Цзэхао ИНЬ

ТЕОРЕТИЗАЦИЯ МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНОГО НАРРАТИВНОГО ЗАТУХАНИЯ В ЦИФРОВЫХ МЕДИА: ПОДХОД СЕМИОТИЧЕСКОЙ ИНТЕНСИВНОСТИ (SIA) И ФРЕЙМВОРК ВОССТАНОВЛЕНИЯ СЛОЖНОСТИ (CRF)

В статье представлена теоретическая модель для исследования «эпистемологии отсутствия» в современных платформенных медиа. Интегрируя подход семиотической интенсивности (SIA) и фреймворк восстановления сложности (CRF), автор концептуализирует скрытые механизмы нарративного затухания, выходящие за рамки явной текстовой пейорации. Исследование предлагает строгую методологическую триаду — от диагностической деконструкции синтаксической и визуальной редукции до контрафактического восстановления агентности. Предложенная модель расширяет границы критического дискурс-анализа и социальной семиотики в эпоху алгоритмической медиатизации.

Ключевые слова: *мультимодальный дискурс-анализ, подход семиотической интенсивности, фреймворк восстановления сложности, затухание, эпистемология отсутствия, цифровая медиатизация.*

Zehao YIN

THEORIZING MULTIMODAL NARRATIVE ATTENUATION IN DIGITAL MEDIA: THE SEMIOTIC INTENSITY APPROACH (SIA) AND THE COMPLEXITY RECOVERY FRAMEWORK (CRF)

The paper establishes an advanced theoretical framework for interrogating the "epistemology of absence" in contemporary platformized news discourse. By synthesizing the Semiotic Intensity Approach (SIA) with the Complexity-Recovery Framework (CRF), the study conceptualizes implicit mechanisms of narrative attenuation that transcend overt textual hostility. It formulates a rigorous triadic methodology spanning diagnostic deconstruction of syntactic and visual dilution to counterfactual agency restoration. The proposed model expands the methodological frontiers of Critical Discourse Analysis and social semiotics within algorithmically mediated communication environments.

Key words: *Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Semiotic Intensity Approach, Complexity-Recovery Framework, narrative attenuation, epistemology of absence, algorithmic mediation.*

Introduction: The Epistemology of Absence in Digital Media Ecosystems. Contemporary mass media discourse operates within an increasingly platformized, high-velocity digital ecology. In this environment, journalistic outputs are systematically

conditioned by algorithmic distribution networks, automated editorial workflows, and compressed reader attention economies [van Dijck, Poell, de Waal 2018: 49]. Within this infrastructural transformation, the operationalization of institutional ideology has undergone a fundamental structural shift. Classical traditions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have historically prioritized the identification of explicit lexical hostility, contentious metaphors, and overt ideological polarization [Fairclough 2003: 32; van Dijk 2008: 85]. In these foundational frameworks, discursive dominance is predominantly understood as an act of presence: the strategic deployment of marked, highly salient linguistic tokens designed to steer audience cognition toward preferred sociopolitical interpretations.

However, modern institutional communication within digital journalism frequently achieves narrative containment not through overt rhetorical excess, but through structural erasure — an ideological mechanism conceptualized here as the "epistemology of absence." Dominant institutional narratives often sustain asymmetrical power relations by systematically omitting linguistic agency, attenuating cross-modal communicative vitality, and sanitizing systemic socio-structural tensions [Machin 2013: 348]. Such omissions are rarely accidental editorial anomalies; rather, they reflect institutionalized routines of discursive suppression that evade traditional content-analytic scrutiny precisely because they generate no immediate surface friction.

Traditional social semiotics and visual discourse analytical models [Kress, van Leeuwen 2006: 42] provide robust instruments for deconstructing overt visual configurations, such as gaze vectoring, salience hierarchies, and framing boundaries. Yet they remain largely tethered to an interpretive paradigm that presupposes an active human consciousness capable of recognizing what has been withheld from the semiotic field. When a visual composition systematically excises the facial vitality of social actors [van Leeuwen 2008: 137], or when verbal news reporting decouples human consequences from institutional causes, orthodox frameworks struggle to quantify the precise ideological magnitude of that absence.

