Original Paper

Discourse Analysis of COP28 News Reports from the Perspective of Attitude in Appraisal Theory

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Abstract

Conference of the Parties is the world's largest and most important annual climate-related conference. Taking the attitude system of Martin's Appraisal Theory as the theoretical framework, this study collects news reports on the 28th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties from China Daily as the corpus. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of the corpus, this study explores the distribution pattern and realization of attitudinal resources in these news reports, aiming to reveal the attitude and stance of China Daily towards COP28. According to the study, attitudinal resources consist mostly of appreciation resources, which comprise over half of the total. Affect and judgement resources follow, with a greater proportion of positive than negative resources. Additionally, China Daily frequently adopts a positive viewpoint regarding COP28 through the use of attitudinal materials. This research aids in the efficient comprehension and expression of attitudes and positions in discourses.

Keywords

Appraisal Theory, attitude system, news reports, stance

1. Introduction

The 28th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP28) was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from November 30 to December 12, 2023. COP28 marked the conclusion of the first Global Stocktake (GST), the main mechanism for assessing progress under the Paris Agreement.

Appraisal Theory (AT) focuses on the negotiation and exchange of attitudes in discourse. As a fundamental component of AT, the attitude system serves as a valuable linguistic tool for investigating attitudes within news discourse (Zhang, 2022). Accordingly, this study adopts the attitude system of Appraisal Theory as its theoretical framework and utilizes news reports from *China Daily* on COP28 as

the corpus for conducting discourse analysis. The aim is to explore how attitudinal resources are distributed and realized, as well as to identify the types of attitudes and stances reflected by *China Daily* in these news reports. To achieve these objectives, both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed.

In terms of significance, this study will consider both theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, it is expected to make a substantial contribution to the development of Appraisal Theory in news discourse analysis. Additionally, the study offers a fresh perspective for understanding opinions on COP28. From a practical standpoint, it provides valuable insights into China's attitude towards COP28 and the global climate change convention. Furthermore, this research expands the application of Attitude as a core sub-system within Appraisal Theory for analyzing news discourse. Moreover, it serves as an informative reference for readers to uncover implicatures and attitudes through the utilization of attitudinal resources in discourse.

2. Literature Review

James R. Martin (2000) presented a comprehensive exposition of the English Appraisal System in his thesis Beyond Exchange: Appraisal System in English Text. Martin and White (2005) elucidated the framework of AT in Evaluation in the English Language: Appraisal System, which signifies the official establishment of AT. Since its inception, AT has been employed as a valuable tool for linguistic investigations encompassing foreign language instruction, translation, and discourse analysis. Ruth and Valladares (2015) utilized AT to examine how educators responded to the national English program with regard to adapting current educational reform measures. McKinley (2018) integrated the appraisal framework with Clark and Ivanic's model to identify writing strategies for constructing a writer identity within a Japanese University English writing context. Si and Pang (2018) discovered that AT holds significance both for translation theory and practice as it facilitates contrasting appraisal meaning between source text and target text.

A substantial number of studies have employed AT for conducting discourse analysis. Empirical studies can be classified into various categories such as media news discourse, academic writing, advertisements, law texts, political speeches and historical textbooks. Regarding news discourses, numerous studies have investigated the authorial stance or national image portrayed in news reports. Wang (2004) conducted a comparative study on the attitudes towards China's earthquake by both Chinese and Australian press outlets. Liu and Sun (2008) examined how China's image was constructed under the influence of editorial notes in *China Daily*. A few linguists extended the Appraisal Theory to specific discourses. Grundlingh (2018) analyzed real and fake suicide letters using Appraisal Theory to determine their true aim.

The literature review reveals a limited number of studies on COP28, despite the wide range of topics covered in news discourse research. In light of this gap, this study adopts Appraisal Theory's attitude

system as its theoretical framework. It utilizes news reports from *China Daily* on COP28 as the corpus for discourse analysis. The aim is to investigate how attitudinal resources are distributed and realized, as well as to identify the types of attitudes and stances reflected by *China Daily* in these news reports.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory (AT) complements the interpersonal function of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar by providing a comprehensive evaluative framework at the lexicon-grammar level. AT aims to analyze the author's attitude, viewpoint, stance, and strategy in order to establish a harmonious relationship between the author and the reader. According to Martin and Rose (2003), "Appraisal is concerned with evaluating attitudes expressed in a text, including the intensity of emotions involved and how values are sourced to align readers". As an extension of SFG, AT explores how authors employ appraisal resources to negotiate with readers and achieve their interpersonal goals. It consists of three sub-systems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Among these sub-systems, attitude plays a central role as it involves assessing participants' actions or processes based on either emotional responses or shared values (White, 2003). Engagement focuses on identifying different voices responsible for value positions or stances. Graduation pertains to measuring the strength of one's feelings or views by scaling the degree of appraising volume. In summary, Appraisal Theory offers researchers a reliable framework for conducting discourse analysis.

