



Analyzing Rasa Teaching Persian to Non-Persian Speakers Video Series from a Social Semiotic Perspective

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Extended Abstract:

In the language teaching and learning context, with the increase in communicative language teaching theories worldwide, the use of video as an audio-visual material has proliferated (Bal-Gezegin, 2014). Nowadays, many publishers produce language learning videos tailored specifically for students in a foreign language program to accompany and complete textbooks. Videos are multimodal because they rely on various semiotic modes or sources (language, gesture, visual imagery, movement, color, music, sounds, and so on). Videos can act as powerful elements in creating learners' knowledge of the real world (Katchen, 2002, as cited Bal-Gezegin, 2014). Despite the abundance of research on images (e.g., Elmiana, 2019; Roohani & Saeidfar, 2013, Tahririan & Sadri, 2013, to name but a few), research on other kinds of visual materials such as videos has received scant attention. Considering the possible effects of videos on constructing learners' views and their psychological effects on the mind of learners, this study aims to analyze the elements of the Rasa Persian teaching video series (hence, RPTVS) created for non-Iranian Persian language learners from a social semiotic perspective. Accordingly, the research questions which guided this study are (1) What is the function of visual aspects in RPTVS?, (2) In what way do the visual aspects of RPTVS support interaction between learners and represented participants? To answer the research questions, three Rasa videos were randomly selected and analyzed based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) three-fold metafunction of visual grammar. The materials selected for analysis in this study were the language teaching videos which

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accompany the Rasa series, for teaching Persian to non-Persian speakers, authored by Shirmohammdi and published in Iran by Al-Mustafa International University in 2012. Al-Mustafa University, established to promote and advance Persian language-learning worldwide for non-Persian speakers, is an international academic, Islamic, and Howzawi Institute in Qom, Iran. RPTVS comes in soft copy featuring 21 units on the whole with each unit accompanying one or two videos related to the particular topic of that unit. It should be mentioned here that the Fundamental level has been chosen because examination of all the levels was beyond the scope of this study and more importantly, the Rasa series is just at the elementary level. The details of the qualitatively analyzed videos were described separately based on the components of visual grammar, namely representational, interactional, and compositional meanings. In response to the first research question, i.e., the function of visual aspects in RPTVS, the findings of the study showed that the visual elements of RPTVS had a naturalistic and humanistic trend. In other words, RPTVS represents the participants in familiar and factual ways. Moreover, all human characters were adults, which might show that the videos were designed for adult users. Regarding the settings and locations, RPTVS portrays common objects which were familiar to students/learners; however, the selection of objects and locations seem somewhat outdated and outstripped by the Iranian lifestyle at present. The represented objects (e.g., clock, Television sets, sofas, tables and many more) are portrayed in ways that could hardly associate with the current life-ways of the Iranian people. Therefore, RPTVS did not show any indications of recent technological improvements in current Iranian society. The findings were in line with Tahririan and Sadri's (2013) findings in which Iranian high school old textbooks used outdated portrayal of objects, overdramatized national identity with poor modality and used grayscale printing. In response to the second research question which was to investigate whether the visual aspects of RPTVS support interaction between learners and represented participants, the results indicate that in the videos of the RPTVS, the medium shot is used more frequently. In this fashion, it can be concluded that the language learners are supposed to keep a personal relationship with the participants as much as possible. The most common contact in videos is the gaze of represented participants toward each other, which shows that represented participants are communicating and encouraging the learners to communicate. Moreover, the results show all visual elements form a demand video through their gaze. In terms of contextualization, the study showed that all videos contained background, except few scenes with a blank background. However, the videos represented real-life activities, which is in line with Ahmadi et al.'s (2020) study of Persian learning textbooks in which the images contained real-life activities to introduce Iranian social life at the national level. Thus, the analysis of the videos

based on contextualization modality indicates that they represent authentic meaning in real-life settings. The results of this study suggest that locally developed materials for language teaching, be it teaching English to Iranian learners or Persian to international students, share a lot of similarities in transmitting language and cultural norms to learners, which distinguish it from international publications such as Touchstone or Interchange series. Specifically, Iranian locally developed materials display substantial commonality in terms of culture load. The major implication of this finding is that to enhance the efficacy of the content, instructors need to raise international learners' cognizance of the intricacies, customs, traditions, and values in the Persian culture which make it unique and different in its own right.

Keywords: Visual Grammar, Social Semiotics, Rasa Video Series, Teaching Persian to Non-Persian Speakers

1. Introduction

In the language teaching and learning context, with the increase in communicative language teaching theories worldwide, the use of video as an audio-visual material has proliferated (Bal-Gezegin, 2014). Nowadays, many publishers produce language learning videos tailored specifically for students in a foreign language program to accompany and complete textbooks. Videos are multimodal because they rely on various semiotic modes or sources (language, gesture, visual imagery, movement, color, music, sounds, and so on). Videos can act as powerful elements in creating learners' knowledge of the real world (Katchen, 2002, as cited Bal-Gezegin, 2014). The locations, circumstances, and represented characters depicted by visual materials in language learning, encourage learners "to know what the real world can look like, and provide students with opportunities to cultivate their understanding of the target language, culture, and worldview" (Mendoza & Reese, 2001, cited in Elmiana, 2019, p.2). Thus, as stated by Tahririan and Sadri (2013), the ways visual materials "portray people in the target society and depict their lifestyles, physical features, communicative manners, and cultural behaviors directly affect learners' judgment and foster specific impressions" (p. 139), and may have a significant instructional role in language learning.

