

Original Paper

Harmonious Discourse Analysis of Multimodal Eco-Speech in Western Contexts

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Abstract

*Based on the theory of harmonious discourse analysis and dynamic multimodal analysis, this paper studies an eco-speech video *Man vs Earth* in Western contexts. It is found that although harmonious discourse analysis is dependent on China's development context, it is not contextually limited and can be employed to analyze the relationship between human beings, society and nature in multimedia ecological discourse in Western contexts, proving the interpretation power of harmonic discourse analysis in non-Chinese contexts. This study broadens the application context scope of harmonious discourse analysis, enriches the methodology of harmonious discourse analysis, and provides a new perspective for the study of multimodal eco-discourse in Western countries.*

Keywords

Harmonious Discourse Analysis, Eco-Speech, Western Contexts

1. Introduction

Drawing on Stibbe's eco-philosophical view, Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and wisdom of traditional Chinese Confucianism and Taoism, harmonious discourse analysis is a localised and innovative attempt to analyse ecological discourse put forward by Huang Guowen (Zhao & Huang, 2017; Zhou, 2018). The ecological analysis of discourse is inevitably affected by the analyst's ecological philosophical outlook, which is the result of the individual's active and conscious choice and involves factors such as the analyst's ideology and value orientation (Huang & Chen, 2016; Lei & Miao, 2020). The Western non-anthropocentric ecological philosophical outlook is influenced by the traditional binary division, ignoring the legitimate interests of human beings, denying the subjectivity and uniqueness of human beings as "the spirit of all living things", and there are a number of paradoxes that are difficult to justify, which is essentially a kind of severance of the relationship between human

beings and nature (Liu & Li, 2019). Harmonious discourse analysis holds the ecological philosophical view of “the unity of nature and mankind”, focusing on the wholeness of ecological problems, which is translated into the research assumption of “human-orientedness” and three research principles in practical analysis, namely, “principle of conscience”, “principle of proximity”, “principle of constraint”, in pursuit of a harmonious symbiotic relationship between human beings, human beings and society, and human beings and nature (Zhao & Huang, 2017). Under the guidance of the harmonious ecological view, harmonious discourse analysis takes language as the main body of analysis, follows the meta-functional theory and holistic principle of Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics, and places discourse analysis in context from the three aspects of empirical function, interpersonal function and discourse function. At the same time, this view stresses the counteraction of language to society, i.e., while paying attention to the cultural and situational contexts of discourse, it also emphasises the social responsibility of linguists to “do something” (Huang, 2018).

Although Huang also pointed out that harmony discourse analysis is not contextually limited and can be “widely applied to ecological discourse analyses of different countries, regions, and ethnic groups at different stages of development and in different social contexts”, most of the existing related studies are set in Chinese social and cultural contexts, and there are only a few studies on non-Chinese contexts (Liu, 2023; Wu & Zhao, 2022; Zhao, 2022a; Zhao, 2022b). In addition, most of the current applications of harmonic discourse analysis focus on written discourse in speech modality, while little research pays attention to the high degree of multimodality and interactivity in online media in the new media era (Liu, 2019; Lu & Chang, 2019; Zeng & Huang, 2022; Zhao & Huang, 2021). In view of this, to broaden the application context and media scope of harmonious discourse analysis, this paper utilizes the harmonious philosophical view to do multimodal discourse analysis on a million-played English eco-speaking discourse *Man vs. Earth* on the social platform YouTube, demonstrating the interpretative power of harmonic discourse analysis in multimodal eco-discourse in non-Chinese contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ecological Discourse Analysis

