Power of McDonald’s ‘Happy Meal’: Globalization of American Culture and Value

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Abstract: This paper aims at exploring and discussing how powerfully McDonald’s ‘Happy Meal’ contributes to globalization of American culture and value in ‘alliance’ with representation and hence ideology in the American animation industry. In particular, as a critical linguistic research, the paper focuses on investigating intertextual and ideological meaning constructions in American animation and McDonald’s promotional discourse for Happy Meal. The discussion will be mainly based on social semiotic analysis and intertextual/interdiscursive analysis of American animations and McDonald’s global Happy Meal promotional leaflets, focusing on construction of socio-cultural values and identities of America and McDonald’s.

Keywords: Ideology, Intertextuality, Happy Meal, McDonald’s, American Animations, Globalization, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Introduction

This paper aims at exploring how powerfully McDonald’s ‘Happy Meal’ contributes to globalization of American culture and value in alliance with representations and hence ideology in the American animation industry. In particular, as a critical linguistic research, the paper focuses on investigating intertextual and ideological meaning constructions in American animation and McDonald’s promotional discourse for Happy Meal, from Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. The discussion will be mainly based on social semiotic analysis and intertextual/interdiscursive analysis of American animations and McDonald’s global Happy Meal promotional leaflets, focusing on construction of socio-cultural values and identities of America and McDonald’s.

McDonald’s, as one of the leading multinational companies, has been a powerful symbol of American culture worldwide. Along with Coke and Disney, it has thrived as an entertainment-based fun-producing company by creating a fantasy of good and modern life (Watson, 1997; Kincheloe, 2002). In this regard, the study specifically considers McDonald’s Happy Meal as a powerful vehicle to convey American cultural values and lifestyles to the globe, contributing to American ‘cultural imperialism’ through this world’s popular entertainment-based menu.

Targeted to young customers, the Happy Meal is served with the choices of typical McDonald’s menu which include an entrée (e.g. ‘hamburger’, ‘cheeseburger’, ‘McFish’ or ‘Chicken McNuggets’), a side order (e.g. ‘French fries’ or ‘vegetable bag’), a beverage (e.g. soft drink, juice or milk) and a toy. In particular, McDonald’s global Happy Meal promotions ally with Hollywood studios (e.g. Walt Disney and DreamWorks), in which the toys feature

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1 Watson (1997: 5) defines as “a new form of exploitation that results from the export of popular culture from the United States, Japan, and Europe to other parts of the world.”
the characters from recently released American animations. Consequently, the Happy Meal has become one of the most successful children’s cultural icons on the globe, exemplifying how powerfully McDonald’s can contribute to creation of American culture worldwide. In this aspect, investigating the Happy Meal is meaningful, in revealing how the entrepreneurial ideologies contribute to globalization of American tastes and values.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective which emphasises social construction in meaning making (Fairclough, 1992), the study sees this American entertainment-based menu may propagandize ideologies of American cultural values and lifestyle worldwide. This can be seen to help McDonald’s capitalize the world as its global market and create its potential Americanized customers. Consequently, the study considers that the Happy Meal menu itself, which masks American capitalism, implicitly propagandizes American culture and values, and McDonald’s discourse in its promotional leaflets explicitly shows linguistic evidence of its American cultural imperialism triggered by its entrepreneurial ideologies.

Background of McDonald’s Glocalized Business Practices

McDonald’s as one of the most world-leading global brands has been pursuing ‘glocalized’ business practices. The term ‘Globalization’, which is linguistically hybridized between ‘globalization’ and ‘localization’, means “the creation of products or services for the global market by adapting them to local cultures” (Blatter, 2006: 358). In particular, in this local approach in the global market, McDonald’s mainly focuses on its menu options and sponsorship to sports programs. Through its 2006 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) report, McDonald’s provokes ‘A Global Commitment ... A Local Approach’ in relation to the menu choices, and ‘Thinking Globally’ and ‘Acting Locally’ in relation to the issue of physical exercises. Respecting local cultures and tastes out of America, McDonald’s has been developing a variety of local menu choices: for instance, ‘Chicken Maharaja Mac’ to replace ‘Big Mac’ with beef patties in India, ‘Beer’ in Germany, ‘Rice Burger’ which is between two glutinous rice patties replaced from common burger buns in Hong Kong, ‘Greek Mac’ which is made of patties wrapped in pita in Greece, and ‘Koroke Burger’ with mashed potato, cabbage and katsu sauce in Japan. Also, globally and locally promoting physical activities, McDonald’s has been in partnership with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as a global sponsor, and also in local sponsorship for a variety of local youth and family sports and other physical activity programs.