Despite the abundance of research on images (e.g., Elmiana, 2019; Roohani & Saeidfar, 2013, Tahririan & Sadri, 2013, to name but a few), to the best of the researchers' knowledge, research on other kinds of visual materials such as videos has received scant attention. Therefore, the focus of this study is on visual aspects of language teaching videos. In other words, pedagogical videos are rarely analyzed from a social semiotic point of view. These videos have implicit messages about target language people, their culture, attitude, and customs not directly imposed by the curriculum to the learners. They are usually disseminated without the learner even being aware of their exposure to such messages in the form of what Skelton (1997) referred to as a 'hidden curriculum'. The purpose of such hidden curricula, according to Tin (2006), is to "socialize students to a particular view of the world whether learners or teachers are made aware of it or not" (p. 132).

To date, as of writing this paper, there is a dearth of studies on social semiotic aspects of videos that accompany language learning textbooks. Considering the possible effects of videos on constructing learners' views and their psychological effects on the mind of learners, this study aims to analyze the elements of the Rasa Persian teaching video series (hence, RPTVS) created for non-Iranian Persian language learners from a social semiotic perspective. Accordingly, the research questions which guided this study are as follows:

1. What is the function of visual aspects in RPTVS?
2. In what way do the visual aspects of RPTVS support interaction between learners and represented participants?

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1. Social Semiotics

Social semiotics, inspired by the Paris Social Semiotics in the 1960s and 1970s and originated in the ideas of Saussure and other linguists, has flourished with Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and eventually has been influenced by critical discourse analysis (hence, CDA). In his book entitled *Introducing Social Semiotics*, Van Leeuwen (2005, p. xi) states that

Just as in linguistics, the focus changed from the "sentence" to the "text" and its "context", and from "grammar" to "discourse", so in social semiotics, the focus changed from "sign" to the way people use semiotic "resources" both to produce communicative artifacts and events, and to interpret them—which is also a form of semiotic production—in the context of special social situations and practices

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996/2006) maintain that sign-making is a complex representation of particular objects or beings evolved from cultural, social, historical, psychological, and contextual influences on the text producer. In other words, text producers employ language and other means of significations to talk over power and ideology from their own point of view. Social semioticians examine those representations for their meaning rather than the sign itself. This suggests that social semiotics employs critical discourse analysis' assumptions with the study of ideology and power relations in the seemingly neutral discourses of institutions (Anthonissen 2003). However, unlike most of CDA studies whose focus has been on texts and talk, social semioticians examine ideology in both linguistic and non-linguistic modes of texts. This study adopts the social semiotic approach to the analysis of the discourse of power and ideology in RPTVS. This is expected to realize how these video series represent Iranian culture and ideology through the use of semiotic resources to non-Iranian Persian language learners.

2.2. Visual Grammar

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996/2006) developed a framework of social semiotics of visual grammar with three metafunctions of representational, interpersonal and compositional meaning which corresponded to Halliday's (1978) meta-function model of ideational, interpersonal, and textual modes, respectively. The representational mode involves the description of the participants, inanimate or animate, the activities represented by the participants,

and the settings within which the representation is developed. The interactive mode is built by the viewer from the way the visual image addresses its potential viewers in interactional terms. The compositional mode focuses on how visual elements are located in the visual text.

The purpose of social semiotics is to compare semiotic modes in different genres such as music, videos, images, etc. to explore how they are similar or different. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest a grammar of visual design to provide a social-based approach of visual representation for describing and analyzing how visual resources as grammatical systems of communication are combined to transmit explicit or implicit meaning. 'Grammar' implies that the researcher tries to explore the meaning of the visual elements, similar to how grammarians analyze how words are combined into a coherent and meaningful whole (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In other words, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) stated "Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so our visual 'grammar' will describe how depicted elements – people, places and things – combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension" (p.1). Similarly, Tahririan and Sadri (2013, p.140) declare that "the grammar of visual design has a critical role in reading the images because it reveals implicit regularities and invisible patterns that govern the visual representation; and hence, helps viewers interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image".

