

The Sense Shaping of Taste in Composite Writing - An Example of "Spicy" Presentation

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Abstract

The integration of multimodal elements in contemporary writing practices has transformed the way sensory experiences are conveyed and internalized by audiences. This study illuminates the mechanisms through which composite writing shapes the sensory experience of taste, with a particular emphasis on the perception of spiciness. By examining composite writings from various media platforms, we uncover the intricate relationship between media representation and sensory perception. Our theoretical framework is anchored in the concepts of synesthesia, metaphor theory, and media studies, particularly the influential ideas of Marshall McLuhan on media extensions and human experience. The study lies in its exploration of how composite writing not only reflects but also shapes the audience's sensory experiences. We argue that the metaphorical use of spiciness in composite writing extends beyond the gustatory to encompass cultural and personal identities, challenging traditional hierarchies of sensory experience in aesthetic discourse.

Keywords

Composite Writing; Sense Shaping; Taste; Spicy

INTRODUCTION

With the popularity of smart devices, the way of content creation is becoming more complex and diversified. It is becoming increasingly difficult to capture the attention of the audience with a single style of writing. Nowadays, when we talk about writing, in other word, content production, we usually require not just words to occupy the eyes of the audience, images and sounds are also used as writing materials, or at least used as addition widely and effectively. Composite writing is an extension of the extension of the concept of writing by new media. It is no longer a single text as a medium, but often a combination of multiple media. Composite writing, on Ji Han

the one hand, ensures to attract readers from various senses; on the other hand, it can explore and awaken readers' experience on multiple levels. Therefore, when composite writing is used to evoke the senses, its effects are often multiple, which can deprive and recreate the senses.

"Writing is the correct reflection of objective things in the appropriate form of words through the author's subjective consciousness."¹If writing is regarded as a kind of reflection and expression, whether it is the expression of individual emotions and feelings or the convey of, we could write with letters and words, traditionally. In the era of digitization, writing has been expanded and we can write with composite media, the use of composite media for expression also can be regarded as a kind of Composite writing.

What is more special is that, even with new media, even with composite writing, the presentation of taste can only be indirect, which can only be triggered as synesthesia through words, images or sounds so that the audience can "feel" the stimulation of taste. There is no place for sound in the traditional food evaluation standard, and the perception of food doesn't need it, the standard and the perception are usually composed of the three concepts--colour, aroma and taste. Thus the sound of food is the icing on the cake and is generally used as an auxiliary means to present the taste. When describing the taste of the food, the word is closer to the taste itself than the image, and when presenting the appearance of the food, the word is farther than the image.

When we receive real food in the conventional environment, the eyes (sometimes together with the ears), nose, and tongue, is successively work so that when only an image of the food is presented, probably due to the inertia of the perceptual process, and for the three concepts of colour, aroma, and taste are usually used in combination in language habits, it is difficult for us to control the corresponding mobilization of the senses of smell and taste, as the idiom describes "watching plum quench thirst"². If we want to feel the sense of taste directly, we must incorporate real external objects into our bodies, which is obviously impossible with the current new media and the composite writing based on them.

McLuhan believed that " the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves."³Based on this, when analyzing composite writing that presents taste in the era of new

¹徐振东, 汉语写作学 (北京, 2007, 北京师范大学出版社), page29.

²Translated by Chinese idiom"望梅止渴"(Wait for the plum to quench thirst), means console oneself with false hopes. ³McLuhan, M, *Understanding Media* (New York, 1964, McGraw Hill), page23.

media, we will find a problem - it is first about the writing itself, and then about our perception. Composite writing provides a variety of media, bringing in more audiences, but correspondingly, it also leads to the invasion of media on our own perceptual abilities. Writing media is enriching and developing constantly, we always pay attention to the convenience it brings, but it is more necessary to examine and reflect on the problems associated with its advantages is more necessary for the healthy development of writing in the digital age. The article aims to connect the act of writing and bodily senses through the analysis of taste writing and to point out the problems and dilemmas of this kind of writing in present. Only by being aware of this issue can writers maintain their independence and subjectivity in the digital age.

Literature Review

Taste, as a fundamental human sensory experience, exhibits complexity and multidimensionality across various disciplinary fields. This literature review aims to synthesize and summarize the interdisciplinary research on taste, particularly its interplay with cognition, culture, language, and psychology.

