counterpart (in Plate 12), who is photographed with a *Frontal angle*, which suggests a fuller involvement with the viewer. While the Japanese participant in Plate 9 is represented with *Representation power* in relation to the viewer, the British model in Plate 10 is photographed from the eye level of the viewer (*Equal power*). Overall, due to the choice of the interactive markers in the system of *Attitude*, the Japanese models are less interactive with the viewer than the British ones: there is a greater distance from the viewer to the Japanese participants than to the British ones.

I would now like to consider what can be drawn from these differences in the formal realisation between the Japanese and the British advertisements, when the same type of lexical items are used. It can be argued that the different choice of forms: interactive meaning markers, itself has significance in terms of the cultural values of Japan and Britain which they realise. It may be safe to say that the representation of the Japanese and the British models suggests one aspect of what is socially and culturally accepted in terms of women's position in each society. Japan is a society where women are expected to be rather 'passive', 'subservient' and 'controlled by social frameworks', compared to the accepted values for British women, which allow them to be more 'active', 'forward' and 'individualistic'.

5 Conclusion

I have discussed visual representations in Japanese and British advertisements with reference to the three notion of metafunctions. My analysis has demonstrated that both Japanese and British visual semiotics are conditioned by a different underlying spatial semiotic systems. This goes against the notion of culturally transparency of visuals. Visual representations and the way in which they convey meaning is culturally conditioned.

I have focused exclusively on the formal structures of visual representation in this paper. What my discussion suggests is; if visual lexis can serve as cultural representation, so can visual syntax. For the full understanding of visual representations from a cross-cultural perspective, a further systematic study on visual syntax as well as visual lexis should become essential. In conclusion, cultures condition visual forms and visual forms represent cultures.

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