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Linguistic Semiotic Features in Interior Furnishing Design

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Abstract. Linguistic semiotics has had a huge impact on the development of humanities, especially in architecture and design. There is a close relationship between architecture and language, design and language. As a new subdivision of interior design, interior furnishing design belongs to architectural space, and this connection is inherent. But little research has been undertaken by interior furnishing designers on these issues. This research discusses the relationship between interior furnishing design and language through the research method of case study. The conclusion of this research is that the interior furnishing design and language have a one-to-one similarity in four aspects: formal elements (vocabulary), structural elements (grammar), meaning elements (semantics), and environment elements (context). Therefore, the linguistic semiotic perspective of interior furnishing design will become a powerful tool for people to understand interior furnishing design, as well as an important means for designers to express their creative thinking.

Keywords. Interior furnishing design, Linguistic semiotic, Language, Comparability

1. Introduction

In terms of architecture, from the 1950s to the 1960s, Western modernism exposed more and more weaknesses, and modernism entered a difficult period (Rowe, 2011). Since Jenks declared in the book "The Language of Post-Modern Architecture" in the early 1970s that "modernist architecture is dead" (Haddad, 2009; Jencks, 1978), The western architectural culture has once again experienced a huge impact. Architects are not satisfied with the knowledge framework of existing architecture. They have borrowed knowledge from other disciplines to enrich the theory of architecture, making architecture more complicated, and the architectural world has thus presented a diversified situation with various doctrines and genres have appeared one after another. One of these is the introduction of linguistics into architecture (Hays, 2000).

In terms of linguistics, because the removal of information barriers between the sciences gives a powerful impetus for the research development, linguistics started exploring the problems that previously were not part in its sphere of interest. Now the sphere of interest of linguistics includes everything that meets the requirements of semiotic systems theory, which we call linguistic semiotics (Maslova, 2018).

In fact, in the research direction of modern linguistics, the structuralist linguistic view (Puech, 2004) initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure has a profound influence on the generation and development of architectural semiotics.

The development of semiotics, on the one hand, is due to the needs of science and technology, such as bionics, animal semiotics, cybernetics, information theory, computer science and logic; on the other hand, the humanities are increasingly involved in symbolic issues, for example, the development of psychology, thinking science, cultural studies, anthropology and philosophy all require the participation of semiotics.

The 20th century is called the "century of linguistics", linguistics has had a huge impact on the development of humanities (Dylgjeri & Kazazi, 2013). The similarities between various art categories and linguistics have made the terms "painting language, design language, sculpture language, music language, dance language, and movie language" widely spread. Among them, the most common discussions are in the field of architecture and design. People often start to associate "architecture" with "language", and "design" with "language". Bruno Zevi wrote "Modern Architectural Language" (Zevi, 1978) in 1978, while Charles Jencks wrote "Post-Modern Architectural Language" (Jencks, 1978) at the same time. They respectively put forward a series of design principles for modern and postmodern architecture. These principles are equivalent to the rules of language-the organization of grammar and semantics， and initially formed a scientific thinking method to grasp design rules from the architectural language system. Since 1977, American architect C. Alexander has successively published "The Oregon experiment" (Alexander, Silverstein, Angel, Ishikawa, & Abrams, 1975), "A pattern language: towns, buildings, construction" (Alexander, 1977) and "The timeless way of building" (Alexander, 1979) explored how to form a complete set of "architectural language". Another person who explores the language of architecture is N. Schultz. The language of architecture is the link between N. Schultz's architectural phenomenology from theory to practice (Chen, 1996).

2. Comparability between language and interior furnishing design

Semiotics can treat architecture as a language, which means it makes extensive use of language patterns. Using the regularity of language to compare the accuracy and standardization of the relationship between the various components in the building is the reason why the concept of architectural language first appeared in the theoretical literature. We cannot help asking, why are "architecture" and "language", or "design" and "language" linked together? And this connection is not accidental, because there is a one-to-one similarity between the two, and this connection does have an indescribable charm. This connection is embodied in the comparability of formal elements (vocabulary), structural elements (grammar), meaning elements (semantics), and environment elements (context) (Figure 1). As a new subdivision of interior design, interior furnishing design belongs to architectural space, and this connection is inherent.
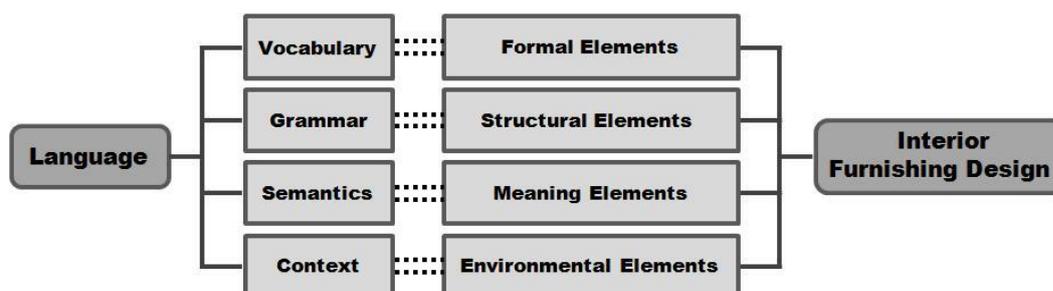

Figure 1. Similarity between language and interior furnishing design

2.1 Comparability of Formal Elements and Vocabulary

The discussion on the similarity between architectural design and language first appeared on formal elements, that is, the linguistic formal elements (word-sentence-text regularity) are used to compare the relationship between the different parts of the building. As early as 1745, Germaine Boffrand wrote in his book "On Architecture": "the architraves and other parts that make up a house are to building, just like words to language" (Collins, 1998). Here, "architraves" and "word", "building" and "language" both become the corresponding comparison. The same is true for interior furnishing design. The smallest unit in interior furnishing design (Such as color, material, texture, shape and functional structure) is similar to the vocabulary in the language.