2.3. Experimental Research on Language Teaching Materials

Numerous studies have investigated how power and ideology are incorporated into the images/videos produced for language learners. For example, Tahririan and Sadri (2013) analyzed 296 selected images in Iranian high school EFL course books based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) model of visual grammar. The findings showed that the images did not exploit visual images adequately to meet the pedagogical needs of the learners. Poor modality, plain graphic design, and outdated portrayal of current Iranian lifestyle and society were among the flaws of the textbooks' images. In a similar study, Tajeddin and Enayat (2010) investigated gender representation and stereotyping in the images of three international and local ELT textbooks: *New Headway*, *Top-Notch*, and *Iran Language Institute (ILI) English Textbook* based on Kress and Van Leeuwen' (2006) model. Their findings showed that, in general, gender bias exists in visual elements of these ELT textbooks, representing men as "more active, competent, socially important, breadwinners, and powerful. In contrast, women appeared as less active and more reactive, objects to be scrutinized, objects of desire, bread takers, and socially less powerful" (Tajeddin & Enayati, 2010, p. 51 & 52).

In a multimodal analysis, Farnia and Gerami (2019) investigated Touchstone textbooks series adopting Halliday's (1978) systemic functional

linguistics, and Kress and van Lueween's (2006) social semiotics model. Analyses of four reading comprehension passages along with the accompany pictures indicated high functionality of the visuals as well as a humanistic trend in the Touchstone series. Moreover, results of the verbal analysis revealed that Touchstone reading comprehension texts describe the real world experiences and actions.

Babaii, Atai, and Kafshgarsouteh (2016) analyzed the representation of verbal and visual various races/ethnicities in four award-winning English-learning software packages, namely, *Rosetta Stone*, *Tell Me More*, *Fairyland*, and *Your Baby Can Read* based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model. The results showed that there was a bias towards race/ethnicity in images rather than texts. More specifically, *Fairyland* and *Your Baby Can Read*, aimed at children, were not explicitly biased towards any race, whereas *Tell Me More* and *Rosetta Stone*, designed for adults, showed implicit or explicit patterns of bias towards different races. In a recent study, Derakhshan (2021) analyzed Iranian national EFL textbook, *Vision 1*, from the perspectives of Iranian teachers and students, adopting a semiotic approach. The findings showed that Iranian EFL textbooks were almost barren with a discussion on cultural awareness and connotations. The paper suggests a model for evaluating cultural representations in textbooks.

Visual analysis in Persian language teaching materials has not been accorded much priority. In fact, a limited number of investigations is conducted to address Persian language teaching and learning materials. For instance, Ebadi and EbrahimiMarjal (2015) studied the type and extent of gender bias in the second and third volumes of a series of Persian language teaching books entitled 'Learn Persian'. In this study, these books, which are taught to non-Persian language learners in the intermediate level, are analyzed in terms of gender in the four categories of 'Representation', 'Priority in Phrase', 'Priority in Job', and 'Priority in Activity'. The results showed that gender representation is not equal and the number of women in the four categories under study is lower than expected and only their presence in traditional roles has been shown. In fact, the results highlighted the fact that the curriculum of Persian language education requires serious revision in terms of gender representation. Considering the related literature, the analysis of visual aspects of videos that accompanies language learning textbooks from the visual social semiotic perspective is a gap that demands more attention. It seems previous research has mostly focused on static images in textbooks rather than videos. The present study attempts to fill this gap as far as possible.

Ahmadi et al. (2020) investigated Persian university teaching textbooks authored by Moghddam based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics. The results showed a very low frequency of representational, interactive and textual meta-functions in the images of the Persian learning textbook. Moreover, gender was represented

equally in the textbook, and the illustrations attempted to present Iranian religious norms at national level to the non-Iranian students.

As seen in the literature, research on Persian language learning and teaching materials are rare, and to the researchers' best of knowledge, no research was found to study the Persian teaching videos to non-Persian language learners. This study addressed this gap by examining the function of the visual aspects of Rasa Persian language teaching video series to non-Persian language learners.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus of the Study

The materials selected for analysis in this study were the language teaching videos which accompany the Rasa series, for teaching Persian to non-Persian speakers, authored by Shirmohammdi and published in Iran by Al-Mustafa International University in 2012. Al-Mustafa University, established to promote and advance Persian language-learning worldwide for non-Persian speakers, is an international academic, Islamic, and Howzawi Institute in Qom, Iran. RPTVS comes in soft copy featuring 21 units on the whole with each unit accompanying one or two videos related to the particular topic of that unit. It should be mentioned here that the Fundamental level has been chosen because examination of all the levels was beyond the scope of this study and more importantly, the Rasa series is just at the elementary level.

Table 1

Duration of Selected Language Learning Videos

Videos	Topics	Duration of videos
Video1	Where? When?	00:02:17
Video2	Jobs	00:01:51
Video3	Adjectives	00:01:49
Total		00:12:50

3.2. Procedure of Data Collection & Data Analysis

The corpus for this study included three videos randomly selected from a series of 21 videos intended for foreign Persian language teaching. The visual elements of videos were analyzed based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) modes of visual grammar. The emphasis of the analysis was to unravel the producers' assumptions, motives, and intended consequences of employing visual elements in these videos.

