

China's National Image in Fighting COVID-19 in the Eyes of Foreign Correspondents and Foreign Medical Experts

MA Lingjie^[a]; LI Zhanfang^{[a],*}

^[a]School of Foreign languages, North China Electric Power University
Beijing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 4 July 2020; accepted 21 September 2020
Published online 26 November 2020

Abstract

This paper takes three foreign correspondents' field reports and three statements from foreign medical experts as data to construct China's national image in fighting COVID-19. First, their different attitudinal resources in frequency and ratio are analyzed. Secondly, using twelve example discourses, their attitudes are analyzed under the framework of Appraisal Theory. Analyses indicate that Judgement and Appreciation resources are the major resources in both kinds of discourses. Furthermore, foreign correspondents construct themselves as the neutral "teller" and "experiencer" of Chinese true and authentic situations, while foreign medical experts construct themselves as "appreciator" of Chinese government's measures. Findings show that in the eyes of foreign correspondents and foreign medical experts, Chinese government is always consistent to its promise of building a global community of shared future in fighting COVID-19.

Key words: China's national image, Appraisal Theory, COVID-19

Ma, L. J., & Li, Z. F. (2020). China's National Image in Fighting COVID-19 in the Eyes of Foreign Correspondents and Foreign Medical Experts. *Canadian Social Science*, 16(11), 33-38. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/11909>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11909>

1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, Wuhan became the epicenter of novel

coronavirus disease outbreak in China and aroused the widespread concern in the world. Large number of news about Chinese government's acts against virus were reported around the world. There have been mixed reviews and comments in the state media of many countries. Some officials in western countries are orchestrating some conspiracies to smear China out of various political aims. Sometimes, the media of those countries also play cheerleader, creating the mass panic. However, there are still favorable media coverage based on the interviews with some local foreign correspondents in Wuhan, statements from medical experts, etc. For instance, David Nabarro, WHO's special envoy on COVID-19, had a video interview with a BBC host in the BBC program "HARD talk" on 20th April. When the BBC host asked him whether WHO colluded and covered up of the beginning of COVID-19 in China. David directly answered: "absolutely not". As an expert representative, David Nabarro used the undoubted and affirmative tone to fight back that groundless question. His answer also verified what China's government has always stressed—Epidemic information must be reported in time and released in an open, transparent and truthful way. Discourse is the statement which is closest to the background and reality in that specific period, and the important component of the social life (Liu, 2012).

Identity not only contains the subject itself, but also is achieved and recognized by others' utterance and discourse (Alexander, 2000). Internally, Chinese people need to tell the good Chinese stories by ourselves so that COVID-19 pandemic crisis would be transformed to the opportunity of constructing the national identity, and China will further grow in tribulation and display it as a major nation and its sense of responsibility in building "a global community of shared future" (He, 2020). Externally, the national identity of China can also be constructed. The change of China's national image, from the Eastern Strongman to Sick Man of East Asia, then

to the Responsible Country, can also be substantiated by foreigner's public opinions pertinent to China during the COVID-19 pandemic, so that the challenge of pandemic crisis will be transformed to the opportunity of exerting Chinese influence toward the world guided by community of shared future for humankind (Gao, 2020).

Taking the interviews and statements of foreign medical experts and field reports of foreign correspondents toward Chinese acts against the virus as data, this paper aims to compare the difference of attitudinal resources between two types of discourses from global medical experts and foreign correspondents, and tries to explore what kind of China's national image will be constructed through discourses under the framework of Appraisal Theory.

2. APPRAISAL THEORY

Appraisal Theory explores attitudes and stances of human language in a systematic way. Appraisal Theory is defined as "the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of feelings involved and the way in which values are sourced and readers aligned" (Martin and Rose, 2003). Appraisal Theory identifies and evaluates the language resources in the specific text in order to uncover the ideological meanings behind language resources. As the figure suggests, Appraisal Theory is composed of three components: Engagement, Attitude, Graduation. Among the three dimensions of Appraisal Theory, attitude system takes up the most essential position.

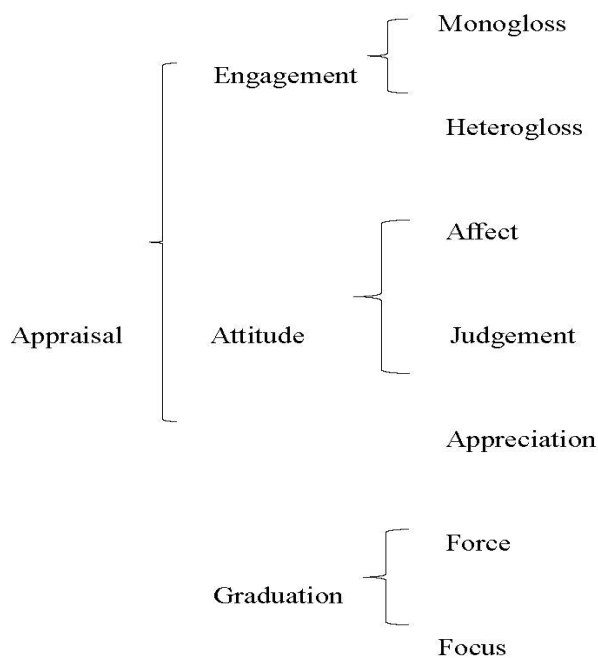


Figure 1
An overview of Appraisal System (Martin & Rose, 2014, p.59)

