Original Paper

Comparison of Chinese and Western News from the Attitude Perspective of Appraisal Theory: A Case Study of Nuclear-Contaminated Discharging Water

Jingru Li[1]

[1] School of Foreign Studies, South China Agricultural University, Guangzhou, China

Abstract

With the process of globalization, news reporting has become an important way for people to learn about the world. News language, as the main carrier of disseminating information, has a distinct social and cultural nature. Since the period of the nuclear-contaminated water discharge, all kinds of news have emerged, which has research value. At present, the research on "nuclear-contaminated water discharge" is in the initial stage, and the research combined with linguistics is rare. In this paper, we take the attitude perspective of the appraisal theory as the theoretical analysis framework, select the related reports of China Daily and BBC as the research corpus, and use the qualitative methods to conduct a comparative analysis to explore the differences in the attitudes and views of the two. The study found that, firstly, there are very rich attitude resources in both news reports, among which appreciation resources are used the most. Second, the use of attitudinal resources in both news reports reflects that different media's evaluations and attitudes toward the same event are influenced by their positions and interests.

Keywords

appraisal theory, nuclear-contaminated water, attitude comparison, news

1. Introduction

In 1970s, linguistic community began to pay attention to the phenomenon of appraisal in discourse. Although the terminology used in these studies varies, all of them examine the phenomenon of appraisal from different perspectives. In the 1990s, linguist James R. Martin and other scholars further developed Systemic Functional Linguistics, represented by Halliday, to create the appraisal theory. Martin believed that the appraisal system focused on the interpersonal relationships in language and the

emotional expression or ideology hidden in the text. (Liu, 2023) The theory examines the emotions, attitudes and values of discourse through the use of vocabulary. Appraisal theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005) is a lexical-grammatical framework constructed by Systemic Functional Linguistics based on the study of interpersonal meaning, and an expansion and extension of the study of interpersonal functioning, which "deals with the different types of attitudes, affective intensities, and means of origin of values embedded in texts" (Martin, 2001, p. 19). In short, appraisal theory is concerned with discourse, negotiation, naturalization of particular intersubjective relationships and ideological linguistic resources.

With globalization and the development of the Internet, there have been significant changes in the way information is disseminated. Traditional media such as TV, newspapers, magazines, etc. are limited in audience interaction, while new media such as social media, blogs, forums, etc. provide people with more convenient ways to obtain information. In the context of globalization, the media not only have to satisfy the information needs of the public, but also have to assume social responsibility and reflect social reality and public voices. The news reports of the media can be seen as a way of expressing opinions, comments and analysis, which not only arouses public concern and discussion, but also has a far-reaching impact on society (Wang, 2023). Moreover, there are discrepancies between different media reports. Chinese media tend to pay more attention to factualness, objectivity and authority in their reports, while Western media pay more attention to in-depth digging and multiple interpretations of issues. Therefore, a comparative perspective is necessary for discourse analysis (Partington, 2015) as it enables analysts to discover distinctive linguistic features. Given this, this study carries out a comparative discourse analysis between China Daily and BBC.

In recent days, nuclear-contamination dumping has drawn more and more countries' attention and aroused their concern with environment. There are many news reports about this event, which reflect disparate attitudes and values through vocabulary. China Daily, a window to know China, is reputed as one of the most authoritative English-language media in China at home and abroad. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the largest news broadcaster in the United Kingdom, is also the world's first television station. What's more, the use of appraisal theory in China is common in the fields of news discourse, education teaching and social phenomena, and not many studies have been conducted in the field of English-Chinese discourse comparison. Based on this, this study uses Appraisal theory as the framework, and conducts a comparative study of news about nuclear-contaminated dumping from BBC and China Daily to analyse and compare the attitude resource of different countries under the framework of appraisal theory.