The visual grammar was analyzed at representational, interactive, and compositional levels (see Table 2). As for the visual analysis at the representational level, the interactions and relations between the social actors, places, and things depicted in the pictures were examined. Regarding the visual analysis at the interactive level, the communication between the represented participants and the interactive participants (viewers) was investigated. In order to do this investigation, three factors were considered: distance, contact, and modality. As for the visual analysis at the compositional level, information value was examined. To assess the reliability and internal consistency of the coding, the coded videos were checked by another rater, and in case of disagreement, the coders met to discuss disagreement until agreement was reached. The results are described qualitatively in the results and discussion section.

Table 2*Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Model of Visual Grammar*

Mode	Category		
Representational	Participant	Human	Age Gender Sociocultural Portrayal
		Non-Human	
Interactive	Distance	Close-Up	
		Medium Shot	
		Long Shot	
	Perspective	Horizontal	Frontal / Oblique
Vertical		High /Low/ Eye-levelled	
Compositional	Modality	Color	Color(Saturation/Differentiation/ Modulation)
		Contextualization	
			Information Value
	Salience		

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The qualitative analyses of the three videos are presented in the following sections.

4.1.1 Topic: Where? When?

This video aims at teaching time and place. The video starts with two men, apparently friends, pumped to each other in the street and started a conversation with one of the men asking the other questions related to activities he had done the day before. The response referred to places such as the library

and home, time in the past (e.g., yesterday, last night, 4 o'clock, 8.30 pm), and activities such as watching TV, having dinner, and saying a prayer.

4.1.1.1. Representational Meaning.

In terms of representation meaning emerged from the video, two human participants are included depicting a humanistic trend in the type of presentation of the participant. In other words, the visuals represented a realistic image of learners' lives where humans' activities and social relations are the central themes. The video portrays common objects familiar to Persian learners: a place with tables and chairs forming the background context conventionally presenting a library.

With reference to bias and stereotypes, both participants were males and no female plays a role or is shown in the video, which may indicate domination and authority on the part of the male participants. In terms of visual appearance, one of the actors had a long beard and the other had stubble on his face. The clothes and haircuts are not modern and fashionable. The two actors are illustrated in accordance with religious and cultural norms of Iranian society at the national level. In other words, they are portrayed in full-covering attire in all the situations, either inside or outside their homes. In terms of facial expression, both men look serious with an impassive face, and twisted thick eyebrows. In this video, the scenes and settings the man involved with was portrayed to the viewer except having dinner with family members. Having dinner with family members requires the producer to show his children and wife which was skipped in the narration. This may represent the importance of the status of the family in traditional Iranian beliefs by not talking over details of what is happening inside the home to a non-related man.

4.1.1.2. Interactive Meaning.

The interactive means of visuals are the 'writing' of what is usually called 'non-verbal communication', a 'language' shared by producers and viewers alike. It entails two kinds of participants, represented participants such as people, places, and things depicted in visual modes, and interactive participants such as people who communicate through visual modes, including the producers and viewers of visuals (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The analysis of interactive meanings of visual resources focuses on aspects of distance, contact, and modality.

The **distance** that the represented participants in the visuals maintain from viewers imparts specific interactive meanings. The choice of distance can make the viewer feel close or far away from the represented participant. Distance of the visuals, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), includes close up which is to show the head and shoulders of the participant, medium

shot, cutting off the subject approximately at the waist. On the other hand, long shot frames show the full figure, with each of the cases transferring different meanings to the viewer and affecting the type of communication between the visual and the viewer.

In this video, the close-up shot is used more frequently focusing on the actor who is asking a question and then, focusing the other actor who is responding in order to enhance the feeling of involvement and the intimate connection between the visuals and the learners as the viewers. Through close-up shot, head and shoulders of the subjects can be observed in the image. The distance that, through the chosen shot, has been maintained between the viewers and the actors in the image suggest the feeling of involvement and intimate connection between the visuals and the learners as the viewers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), **contact** is the means through which the represented participants in the images connect with the interactive participants (viewers) out of the image to create an imaginary relationship. On the one hand, in an image the represented participants may make eye or gestures contact with the viewer; in this case, the represented participants 'demand' something from the viewer. On the other hand, in an image the represented participants may take their look away from the viewer, which means the represented participants 'offer' something to the viewers.

In this video, none of the represented actors look directly at the viewer, hence offering something to the viewer. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that in offer visuals, "the viewer is not object, but subject of the look and the represented participants is the object of the viewer's dispassionate scrutiny" (p. 119). As a result, in this video, viewers are invited to observe a conversation in which the represented participants can be 'as an item of information' or 'objects of contemplation' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

And finally, to show the level of video credibility, two **modality** markers of contextualization and representation were taken into account. One of the elements of naturalistic modality is concerned with the degree of contextualization of the represented participants. **Contextualization** included natural settings in the participants' backgrounds. In this video, when one of the actors is asked where he has been the day before and what he has been doing, the viewer learns about these places and activities through the actor's thinking back.