Within the framework of Appraisal Theory, Attitude has to do with evaluating things (Appreciation) and people's character and behavior (Judgement) and their feelings (Affect). Meanwhile, evaluation resources can be analyzed in terms of information grading and sources. On the one hand, the evaluations can be more or less intense, that is, they may be more or less amplified. On the other hand, the evaluation resources may be the writer's own or they may be attributed to some other sources. These are the three aspects of appraisal (attitudes, how they are amplified, and their sources). One of distinctive feature of Attitudes is that they are gradable according to how intense and strong our reactions to someone or something are. Graduation composes of Force and Focus, with *very* or *quite*, *kind of* or *absolute* as their respective indicators. For example, David Culver reported Wuhan situation after the resumption of work, saying that "yet you've got some mist and fog here in the air, which is *kind of* uncertainty, that's still surrounded many businesses and communities here *quite* frankly." *Kind of* can soften the meaning of uncertainty and *quite* can intensify the meaning of frankness. Engagement explains the sources of attitudes, in which monogloss regards the source of an attitude as the author's whereas heterogloss considers the source of an attitude as other than that of the writer. The foreign correspondents' reports and foreign experts' statements towards Chinese measures against the COVID-19 are considered as heterogloss.

As the core of Appraisal Theory, Attitude is divided into three aspects, including Affect (people's feelings), Judgement (people's character) and Appreciation (the value of things). Within Attitude, affect is the resource deployed for construing people's feelings and emotions towards the event in the text. People may have positive or negative opinions toward certain affair, so affect can be positive and negative. People can express their feelings directly, or we can infer how people are feeling, thus, affect can be expressed directly or implied. Judgement is deployed for moral evaluations of behaviors in relation to resources for assessing the people's behaviors in terms of social norms, such as law and morality. As with affect, judgement of people's character can be positive or negative, and they may be judged explicitly or implicitly. Appreciation construes the aesthetic quality of the text, which expresses people's evaluation. It represents the addresser's cognitive activity toward an object. It also has positive and negative dimension.

Wang (2001), one of the earliest Chinese researchers in this field, elaborates on the background knowledge of Appraisal Theory, framework and its operation, making the prediction on the level of word, clause, text genre, etc. He applies the Attitude Theory to the analysis of Chinese hard news and English hard news, finding that the device of Judgement is employed more than that of Affect and Appreciation (Wang, 2004). Hu (2009)

thinks that the identification of attitudinal resources is a classification process which is grounded by the language use in situation in reference to subjective consciousness and social value, and analysis for attitudinal resources needs to compare with relatively regular expressions. The speaker's attitudinal resources can be realized in the single wording, in and between the clauses, and in the physically social activity.

At the lexical level, adjectives and adverbs usually can directly and explicitly express the addresser's attitude toward the target things, compared with nouns and other parts of speech. Foreigners' affect, judgement, appreciation towards epidemic situation in China, no matter positive or negative, would be elaborated clearly by the adjectives and adverbs in the media texts. Therefore, focusing on the adjectives and adverbs, the foreigners' attitude towards China can be found directly by analyzing the foreigners' utterances and statements. The analysis of discourses in terms of Appraisal Theory in this paper would be more based on all the adjectives and adverbs in three field reports and three medical statements to construct national image of China.

3. DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

On 24th February 2020, Press Conference of WHO-China Joint Mission on COVID-19 was held in Beijing. Bruce Aylward, head of World Health Organization Experts Team released some statements about the results of field investigation in Wuhan. On 2nd May, Bai Yansong, a famous Chinese commentator, invited Richard Horton, the chief editor of prominent British medical journal *The Lancet*, to take an interview in the CCTV program "News 1+1". During the interview, Richard expressed his attitudes and views toward Chinese acts against virus. As British authoritative medical journal, *The Lancet* released a Correspondence, Statement in support of the scientists, public health professionals, and medical professionals of China combating COVID-19, in which 27 global scientists were united together to give the full support to all Chinese medics in the forefront.