However, in spite of having developed those localized menus, McDonald’s still serves very limited menu options within its typical global menus for the Happy Meal, through the world. For instance, young customers worldwide, who purchase the Happy Meal, experience only the tastes of McDonald’s typical global menu items: main dishes (e.g. ‘Cheeseburger’, ‘Chicken McNuggets’, or ‘McFish’) with side dishes (e.g. ‘French fries’ or ‘Apple Dippers’) and drinks (e.g. ‘Coca Cola’ which is also one of globally powerful brands). More importantly, ordering Happy Meal in the restaurant, they are also provided with toys which feature the characters from globally released animations or films. In particular, in McDonald’s Global Happy Meal promotions, McDonald’s provides the toys which feature characters from recently released American animations, serving with McDonald’s typical global menu items. In this regard, the Happy Meal needs to be critically considered as global menu to contribute to globalization of American culture and tastes. Importantly, in this aspect, the study assumes
that the Happy Meal also could play the crucial educator’s role for kids during their critical learning period, to create them as potential Americanized global customers for the future.

**McDonald’s Global Happy Meal & Hollywood Studios**

Related to the Happy Meal promotions combined with toys and movies, McDonald’s has been criticized in that it promotes ‘junk food’ which may cause ill-health and hyperactivity in children, luring them with toys into the restaurants (London Greenpeace, 1985). In dealing with the criticisms, McDonald’s has been in alliance with other brands, such as Walt Disney and DreamWorks, to create its positive brand image from consumers (Schlosser, 2002). Consequently, McDonald’s Happy Meal is still one of the most powerful global menus among young kids, contributing to creation of American culture mania worldwide. The alliance has also brought benefit to Hollywood studios as well as McDonald’s. According to Schlosser (2002), linking with a fastfood company, Hollywood studios typically gain additional $25-45 million per film. Accordingly, interestingly, since McDonald’s started providing Happy Meal in 1976, it has become the largest toy distributor in the world (Barry, 2008).

For McDonald’s Happy Meal global promotions, Disney signed a ten-year global marketing agreement with McDonald’s, getting more benefit from the deal by gaining a steady source of marketing funds with greater control over the joint promotion (Schlosser, 2002). During the marketing agreement from 1997 to 2006, McDonald’s had promoted the Happy Meal with Disney animations, including ‘Hercules’ (1997), ‘Mulan’ (1998), ‘Tarzan’ (1999), ‘The Emperor’s New Groove’ (2000), ‘The Lost Empire’ (2001), ‘Lilo and Stitch’ (2002), ‘Brother Bear’ (2004), ‘Lion King 1½’ (2004), and ‘Car’ (2006). As there were growing concerns over an obesity epidemic from the public, Disney became worried that the alliance with McDonald’s would damage its family friendly image (Hickman, 2006). In 2006, McDonald’s and Disney ended the ten-year exclusive partnership. Then, McDonald’s started a two-year partnership with DreamWorks in 2007, launching its global Happy Meal promotion with ‘Shrek The Third’ in 2007, followed by the promotions with ‘Bee Movie’ (2007), ‘Kung Fu Panda’ (2008) and ‘Madagascar 2’ (2008). Unlike the ten-year exclusive partnership with Disney, in which McDonald’s was not allowed to depict any of Disney’s characters (Schlosser, 2001), McDonald’s has got better conditions in this two-year agreement with DreamWorks. It was allowed to contract with other studios and also to use the characters to create promotions connecting to its ‘Balanced, Active Lifestyles (BAL) program’, focusing on providing information on eating and exercise. Here, McDonald’s targeted not only to children but also to adults to appeal all age groups.