Ecological discourse analysis originates from one of the two major paths of eco-linguistics, the Halliday mode, which is different from the Haugen one that pays attention to the living environment of linguistic associations, and the Halliday mode studies the relationship between language and ecology, with particular emphasis on the exertion of language on the environment (Halliday, 2004; Haugen, 1972). The ecological discourse analysis under Halliday mode has two analytical paths, i.e., analysis of ecological discourse and ecological analysis of discourse, which not only focuses on ecological discourse, but also pays attention to ecological or non-ecological meaning behind the non-ecological discourse at the same time, which greatly expands the scope of application of ecological discourse analysis (Alexander, & Stibbe, 2014). Stibbe (2015) improved the framework of eco-discourse analysis

and put forward the concept of the analyst's eco-philosophical outlook, advocating that the ideology behind the discourse be revealed through its linguistic characteristics, and classifying eco-discourse into beneficial, neutral and destructive discourses according to its compatibility with the analyst's eco-philosophical outlook. At the same time, the establishment of the concept of the analyst's eco-philosophical outlook provides analytical standards and principles for the "eco-analysis of discourse", which further completes the research approach under the Halliday mode (Stibbe, 2015, 2021). Eco-linguistics is interdisciplinary in nature, and the integration of more and more knowledge and research methods from other disciplines is one of its future trends (Haugen, 1972).

2.2 *Harmonious Discourse Analysis*

Based on Stibbe's ecological philosophical view and Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, Harmonious Discourse Analysis (HDA) is the localisation of eco-discourse analysis that is set in the Chinese cultural context (Huang & Zhao, 2017, 2021). The research goal of harmonious discourse analysis is to explore the relationship between language and ecology and the influence of language on ecology, and its ecological philosophical view is the pursuit of harmony between mankind and nature (Huang, 2017). Influenced by traditional Chinese Confucianism and Taoism, its view can be translated into the research assumption of "human-orientedness" and three research principles in practical analysis, namely the principle of conscience, the principle of proximity and the principle of constraint, in pursuit of the harmonious relationships between human beings, between humans and society, and between humans and nature (Haugen, 1972). The assumption of "human-orientedness" starts from and works for solving human problems, and the definition of human emphasizes its social and political, rather than biological nature. The "principle of conscience" refers to the internal standard for measuring right and wrong, good and evil, which originates from the heart and is naturally generated, and is the prerequisite for the "human-orientedness" assumption; the "principle of proximity" draws on Chinese Confucianism's idea of "difference and equality" to judge the relationship between human beings, human beings and society, and human beings and nature in different dimensions and levels from different bases, and it is a concrete manifestation of the "human-orientedness" assumption. The "principle of constraint" includes the limits of human behaviour at the individual, society and state levels, and is the constraint of the "human-orientedness" assumption (Huang, 2017; Zhao & Huang, G. 2017, 2021). In addition, harmonious discourse analysis stresses the social responsibility of linguists to "do something" to better both the ecological and non-ecological discourse (Halliday, 2004; Huang, 2017).

At present, domestic and international research on the theory of harmonious discourse analysis mainly focuses on the two aspects of theoretical promotion and empirical application. Harmonious discourse analysis at the theoretical level has a wide range of research, mostly gathered on its theoretical basis, research purpose, ecological concept, or the continuous improvement of the framework of harmonious discourse analysis (Huang & Zhao, 2017, 2021; Zou, 2021b). At the empirical level, harmonious

discourse analysis has been mainly applied to the ecological discourse analysis of different genres of written texts in the Chinese context. For example, based on functional discourse analysis, ecological discourse analysis and harmonious discourse analysis, Zeng and Huang (2022) constructed a framework for harmonious discourse analysis of nature literature under the perspective of historical context and carried out a harmonious discourse analysis of the transitive system of a chapter in a Chinese novel in the historical context (Zeng & Huang, 2022). Liu (2023) combined the theory of harmonious discourse analysis with corpus linguistics and research methods to construct a multidimensional analytical framework for corpus-assisted ecological discourse research and conducted a multidimensional analysis of the construction of the national image in the climate change news reports of *China Daily* (Liu, 2023).

Some scholars pointed out that although harmony discourse analysis is dependent on Chinese context, it is not contextually limited and can be “widely applied to ecological discourse analyses of different countries, regions, and ethnic groups at different stages of development and in different social contexts” (Huang, 2017; Zhao & Huang, 2017). However, existing related studies are mostly set in Chinese social and cultural contexts, and seldom take a look at non-Chinese contexts. In addition, the discourse types analysed in existing studies are relatively limited to traditional written text discourse, and multimedia discourse in this new media era deserves more attention (Liu, 2019; Zhang, Huang, Li, & Bao, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). Therefore, it is necessary to expand the context and media scope of the application of the harmonious discourse analysis.