3.2 Attitude System

The attitude system constitutes the fundamental aspect of Appraisal Theory. Crystal (1990) posits that Language serves as a manifestation of its user's attitude, representing a human activity. Attitude is a comprehensive system comprising three semantic domains: emotion, ethics, and aesthetics. It functions to depict the appraiser's feelings as construed in the text. Attitude involves evaluating various aspects such as things, people, character traits, and their emotional states (Martin & Rose, 2003). These evaluations can be implicitly or explicitly conveyed through lexical strategies or other language tactics including pragmatic strategy, syntactical strategy, and cognitive strategy. As indicated by Martin and White (2005), Attitude encompasses affective responses along with judgments and appreciation within its subsystems. Affect represents the primary subcategory; however, attitudinal resources exhibit distinctive features within the corpus context. Generally speaking, attitudinal resources typically encompass three key characteristics: implicitness/explicitness, polarity orientation, and gradation intensity levels. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework of this study based on Martin's Appraisal Theory.
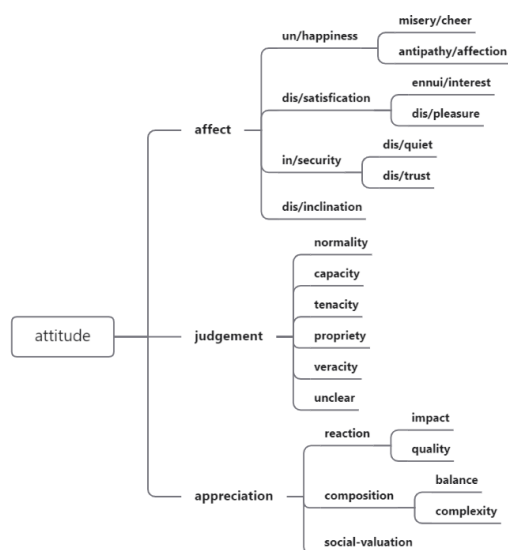
Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Questions

Taking the attitude system of Martin's Appraisal Theory as the theoretical framework, this study focuses on attitudinal resources in news discourses reporting the COP28 from *China Daily*, intending to explore how attitudinal resources are applied and what kinds of attitudes and stances of *China Daily* are reflected in these news reports. In line with the aims, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

(1) What is the distribution of attitudinal resources in these news reports?

(2) What is the realization of attitudinal resources in these news reports?

(3) What kind of attitude and stance of *China Daily* are reflected by attitudinal resources?

4.2 Research Corpus

A small corpus was established in this study, comprising samples selected from the websites of *China Daily* (www.chinadaily.com.cn), which are globally recognized for their high quality, authenticity, and abundant attitudinal resources. Moreover, *China Daily* targets a global readership, making the corpus easily accessible and suitable as the source for this study. The samples specifically focus on climate change under COP28, excluding irrelevant content. The selection criteria were based on the relevance and length of news reports related to COP28. The chosen samples encompass reports from the opening ceremony of COP28 on November 25, 2023, until its closing ceremony on December 23, 2023. Ultimately, a total of 20 news reports with word counts ranging between 500 and 1200 words were included in the self-established corpus to ensure sufficient attitude information for analysis purposes. Consequently, these selected news discourses collectively amount to a total of 11266 words.