According to Artz (2002), Disney has served the role of America’s moral educator to children through its avuncular representation of animated features with family-based theme. The Happy Meal which is integrated by these two big brands is not just the menu served with a hamburger and a toy. Also, it may contribute to construction of America as a cultural guru among the young kids worldwide, providing them with education of American cultural values and tastes. Accordingly, the study needs to discuss how the Happy Meal helps to construct socio-cultural values and identities of America and McDonald’s, through cross-cultural semiotic analysis and intertextual discourse analysis in American animations and McDonald’s Happy Meal promotional leaflets. In particular, among the Hollywood studios,
the animations from Disney and DreamWorks are considered because they have been in the main partnership with McDonald’s Happy Meal promotions.

**Ideological Semiotic Construction in American Animation**

Based on semiotic analysis of American animations from Disney and DreamWorks, the discussion in this section focuses on how American culture and values are ideologically constructed, from the aspects of cross-cultural transformations and racial stereotype construction.

**Cross-cultural Transformation**

Mulan, a Chinese legendary warrior who disguised herself as a man for her father and fought for her country against the Huns, has become the most well-known Chinese woman since Disney’s animation ‘Mulan’ was released in 1998, due to Disney’s market power across the globe. In the *Ballad of Mulan* which is original Chinese version of Mulan made up of only around 400 Chinese characters, Mulan is viewed as a daughter to do her filial duty and as a courageous soldier to spread patriotism, which are among the traditional virtues in Chinese Confucian cultures (Liu & Zuo, 2007). However, according to Liu & Zuo (2007: 72), the shortness of the Chinese version could provide “sufficient room for Disney to exercise its imagination and transfigure a new image, which is tinted with American culture.” In fact, the Ballad of Mulan starts with depicting Mulan as a traditional Chinese woman who is weaving, in the first two lines: “Tsiek tsiek and again tsiek tsiek, Mulan weaves, facing the door” (Frankel, 1976). However, by Disney’s touch, the animation Mulan starts with Mulan’s disastrous appearance to the local matchmaker, depicting a free-spirited girl. This Chinese culture-specific story about the filial daughter became a story about a girl’s quest for her own selfhood as an individual, describing her as an independent, competent, intelligent and action-taking heroine (Liu, forthcoming). Here, in the animation, Mulan is characterised of individualism and feminism, which are the mainstream of American culture (Liu & Zuo, 2007; Liu, forthcoming).

Another Chinese culture-specific animation ‘Kung Fu Panda’ was produced by DreamWorks, and released in 2008. This is a story about a panda, called Po, in ancient China who becomes a martial-arts superhero by beating tiger warrior Tai Lung. The animation presents a variety of Chinese cultural elements – including kung fu, chopsticks, noodles, firecrackers, acupuncture, calligraphy, and Chinese distinctive landscape with architecture and nature. Also, the movie shows traditional Chinese philosophical background of ‘Taoism’ and ‘Buddhism’. For instance, Po proves himself as Dragon Worrier, and then takes the Dragon scroll which is the secret manual to limited power in Kung Fu. However, when Po opens the scroll, it is blank with only reflecting Po on its surface. Then, Po finds that there is no secret ingredient other than the warrior’s belief in himself. Here, this ‘blankness’ represents high level of understanding in ‘Taoism’ and ‘Buddhism’. However, in spite of all these Chinese-specific visual and philosophical presentations, according to van der Gallien (2009), the animation still presents American story and cultural value with American principle: ‘If you work hard, you can become anything you want. You may face obstacles along the way – No, you will face obstacles – but the only one able to stop is you.’ Also, it presents American way of social interactions, particularly regarding to the relationship between Shifu
and Po. Generally, in Chinese versions of kung fu movies, kung fu trainees show their respect to the Master in their behaviour and speaking, which reflects power differences in their relations. However, Shifu and Po show rather informality and egalitarianism in the relations, which is generally identified from the relationship for Americans (Naylor, 1998).

**Ideological Construction of Racial Stereotypes**

In investigating ideological construction of racial stereotypes, the study discusses in two aspects: visual images and language use, particularly considering Disney animations. According to Artz (2002), Disney creates simple and transparent visual images to construct social and cultural templates, preferring American social and cultural view. For example, in Lion King (1994), Scar and the hyenas who are the villains in the story are shaped thin, angular and disfigured with dark colour, while Mufasa who is the King of the Pride Lands is shaped smoothly muscular with bright colour. Similarly, in Aladdin (1992), Jafar, the villain in the story, is described as a dark man with a dark purpose, figured as a threateningly tall and highly-angular with large nose and Arabic-looking guy. On the contrary, Aladdin and Jasmine are drawn smoothly curved with light skin. Intertextually, this depiction encourages a reading of the characters as westerners rather than Arabic in spite of their dark hair and eyes.