3. Research Methodology

This study draws on Zhang Delu’s multimodal discourse analysis framework, which considers not only verbal modalities as well as modalities of non-verbal bodily features such as eyes, facial expressions, body postures, etc., but also modalities of non-verbal non-physical features that are realised by the new media technology, which contains scene set-ups, sound effects, prints, and so on (Zhang, 2009).

The tool chosen for this study is Elan 6.3, which is mainly used to transcribe the multimodal corpus of the selected speech videos and to annotate and count the image, subtitle, music and sound effect information. The multimodal harmony discourse was analysed by firstly analysing the verbal and non-verbal non-physical modes separately, following the order of quantitative analysis followed by qualitative analysis, and then exploring the synergistic relationship between the modes. This study adopts the research methods of combining quantitative and qualitative, macro and micro, to obtain the overall structure of the discourse and at the same time to analyse specific examples, in order to explore how the verbal and non-verbal non-physical modes work together to build harmonious discourse meaning.

4. Corpus Selection

The corpus selected for this study is the ecological keynote speech video *Man vs Earth* released by Prince ea, which has over six million views on the YouTube website. *Man vs Earth* is 4 minutes 06 seconds long with English subtitles and is divided into four parts: introduction, development, climax and conclusion. The introductory part describes the insignificance of human beings compared to the earth, the developmental part accuses human beings of causing damage to nature and other living things, the climax elaborates on the inseparable relationship between human beings and nature, and the ending part expresses the call for human beings to protect the earth from now on.

5. Verbal Resources Distribution Analysis

The main modality of the whole speech is verbal modality, and this study focuses on the transitivity system and modality resources contained in speech modality, and the experience and interpersonal meaning constructed by them, respectively. Under the guidance of the harmonious ecological perspective, the quantitative and qualitative analyses of material process resources and affective resources are used to determine the ecological discourse types of the clauses in which they are embedded.

5.1 Transitivity System Analysis

As a semantic system, the system of materiality realises the expression of the meaning of experience in the real world (including the inner world) through the selection of the process, the role of participants and the role of the environment (Halliday, 2004). Halliday (1994) classified human experience processes into six categories, namely, material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioural and existential processes. In this paper, different processes in *Man vs Earth* are categorised and the statistics are shown in Table 1 (Halliday, 1994).

Table 1. Transitivity System Resource Distribution

Statistics	Introduction		Development		Climax		Conclusion		Total	
	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)
Material process	2	33.33	18	47.37	5	27.78	17	36.95	42	38.89
Relational process	3	50	10	26.32	7	38.89	12	26.09	32	29.63
Mental process	0	0	8	21.05	1	5.55	12	26.09	21	19.44
Verbal	1	16.67	1	2.63	3	16.67	2	4.35	7	6.48

process										
Behavioural process	0	0	0	0	2	11.11	3	6.52	5	4.63
Existential process	0	0	1	2.63	0	0	0	0	1	0.93
Total	6	100	38	100	18	100	46	100	108	100

Table 1 shows that Man vs Earth has a large number and rich variety of process representation resources, in which material processes appear 42 times in total, accounting for the highest proportion (38.89%); relational processes appear 32 times in total, accounting for the second largest proportion (29.63%); followed by mental processes (19.44%), appearing 21 times in total; and the remaining three types of processes account for a small proportion of the total, in the order of verbal processes (6.48%), behavioural processes (4.63%) and existential processes (0.93%). The material process clauses and relational process clauses are the most prominent in this ecological speech discourse.