4.3 Research Procedures

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the attitude and stance underlying the attitudinal resources utilized by *China Daily*. Firstly, the corpus is annotated and attitudinal resources are calculated using the UAM Corpus Tool. Secondly, an analysis of the overall attitudinal resources in the corpus is conducted based on statistical results obtained from both UAM Corpus Tool and WordArt.com (an online word cloud generator). Lastly, a comprehensive examination of affect, judgement, and appreciation within the attitudinal resources is carried out using statistical findings from UAM Corpus Tool.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 The Overall Distribution of Attitudinal Resources

The attitude system is composed of three sub-categories: affect, judgement and appreciation (Martin & White, 2005). The results of the UAM Corpus Tool show that the total number of attitudinal resources is 642. The amounts and ratios of the three sub-systems are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Overall Distribution of Attitudinal Resources

	Types	Positive	Negative	Number (Percentage)
Attitude Subsystems	Affect	133	49	182 （28.3%）
	Judgement	85	53	138 （21.5%）
	Appreciation	189	133	322 （50.2%）
Number (Percentage)		407 （63.4%）	235 （36.6%）	642 （100%）

With 642 attitudinal resources in the corpus, *China Daily* uses a lot of attitudinal resources in the news reports that are gathered, as the table illustrates. With 322 occurrences, appreciation resources rank highest among the Attitude sub-systems and make up 50.2%, or more than half, of the total attitudinal resources. The preponderance of sources expressing gratitude suggests that *China Daily*'s assessments are primarily objective concerning affects and judgments, with an emphasis on events or objects. Second place goes to affect resources, with 182 occurrences and a 28.3% share. The least common resource is judgment, with a smaller percentage of 21.5% and fewer instances of 138. An overall perspective of the distribution of attitudinal resources is offered based on the statistical results above. The polarity of attitudinal resources is important to consider in addition to the three subsystems of

attitude since it shows the readers or listeners what impressions the evaluated targets leave. The data reveals that, with a percentage of 63.4% and 36.6%, respectively, positive resources dominate negative resources. This indicates that *China Daily* primarily has a favorable opinion of the COP28. The stark contrast between positive and negative resources can indicate that *China Daily* takes a positive tone on the matter to reflect the support of COP28. In addition, it aims to show that countries can collectively address the challenges posed by climate change, promote sustainable development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect the environment and human health.

High-frequency keywords can aid in fostering comprehension of the primary subjects covered in news discourses as well as the methods by which attitudinal resources are implemented, in addition to the distribution of attitudinal resources generally. The overall high-frequency word cloud of the gathered corpus is displayed in Figure 2, from which the primary subjects covered in the news report may be easily extracted.

Figure 2. The Overall High-frequency Word Cloud

As shown in Figure 2, the main topic of the selected news reports is around the COP28, which can be immediately captured through high-frequency keywords such as "climate", "country", "change", "global", "develop", "action", "China" etc. In more detail, Table 2 provides a list of the top 10 high-frequency words based on the part of speech, which can reflect how attitudinal resources are realized. It can be seen that through the use of positive words as positive attitudinal resources, *China Daily* expressed its support for COP28 and urged it to work together to contribute to the future of sustainable development and the well-being of our planet.

Table 2. Top 10 High-frequency Words

Words	Frequency
Climate	193
Country	86
Change	77

Global	71
Develop	62
Action	54
China	54
Energy	48
Nation	32
Unites	36

5.2 The Micro Analysis of Attitudinal Resources

According to Martin and White (2015), attitude can be used to characterize the emotions that come from its subsystems, affect, judgment, and appreciation. The distribution and analysis of attitudinal resources within these three subsystems are displayed below.

5.2.1 Analysis of Affect

Affect is the expressive resource that is physiologically embodied from birth. Lexis with attitudinal meaning can be used to actualize the emotional response to behaviors, texts, processes, or phenomena. Happiness or unhappiness, contentment or discontent, security or insecurity, and inclination or disinclination are all examples of affect.

Comprehensive interpretation with typical samples will be listed as follows.

(1) COP28 President Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber said on Sunday that parties were making progress in talks for reaching a consensus [Affect: inclination] on issues at stake, but not fast enough.

Sample 1 represents the willingness and intentions of participating nations to address climate change, particularly the increase in global temperature. Developed and developing nations have begun to agree to take action.

(2) We both hope and are pleased [Affect: inclination] that we think our joint work not only advanced our respective national efforts but also reflected COP in many ways.

The above example is from a statement made by Xie Zhenhua, Special Representative of President Xi Jinping and China's Special Envoy for Climate Change Affairs, at the conference. In line with the principle of "community of human destiny", it used the word "hope" to express its attitude towards the proposal, to make progress in the areas of energy transformation, circular economy, methane emission control and low-carbon sustainable provinces, to better implement their respective nationally owned contributions and to promote the multilateral process. This initiative reflects China's responsible attitude towards international affairs and its concern for developing countries, reflecting China's great power.