Along with construction of the visual stereotype, stereotype construction in language use (e.g. voice and accent) is also found in Disney animation. For example, in Aladdin (1992), while Jafar who is the villain in the story speaks English with thick Arabic accent, Aladdin and Jasmine as protagonists are the only characters who speak English with American accent in the animation (Artz, 2002). Also, in Lion King (1992), Mufasa speaks English, using diction and accent of British nobility, but Scar and the hyenas act and speak like urban black and Latino American youth (Artz, 2002).

Importantly, Artz (2002) argues that those images created by Disney can be acquired as social templates for children to judge their future social interactions, introducing an example story in America, in which a group of young black people were talking near a shopping mall, and a white toddler heard their talking, and told his mother “Look, mom, hyenas!”. In this regard, the study sees that Disney and DreamWorks provide huge contribution to educate children as its potential Americanized global customers through constructing social and cultural templates which are ideologically rooted in American value.

**Intertextual Constructions in McDonald’s Discourse**

In the Happy Meal promotions, McDonald’s constructs intertextual relations to American animations, to attract more children to the restaurants. In particular, through the intertextual construction, McDonald’s may try not only to improve its own global images by creating new meanings of its business practices, but also to bridge American culture and lifestyle to its young customers worldwide through its Happy Meal promotions.

The study found that McDonald’s has developed its intertextually constructed promotional phrases, particularly, in relation to DreamWorks’ animations. As already mentioned above, unlikely to the contract with Disney, during the contract with DreamWorks, McDonald’s can make a contract with other studios and also create promotional depiction connecting to
DreamWorks animations. This may encourage McDonald’s to create intertextual meanings to (re)create its new images and identities in Happy Meal promotion.

**Intertextual Construction: ‘Go for Green’ (2007)**

McDonald’s intertextually created the phrase ‘Go for Green’ for promotion of Happy Meal with Shrek The Third in 2007.

*Example 1* > from McDonald’s leaflet for Happy Meal promotion with Shrek the Third

“Worldwide Promotion of DreamWorks Animation’s “Shrek The Third” Represents Evolution in McDonald’s Offerings for Kids and Families. The Golden Arches are going green for “Shrek The Third” as McDonald's launches one of its largest and most exciting promotions ever.”

In particular, from Example 1, from the expression ‘Evolution in McDonald’s offerings from Kids and Families’, the study assumes that McDonald’s may provide evolutionary menu items or events related to ‘Shrek The Third’ by saying ‘going green for “Shrek The Third”’ in the following sentence. Here, in terms of intertextuality, the word ‘green’ may create several images, responding to social voices around McDonald's business practices. There are some possible images McDonald’s want to create, as below:

1. *‘Green’ colour image:* As Shrek is a green ogre who came from green swamp, it may represent Shrek’s green colour image, for instance, using the green-coloured package for food with green-coloured Shrek toys.
2. *‘Fresh’ menu image:* McDonald’s has been criticized in relation to ‘obesity’, for instance, from the documentary film ‘Super Size Me’ which is directed and starred by Morgan Spurlock. In this regard, McDonald’s may intertextually connect the ‘Green’ to its meal with fresh ingredients (e.g. vegetables) to emphasize ‘no junk food’, to deal with the criticisms on its nutritional issues.
3. *‘Eco’ business image:* McDonald’s has been criticized in relation to its contribution to destroying the environment. For instance, in 2006, Greenpeace criticized its connection to deforestation of Amazon by purchasing soya grown from the Amazon area, through its two reports titled ‘WE’RE TRASHIN’ IT: How McDonald’s Is Eating Up the Amazon’ and ‘EATING UP THE AMAZON’. Then, McDonald’s immediately responded to them through its press release titled ‘Greenpeace Report’ in the U.K, in 2006. In this regard, in responding to the criticism, McDonald’s may intertextually create the image to contribute to conserving the environment.