When researchers combine these "words" according to certain rules, they form a relatively complete unit -- "sentences", such as the furnishings in the space: furnitures, curtains, carpets, ornaments, green plants, etc. Finally, these sentences are connected according to certain rules, which constitute the text, that is, the whole interior furnishing space. Although in the formal elements of architecture, the dividing line between words, sentences and texts is not as clear and definite as language, the comparability of the regular relations among the formal elements (words, sentences and texts) is definitely existing.

2.2 Comparability of Structural Elements and Grammar

Structural elements, that is, the constituent relationships between the elements. In language, words can only form correct sentences according to the grammar rules. "The various rules of grammar are abstracted from countless specific sentences. The specific sentences are infinite, while the rules of sentence composition are limited" (Liu, Huang and Liu, 1986). There is also a certain composition relationship between the various elements of the building. In China, Mr. Liang Sicheng mentioned in the article "Characteristics of Chinese Architecture" in "Journal of Architecture": Construction conventions that have been used and developed for two or three thousand years is known as "grammar", "between building component, building component and their processing decoration, between individual building, all have certain treatment method and mutual relation" (Liang, 1954). In here, "construction conventions" and "certain treatment methods and mutual relations" are the structural elements of architecture.

For interior furnishing design, the structural elements of interior furnishing design are a reasonable organization and arrangement of design elements. Take the sofa of Chinese style hotel room as an example, this sofa must follow the color, texture, shape system of Chinese tradition style, it also must accord with human body engineering principle, usage custom and mechanics principle. In here, the law of traditional form and functional structure are the structural elements (grammar) of this sofa. Although the formal elements (vocabulary) of today's interior furnishing design have changed a lot, the furnishings (sentence) in the space have been greatly enriched, but fundamentally, the structural elements (grammar) of the design still maintain a certain stability, abstractness,   and infinite transformation generation ability. Just as in linguistics, a finite grammar can generate infinite sentences.

2.3 Comparability of Meaning Elements and Semantics

The meaning element of language, namely semantics, is the content part contained in the language component. "Semantic is actually the expression form of concept in language." (Gao, 1995). This is very close to the design concept and cultural connotation to be expressed

in the design. The difference is that the meaning elements of language are expressed by voice, while the design is expressed by "form". It is not difficult to find that the form and content of design often have internal and inevitable connections. For example, white means pure and minimal, in the interior furnishing design, screens represent regional separation and virtual occlusion, and Chinese ink painting symbolizes ancient Chinese humanity spirit.

2.4 Comparability of Environmental Elements and Context

The environmental elements of language (context) are very important for the transmission and understanding of language. Researchers often cannot judge the true meaning of a particular word or sentence without considering the specific context. In language, context includes social environment, natural environment, human environment, use environment, as well as the place environment where speech is expressed. Design also has its environmental elements, because design cannot be separated from specific historical, cultural, technological, economic, natural and other factors. For example: In the architectural design, because of the different environmental elements, ancient Roman architecture is completely different from ancient Chinese architecture of the same period; The evaluation of the pyramid must take into account the economic, technological and other environmental factors when it was built to show its greatness and surprise.

In interior furnishing design, in order to better adapt to the difference in climate, houses in cold areas and houses in hot areas will inevitably appear in different forms. In cold region such as Northern Europe, residential buildings like to use fur, wool knitted fabric, wood and other materials, install fireplaces, use double-layer windows with smaller size, and thick and closed walls (Figure 2-3). While in the Mediterranean area, where the climate is relatively hot, the houses are lighter and more open. Low-walled corridors (Figure 4) are often used in the architecture. In addition, they also like to use ceramic tiles and stone, weaving bamboo, gauzy fabric (Figure 5) and floor-to-ceiling glass windows.

Figure 2: Architecture in Iceland
Figure 3: Iceland Deplar Farm Hotel room

Figure 4: Architecture in Greece
Figure 5: Housing in Greece

3. Inspiration of linguistic semiotics to interior furnishing design methods

Different linguistic semiotics research directions will have different influences on the interior furnishing design. This research is based on the structural linguistic semiotics to explore the method of interior furnishing design. "Structuralism was developed in linguistics but was transferred, as we have seen, to numerous other fields" (Söderqvist, 2011; Andersen and Kaspersen (Eds.) 2000, P371). The theory gives priority to structuralism and contains several basic ideas: (i) The whole society is not as simple as material objects and events, but is composed of a symbol system, the essence of which is a structural system composed of an internal system and an external system. Linguistics is the foundation of architectural semiotics and design semiotics, and linguistics provides them with methodological support. (ii) For human behavior or product to have meaning, it must be placed in the system that makes this meaning possible. While the rule system determines human behavior and the meaning of products, it also creates various possibilities for the specific form. (iii) Anything or text has a corresponding structural system. According to this structural system, people can analyze and describe production mode of its form and meaning with limited logical premises. (Andersen and Kaspersen (Eds.) 2000)

4. Conclusion

It is not difficult to find that interior furnishing design and language have comparability in formal elements, structural elements, meaning elements and environmental elements. As a result, since the 20th century, with the continuous development of social life and the update of thinking concepts, the connotation and extension of interior furnishing design from the perspective of linguistic semiotics are constantly being enriched and expanded. Linguistic semiotic perspective of interior furnishing design has become a powerful tool for people to

understand interior furnishing design. At the same time, it has become an important means for designers to express their creative thinking.

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