Cognitive Psychology and Linguistics

Research in cognitive psychology and linguistics highlights the role of taste in metaphor creation and conceptual formation. For instance, Wang Shaohua and Xu Jian (2002) explored the synaesthesia phenomenon through the conceptual metaphor theory, revealing the mapping process between sensory features across different sensory forms. Yang Zhen (2013) discussed the potential of taste in aesthetic experience, challenging the traditional aesthetic neglect of taste. Zhao Yan and Wu Lin (2019) analyzed the representation of moral metaphors from an embodied cognition perspective, emphasizing the significance of bodily experience in concept formation.Chao Xiangyu (2030) pointed out the emotion of anger has a mapping relationship with spiciness.

Cultural Studies and Identity

Cultural studies focus on how taste is linked to individual or collective cultural identity and memory. Chen Shouhu (2014) analyzed the documentary series "A Bite of China" to demonstrate how taste narrative constructs a spiritual homeland. Liu Jiaying (2021) studied the dietary synesthesia, "hometown" experience, and memory identity of the Yi people who have migrated, revealing the role of dietary synesthesia in identity formation.Sutami, H (2024) and Aretha, P (2024) both paid attention to the close relationship between food and local culture, but did not delve into taste in depth.

Taste Metaphor and Language Use

Li Jinlan (2005) delved into the cognitive structure and semantic characteristics of taste metaphorization, discussing the process from a cognitive perspective. Research on taste metaphor and language use includes Zhao Ke's (2018) exploration of the semantic extension of taste words "sour, sweet, and spicy" through synesthetic metaphor, analyzing how these terms project into different sensory domains and form new meanings. Cheng Haiting (2024) offers an in-depth understanding of the cognitive differences in the acquisition of Chinese sadness synaesthetic metaphors in second language learning.

Psychological Research on Taste

Psychological studies focus on the psychological mechanisms behind taste behaviours. Fu Yuling et al. (2018) discussed the psychological issues in spice consumption, such as benign masochism and sensation-seeking, providing new insights into understanding spice preferences. Zhou and Tse (2020), systematically investigated the metaphorical associations between taste and emotion/emotion-laden words, providing empirical support for the role of taste in human emotional expression.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study is underpinned by theories of sensory perception and media studies, particularly focusing on how media extensions shape human experience, as posited by Marshall McLuhan. Additionally, the research incorporates concepts from synesthesia and metaphor theory to examine how taste is associated with other sensory and aesthetic experiences.

The study adopts a qualitative research design focused on content analysis and discourse analysis to explore the multifaceted representations of taste within composite writing. The qualitative approach allows for an indepth understanding of how the sensory experience of spiciness is conveyed and interpreted across various media forms. By this means, a comprehensive examination could be allowed, which includes both the content of composite writings and the audience's reception of these sensory representations. Discourse analysis is employed to deconstruct the language and media elements that contribute to the shaping of taste perception, focusing on metaphorical language, cultural discourse and aesthetic discourse.

Besides, the research acknowledges potential limitations, such as the subjectivity inherent in qualitative analysis, which may affect the generalizability of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that composite writing significantly influences the audience's sensory experience by creating a multi-sensory engagement. The metaphorical use of spiciness extends beyond the gustatory to encompass cultural and personal identities. However, the study also identifies a tendency towards simplification and standardization in the presentation of taste, which may obscure individual sensory experiences.

The Metaphors and Aesthetics of Taste Writing

The cultural significance of taste is always related to our identity construction and identification. Regional taste writing, however, shows a tendency for rough simplification, as if there are only two kinds of distinctions: spicy and non-spicy. Of course, sweetness as a taste preference is relatively prominent, but the reason why sweetness can be widely "seen" by the public is partly due to the fact that the economic development of these areas, whether sweetness as a part of their life or a part of their culture, it is difficult to be ignored because of their strong economic power.⁴ In addition, people in these regions also emphasize regional divisions and distinctions. Food and its taste senses can create a taste community, but this community shares not just the certain taste but the metaphor of taste. Understanding the world needs metaphor, and the taste category is projected to other perceptual fields. Expressing other feelings with taste is also in line with the psychological and cultural development schema. Something abstract, strange and indescribable, would be better understood and expressed when they are presented through concrete, palpable, and easily grasped things.