With the acceleration of globalization, theoretical attitudes in domestic and foreign news reports are also affected by multiple factors, such as the level of economic development, cultural background and social changes, which may change people's values. By comparing different news discourse, we can observe the differences in theoretical attitudes of the global news media, and accordingly understand the orientation of public opinion in different regions and countries. Therefore, a comparative analysis of

news discourse under the perspective of attitude resources of appraisal theory can provide us with a new perspective to comprehensively understand the differences and characteristics of news reporting in the two regions, and to understand the different views of different media on the same event, thus reflecting the different political stances, which can help to promote the healthy development of the media in China and globally.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter mainly introduces the theoretical framework, including appraisal theory. To better compare and analyze news at home and abroad, we base it on the appraisal theory, which was written by James R. Martin. James R. Martin, a prominent linguist and scholar, has significantly contributed to the field of linguistics with his extensive work on systemic functional linguistics (SFL). His appraisal theory, a crucial component of SFL, offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing language that explores how language expresses evaluative meaning. Martin's appraisal theory delves into the ways in which language is used to convey attitudes, opinions, and evaluations in discourse. At the core of his theory are three primary types of attitudes: affect, judgment, and appreciation.

Based on Martin's appraisal theory, this study divides the attitudinal words (including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) in the three articles into three categories of affect, judgment, and appreciation according to their different semantic functions and makes a comparative analysis of them one by one in news to dig out the meaning behind the attitudinal words.

Affect, the first type of attitude in Martin's appraisal theory concerns the emotional stance or feelings expressed by the speaker towards the subject matter. It encompasses emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, or fear, and is conveyed through linguistic choices like adjectives, adverbs, and intensifiers. Affect enables individuals to infuse their language with personal sentiments, thereby adding a layer of subjectivity to their expressions. Martin's analysis of affective language enables scholars and linguists to explore how emotions are linguistically constructed and conveyed within different contexts.

Judgment, the second type, deals with attitudes towards behavior, which we admire or criticize, praise or condemn. (Martin, 2003) Judgment can be divided into social esteem and social sanction. "Judgments of esteem have to do with 'normality' (how unusual someone is), 'capacity' (how capable they are) and 'tenacity' (how resolute they are), while judgments of sanction have to do with 'veracity' (how truthful someone is) and 'propriety' (how ethical someone is)."

Appreciation involves evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena according to the ways in which they are valued or not in a given field. (Martin, 2003) In general terms appreciation can be divided into our "reactions" to things (do they catch our attention; do they please us?), their "composition" (balance and complexity), and their "value" (how innovative, authentic, timely, etc.).

Martin's appraisal theory stands as a pivotal framework within systemic functional linguistics, offering a nuanced understanding of how attitudes are embedded within language. By identifying and analyzing affect, judgment, and appreciation, Martin provides a comprehensive lens through which we can explore

the intricacies of evaluative language.

3. News Analysis

3.1 Research Content and Methodology

This study uses the authoritative public news website 2023 nuclear-contaminated water discharge as the corpus, of which the English news discourse is from a China daily news report on August 24, 2023 and a BBC news report on August 26, 2023. This study takes the attitudinal perspective of the appraisal theory as the theoretical analysis framework, and uses the qualitative methods to conduct a comparative analysis to examine the ways in which appraisal theory is applied in discourse and explore different attitudes and stances expressed in news of nuclear-contaminated water discharge.

3.2 Affect System

Affect refers to the expression of human emotions and feelings, and the value of emotional expression lies in the fact that it clearly reveals the speaker's attitude towards a certain phenomenon. Speakers use these linguistic resources to express the emotional impact of an event or phenomenon and to evaluate the event or phenomenon from an emotional point of view. Appraisal theory mainly divides affect into un/happiness, in/security and dis/satisfaction.

Example 1:

(1) Japan's unilateral decision to discharge the nuclear-contaminated water into the sea is an extremely selfish and irresponsible act, which China firmly opposes and strongly condemns, Ministry Spokeswoman Shu Jueting said at a news conference. (China Daily 2023-08-24)

(2) The UN's atomic regulator says the water will have "negligible" radiological impact on people and the environment. (BBC 2023-8-26)

These two examples are the language resources of security and satisfaction in the affective language resources of China Daily and BBC respectively, which involve the evaluation of nuclear-contaminated water discharge, but they are different in their evaluation content and perspectives. It can be seen that the first example is

intense and the elaboration of the sense of security focuses on the threat and harm that nuclear effluent discharge has brought to the world as well as China's concern and anger, and it can be seen that China holds a strong critical attitude towards this event from the phrase "extremely selfish and irresponsible act", believing that this is a threat to the world. From the phrase "extremely selfish and irresponsible act", it's observed that China is strongly critical of this incident, considering it an extremely selfish and irresponsible act, and expressing China's firm opposition and strong condemnation of it. This evaluation is mainly negative, expressing dissatisfaction and criticism of the incident. In the second sentence, "The UN's atomic regulator" has a positive evaluation of this event from the sentence "the water will have 'negligible' radiological impact on people and the environment". The language is milder and focuses on the negligible radiological impact of the incident in the elaboration of the sense of satisfaction, indicating that the media thinks that the incident will not pose much threat to the world and expresses its

recognition of the incident.