5.2 Modality Resource Analysis

Mood is defined as the speaker's cognitive, affective and volitional attitude towards the proposition, and is divided into modalization and modulation, with three values: high, medium and low. Modulation includes possibility and regularity, which is the speaker's evaluation of the truth of the proposition; and intentionality includes obligation and willingness, which indicate different degrees of responsibility and obligation and willingness tendency (Halliday, 2004). In this paper, we categorised the modal resources in Man vs Earth, and the statistics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Modality Resource Distribution

	Introduction		Development		Climax		Conclusion		Total	
Statistics	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)
Modality										
Modulation	0	0	3	100	0	0	3	37.5	6	54.55
Intentionality	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	62.5	5	45.45
Total	0	0	3	100	0	0	8	100	11	100

Table 2 shows that Man vs Earth contains a total of 11 modals, of which modal verbs appear a total of 6 times (54.55%); intensional verbs appear 5 times (45.45%), with a relatively small difference in the proportion of the two types of modals. At the same time, the distribution of modal resources in this ecological speech discourse is very distinctive, with modal verbs appearing in the development part

(100%) and the ending part (37.5%) of the speech discourse; and intransitive verbs are all concentrated in the ending part of the speech (62.5%).

6. Case Analysis

The following is specific analysis of the typical discourse fragments in *Man vs Earth* based on the ecological concept of the harmonious relationship between human and nature. The selection of typical discourse fragments is based on two criteria: firstly, the content of the discourse fragments can clearly convey the central idea of the part of the speech; secondly, the modalities involved in the selected discourse fragments should be comprehensive, and they should be able to reflect the synergistic effect of the verbal modality and the non-verbal non-physical modality.

6.1 *We Have Modestly Named Ourselves “Homo Sapiens”, Meaning “Wise Man”, but is Man really so Wise?*

The above discourse fragment is derived from the developmental part of a speech. The main modality of the fragment is the speech modality, which contains three attributive relational processes, and the carrier of all three relational processes is “human beings” and the attribute is “wise”. These relational processes with the same carrier and attribute have the effect of intensifying the irony that human beings, as higher animals, frequently destroy their own homes. At the same time, the discourse fragment uses rich textual print resources (as shown in Figures 1), and the speech modes of “homo sapiens”, “wise man” and the punctuation “?” and the broken “3 SECONDS” text prints imply that human beings call themselves “homo sapiens” but have done great damage to nature in a short period of history, and all of the above text prints strengthen the expression of the verbal modality. The above textual prints both enhance the effect of verbal modal expression. The synergistic effect of the two modal resources expresses the questioning of whether human beings are as “homo sapiens” as they claim to be, which can promote human beings to reflect on their destructive behaviour towards nature, and is conducive to arousing human beings’ ecological “conscience”, therefore, this example sentence belongs to the category of ecologically beneficial discourse.



Figure 1. Textual Print Resources in the Development Speech Part

6.2 But it Has Been Said that Something as Small as the Flutter of a Butterfly’s Wing Can Cause a Typhoon Halfway around the World. Well, When Enough People Come together, We too Will Make Waves

The above discourse fragment is derived from the conclusion of a speech. The main modality of the fragment is the speech modality, which consists rich modal resources. The modal shift from “can”, a low probability modal verb, to “will”, a medium probability modal verb, is a value-added modal shift. Butterfly effect is a common sense in Western contexts, meaning small changes can lead to large, long-term chain reactions throughout the system. The tiny change of a butterfly flapping its wings may lead to a huge chain reaction, and the present unity of human beings to protect the ecology will also have a significant effect, which shows the speaker’s affirmation of the feasibility of human beings joining hands to build a harmonious home. The example also uses video print resources (as shown in Figures 2) to visually emphasize the verbal modes of “butterfly’s wings” and “all hands on deck”. The synergistic reinforcement of these two modes emphasizes the need to give full play to human initiative and consciously take responsibility for ecological protection in the pursuit of harmonious development, i.e., to “do something”, and is therefore ecologically beneficial discourse.



Figure 2. Video Print Resources in the Conclusion Speech Part

7. Conclusion

The article applies Huang Guowen's harmonious discourse analysis framework to conduct a multimodal harmonious discourse analysis of Prince ea's 4:06 speech from the introduction, development, climax, and conclusion parts of the speech video, and the main finding is that harmonious discourse analysis is equally pervasive to multimodal eco-discourse analysis in non-Chinese contexts. By analysing a video of an ecological speech on an online social networking platform, this paper provides further insights into the application of harmonic discourse analysis at the practical level, and enriches the application context scope of harmonic discourse analysis.

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