



## Appraisal System and News Discourse

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### Abstract

Appraisal is the core of all discourses and texts, and it can be divided into explicit and implicit evaluation. News media discourse usually employs linguistic elements and sentence patterns which seem neutral but imply attitudinal denotation to express the stances and positions of media groups. This study analyzes the forms of implicit evaluation from three aspects: lexical metaphor, ideational meaning and engagement resources, and explores its evaluation function in discourse. The evaluation resources in the discourse are very rich, and the probe into appraisal system in the news text is significant to understand the theme in the discourse. Therefore, the evaluation of news media language is worthy of further discussion by scholars at home and abroad.

**Key words:** Appraisal system; Lexical metaphor; Ideational meaning; Graduation; News text

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the application of appraisal (evaluation) theory into English discourse analysis has become a hot topic in linguistics. In the 1990s, Martin, the famous Australian linguist, proposed the Appraisal System Theory based on the interpersonal meaning of systematic functional linguistics. In 2005, Martin, together with

White, published *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* and developed the Appraisal System Theory. Evaluation theory focuses on “the various attitudes negotiated, the intensity of the emotions involved, and the various ways in which values are expressed and readers are allied” in a discourse. (Martin & White, 2005) In the framework of evaluation theory, evaluation resources are summarized into three systems: attitude, engagement and graduation, and the three systems can be divided into several sub-systems. News discourse is a kind of value-loaded text, which carries the ideological denotation and potentially affects readers’ outlook on the world as well as beliefs. There is a large amount of evaluation resources in English discourse that represent the thoughts, attitudes and viewpoints of the discourse organizers. Therefore, it is necessary to explore critical reading of news discourse, dig out its evaluation meaning and deeply understand the position of the media. It is reasonable to overcome the barriers in the interpretation of these various and complex academic terms in evaluation theory. Many terms in evaluation theory are complicated and obscure, mostly originating from the developments in ethics, law, aesthetics, etc., which may bring some challenges in discourse analysis. Therefore, more attention should be paid in practical operation, and the combination of the achievements between these different disciplines should be taken into consideration, so as to reduce some obstacles for the practical application of evaluation theory into the process of the research.

It is significant to distinctively select evaluation resources and to classify the attitudinal meanings in terms of the certain standards. Evaluation resources are instrumental to make the interpretation of the attitude and stance represented in the discourse, so how to construe evaluation resources has become a big concern in the subject research. Some evaluation language resources in the discourse obviously indicate attitudinal meaning, such as verbs, adjectives, adverbs, nouns, etc., but this

norm is not the sufficient condition to judge evaluation. The criterion to appreciate appraisal system is related to psychology, ethics, sociology, aesthetics and other disciplines, and this criterion for selecting linguistic inventory in the textual organization is based on the meaning of words. But in practice we often encounter the matters of judgment and appreciation of the attitude, which requires combination with the context as well as the rhythm.

## 2. DOMESTIC AND OVERSEAS RESEARCH

Evaluation theory focuses on evaluation resources in discourse, because discourse is permeated with the strong attitudinal and theoretical value. In the 1970s and 1980s, critical linguists represented by Hodge (1979), Kress (1979), Fowler (1986, 1991) and Iedema (1994) extensively applied the theoretical concept of evaluation in the analysis of news reports. White (2002) used the evaluation theory to distinguish the objectivity and subjectivity of news reports, and Martin (2004) analyzed how two commentaries on “9.11 Incident” employed evaluation to arouse readers’ sympathy. After the evaluation theory was introduced into China by Zhang Delu (1998) and Wang Zhenhua (2001), Chinese scholars have made a lot of achievements in the development and application of this theory (Li, 2001; Yang, 2003; Liu, 2007; Song, 2007; Miao, 2007; Zhang, 2007; Zhu, et al, 2009). At the same time, domestic linguists and scholars also published books and articles to introduce evaluation theory. Hu Zhuanglin, a distinguished linguist in China, made a brief introduction to systemic functional linguistics (Peking University Press, 2005). Liu Shizhu analyzed the structural potential of attitude (China social sciences press, 2007). Wang Tianhua, a Chinese scholar, published a book on the significance of English journalistic discourse evaluation -- *Implicit Evaluation and Dynamic Readership orientation of Journalistic Discourse* (Heilongjiang University Press, 2010). The research about application of evaluation theory has also paid great attention to news discourse, mainly involving hard news (Wang, 2004), editorials (Yang, 2001; Chen, 2007) and news editorials (Li, 2005, Liu & Han, 2004) discussed the implications of news discourse into foreign language teaching.