In addition, David Culver, a CNN correspondent in China, did lots of field reports in Wuhan and Beijing since the Chinese outbreak of COVID-19. Two of his field reports are adopted in this paper. One report indicate that Wuhan resumes to work in April, and the other report introduces that Beijing is taking the nucleic acid testing measures for the mass in fight against COVID-19 outbreak in market, Xinfadi, in June. The last field report is selected from the *Reuters* report made by Branda Goha, who experienced the procedure of getting a nucleic acid test in Wuhan.

Considering the differences of statement made by medical experts and field report made by correspondents, this paper adopts attitudinal resource system of the Appraisal Theory to analyze the six discourses and focuses on two points: First, what is the frequency of attitudinal resource within the use of adjectives and adverbs and what is the proportion of each part of attitudinal resources in the medical experts' statements and the field reports? Secondly, what kind of national identity or image of China can be constructed through the two types of discourses?

3.1 Analysis of the Attitudinal Resources in General

Firstly, all the adjectives and adverbs are selected within three statements from the medical experts and three field reports, then some of them can be interpreted as the speakers' attitude, so they finally become the clear attitudinal resources. The figures demonstrate the frequency of attitudinal resources within the use of adjectives and adverbs from the perspective of field reports and experts' statements respectively.

Table 1
Attitudinal resources analysis in three field reports

Attitudinal resources	Positive sum	Negative sum	Object	Percentage
Affect	3	1	nucleic acid test	4(19.2%)
Judgement	9	0	nucleic acid test Wuhan reality	9(42.8%)
Appreciation	7	1	nucleic acid test Wuhan reality Chinese policy	8(38%)

Table 2
Attitudinal resources analysis in three statements from medical experts

Attitudinal resources	Positive sum	Negative sum	Object	Percentage
Affect	3	0	Chinese people medical stuff	3(8.3%)
Judgement	8	6	control measures conspiracy medical stuff	14(38.8%)
Appreciation	19	0	control measures	19(52.7%)

As Table 1 is shown, the total sum of attitudinal resources in these three field reports is 21 in general. In addition, there is the highest percentage of Judgement system in the field reports, accounting for 42.8%, and then followed by the Appreciation system, making up 38% in total. However, the least is Affect system, only 19.2%. In Table 2, the total number of attitudinal resources in three statements from medical experts is 36. More than half of

them are identified as the Appreciation system, taking up 52.7%. The Judgement system ranks the middle, and the least one is Affect system, the same as Figure 1.

3.2 Analysis of the Correspondents' Field Reports

In order to have a further explanation of correspondents' discourse, some examples are demonstrated below to see what kind of personal identity of correspondents can be constructed.

Example 1: This is where the staff will take off all of their protective equipment and then throw it away. It kept it in the separate area.

This discourse is from David Culver's field report in nucleic acid checkpoint of Beijing where he visited the dressing room of medical staff. According to Martin, "safe" is the affect state. David felt comfortable and safe in emotion facing with the sanitation of checkpoint. In addition, another word "separate" is praise for the sanitarian area, instead of dirty and chaotic scene, therefore, it is seen as judgement and compliment for nucleic acid checkpoint.

Example 2: The test, while not pleasant, took less than three seconds.

Branda Goh, the correspondent from *Reutor*, felt unpleasant when he got the nucleic acid test because the medical staff need to stick a swab down his throat, nearly triggering a gag. The feeling made him unpleasant, rather than anything else. Branda's feeling is negative, in accordance with the statement in Appraisal Theory that people can have positive and negative opinions towards certain affair.

Whether satisfied or not, David Culver and Branda express their first-hand and true feeling and emotion of state on the basis of what they saw and heard. They are the real "experiencer" of Chinese actual and authentic situation, further depicting a responsible government which spares no effort to provide all sanitary and health conditions for the citizens.

Example 3: One of the things that we struggle is the background of traffic. but that is a good sign that means it is clear that folks are trying back to life, trying to get back online with their business. And yet you've got some mist and fog here in the air, which is kind of uncertainty, that's still surrounded many businesses and communities here quite frankly.

This discourse is reported by David Culver when he was connecting with CNN host on the street of Wuhan on 22th April. This paragraph consists of three sentences, including two adjectives, and one adverbs, that is, "good" "clear" "frankly", and they are all attributed to judgement for the Wuhan real scene, indicating that Wuhan and its citizens are getting back on track after government's harsh lockdown in the past 76 days to control the spread of virus, besides, are risking a rebound if the government does not properly in all fields. Therefore, David frankly

said that he can perceive some uncertainty in many businesses and communities.

Based on this, David is the neutral "teller" of actual situation. His report indirectly illustrates that China, as a major responsible country, is keeping the serious measures in the areas of high risks within Wuhan, with the aim of protecting the health and safety of people.

Example 4: Coronavirus tests can be difficult to come by in many countries including in hard-hit parts of the United States and Britain, but in Wuhan, the Chinese epicenter of the pandemic, they are fast, cheap, and easy to get.