To address this methodological void, this paper advances an integrated theoretical architecture comprising two core models: the Semiotic Intensity Approach (SIA) and the Complexity-Recovery Framework (CRF). Together, these models re-theorize narrative omission not as a passive null-state, but as an active, measurable semiotic process of attenuation, providing a systematic paradigm for auditing modern digital media discourse.

Theoretical Foundations: The Semiotic Intensity Approach (SIA). The foundational premise of the Semiotic Intensity Approach (SIA) is that communicative artifacts do not convey meaning through static lexical or pictorial inventories alone; rather, they project meaning across a dynamic continuum of communicative force termed semiotic intensity [Yin 2026: 154]. Drawing upon Systemic Functional Linguistics and social semiotic modulation theories [Halliday, Matthiessen 2014: 211; Martin, White 2005: 137], SIA posits that any multimodal proposition possesses an intrinsic energetic state. This state fluctuates between two dialectical poles: semiotic amplification and semiotic attenuation.

Semiotic amplification designates the multimodal intensification of communicative salience, affective resonance, and agency transparency. In the verbal register, amplification manifests through high-commitment epistemic modalities, active agentive syntax, transitive attribution of institutional actions, and dense evaluative lexis [Martin, White 2005: 140]. In the visual register, it corresponds to saturated chromatic palettes, proximal social distance, frontal perspective vectors, and unobstructed gaze engagements that demand immediate cognitive identification from the viewer [Kress, van Leeuwen 2006: 118].

Conversely, semiotic attenuation constitutes the deliberate dampening, dilution, or systematic subtraction of communicative intensity. Attenuation does not denote communicative failure or unintentional informational poverty. Instead, it functions as an ideological masking strategy wherein controversial socio-political realities are drained of immediate human vitality and structural accountability. Attenuation operates across two primary semiotic layers:

First, syntactic attenuation in verbal structures relies upon systematic agent-erasing configurations. Foremost among these are truncated passive clauses where relational transitivity is maintained but the logical agent is deleted—and heavy nominalizations that transmute dynamic social conflicts into inert, abstract entities [Fowler 1991: 78; Fairclough 2003: 143]. By decoupling causal agents from downstream real-world consequences, syntactic attenuation permits digital news platforms to report contentious geopolitical crises or institutional failures without explicitly attributing historical culpability, enacting what van Leeuwen defines as the radical suppression of social actors [van Leeuwen 2008: 28].

Second, visual attenuation operates through spatial and chromatic suppression. Unlike overt visual demonization, visual attenuation removes the semiotic resources required for empathetic human connection. This is

realized through chromatic desaturation — rendering scenes in cold, monotone palettes that systematically lower the experiential modality of the representation [Kress, van Leeuwen 2002: 351] — as well as the systematic omission of human focalizers and the geometric obstruction of the social gaze [van Leeuwen 2008: 137].

Crucially, SIA conceptualizes semiotic intensity as an inherently relational, cross-modal dynamic. In contemporary multimodal texts, attenuation rarely occurs uniformly across all communicative modes simultaneously. Rather, platformized media frequently exploit cross-semiotic decoupling: a configuration wherein the verbal text maintains a superficial facade of objective neutrality, while the co-present visual artifact subtly enacts profound narrative erasure, or vice versa. The core methodological objective of SIA is therefore to calibrate this baseline of intensity, rendering visible the systematic attenuation that constitutes the zero-degree mythology of contemporary journalism [Barthes 1968: 76].