The first scene shows the library, conventionally familiar to the viewer, and the actor as the only person in the library may denote silence and a less crowded place one needs while studying. The next scene in response to the question was the same actor's house, furnished with a Persian carpet, a television on a TV table, and a sofa in the background context. However, in showing home, the selection of objects and locations seem somewhat outdated and outstripped by the Iranian lifestyle at the present time. The represented objects

(e.g., the clock, the TV set, sofas, tables and many more) are portrayed in ways that could hardly associate with the current life-ways of the Iranian people. Therefore, this video did not show any indications of recent technological improvements in current Iranian society, for example, computers, LCDs, cell phones, and the like. In fact, the kind of old-fashioned home appliances like the television set presented in this video is uncommon and out of the ordinary.

Representation as another naturalistic marker of the modality pertains to the abstraction or presentation of pictorial details. This video presented pictorial details such as the library and house with pictorial details, enabling the audience to see the details of the scene. None of the participants had eye contact or direct gaze at the viewer which was analyzed as 'offer'. Therefore, the two actors are represented in a way that their facial features are to some extent distinguishable.

4.1.1.3. Compositional Meaning.

One of the principles of compositional structure is information value. From among the categories of information value, the placement of elements, i.e., on the left or right, the top or bottom, is related to compositional meaning. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), this kind of placement can exactly play the role that in discourse analysis is distinguished by sequential information structure of 'Given' and 'New'. So, what is situated on the left side of the picture, similar to Given in language, is represented as something already known by the viewer and in this manner, assumed to be an agreed-upon point of departure for the message of the picture. On the other hand, what is situated on the right side of the picture, similar to New in language, represented as something unknown, and therefore demands special attention.

In this video, the man(A) who started the interaction by asking a question, stood on the right side of the picture and the man(B) who answered his question, stood on the left side of the picture. In this way, it can be said that the man(B) is represented as the Given, as a participant who is known by the viewers, and the man(A) as the New, someone who evokes the viewers' attention and directs their concentration towards himself. As mentioned before, the meaning assigned to the Given is something commonsensical and self-evident, and that of the New is problematic, contestable and, the information at issue. In this case, the man(A) provokes the viewers' thoughts and makes viewers get involved with his concerns and interests.

Dynamic discourse, however, is different from static images. As Baldry and Thibault (2006) point out, in progressive pictures, left and right structuring is not really helpful; the New information is construed by dynamically salient informational variants or transformations while the Given is constituted by informational invariants. Thus, in the promotional video, compositional meaning cannot be analyzed in the form of the static frame alone, as the images are

progressive and keep changing. Each shot is an inseparable unit of the scene to generate new information to construe visual meanings as a whole.

4.1.2. Topic: Jobs

The purpose of this video is to teach jobs in Persian. A narrator starts the video by introducing Mr. Azizi, who was sitting close to the school pool. Mr. Azizi approached his friend, Ahmad, and they started their conversation about Ahmad's brother's job, who was standing around photographing. The conversation continued with Ahmad's asking about Mr. Azizi's brother's (who was absent in the video) job. In the last scene, Ahmad sent his regard to Mr. Azizi's brother (implying Ahmad should have known his brother before but did not know his job), and then they said goodbye. The video ends by introducing some jobs in a monologue.

4.1.2.1. Representational Meaning.

The video included human participants depicting a humanistic trend in the type of presentation of the participant. The visuals represented a realistic image of learners' lives where humans' activities and social relations are the central themes. Regarding settings and locations, what make the background of the represented actors (i.e., all men) are trees as well as bricked walls of a big Theology School, namely, Madreseh. With regard to facial expression, both men smile at each other most of the time while talking, depicting a friendly atmosphere. The walls of this school are designed with tile paintings mostly used in mosques and shrines. In this video, only men play social roles even in introducing different jobs at the end of the video from sewing and cooking to medicine and sales. This may imply to the viewer that only men exist in the society and women do not have any active roles.

Regarding gender bias and stereotypes, men and women were represented unequally because both actors were males and did not show any female characters. At the end of the video, some jobs such as tailor, doctor, cloth sellers, etc., are introduced through a male character. The only women in this video are the customers in the cloth store whose back was to the viewers and wore Iranian traditional black headscarves (Chador). This video lacks any social communication between the two genders. It seems that the representation of gender in pictures follows a culture-based ideology in which social relationships between the two genders are forbidden.

Although the goal of this video was to teach jobs in Persian, the hidden curriculum served to legitimate, reproduce, and perpetuate the social practices that made job-related issues exclusively male-dominated in the Iranian society. These portrayals were not neutral. Iran is one of the countries in the world in which women are often not visible in the society for cultural and religious reasons.

Because of a traditional attitude that views men as the breadwinners of the family and discourages women from working outside the home, RPTVS does not feature women in occupational matters. We can see gender inequality in job-related issues. Representation of just men in the introduction of the different types of jobs is a reflection of gender inequality in the workplace.

4.1.2.2. Interactive Mode.

Interactive mode analysis, including distance, contact, and modality was carried out. Distance of the visuals, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), includes close up which is to show the head and shoulders of the participant, a medium shot, cutting off the subject approximately at the waist. This distance can symbolically mean that subjects can share their personal interests with viewers.