While comparing with the nucleic acid test in other countries, Branda appreciates Chinese nucleic acid test as "fast" in speed, "cheap" in price, "easy" in process. These three adjectives reveal that it is worthwhile to learn Chinese government's measures to receive nucleic acid test for public to the rest of the world. The appreciation directly affirm the China's government is responsible for every citizen in Wuhan.

3.3 Analysis of the Medical Experts' Statements

Apart from the correspondents' statement analysis, some more utterances made by medical experts will be shown to construct their identity.

Example 5: We have a lot to be thankful for Chinese doctors and scientists who have managed this pandemic.

Example 6: And when this disease finishes, hopefully, we will have a chance to thank the people in Wuhan for the role that they played in it

The first sentence is said by Horton when Bai Yansong is asking whether China should pay for the virus. The second sentence is said by Bruce when he was reporting his field investigation in Wuhan in the press conference. "Thankful" and "hopefully thank" are the affective expressions, both of them are conveying the gratitude and appreciation to Chinese and Wuhan people for what they have sacrificed, indirectly suggesting that China's government and its people would not shirk their responsibility to go through such special period.

Since the covid-19 sweeps the world, some politicians in western countries have been hyping up claims that China should be held accountable for the beginning of this pandemic, accusing China of paying for this virus spreading around the world. Richard Horton gave his comment facing with such conspiracy.

Example 7: It is the most unfortunate that people are blaming the countries, such as China, for the origin of this pandemic. It's not helpful and not true to blame a country in this way.

Example 8: And for international political leaders to be so critical, it's not only unfair, but also plainly incorrect and factually untrue.

"Unfortunate" "not true" "unfair" "incorrect" "untrue" are the judgement words which show Horton's

disagreement and disapproval on remarks of Chinese paying for the pandemic. “Unfair” means that Horton thinks that groundless accusation of the other countries should be reproached, and “not true” “incorrect” and “untrue” denote that it is not truthful and honest to accusing China of paying for the happening of this pandemic. Therefore, such behavior of calling the other countries to account, instead of finding the solution to control the virus spreading, should be condemned in the legal and moral sense.

Example 9: I think the innovation of shelter hospitals as one of the most important elements in your successful defeat of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Example 10: It was a very very important element of your successful response. And again an important lesson for other country to learn from.

Example 11: And I just thought it’s so important that we recognize that to the people of Wuhan, it is recognized, the world is in your debt.

Example 12: Many of us, many of the people here have suffered but the people of that city have gone through an extraordinary period and are still going through it. And it is so important that the world understand it at this point.

Horton adopts repeatedly “important” “successful” (Example 9 and 10) to describe and appreciate the critical role of building of makeshift hospital in the prevention and control of this pandemic. Building the makeshift hospital is the pioneering work and is proved to be worthwhile for other countries to learn that. Through the field investigation by the Chinese and foreign expert team, Bruce also employs “important” (Example 11 and 12) twice to appreciate the sacrifice of people of Wuhan and what they have and suffered and gone through for the whole world during the stressful period of January. It is conspicuous that Horton Richard and Bruce Aylward are the “appreciator” of Chinese governments’ prevention measures. Their words can directly tell that Chinese government’s responses, such as the establishment of makeshift hospital and decisive lockdown of Wuhan, against the virus are worth learning for other countries.

In the three field reports made by correspondents, judgement and appreciation are the major resources to express their attitudinal resources. David and Branda, they construct themselves as the “experiencer” and “teller” of Chinese actual and authentic situation by adopting the words such as “safe” “separate” “frankly” “fast” “cheap” and “easy”. In the three statements from the medical experts, appreciation is the substantial resource to convey the attitudinal resources. Horton Richard and Bruce Aylward and other medical experts construct themselves as the “appreciator” to express their great gratitude to people of Wuhan, especially

the medical stuff, by means of the words “thankful” “important” and “successful”.

CONCLUSION

Amid adjectives and adverbs analysis of three field reports and three medical statements on the basis of the Martin’s Appraisal Theory, this paper finds out that the judgement and appreciation resources are the major resources, apparently higher than affect resources, related to Chinese government’s measures against the epidemic from the perspective of foreign correspondents and medical experts. What’s more, medical experts use more judgement and appreciation resources in total number than correspondents and employ some negative judgement resources to oppose the western conspiracies that smear Chinese government.

These two extinct kinds of discourses can construct different identities, correspondents construct them as the neutral “teller” or “experiencer” of Chinese true and authentic situations, reflecting that Wuhan is getting back on track after the stressful period, and continues in the risk of uncertainty, and affirming that the Chinese government’s measure to get citizens receive nucleic acid test is effective and palatable. Medical experts construct them as the “appreciator” of Chinese government’s measures, and their statements explicitly construct China as a responsible government which prioritizes health safety of every citizen and takes the decisive and practicable measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

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