From this comparison, it can be observed that the absence of language resources for happiness in China Daily explains China's concern and uneasiness about the incident; the elaboration of language resources for security in China Daily explains its concern about the security threat posed by the incident; and the use of language resources for satisfaction in the BBC explains the foreign media's recognition of the incident.

Example 2:

(3) "By dumping the water into the ocean, Japan has turned itself into a saboteur of the ecological system and polluter of the global marine environment," the spokesperson said. (China Daily 2023-08-24)

(4) A report by a UK-based data analysis company called Logically, which aims to fight misinformation, claims that since January, the Chinese government and state media have been running a coordinated disinformation campaign targeting the release of the waste water. (BBC 2023-8-26)

These two examples are from China Daily and the BBC's emotional language resources for Security. In the first sentence, "Japan has turned itself into a saboteur of the ecological system and polluter of the global marine environment" expresses the criticism and condemnation of nuclear effluent discharge and the articulation of sense of security focuses on the threat as a destructive act that damages the ecological system and the global marine environment. By way of comparison, in the second sentence, a British data analytics company called Logically published a report accusing the Chinese government and official media of a disinformation campaign about the incident since January of this year. This statement on security focuses on the accusations against China, emphasizing that the opposition of the Chinese government and official media to nuclear discharge is a disinformation campaign. What's more, it also simply describe the nuclear-contaminated water as waste water, which underestimates the threat and harm of this event. This language is not credible in terms of the authenticity of the information, but merely dismisses Chinese perceptions from the research of some experts, which is one-sided and not forward-looking, and is prone to be misinterpreted by the public.

3.3 Judgment System

Example 3:

(5) China has made serious demarches to Japan and asked it to stop the discharge, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said in a statement, adding that Japan " is bound to face international condemnation for many years to come". (China Daily 2023-08-24)

(6) The Japanese Embassy in China claimed that China has taken an "aggressive" stance by banning Japanese aquatic products. (China Daily 2023- 09-05)

(7) China firmly opposes and strongly condemns Japan's releasing of nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the sea, and will take all necessary measures to safeguard public health, the Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday. (China Daily 2023-08-24)

From the above examples, "asked it to stop", "banning Japanese aquatic products", "take measures", and "safeguard" all represent judgment's social esteem, "capacity". These words show that China has a huge

sense of responsibility, and it is ready to fight irrational international affairs. What's more, it also sends a signal that China has the economic and political capacity to oppose the release of nuclear-contaminated water. The phrases " firmly opposes" and "strongly condemns" convey a clear evaluative judgment on China's part. The strong language used here indicates a negative assessment of nuclear effluent discharge. These expressions suggest that China sees the release of nuclear-contaminated water as unacceptable and deserving of condemnation. The commitment to " take all necessary measures to safeguard public health" reflects a judgment on the severity of the issue and underscores China's determination to protect its citizens. This language implies that China perceives its actions as not only morally justified but also necessary.

Example 4:

(8) According to a statement from the Chinese Embassy exclusively obtained by China Daily, following Japan's decision to release treated radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean, their staff have been subjected to a wave of hostile calls, intense shouting, and even personal threats from Japan. The embassy's fax machines have been inundated with letters containing radical content, exacerbating the situation. Additionally, right-wing groups have reportedly been disrupting the embassy's operations by causing disturbances at its entrance. (China Daily 2023-09-05)

"Hostile calls", "intense shouting", "personal threats", etc., all words are related to social sanction, "propriety", and they are sending negative meanings. Through these words, we can see that this news condemns the unreasonable reactions, and it also reflects Chinese society's collective gaze on those who damage the environment and break the rules, as well as China's image as a strict " environmental enforcer".