Although scholars at home and abroad have made a lot of achievements in the application of evaluation theory in discourse, the application of evaluation theory mostly appears in the lexico-grammatical level. The evaluation meaning is actually embodied at all levels of language, including words, clauses and the whole discourse. At present, the discussion on the evaluation meaning of clauses is still in the preliminary stage, and there is still no perfect approach to establish the semantic and grammatical framework of evaluation theory if taking the discourse into the consideration. The tenses of clause,

sentence patterns and grammatical structures in English texts also carry evaluative attitude and therefore need to be further studied. There are few studies on the generation and understanding mechanism of evaluative language from a cognitive perspective, and few researches on the pragmatic and communicative functions of English texts on evaluative meaning. In a word, the research scope of the evaluation meaning of English news discourse needs to be further expanded. This paper uses the evaluation theory developed under the framework of system function theory to analyze and study the evaluation resources and interpersonal meaning of English news discourse.

## 3. THE APPRAISAL SYSTEM THEORY

This paper will briefly introduce Martin’s theory of evaluation in detail, and explores the significance and value of the application of evaluation theory in the study of interpersonal meaning in the text. The evaluation system is the theory to represent attitudes and stance in language resources, including attitude, engagement and graduation. The attitude system can be subdivided into effect, judgment and appreciation. Affect involves people’s positive or negative feelings, judgment involves people’s attitude towards behavior, and appreciation is the evaluation of whether some phenomena are valuable or not. Attitude is the core system of evaluation. Generally speaking, Affect is emotional, judgment is ethical, and appreciation is aesthetic. The engagement system is used to study the source of attitude, which is divided into monogloss and heterogloss. The graduation system refers to the increase and deduction of attitude, which can be subdivided into force and focus.

Through the employment of Martin’s appraisal system theory to analyze English news discourse, we can further gain insight into the deep understanding of evaluation theory in terms of the attitudinal expression. And we also distinguish between attitude resources in terms of evaluation hierarchy, evaluation standard, the content of form and so on. This study mainly depends on the discourse analysis to study the “evaluation” in Chinese and American news reports, examines and explains the characteristics and differences in the use of evaluation resources in the media texts, so as to explore the decisive factors in the organization of structure and interpretation of cultural values.

## 4. THE DETAILED ANALYSIS

By analyzing the evaluative resources of English news discourse at home and abroad with the application of the evaluation theory, this paper can get the characteristics of the evaluative resources in the discourse and the characteristics of its attitudinal denotation. At the same time, it can further understand the position and attitude of the news media and the vested groups they represent and

influence the readers' views on the event. Therefore, the study of the evaluation meaning in news discourse becomes an important way to reveal the position of the media.

This paper analyzes English news discourse by means of evaluation theory, excavates the attitude and emotion of the organizer of news discourse, so as to better display and explore the communicative relationship between the organizer and the reader of news discourse, so as to in more detail elaborate the interpersonal meaning of news discourse. This paper will briefly introduce Martin's theory of evaluation in detail, and explores the significance and value of the application of evaluation theory in the study of interpersonal meaning in the text. The evaluation system is the theory to represent attitudes and stance in language resources, including attitude, engagement and graduation. The attitude system can be subdivided into effect, judgment and appreciation. Affect involves people's positive or negative feelings, judgment involves people's attitude towards behavior, and appreciation is the evaluation of whether some phenomena are valuable or not. Attitude is the core system of evaluation. Generally speaking, Affect is emotional, judgment is ethical, and appreciation is aesthetic. The engagement system is used to study the source of attitude, which is divided into monogloss and heterogloss. The graduation system refers to the increase and deduction of attitude, which can be subdivided into force and focus.