Writing for presenting taste experience does not end with the completion and publication of a manuscript, feedback and communication from the audience are also parts of this writing. In multi-directional writing, the experience, the metaphor, group memory, and social or cultural significance behind the taste, can all be strengthened and sublimated. At the same time,

⁴刘嘉颖. (2021). 流动的味觉观:迁居彝人的饮食通感、"家乡"体验与记忆认同. *民族学刊* (02), 85-91+102.

it is in writing that this kind of community can be clearly identified and expressed, and then the audience can find "Allies" with the possibility and foundation.⁵ Among them, spicy derived many metaphors, such as enthusiastic, fierce, outgoing, spicy, adventurous, passionate, sharp, decisive, vi-

cious, and unconventional... because of some ideal or practical consideration, most of them can be recognized and pursued in contemporary society. The key is that composite writing can more easily obscure the source and target domain of metaphor in various ways.

For the individual, when eating spicy food is presented as a personal trait or ability, what the writer expects is that the audience will be able to guess and grasp what kind of person the spicy person is through this characteristic. The acceptance and tolerance of stimulating spiciness also implies the possession of the metaphor of spiciness and the ability to manage and control it. What he expects is not only the audience's recognition of the sensory experience but also the audience's recognition of the metaphor of character reflected in the sensory preference. The writing of taste is often not about the taste itself, it's usually accompanied by reference and metaphor, which is more hidden in the seemingly pure and personalized taste expression.

In groups, especially in regions where spicy food is not popular, spicy food can be used as a representation of the locality of the stranger -- it holds the attachment to the hometown, nostalgia for the past, and stores the imprints of the growing environment; at the same time, spicy food can also become a purely dietary trend that is widely pursued, then the locality covered by groupness. Therefore, the taste of food, especially the taste with strong qualities, such as spiciness, can help the subject reconnect with the homeland and help us reconstruct the regional identity. However, the shaped pursuit of particular flavours is implicit in the ambiguity of regional identity and the sense of belonging, even the decay of sensory capabilities if the flavours can not constitute a strong impact and stimulation on the senses, or if there is no way to visually represent them in pictures, words, etc., the subject is not strong enough to construct a representation of his/her regional identity for attachment.

Taste not only generates metaphors from itself, it is also related to aesthetic experience.

Whether in Chinese or English, when "taste" comes out of the body, it goes to the aesthetic categories. There seems to be an innate connection

⁵赵可. (2018). 味觉词"酸、甜、辣"通感隐喻式的词义引申研究. 汉字文化 (S1), 25-28.

between taste and aesthetics, but there is also a huge and insurmountable fracture between taste and aesthetics, as aesthetics has long been associated only with sight and sound. In the aesthetic system, the senses are settled in different hierarchies, and taste, which satisfies the appetite, is at the lower end of the scale. Taste, or the sense of taste, is directly related to appetite, even if aesthetics is not always required to be separated from human desires, it is required to be separated from such lowly, primitive, and even animalistic desires at least, and in most contexts rice, hot pot, and braised meat cannot be aesthetically pleasing.

When "taste" enters the realm of aesthetics, it needs to be stripped of its materiality and endowed with the pure feeling of spirituality. If it is placed in a cultural context, the sense of taste will not be satisfied with staying in itself but should be directed to a broader and more advanced field, and the metaphors and other cultural connotations radiating from the sense itself can become a ladder to elegance and aesthetic, and using taste to characterize aesthetics can only be carried out through its hints or metaphors. The behaviours and actions that acquire taste and trigger taste⁶, also extend the meaning of appreciation. Therefore, when using such verbs in writing, the feeling of taste naturally symbolizes and evokes part of the aesthetic experience, realizing a transition between taste and taste.

The Writer's Trap

From the perspective of the sensory expression effect, composite writing makes the "Proust effect" more accessible and more tangible. Words, images, and sounds can make the "sensations" triggered by flavours solidify, no longer drift away, and make it back to us with more "reality", which can be achieved even without the presence of flavours and food. Writers externalize their experiences, and the media provide a variety of ways of presenting, such as words, images, and sounds. The process by which writers present individual sensory experiences through composite writing is, on the one hand, intensely subjective; on the other hand, this writing process is to some extent also standardized by default. Firstly, these subjective sensory experiences are required to be shaped into alternative experiences, which can be easily replaced and embedded by the audience; secondly, this kind of writing defaults to the principle of "more is better" in terms of media usage, and writers should fully access and utilize all the expressions given by the platforms, so as to connect content production and content

⁶In Chinese, the verb "taste", could be translated as "品"、"尝"、"品味" etc.

acceptance.