Example 5:

(9) But analysts say that the reactions from China, in particular, are as much motivated by politics as they are by genuine concerns. Tokyo's relationship with Beijing has deteriorated in recent years as it draws closer to the US and also shows support to Taiwan region, a self-ruled island claimed by China. " Beijing may have made less of a fuss about the water release if its relationship with Tokyo was in a better place." (BBC 2023-08-24)

The statement from BBC suggests that Beijing's response could be influenced by the current state of its relationship with Tokyo. The implication is that if the relationship were better, China might not have protested as strongly against nuclear effluent discharge. Essentially, this judgment implies that China's actions are conditional upon its bilateral relations and that its level of protest might be subdued if diplomatic ties were more favorable. It paints China's reaction as possibly exaggerated due to strained relations rather than solely by environmental or ethical considerations. This viewpoint reflects a certain level of prejudice or skepticism about China's motives and the nature of its responses in international matters.

3.4 Appreciation System

Example 6：

(10) China has banned Japanese seafood as a result of the waste water release. Some media commentators believe this could be a political move, especially as experts say there is no scientific evidence backing concerns around seafood, as the radiation released is so low. (BBC 2023-8-26)

(11) China firmly opposes and strongly condemns Japan's releasing of nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the sea, and will take all necessary measures to safeguard public health. (China Daily 2023-8- 24)

Sentences (10) and (11) elaborate on "China's attitude towards the nuclear-contaminated water discharge", which are value resources in the UK and Chinese appreciative language resources respectively. In the Sentence (10), the BBC, equipped with value-based appreciative linguistic resources, mainly divides its linguistic resources into "China has banned Japanese seafood" and "radiation released is so low", which weakens the serious consequences of the nuclear-contaminated water discharge and is not credible in terms of information authenticity. The BBC's report is not convincing in terms of the truthfulness of the information. Moreover, in the name of media commentators and experts, BBC defines China's concern about seafood after the release of nuclear wastewater as a political action, which may easily lead viewers to have an inappropriate understanding of the deterioration of Sino- Japanese relations and China's use of the opportunity to crackdown on Japan.

Sentence (11) shows that when China Daily allocates value-based linguistic resources, it expresses China's strong condemnation of the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water through expressions like "firmly opposes and strongly condemns", and also intuitively expresses its concern about the consequences of nuclear-contaminated water. Such an expression not only reveals China's strong condemnation of the discharge of nuclear wastewater, but also intuitively expresses its concern about the consequences of nuclear-contaminated water, which shows China daily 's practical attitude. In addition, the expression "take all necessary measures to safeguard public health" conveys China's attention to the health of the whole human being, and explains China daily's great focus on the discharge of nuclear contaminated water as well as its seriousness. It also shows that China daily attaches great importance to the release of nuclear contaminated water discharge and takes a serious and holistic approach to the issue.

4. Conclusion

Different from the traditional research, this article takes the China Daily and BBC news reports related to nuclear discharge as the research corpus, analyze the corpus from the linguistic perspective based on Martin's appraisal theory, as well as the hidden attitudes behind the language. The study of news reports on nuclear discharge from a linguistic point of view is conducive to understanding the attitudes and policy directions of various parties towards nuclear discharge. Through analyses of China Daily and BBC's news reports on nuclear effluent discharge, the study finds that they have similarities and

differences in the attitudinal linguistic resources. First of all, both China Daily and BBC have the most appreciative language resources, mainly because the discharge of nuclear effluent is a world news, which needs to be described in detail about the process of its occurrence and its impact. Secondly, by analyzing the reports on nuclear-contaminated water discharge by China Daily and BBC from the perspective of attitude of appraisal theory, it can be observed different emotional attitudes and judgmental perspectives from the words used in the news. Appraisal theory involves subjective meanings such as emotions, attitudes and values, and there are differences in the emotions and attitudes expressed by Chinese and Western media in their reports on the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water, as well as differences in their evaluations and attitudes towards this event. Some Chinese media and government agencies criticized the discharge of nuclear sewage as an act of destroying the ecology and the global marine environment, which should be condemned. The BBC, on the other hand, believes that the Japanese government and companies should adopt a responsible attitude and ensure that the discharge process meets international standards. As a guide of social opinion, the media's evaluation and attitude towards the same event will also be influenced by their position and interests. Therefore, we can look at how the media reflects cultural beliefs and ideologies about the same event through analysis of language (Yu L, 2023), and we can learn that the media in diverse countries and regions may have different evaluation angles and values when reporting on nuclear-contaminated water discharge.

Acknowledgement

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