In terms of **contact**, in this video, none of the represented participants look at the viewer. Hence they offer something to the viewer. The represented participants are directed towards each other, demonstrating that they are doing a collaborative activity. This is, according to Baghermousavi and Nabifar (2015), known as one of the main aims of learning a foreign language, that is, learning how to communicate. This kind of gaze (towards each other) can persuade the learners to have conversations.

In terms of **modality**, two markers of contextualization and representation are taken into account. **Contextualization** of the represented participants, as a naturalistic marker of modality, has been appropriately deployed according to the place in which the conversation has been held. In this video, participants are in a theology school with a big pool at the edge of which Mr. Azizi was sitting and behind the participants were some brick and tiled wall buildings and trees which consequently make contextualization in this video natural.

Some men in this video had beards and moustaches and wore long trousers and long-sleeved shirts. This kind of outfit for men is in accordance with Islamic and Iranian gender-based ideology. As stated by van Leeuwen (2005), clothes are significant means through which people show their religion, occupation, values, and cultural beliefs. They also use the Arabic word (such as *Salaam Alaykom* and *Alhamdulillah*), which represents a special class of people, i.e., the religious. Representation in this video was high and pictorial details were represented. Details to specify the participants' location and activity were also high. Some details included landscapes, trees, benches, a pool, buildings behind the participant, suggesting that the school was most likely theology one.

4.1.2.3. Compositional Meaning.

In this video, there are two participants talking to each other: Mr. Azizi on the left side and Ahmad situated on the right side of the picture. They are looking at each other. Ahmad on the right was represented as 'new' information and Mr. Azizi was considered as 'given'.

4.1.3. Topic: Adjectives

The title of the videos was adjectives. The video starts with a narrator who introduces Ali. Ali was on a chair in the park looking at his family album when his friend approached him and sat beside him. His friend started asking about the people in the album. The conversation exchanges involve using adjectives to describe people's appearance. The persons introduced in the conversation was Ali's brother and his brother's two children.

4.1.3.1. Representational Meaning.

Regarding the type and frequency of the represented participants, this video included human participants and humans' activities and social relations are the central themes. Regarding settings and locations, the conversation takes place in a park (according to the narrator), though the bricked columns in the background looks like the garden of the theology school in other videos. The narrator introduced the two men as friends which can also be understood from their intimate conversation. However, the participants' facial expressions did not confirm it as both men had serious impassive faces which consequently made the modality of the video lower.

Both men are bearded. One of them was wearing a long-sleeve shirt and the other one a short-sleeve shirt, both with old-fashioned clothes and haircut. Other people shown in this video were some children, a girl and two boys. The girl was wearing an Iranian traditional long headscarf or chador in white color which is commonly used for prayer, and boys with short-sleeves. All these are in accordance with Iranian religious and cultural norms. In other words, they are portrayed in full-covering attire (females in hijab), and men have mustaches and beards.

Regarding gender bias and stereotypes, as with other analyzed videos of the RPTVS, men and women were represented unequally in the video because both participants were men and did not show any adult woman, which may imply a clear indication of domination and authority on the part of the male participants. Therefore, in RPTVS, men and women are rarely shown simultaneously in a scene and also cannot interact physically.

4.1.3.2. Interactive Meaning.

The analysis of the **distance** for this video suggested a medium shot more frequently, cutting off the subject approximately at the waist which implies

a far personal distance and social connection from viewers. This distance can symbolically mean that subjects can share their personal interests with viewers.

In terms of **contact**, none of the represented participants look at the viewer; thus, they offer something to the viewer. The represented participants are directed towards each other and sometimes the gaze of the represented participants is to the album that one of them is holding. This video conveys an atmosphere therein a natural conversation might happen.

In terms of **modality** analysis, contextualization of the represented participants, as a naturalistic marker of modality, has been appropriately deployed according to the place where the conversation has been held. In this video, participants are in a park; Bench, flowers, landscape, trees, etc., formed the background context presenting a park in a conventional way familiar to the viewer. **Representation** analysis revealed different dimensions. The details of the participant's appearance, face, feeling, and activity were high. The details of what they were doing were depicted clearly, for example, showing the pictures in the album to increase the modality.

4.1.3.3. Compositional Meaning.

In this video, there were two male participants sitting on a park bench: one man (Ali) on the left side of the picture, and another man on the right side. The man on the right was represented as 'new' information and Ali was considered as 'given'.

4.2. Discussion

In response to the first research question, i.e., the function of visual aspects in RPTVS, the findings of the study showed that the visual elements of RPTVS had a naturalistic and humanistic trend. In other words, RPTVS represents the participants in familiar and factual ways. Moreover, all human characters were adults, which might show that the videos were designed for adult users. Regarding the settings and locations, RPTVS portrays common objects which were familiar to students/learners; however, the selection of objects and locations seem somewhat outdated and outstripped by the Iranian lifestyle at present. The represented objects (e.g., clock, Television sets, sofas, tables and many more) are portrayed in ways that could hardly associate with the current life-ways of the Iranian people. Therefore, RPTVS did not show any indications of recent technological improvements in current Iranian society. The findings were in line with Tahririan and Sadri's (2013) findings in which Iranian high school old textbooks used outdated portrayal of objects, overdramatized national identity with poor modality and used grayscale printing.