In addition, according to Wigder (2007), ‘green’ conceptualizes what we leave for our children, such as ‘the future’, ‘legacy’, ‘inheritance’ and ‘sustainability’ as well as a sense of natural goodness, such as ‘goodness’, ‘purity’ and ‘fresh and clean’. Also, Schroeder (2006: 5) argues that “Images – including brand images, corporate images and websites – constitute much corporate communication about products, economic performance and corporate identity.” Hence, by approaching consumers with the ‘Go for Green’ phrase and green-coloured toys featuring Shrek, McDonald’s may try to visualize its images with inspiring its (new) corporate image and identity into customers.
Related to creating those possible images, McDonald’s describes ‘Go for Green’ message in detail in Example 2, as below:

Example 2> from McDonald’s leaflet for Happy Meal promotion with Shrek the Third

“In the United States, McDonald’s is celebrating the arrival of “Shrek the Third” with its “Go for Green” message. The campaign showcases a variety of food choices including Premium Salads, Premium Chicken Sandwiches, fun desserts and a Happy Meal featuring Chicken McNuggets® Made with White Meat, Apple Dippers (fresh, peeled apple slices with optional low-fat caramel dipping sauce), and low-fat white or chocolate Milk Jugs served in child-friendly containers with Shrek packaging to encourage consumption.”

McDonald’s mainly mentions about food choices in relation to ‘Go for Green’ message. Here, McDonald’s uses appraisal expressions (e.g. ‘premium’, ‘fun’ and ‘child-friendly’) in language choices, modifying and qualifying the menu items: for instance, ‘Premium’ salad, ‘Premium’ Chicken Sandwiches, ‘fun’ desserts, and ‘child-friendly’ containers. However, interestingly, the menus introduced in Example 2 were already added before this promotion was launched in 2007. For example, the ‘Premium Salad’ was introduced in 2003, ‘Premium Chicken Sandwiches’ was in 2005, and the Happy Meal menu option with Chicken McNuggets®, Apple Dippers and Milk Jugs was in 2006. That is, McDonald’s aims at creating the image of evolution to develop and provide better quality of food to customers through a ‘smoke screen’ with the ‘Go for Green’ message without adding any updated menus, by saying that “Worldwide Promotion of DreamWorks Animation’s “Shrek The Third” Represents Evolution in McDonald’s Offerings for Kids and Families” in Example 1 above.

Also, interestingly again, McDonald’s uses the expression ‘White Meat’ in ‘Chicken McNuggets ® Made with White Meat’. The expression ‘white meat’ is generally regarded as ‘meat such as chicken and pork which is pale in colour after it has been cooked’ (Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, 1994: 1665), contrasted with ‘red meat’ (e.g. beef and lamb). Furthermore, it is also regarded as ‘the pale-coloured meat from the breast, wings etc of a cooked chicken’ (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English - Online), contrasted to ‘dark meat’ which is the meat from the thigh and drumstick of chicken. Importantly, based on a decade-long US study, a high consumption of white meat lowers death risk from all causes including cancer, while red meat causes a higher risk of death (Sydney Morning Herald, March 25, 2009). Accordingly, recently, white meat is considered as a better choice for healthy or well-being diet than red meat is. In this regard, the expression ‘Made with White Meat’ qualifies ‘Chicken McNuggets ®’ in a subtle way, without any further description on which it specifically means – just cooked chicken, or only specific parts of chicken (e.g. breast and wings). Here, by choice of the words which are subtle in meaning, and have an intertextual ‘healthy’ message (i.e. ‘not red meant’), McDonald’s aims at an effect to make healthier or more nutritious image of ‘Chicken McNuggets ®’.

Through the analysis of McDonald’s discourse related to this ‘Go for Green’ message, the study found that ‘nothing’ is eventually related to ‘Evolution in McDonald’s offerings from Kids and Families’ which is mentioned in Example 1. Consequently, the study sees that McDonald’s may try to construct ‘green’ image by mainly using ‘words’, not by doing
some ‘real actions for good’. Accordingly, the study interprets that McDonald’s tries to re-construct its images and identities with visualising the ‘green’ colour which helps to conceptualize the sense of freshness and natural goodness from customers, to be perceived as a company with ‘Fresh’ and ‘Eco’ images.

**Intertextual Construction: ‘One minute to move it’ (2008)**

Compare to the Happy Meal promotions with other animations, in promoting with Madagascar 2, McDonald’s shows different patterns in meaning construction.