Writers are content producers, but they are also expressers of sensory experiences. They are endowed with stronger "ambitions" by more powerful writing tools, and sometimes fall into the alienation, exactly, the objectification of writing: driven by the interests of cash flow and so on, the writing that expresses the senses is gradually alienated into the writing that shapes the senses. Compared with the past, the expressions that composite writing can use, and the contents that creators express through composite writing have added some "non-verbal signals and hints", such as eyes, facial expressions, postures, etc. As a result, although the audience only acquires alternative experiences in the process of reception, the process of acquisition itself is more consistent with the audience's sense of personal experience.

Complex writing, which integrates multiple media, is also able to upgrade and optimize its techniques and expressions continuously according to the effects it produces on individuals or groups of audiences. What writers are trying to achieve is not only to attract the audience's attention but also to solidify the audience's recognition with the experience of sense in writing. And the audience's indulgence in alternative experiences is precisely what some content producers are looking for. Not to mention that composite writing that shapes the senses is supposed to be used as part of sensory marketing on many occasions. For them, this obsession becomes an identification with the writer's own experience, or fictional myth of experience, consciously or unconscionably, the training, assimilation, and shaping of the senses starts in the writing in silence.

The writing that shapes the senses must attract and consolidate the audience, and it should guarantee a model of protection, it promotes several real experiences for the high-sensory seeker, regardless of whether they are satisfied with the gustatory experiences that the writing presents or not. On the other hand, this kind of writing guarantees the group except high-sensory seekers are compensated and satisfied by their experiences similarly, and those whom the writing fails to attract or capture are only non-highsensory seekers who are dissatisfied with the way of prevention or displeased with the alternative experiences they present.

Before the senses were shaped by writing, taste was a very personal thing and a very private feeling, but when it is presented in the way of composite writing, a particular taste, such as spicy, is moulded into a standard that should be shared. Besides, the presented information continues to deprive and reshape the audience's senses. So, when we confront the object, it is no longer about how we feel, and what feelings are being produced, but about how we should feel, what we should feel, and even how we should react to the certain objection. Instead, we are told how we should feel and how we should react to the object. Discourses that were originally intended to express our own feelings, but right now, it was able to shape our senses, to provide alternative experiences for our senses. Furthermore, the alternative experience has no need to be experienced, it can take advantage of a direct connection between audience and media, to disguise this experience as a personal, direct experience. On the other hand, all kinds of sensory descriptions become the criteria for examining the normalcy of our senses.

When a description, such as "excellence in colour, aroma and taste", is presented, the audience has no personal experience of any of them at the moment. Such representations are able to extract past memories and sensory experiences, realize the shaping of current senses, and through the substitution of adverbs of degree and synonyms, raise our thresholds in terms of sensation and freshness constantly.

The Recipient's Self-trap

In the process of shaping the senses by composite writing, the audience is not entirely innocent. Those who indulge in the new media net tend to be more inclined to be recipients of other expressions rather than writers themselves. They are always accustomed to obtaining and using some alternative experience rather than direct ones.

It is important to note that this moulding of the senses is based on the stripping and confinement of the real senses. The writer, consciously or unconsciously, disciplines the other with the subjective experience of individuality, or even the imagined experience, while the audience is willing to be disciplined. This is partly due to inertia, as it costs money, energy, and time to go through direct experience, to express and to write, whereas alternative experience and alternative writing, allow us to acquire unearned experiences, which should be gotten with effort and dedication. The audience skips the experience and saves the energy which would be spent on the experience, but they still gain the experience. This acquisition of experience is very peculiar, it was gotten directly, but it is a second-hand alternative experience. At the same time as they are being expressed, these experiences and feelings can be instantly embedded in their own experience by subjects who do not have the relevant experience. This phenomenon can also be seen

in expressions such as "Internet mouthpiece"7.

Spiciness may be a unique human preference for taste, and only humans can be shaped to adapt to spicy foods.⁸ Spiciness may be a unique taste preference to humans and only humans can be moulded to adapt to spicy foods. Spicy, as the sensation of pain or heat is understood as a taste, and the intense stimulation from spicy food contains pain, but at the same time, it promotes the release of endorphins, so eating spicy food is an activity with high stimulation and low risk. In terms of the occurrence mechanism, it is supposed to be painful; however, in terms of the sensory experience, it brings enjoyment and pleasure, and spiciness becomes an alternative to pain in the form of taste.