Regarding gender bias and stereotypes, the results show that there is a considerable imbalanced distribution of females and males in the videos of

RPTVS. Gender bias and stereotypes were found in other studies analyzing Persian learning textbooks (Marefat & Marzban, 2014; Roohani & Heidari, 2012, Tajeddin & Enayat, 2010). These studies reported bias and gender stereotyping in Iranian high school old textbooks and the Iran Language Institute (ILI) textbooks.

In other words, men outnumbered women in terms of presence in these videos which is a clear indication of domination and authority on the part of male participants. This pattern of the inclusion of males and the exclusion of females was consistent throughout the content of the visual texts in videos of RPTVS. The underlying assumption that such exclusion may portray was that females did not have enough power to participate in the society and they were shown as being less popular in the society. The females' low visibility can be attributed to the video maker' ideology. The producers may consider women as unequal to men. They may suppose that women cannot play crucial roles in their society, due to their frail physical or psychological nature. Thus, the producers avoided depicting women as impressive personalities, excluded from mainstream society, and violated their human rights. What was of central importance for this section was that men constructed the significant characters in videos of RPTVS. It can be deduced that females' voices and perspectives are neither acknowledged and nor reflected in educational videos. This is in line with Ebadi and Ebrahimi Marjal' (2015) study who reported that in comparison with men, women were often less visible in the Persian language textbooks.

Rasa videos have tried to portray Iran's religious community, but ideologies such as male supremacy, sexism and women's marginalization shown in them are very traditional and have become more intangible in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The drastic change in society has rendered women active and significant members of it. In this way, the content of these videos fails to delineate a true and fair image of Iranian women to the learners. In RPTVS, religious discourse and practices are pretty evident due to the importance of religion in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

People look at religion from different perspectives and convey it in their discourse with their values and beliefs. In the Persian-speaking community of Iran, it is also an important part of people's lives and cultures. Indeed, one of the foundations of the Iranian nation's identity is religious identity. In addition to the importance of religion in the Persian-speaking culture, many Persian learners also study Persian with religious motivations and for religious studies in Iran. However, it is expected that materials for teaching Persian language and culture be designed in such a way as to not only reflect the cultural, social and political values of Iranian society, but also the thoughts, attitudes and lifestyles of Islamic Iran. In other words, Persian language education materials should mirror the present realities of modern Iran and refrain from representing any gender discrimination and biased gender views, because reflecting stereotyped beliefs in

the content of materials may lead to a different mentality in non-Persian contexts.

In modern Iran, as all individuals in society are equal and have equal rights to choose their roles in society, it is expected that women and men and their issues be balanced in the compilation of Persian language teaching materials and prevent the reflection of stereotyped and discriminatory beliefs in their content of materials. By revealing these indicators, we can prevent any bias in editing and compiling new Persian language teaching materials.

In recent decades, we can see that Iran's social system and values have improved over time. Due to the vast cultural and social developments that have taken place in Iran, women can participate in the society, in labor force, and gain more advanced education without any contradiction with their families or other cultural and religious issues. This opposes the gender stereotypes that attribute inferior characteristics to women and cause inequality and limitation in their daily lives. Although gender stereotypes still exist both in the minds of people and in social institutions in Iran, the intensity of gender stereotypes seems to be decreasing nowadays. RPTVS do not reflect many of the changes and improvement that Iran has experienced.

In RPTVS, men and women did not show up simultaneously in a scene, so they did not have any interaction with each other at all. The qualitative scanning of the videos revealed that all instances of individuals talking/walking with each other was limited to the male/male dyad. This is, again, in line with Islamic laws, customs, and traditions where men and women who are not Mahram under Islamic laws are not allowed to socialize together and being in a place together.

In terms of image appearance, in the RPTVS, all women wore Islamic hijab (all with chador). By depicting women dressed in hijab, videos were covertly indoctrinating the fact that women must be covered. There was no instance of displaying women dressed in other forms of garments in these videos. It is thus a necessity for both males and females to be dressed modestly. Not only are women represented in Islamic clothes, including long dresses and scarves, but also men were mostly represented in long-sleeved shirts and bearded. This can be due to the fact that although men are not required to cover their heads, in Islam, men should not reveal their bodies (Bullock, 2002). Hence, similar to women, there is no instance of men wearing short pants. This shows that religious beliefs largely shaped the content of the RPTVS through the frequent inclusion of contents that discussed religious-related issues. These findings are in line with other Ahmadi, et al.'s (2020) analyses of Persian learning textbooks where the Iranian dress code, even observed by international students, was depicted.