First of all, in this promotion, McDonald’s constructs physically active image by creating the physical program titled ‘One minute to move it’. The title of the program is intertextually created related to the animation Madagascar 2, as can be seen in Example 3.

In a scene of the animation, zoosters dance in a party with the background song ‘I like to move it’. Here the song with very simple rhythm is repeated mainly with ‘I like to move it move it’ and ‘physically fit’ in lyrics. The McDonald’s ‘One minute to move it’ program promotes the customers to move for one minute, which is designed to encourage kids to see what a difference a minute can make. Furthermore, based on the title ‘One minute to move it’, McDonald’s also created a variety of activity types and options to replace ‘move it’, as can be seen above in Example 4. In particular, in promoting the program, U.S. Olympic gold medal gymnast Shawn Johnson joined to the event, and jumped with kids in some restaurants in the U.S. in 2008.

As mentioned above in Section 5.1, McDonald’s has been criticized for its ‘junk food’ which causes obesity. To deal with the criticisms, McDonald’s developed ‘Balanced, Active Lifestyles’ program which emphasizes the importance of physical activity to reduce obesity rate. In this regard, ‘One minute to move it’ program also responds to the criticisms in relation to the obesity issue. However, as a fast food business company, McDonald’s provides only the customers who purchase the Happy Meal with the chance to join this physical activity program in the restaurants.

Secondly, in meaning construction through its promotional leaflet for the Happy Meal with Madagascar 2, McDonald’s shows different patterns of intertextual meaning construction, compare to the meaning construction in other promotions. Regarding to construction of agent role of McDonald’s from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) point of view (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Eggygs, 2004), generally, McDonald’s constructs itself as Actor² to per-

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² In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), ‘Actor’ is defined as ‘the constituent of the clause who does the deed or performs the action (Eggygs, 2004: 216).
form actions related to the promotions. For example, in the promotion with Shrek The Third, McDonald’s is constructed as Actor to perform to bring or offer the Happy Meal and Shrek to customers, as can be seen in Example 5 below. Here, customers are constructed as Beneficiary\(^3\) to be given or done related to the Happy Meal with Shrek by McDonald’s.

**Example 5** from McDonald’s leaflets from Happy Meal promotion for Shrek

1. McDONALD’S BRINGS THE JOY OF SHREK TO CUSTOMERS AROUND THE WORLD.
2. We’re committed to bringing our customers the best and most trusted properties around,
3. Beginning May 11, participating McDonald’s restaurants in the United States also will offer customers limited-edition Shrek Arch Cards featuring four beloved Shrek characters, as well as four unique collector’s glasses.

Also, in Example 6 on the Happy Meal promotion with Kung Fu Panda, McDonald’s is construed as Actor. Compare to the promotion with Shrek, McDonald’s shows a little different approach to customers. That is, McDonald’s as Actor more directly influences to the customers who are constructed as Goal\(^4\) in the leaflet, through creating and inspiring customers rather than bringing or offering to them.

**Example 6** from McDonald’s leaflets for Happy Meal promotion for Kung Fu Panda

1. McDonald’s launches DreamWorks’ “Kung Fu Panda” Global Happy Meal® Promotion to inspire Kids Around the World.
2. McDonald’s, DreamWorks and conservation International create Panda-mania by Kung Fu Panda party.

As mentioned above, in both promotions with Shrek 3 and Kung Fu Panda, McDonald’s is construed as Actor who performs action directly to customers, Beneficiary in Shrek 3 who is given by McDonald’s and Goal in Kung Fu Panda who is directly influenced by McDonald’s. However, in the promotion with Madagascar 2, McDonald’s shows a different agent role in relation to customers. Here, McDonald’s is mainly constructed as Initiator\(^5\) to encourage customers to move, in Example 7. Interestingly, in this promotion, customers are construed as Actor, initiated and encouraged by McDonald’s. More interestingly, in terms of intertextuality, the phrase ‘Take One Minute to Move It’, in 1) in Example 7, is construed with two meanings: for instance, customers are encouraged to take one minute and move it, or encouraged to buy the Happy Meal and get the chance to join the event ‘One Minute to Move It’. In this regard, in relation to the promotion with Madagascar 2, the study sees that McDonald’s takes two voices: a voice of nutritionists or public health and a voice of a marketing promoter with entrepreneurial ideology.