5.2.2 Analysis of Judgement

Judgement is the process of interpreting the significance of a speaker's attitudes toward other people and their behavior, or their character (i.e., how they measure up). Social esteem and social sanction are

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the two subsystems that are typically involved in judgment. Four subcategories make up social esteem: normalcy (an individual's degree of unusualness), capacity (an individual's level of ability), and tenacity (an individual's degree of resolve). Veracity, or an individual's degree of honesty, and Propriety, or an individual's level of ethics, make up social sanction. This section will provide a detailed analysis.

(3) But we are gravely concerned that it does not take us far enough or fast enough [-capacity] to adequately address the climate crisis.

In the above example, "does not take us far enough or fast enough" indicates that the speaker thinks the agreement made on COP28 is not capable of addressing the climate crisis thus needing tougher actions and commitment in the future to accelerate the process of protecting the environment.

(4) Unfortunately, in the current global climate process, such as mitigation, adaptation and finance, many concerns of developing countries have not been fully paid attention to and resolved [-capacity], and developed countries have a historical responsibility for climate change, he added.

The term "have not been fully paid attention" suggests that many of the concerns of developing countries have not been adequately attended to and addressed. This partly implies dissatisfaction and criticism that the concerns of developing countries are being ignored. Then the reference to "historical responsibility" suggests that developed countries have a historical responsibility for climate change. This part emphasizes the historical responsibility of developed countries for climate change and shows criticism and blame for developed countries. As a whole, the sentence expresses criticism and concern about the problems in the current global climate process, suggesting that the concerns of developing countries are not being taken seriously enough while emphasizing the historical responsibility of developed countries in climate change.

5.2.3 Analysis of Appreciation

The evaluation of texts, processes, and phenomena through aesthetics is the focus of appreciation. It is divided into three smaller categories: reaction, composition, and appraisal. Impact and quality make up a reaction. People's perceptions of items' intricacy and balance are all included in the composition. The significance and worth of objects are related to valuation. This section will make an analysis of them in the news reports on COP28 from *China Daily*.

(5) The significance [+valuation] of the United Nations climate conference is not just its pivotal role in addressing government policies, with over 70,000 delegates converging to pursue common objectives.

In example 5, the word "significance" to highlight the high importance of the recent global agreement reached at COP28. The new global agreement includes new commitments to reduce carbon emissions, climate finance, and investment in addition to the Paris Agreement, which is considered as a tremendous step forward but lacks ongoing, effective implementation.

(6) Collaboration, training and technology transfer are key [+valuation] to ensuring that AI contributes effectively to climate mitigation and adaptation for small island developing states," she said.

This quote is from the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister of Barbados, who demonstrated the

critical importance of cooperation, training and technology transfer in ensuring that AI effectively contributes to climate mitigation and adaptation in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This section highlights the criticality of cooperation, training and technology transfer in ensuring that AI works, showing the importance and recognition of these measures. Taken as a whole, this statement demonstrates optimism about the potential of AI for climate mitigation and adaptation, while emphasising the importance of cooperation, training and technology transfer in achieving this goal. This positive attitude demonstrates confidence and expectation in the use of AI to address climate issues.

6. Conclusion

Through the discourse analysis of COP28 news reports from the perspective of attitude in Appraisal Theory, the findings of the study probed into are as follows. Firstly, as for the sub-systems of attitude, appreciation resources rank top, accounting for more than half of the whole attitudinal resources, followed by affect and judgement resources, and among them, positive resources outweigh negative resources. Secondly, the attitude resources in the collected news report are mainly achieved through words or phrases with positive or negative meanings. Thirdly, through the use of attitudinal resources, *China Daily* tends to adopt a positive attitude towards the issue to demonstrate the stance of the Chinese government and people of COP28. Analyzing the news reports of *China Daily* on COP28, this study helps to effectively understand and express attitudes and stances in discourses through attitudinal resources.

Finally, the present study is far from being perfect. First of all, the size of the corpus is insufficient, which could have an impact on the study's conclusions. To strengthen the findings, it is advised that future studies increase the corpus size. Furthermore, even though the results have been verified four or five times, the attitudinal analysis is inherently subjective due to the manual annotation process of attitudinal resources. Besides, the attitude system of Appraisal Theory is the only theoretical framework this study uses due to space constraints. The graduation system and engagement system can be used in the future to carry out pertinent research. Additionally, two distinct media can be chosen to carry out a comparative study on this subject.

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