We conduct corpus establishment in this research, through words collation and preliminary analysis. The materials analyzed in this topic come from *China Daily* and the *Wall Street Journal*, which are the most representative and influential English newspapers in China and are famous for their detailed as well as seemingly fair report and columns. Based on the news corpus of two English newspapers in one year, the rich and detailed language evaluation resource reservoir is established. There are a lot of evaluative means in language, which are expressed at various levels. For example, unmarked stress and modality can be embodied in phonological level. The lexical items are representative of the evaluation in the lexical level. The typical or special sentence pattern can carry the evaluation meaning in grammatical layer, and in terms of the narrative angle and semantic coherence we also perceive the evaluation meaning in discourse layer.

The following examples of news discourse are analyzed. Firstly, based on the corpus of selected English news texts, this paper uses quantitative and qualitative analysis methods together with WordSmith software to analyze the distribution of evaluation resources in the discourse, and explore the function in the evaluation discourse. Secondly, through the comparison and analysis of the characteristics of different English discourse evaluation resources at home and abroad, it is concluded that the distribution of English evaluation resources in different domestic and foreign newspapers are sharply different from each other.

After the probe, investigation and research, it is proved that the research design of the subject is feasible, and the expected results are essentially achieved. Some achievements have been made in the evaluation research of news discourse. In general, by using Martin's evaluation theory to analyze English news discourse, we can further understand the significance of evaluation theory and its accuracy in dividing the attitudinal language points, strengthen the application of evaluation theory in actual discourse analysis, and provide a practical theoretical basis for the improvement and development of evaluation theory. Explicit evaluation resources in news discourse are easy to identify, while implicit evaluation resources are difficult to identify, which is the focus of this study. Specific research results are as follows:

#### 4.1 Application of Implicit Evaluation in News Discourse

The English version of *China Daily* is the most widely distributed English newspaper in China and has great social influence. By taking the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 as an example, the paper analyzes the manifestation of implicit evaluation and discusses its evaluation function based on relevant news reports. This paper analyzes the forms of implicit evaluation from three aspects: lexical metaphor, ideational meaning selection and engagement resources, and explores its evaluation function in discourse.

We can elicit the reader's cognitive attitude through the analogy between different conceptual fields in the text. The metaphorical language of analogical nature strengthens the emotional resonance of the appraised object. In the description of example (1) below, the use of lexical metaphor plays a role in stimulating evaluation:

(1) We were bought like a market. We was all lined up in white dresses, and they'd come round and pick you out like you was for sale.....I remember all we children being herded up, like a mob of cattle, and feeling the humiliation of being graded by the color of our skins for the government records.

Engagement is a common linguistic phenomenon, which quantifies things, qualities and behaviors to express the strength or weakness of attitude meaning. The semantic part of Engagement plays a key role in the evaluation system, which can not only express the conceptual meaning, but also have interpersonal functions such as emphasizing, mitigating and blurring attitude and judgment. The classification of conceptual meaning can be evaluated by flagging, which means that speakers use the differential emotional resources as signals to indicate the existence of attitudinal meaning to readers. Thousands of the Crimean people have left Ukraine for Russia and then joined Russia. Thousands of the Crimean people have left Ukraine for Russia.

(2) Thousands of [force: quantification] Russian military forces had got to Crimean in the establish to

Sunday's referendum, in which Russian-majority Crimea voted absolutely [force: intensification] to leave Ukraine and then join Russia.