\(^3\) In SFL, ‘Beneficiary’ has two kinds: ‘a Recipient (the one to whom something is given), and a Client (the one for whom something is done)’ (Eggins, 2004: 220).

\(^4\) In SFL, ‘Goal’ is defined as the participant at whom the process is directed, to whom the action is extended. It is the participant treated in traditional grammar as the Direct Object. (Eggins, 2004: 216)

\(^5\) In SFL, ‘Initiator’ takes account of the executive role (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).
Example 7 > from McDonald’s leaflets for Happy Meal promotion with Madagascar 2

1. McDonald’s® Encourages Kids to Take One Minute to Move It.
2. McDonald’s will engage kids and families around the world with major family events in key markets; an interactive digital community for kids; specially designed, motion-activated Happy Meal toys; and in-restaurant display.
3. McDonald’s and the characters from DreamWorks’ “Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa” embark on a global campaign to encourage kids to take “One Minute to Move It,” at series of activities to inspire creativity and activity in kids and families, featured at select locations in the U.S. and around the world.

Discussion & Conclusion

Although there are many criticisms about McDonald’s, such as a documentary film ‘Super Size Me’ directed by Morgan Spurlock in 2004 and ‘Fast Food Nation’ written by Eric Schlosser (2002), McDonald’s still continues to thrive around the globe, representing American food culture. Based on the semiotic and intertextual discourse analysis above, the Happy Meal has contributed to globalization of American culture and value through its combining with American animations.

Discussing American animations from a cross-cultural aspect, Disney, in particular, has produced many animations which have been taken from world-famous classic folk tales or legendary stories from other countries, for example, ‘Hercules’, ‘Aladdin’, ‘Cinderella’, and ‘Mulan’. Through the animations, Disney cross-culturally reconstructs the characters in favour of American cultural values. The characters of protagonists and villains are generalized in terms of visual images and language use, constructing Disney-based social templates which may influence children’s global social interaction in the future world.

Also, discussing McDonald’s discourse in its Happy Meal promotional leaflets based on intertextual/interdiscursive semiotic and discourse analysis, McDonald’s tries to construct new images and identities and also its social relations with customers. First of all, through its global Happy Meal promotion, McDonald’s takes distinguishing features from the animation, and creates its main concept of the promotion by connecting the features into its discourse and products. Here, the distinguishing features are mainly decided to deal with the criticisms. For example, in McDonald’s Happy Meal with Shrek 3, the ‘green’ colour of Shrek is intertextually recreated as McDonald’s promotional phrase ‘Go for Green’. Here, the phrase, transferred to McDonald’s own voice with creating ‘fresh’ and ‘trustworthy’ images, responds to the voices of criticisms, such as ‘Super Size Me’ and ‘Greenpeace’. Also, in McDonald’s Happy Meal with ‘Madagascar 2’, McDonald’s ‘One minute to move it’ program is intertextually related to the animation’s OST, ‘I like to move it’, to create the voice of public health or Governments who promotes physical activities to the public.

In creating those images, from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) point of view, McDonald’s shows different grammatical choices related to the agent roles. In the promotion with Shrek 3, McDonald’s (Actor) is presumed to deliver the benefit of the Happy Meal with the animation to the customers (Beneficiary). In this ‘green’ promotion, intertextually responding to the criticisms, the customers are supposed to receive ‘green’ things (e.g. ‘fresh’ food or ‘green’ environment) rather than the things which represent the animation Shrek. Also, in the promotion with Madagascar 2, McDonald’s (Initiator) initiates the customers...
(Actor) to perform physical activities in the restaurants. That is, the customers are implicitly promoted to purchase the Happy Meal, in order to perform the physical activities in the restaurants. In this regard, from the linguistic evidence, the promotional phrases are set up as a kind of ‘smoke screen’, in order to create its social contribution images.

In conclusion, the study argues that purchasing Happy Meal does not mean just buying Happy Meal for fun. It also means that the children are unconsciously learning and experiencing American culture and value in their local McDonald’s restaurants, particularly, during their critical learning period. Consequently, the children will be grown up as potential Americanized global customers.

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