In response to the second research question which was to investigate whether the visual aspects of RPTVS support interaction between learners and represented participants, the results indicate that in the videos of the RPTVS, the medium shot is used more frequently. In this fashion, it can be concluded that the language learners are supposed to keep a personal relationship with the participants as much as possible. The most common contact in videos is the gaze of represented participants toward each other, which shows that represented participants are communicating and encouraging the learners to communicate. Moreover, the results show all visual elements form a demand video through their gaze. In terms of contextualization, the study showed that all videos contained background, except few scenes with a blank background. However, the videos represented real-life activities, which is in line with Ahmadi et al.'s (2020) study of Persian learning textbooks in which the images contained real-life activities to introduce Iranian social life at the national level. Thus, the analysis of the videos based on contextualization modality indicates that they represent authentic meaning in real-life settings.

The results of this study suggest that locally developed materials for language teaching, be it teaching English to Iranian learners or Persian to international students, share a lot of similarities in transmitting language and cultural norms to learners, which distinguish it from international publications such as Touchstone or Interchange series. Specifically, Iranian locally developed materials display substantial commonality in terms of culture load. The major implication of this finding is that to enhance the efficacy of the content, instructors need to raise international learners' cognizance of the intricacies, customs, traditions, and values in the Persian culture which make it unique and different in its own right.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study was carried out to find out the visual features of language learning videos of RPTVS. By and large, the findings confirmed that, at the representational level, the visual elements demonstrated the participants in factual and familiar ways. The topics are not odd and are familiar to the learners in a way that learners share previous experiences with them. Therefore, the language learning videos have communicative purposes and humanistic trends. The integration of visual elements and modes of meaning is logical and purposeful. The visual elements almost have a certain naturalistic trend that attracts the learners' attention and looks interesting.

The results showed that due to cultural differences, selecting the suitable types of videos that students can understand and communicate with is of high importance. The results of the study can help to make reasonable and persuasive decisions about material selection. The findings of this study can be beneficial

for foreign languages pedagogy administrators. Therefore, the findings might help make reasonable and scientific decisions to present materials that linguistically, communicatively, and culturally are proper for the students. As a result, the finding would help foreign language teachers and learners, material developers, and educational administration. The results of the present study raise awareness of gender positioning in the videos of RPTVS.

One of the imposed limitations of this study is that no interview was conducted in order to find out about the view of the teachers who are teaching or have taught these series. Various types of interviews can be conducted in order to more precisely allow for teachers' and learners' opinions about the series. The results expand the existing research in the area of foreign language teaching material selection and evaluation. However, in order to be able to make more sound judgments about the different visual characteristics of these videos, more research of this kind needs to be conducted. This study has been founded on the visual semiotic framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). As such, the results of the present study do not include other modes of communication. As a result, a discursive-semiotic study of foreign language teaching videos can be more comprehensive.

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تحلیل مجموعه فیلم‌های آموزشی زبان فارسی به غیر فارسی‌زبانان رسا از دیدگاه نشانه‌شناسی اجتماعی (پژوهشی)

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چکیده

هدف این تحقیق، تحلیل دقیق نشانه‌شناسی اجتماعی ویژگی‌های بصری مجموعه‌های ویدیویی رسا در آموزش زبان فارسی به غیرفارسی‌زبانان است. برای این منظور، سه فیلم رسا به طور تصادفی انتخاب شد و بر اساس کارکرد متغیر سه وجهی دستورزبان تصویری کرس و ون‌لووون (۲۰۰۶) مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت. جزئیات تجزیه و تحلیل بصری با توجه به معنای بازنمایی، کنش متقابل و ترکیب به طور جداگانه شرح داده شد. یافته‌های مربوط به حالت بازنمایی معنا نشان داد که عملکرد بیشتر تصاویر بصری بالا است و آنها با روندهای ارتباطی انسان‌گرایانه طراحی شده‌اند. با توجه به تعصبات جنسیتی و کلیشه‌ها، در فیلم‌های بررسی شده زنان کمترین حضور را داشتند. علاوه بر این، فیلم‌ها آداب و رسوم مذهبی جامعه ایران را برای زبان‌آموزان فارسی به تصویر می‌کشید. از نظر حالت‌های تعاملی معنایی، اکثر مجموعه‌های ویدیویی رسا از نوع متوسط بوده و این بدان معناست که زبان‌آموزان قرار است تا آنجا که ممکن است رابطه شخصی با شرکت‌کنندگان داشته باشند. علاوه بر این، نتایج تجزیه و تحلیل نشان داد که فیلم‌ها در محیط واقعی، معنای واقعی دارند. معمول‌ترین تماس در فیلم‌ها نگاه شرکت‌کنندگان نشان داده شده به یکدیگر است، که نشان می‌دهد آنها در حال برقراری ارتباط و تشویق فراگیران به برقراری ارتباط هستند. در حالت ترکیب، فیلم‌ها می‌توانند به زبان‌آموزان کمک کنند تا به طور مداوم با اطلاعات ارائه شده در فیلم ارتباط برقرار کنند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: دستورزبان بصری، نشانه‌شناسی اجتماعی، مجموعه ویدیویی رسا، آموزش زبان فارسی به غیر فارسی‌زبانان