The Complexity-Recovery Framework (CRF): Methodological Architecture. While the Semiotic Intensity Approach provides theoretical taxonomy for diagnosing narrative attenuation, the Complexity-Recovery Framework (CRF) supplies the operational methodology for evaluating and recovering that omitted communicative substance. Traditional discourse analysis has historically remained descriptive and diagnostic: it identifies an ideological bias within an empirical corpus, critiques its social implications, and concludes without demonstrating what a non-distorted communicative alternative would look like in practice. CRF overcomes this descriptive limitation by establishing a counterfactual, restorative paradigm.

The conceptual architecture of CRF rests on the premise that ideological flattening can only be comprehensively measured by calculating the distance between an observed, attenuated discourse and its fully restored, counterfactual equivalent. The framework operates across three theoretically interlocked phases:

1. Structural Deconstructive Diagnostics. In the diagnostic phase, the analyst systematically audits communicative vacancies rather than merely tallying explicit keywords. In the verbal stratum, this involves identifying every instance of truncated transitivity, deleted institutional agency, and abstract circumstantial substitution [Fowler 1991: 82]. In the visual stratum, it entails mapping the spatial absence of human agency, geometric gaze avoidance, and contextual erasure [Kress, van Leeuwen 2006: 124]. This phase isolates the exact syntactic and visual nodes where communicative complexity has been institutionally extracted.

2. Relational and Institutional Contextualization. The second phase interrogates the socio-institutional infrastructure that motivates such attenuation. Discursive omission does not occur in an institutional vacuum. Editorial formats, corporate ownership models, geopolitical alignments, and platform distribution constraints act as structural filters that enforce specific parameters of semiotic intensity [van Dijck, Poell, de Waal 2018: 54]. In this stage, the identified sites of semiotic attenuation are mapped against institutional variables, demonstrating how institutional imperatives systematically incentivize news producers to flatten controversial events into sanitizing, attenuated narrative templates.

3. Counterfactual Restoration and Evaluative Delta Calibration. The defining innovation of the CRF lies in its restorative phase. Once the points of attenuation are identified, the analyst constructs a counterfactual, complexity-recovered twin of the original multimodal artifact. This restorative procedure does not invent extraneous semantic information; rather, it restores the precise syntactic agents and visual vitality that were institutionally excised.

Syntactically, truncated passives are converted into active transitivity configurations, re-anchoring institutional actors to their respective actions and structural outcomes [Fairclough 2003: 143]. Visually, attenuated compositions are restored by recovering the visual agency, contextual framing, and chromatic warmth that were previously stripped. By pairing the natural, attenuated artifact with its synthetic, complexity-recovered counterpart, CRF establishes a controlled evaluative setting. This comparison allows researchers to calibrate what is defined as the Communicative Ideological Delta: the substantive shift in cognitive perception, institutional trust, and affective engagement that occurs when structural complexity is reinstated into the public discourse.

Algorithmic Mediation and Downstream Epistemic Injustice. The integration of SIA and CRF possesses urgent theoretical relevance for analyzing the contemporary digital media environment, specifically regarding the rise of automated information processing and generative artificial intelligence. Mass media outputs are no longer consumed exclusively by human audiences; they serve as the massive, foundational training corpora for digital indexing systems, algorithmic recommenders, and large multimodal language models [van Dijck, Poell, de Waal 2018: 62].

When platformized news media systematically employ narrative attenuation — erasing human actors, de-linking causal chains, and visually flattening sociopolitical crises — they do not merely misinform human readers

in the immediate temporal present. They fundamentally distort the downstream epistemic architecture of the digital public sphere. Automated curation algorithms and language models internalize these structurally attenuated corpora as normative representations of objective reality.

Consequently, the "epistemology of absence" becomes re-inscribed into algorithmic logic. When queried by end-users, automated systems reproduce these flattened ideological models, treating institutional agency deletion not as a strategic rhetorical omission, but as an empirical fact. This dynamic induces a profound state of epistemic injustice [Fricker 2007: 44], wherein marginalized social actors and structural institutional responsibilities are twice erased: first by editorial news curation, and subsequently by the automated systems trained upon those attenuated representations.