Through these implicit expressions, news discourse can lead readers to accept its value orientation, construct the relationship between subjects, and achieve the purpose of interpersonal interaction. Therefore, it is very important to explore the attitude of news discourse writers and the stand and ideology of media groups to construct and interpret interpersonal social relations.

#### 4.2 Implicit Evaluation on the Macro Level of English News Discourse

This paper analyzes and explores the embodiment of implicit evaluation in news discourse from three aspects: the rhythm of evaluation, the interaction between explicit and implicit evaluation, and the historical and cultural background. It should be pointed out that the implicit evaluation in news discourse is reflected by the linguistic components with no obviously attitudinal markers, which is not easily detected at the linguistic level. Therefore, the recognition and interpretation of implicit evaluation resources in news discourse needs to be activated by means of context and relevant context.

The embodiment mode of interpersonal meaning in the discourse is prosodic, not only at the level of words and clauses, but also pervades the whole discourse. There are both explicit evaluation and implicit evaluation in the discourse, which are interwoven to express the attitude of the text author. Hood believes that both explicit and implicit evaluation can coexist in discourse, and implicit evaluation is generated by the radiation of explicit evaluation, while explicit evaluation is generated by the strengthening of implicit evaluation (White, 2004). In Example (3), the first sentence is the topic sentence of the paragraph (supertheme), which embodies the explicit evaluation function. At the same time, supertheme also has the function of predicting the information of subsequent discourse. The explicit evaluation of the topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph radiates to the rest of the text. Although the rest of the text has no explicit evaluation vocabulary, the content it represents is the semantic radiation of the topic sentence.

Russia's politic and affective ties to Crimea are essentially deep. The Kremlin regards Ukraine as significant to its trials to set up a Eurasian Committee modeled after the European Commission, the controlling arm of the EU. The great majority of Crimea's population is Russian in ethnicity and the Kremlin has leased on a basic port for a long time there for its ultra-important Black Sea Fleet. Tens of thousands of Russian military forces were already assigned to the peninsula. Russia also has deployed a big force opposite to Ukraine's eastern border, the industrial and economical heartland with a big Russian-speaking population.

Through the analysis of the English version of *China Daily* and *the Wall Street Journal*, we find that there are a large number of implicit evaluation resources in newspapers and periodicals, and these language resources

indirectly convey the attitudes and views of newspaper reporters. Therefore, exploring the implicit evaluation resources behind newspapers and periodicals in the teaching process is of certain guiding significance to cultivate students' critical reading ability and promote the teaching of elective reading courses of English newspapers and periodicals. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has been set up by the Wall Street Journal.

(4) According to the Xinhua News Agency in China, by March 30 [quantification: extent], 45 countries [quantification: number] had applied to be the founding members, of which 30 [quantification: number] had already been completely approved and others were still waiting for approval, including Australia.

By March 30, the countries worldwide are greatly eager to join the AIIB to continue and promote their own economic and social development. At the same time, it also indicates a positive influence on the actions taken by China to set up the AIIB.

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## 5. CONCLUSION

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Evaluation is the core of all discourses and texts, and it can be divided into explicit and implicit evaluation. News media discourse usually employs linguistic elements and sentence patterns which seem neutral but imply attitudinal denotation to express the stances and positions of media groups. This study analyzes the forms of implicit evaluation from three aspects: lexical metaphor, conceptual meaning selection and engagement resources, and explores its evaluation function in discourse. At the same time, it also analyzes and explores the embodiment of implicit evaluation in news discourse from three aspects: the evaluation rhythm, the interaction between explicit and implicit evaluation, and the historical and cultural background. The recognition and interpretation of implicit evaluation resources in news discourse needs to be activated by means of context, relevant context and cultural background knowledge. Finally, it is pointed out that the evaluation resources in the discourse are very rich, and the research angle and thinking of this paper will inevitably give priority to one or the other. Therefore, the evaluation of news media language is worthy of further discussion by scholars at home and abroad.

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