In the contemporary, the natural and social identities of human beings, and the different dimensions of social identity, are separated and need to be separated. This need for separation implies the separation of mind and body itself is appropriate and reasonable, but in the context of the social needs of contemporary and contemporary people, this separation is necessary. When eating spicy or accepting the alternative experience of this, the body must accommodate and digest the intense external stimulus, and the mind does not feel pain, but rather pleasure, Perhaps the degree of eating spicy food symbolizes the ability to separate the body and mind and to digest the conflict. Compared to other flavours, only eating spicy food can be counted as an "ability".

The body and the mind of humans are separated, but the body and the senses perceiving the object are tightly intertwined with the medium. The platforms on which the content of our creating is presented and the space of our daily lives are becoming more and more intertwined. We can no longer define the boundaries of the virtual space, nor can we clearly separate and cut off the sensory experiences presented by our creating or writing from our real-life experiences, alternative experience and real experience are entangled. When spiciness is presented as a flavour by composite writing, it is an alternative experience with double meanings: on the one hand, it is the replacement of the writer's individual experience for the audience's experience, and the audience absorbs and embeds the alternative experience; on the other hand, it is the replacement of the replacement of the sensarily of the enjoyment of taste for the sensation of pain.

⁷Translated from the Chinese phrase"互联网嘴替", means someone just took the words right out of my mouth and said what i want to say.

⁸Rozin, P., Guillot, L., Fincher, K., Rozin, A., & Tsukayama, E. (2013). Glad to be sad, and other examples of benign masochism. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 8(4), 439-447.

This process involves the compromise of taste to the other senses and the compromise of the self-sense to the other's experience. This means that it is acknowledged that taste can be presented by composite writing, in which the taste senses can be replaced by other senses. Although the subject may sometimes realize that the result of this expression and presentation is not the taste itself, people embrace the alternative experience (other-self, other senses-taste) into the subject. At the same time, the audience is lost in the exquisite alternative experience, giving up their own senses of taste, placing themselves in a position of domination, and finding it is difficult to deny and reject the exquisite words and pictures.

The experience of eating spicy food and its expression and reception embody a strong dichotomy between mind and body, it is an alternative experience where one can transcend the limitations imposed by physical, spatial, and other material conditions, such as the avoidance of pain. This experience would be repeated many times sometimes, in different forms and diverse superimpositions. Because there is no need to experience it personally, the subject's acquisition and absorption of these experiences is unrestrained. And the repeated and massive acceptance of alternative experiences likewise drags and depletes our senses themselves. When we see similar content that expresses the same senses over and over again, it is as if we have already experienced it many times, or at least, we can "experience" this kind of gustatory and olfactory experience many times on the visual level. In essence, we are numbed to the same type of text or image content, and the senses are associated. Despite the lack of personal experience, the tops and limits of sensory experience are still being stretched without boundaries, moving further and further away from the limits of what the individual has felt or could have endured.

Besides the numbing and depletion of senses, the tool nature of alternative experience fades away as the subject becomes fully adapted to replacing and embedding our own experience with alternative experience, and this adaptation and reliance on alternative sensory experience adapts and modifies our own bodies and sensory capacities. As the assembly line for producing alternative experiences becomes more and more sophisticated and efficient, and the use of alternative experiences becomes more and more skilled, our own sensory capacities and our ability to express gradually wither away.

CONCLUSION

Writing tools in this era become more and more advanced, creators should return to the writing that expresses the senses consciously, and try to achieve a kind of writing that recovers the senses -- not only presenting one's own sensory experiences or arousing the sensory experiences of other people, but also stimulating the passion and contact to the real object.

It is through writing that the subject is inspired to be passionate and in touch with the real object, to maintain a natural sensitivity to the object, and to lead the subject out of the numbness and the decadence that follows numbness. Writing that recovers the senses does not reject the intervention and synthesis of new media, and it does not mean that we should cut ourselves off from composite writing and return to the words completely, Instead, we should think twice when applying them, both words and other media, always keep open mind to and explore problems which have emerged. In addition, to counteract the passivity that may arise from the consumption of alternative sensory experiences, writing should encourage active audience participation. This could involve interactive elements or prompts that invite the audience to reflect on and share their own sensory experiences.

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