The Complexity-Recovery Framework functions within this context as a critical auditing instrument. By deploying counterfactual recovery techniques, researchers can systematically audit digital media infrastructures and algorithmic engines, exposing the hidden ideological shifts that occur when structural complexity is flattened versus when it is restored. This approach transforms multimodal discourse analysis from a retrospective commentary into an active, predictive auditing paradigm capable of holding digital media infrastructures accountable to principles of communicative justice.

Conclusion. The evolution of modern mass media discourse demands an equivalent evolution in the conceptual and methodological apparatus of applied linguistics and social semiotics. As news media systems increasingly substitute explicit rhetorical hostility with sophisticated, platform-mediated techniques of narrative attenuation, critical scholarship can no longer rely solely on paradigms that analyze visible, present linguistic signs.

By formalizing the Semiotic Intensity Approach (SIA) and operationalizing the Complexity-Recovery Framework (CRF), this study provides a comprehensive theoretical framework tailored to the demands of contemporary media analysis. SIA provides the analytical vocabulary needed to capture the delicate gradations of communicative energy across verbal syntax and visual composition, reframing narrative omission as an intentional, ideological act of attenuation. Simultaneously, CRF supplies the methodological pathway for moving beyond static critique, utilizing counterfactual restoration to demonstrate the profound perceptual consequences of structural omission.

Importantly, this theoretical synthesis respects the multi-layered nature of contemporary communication without reducing discourse to isolated

variables. It opens fertile new directions for interdisciplinary inquiry bridging functional linguistics, visual social semiotics, critical media studies, and digital communications pedagogy, offering an essential analytical compass for navigating the complex discursive currents of our digital age.

References:

Barthes R. Writing Degree Zero / R. Barthes; trans. by A. Lavers, C. Smith. – New York: Hill and Wang, 1968. – 111 p.

Fairclough, N. Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research / N. Fairclough. – London: Routledge, 2003. – 288 p.

Fowler R. Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press / R. Fowler. – London: Routledge, 1991. – 254 p.

Fricker M. Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing / M. Fricker. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. – 188 p.

Halliday M.A.K., Matthiessen C.M.I.M. Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar / M.A.K. Halliday, C.M.I.M. Matthiessen. – 4th ed. – London: Routledge, 2014. – 808 p.

Kress G., van Leeuwen T. Colour as a semiotic mode: notes for a grammar of colour / G. Kress, T. van Leeuwen // Visual Communication. – 2002. – Vol. 1, No. 3. – P. 343–368.

Kress G., van Leeuwen T. Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design / G. Kress, T. van Leeuwen. – 2nd ed. – London: Routledge, 2006. – 291 p.

Machin D. What is multimodal critical discourse analysis? / D. Machin // Critical Discourse Studies. – 2013. – Vol. 10, No. 4. – P. 347–355.

Martin J.R., White P.R.R. The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English / J.R. Martin, P.R.R. White. – London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. – 278 p.

van Dijk T.A. Discourse and Power / T.A. van Dijk. – Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. – 308 p.

van Dijck J., Poell T., de Waal M. The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World / J. van Dijck, T. Poell, M. de Waal. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. – 226 p.

van Leeuwen T. Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis / T. van Leeuwen. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. – 185 p.

Yin Z. The Semiotic Intensity Approach: A Scoping Review of Amplification and Attenuation Mechanisms in Multimodal Media Discourse / Z. Yin // Terra Linguistica. – 2026. – Vol. 17, No. 2. – P. 152–168.

ИНЬ Цзэхао (YIN Zehao) – аспирант Аспирантской школа по филологическим наукам, НИУ «Высшая школа экономики» (г. Нижний Новгород).

Научный руководитель – *БАЛАКИНА Юлия Владимировна*, PhD, доцент, профессор департамента теоретической и прикладной лингвистики, НИУ «Высшая школа экономики» (г. Нижний Новгород).