Analysis of Attitude Resources in News Headlines of the Economist From the Perspective of the Appraisal Theory

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The news headline is one of the most important parts of news. Based on the appraisal theory in systemic functional linguistics, the present study selects 30 headlines of the Economist’s reports on China in 2018 as the research objects. By giving annotations of the news headline according to its evaluative resources, this paper investigates what attitude the foreign mainstream media adopt when reporting Chinese news events. The statistical results show that most of the news headlines bear rich resources of valuation, and most of them bear negative attitudes rather than positive attitudes. Therefore, it is concluded that foreign media pay more attention to the problems in China’s development process, so they often directly use negative evaluative vocabulary when reporting Chinese events. To some extent, the negative evaluation resources also confirm the character of self-worship of the westerners. Therefore, theoretical and practical implications of this study are drawn for us to better understand foreign news headlines.

Keywords: the appraisal theory, news headlines, analysis of attitude resources

Introduction

The important role news headline plays in our daily life cannot be overemphasized in this fast-paced time. As the flooding news covers a wide range of topics, we can not only keep abreast of ongoing events, but also encounter fashion, travel, life, and people. However, the information explosion leaves people limited time to browse the news, which indicates the importance of the headlines.

Besides being the first and most important frame element in news reports, headlines also have ideological functions (Bell, 1991; Van Dijk, 1988). Since headlines serve as a summary of what writer considers most important, they could imply an opinion or a specific perspective on the event which would influence the interpretation of the readers. Actually, a careful examination of news headlines of the same newspaper is sufficient to see that attitudes towards the events of some countries are conveyed with the employment of various evaluative resources. Evaluative resources in various genres have been widely investigated in media studies and in sociolinguistics (Thompson & Hunston, 2000; Martin, 2000; White, 2003). Initially, scholars pay more attention to the effects of the appraisal theory on narrative writing in the workplace and secondary schools. Later focus is changed on media discourse, and thereafter the appraisal theory begins to be applied to the evaluations in other types of discourse. With the theory itself continually updated and promoted, a significant body of achievements on the relevant researches has been gained in the field of linguistics. Iedema, White, and
Freeze (1994) apply the appraisal system to the journalistic discourse. In their report Media Literary, the ways of different voices conveyed in the discourse in terms of their different uses of appraisal values are explored. They identify the expression of objectivity and subjectivity in terms of the author’s attitude. Previous findings give rises to greater interest in the stance analysis in the media discourse. For instance, Wang (2004) applies the sub-system of attitude to the analysis of both Chinese and English hard news. He finds that the linguistic devices of judgment are more used than affect and appreciation in both Chinese and English hard news. On the basis of the appraisal theory, therefore, with affect, judgement, and appreciation of the attitude system as the theoretical support, appraisal realizations is illustrated so as to reveal how writers adopt particular value positions and what kind of attitude they hold. With the analysis of the evaluation resources in selected news headlines, significant conclusions are drawn correspondingly.

The present study is of great significance. Since the appraisal theory provides a possible model for the recognition and analysis of the lexical signals and realizations of value insertion, it has been widely used to explore the evaluative semantics and attitudinal positioning in news media. Therefore, it is reasonable that the present research resorts to the appraisal theory as theoretical framework. By applying this theory, the effectiveness of the appraisal theory for analyzing news headlines will be verified, especially for the revelation of how writer’s attitude is embedded in the news headlines.

**An Overview of the Appraisal Theory**

The system of “appraisal”, the semantics of evaluation, developed by a number of Australian linguists represented by J. R. Martin, is within the framework of the interpersonal meaning of Halliday. It is “a framework for analyzing evaluation and stance as they operate in whole texts and in groupings of texts from any register” (White, 2002, p. 2). The concept of “appraisal”, as is pointed out by White, is “concerned with evaluation: the kind of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 25). The evaluation system is divided into three subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation. The attitude subsystem is the core of the evaluation theory, which is further divided into three small systems: affect of expression of one’s feelings, judgment of personality and behavior, and appreciation of the value of events. The former is termed as “affect” which is basically emotional, while the latter embodies two types of attitude, concerning morals which is called “judgment”, and related to esthetic, which is “appreciation”. More specifically, affect is a resource to interpret the language, using emotional reactions to actions, texts, processes, and phenomena, which involve people’s positive or negative feelings. For example, love feeling involves people’s positive or negative feelings, pleasure or pain, confidence or worry. The judgment system is used as a resource to explain language phenomena and how language users give the judgement according to the ethical or moral rules. Judgment involves people’s attitudes towards behaviors, such as praise or criticism, praise or blame. The appreciation system, as the explanation language phenomenon resources, is used to clarify language users’ aesthetic appreciation for texts, processes, and phenomena. Therefore, appreciation is about an assessment of value, such as perfection and beauty. In conclusion, attitude system can also be divided into positive attitude and negative attitude. The following sections will be dedicated to a detailed account of the attitude system with a view to providing overall idea of how the three aspects of attitude system are realized and what kind of position is being dealt with.
Analysis of Attitude Resources in News Headlines

This part describes the headlines in terms of total units of the appraisal resources and their distributions in each type of evaluative resources, namely, affect, judgement, and appreciation. The titles of marked news are counted, and it is found that the news titles contain abundant evaluative resources. The statistic results are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
*Evaluative Resources in Newspapers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total units</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude-type</td>
<td>N = 29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgement</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 is a general descriptive statistics of attitude resources in the samples of news headlines, which means every subsystem is counted based on the whole annotated items. From the general statistics, we can know how each feature is distributed in the whole system. As is shown in Table 1, there are 29 attitude items annotated altogether, among which judgement resources take up a huge percentage with 16 items, accounting for 53.33%, while resources of appreciation and affect are much less compared to those of the judgement with nine items accounting for 30.00%, and four items accounting for 13.33% respectively. From the statistics above, it can be seen that there are abundant attitude resources in news headlines, which means the writer’s feelings or opinions towards Chinese people or things are largely involved within the events. Of all the attitude resources, judgement resources occupy an relatively large percentage, being roughly 53.33%, as judgement is the direct evaluation on people and their behaviors when construing the attitude, which conforms to social culture and ethic in that the attitude of admiring or criticizing, praising or condemning towards those events can be realized. Besides, based on the judgement resources, the study has annotated, amount of valuable information about the image that the writer constructed about Chinese government can be specified. As for appreciation, not taking up a huge proportion of all the appraisal resources, it only accounts for 30.00%. Appreciation tends to get rid of institutional feelings which take us out of the common sense world into uncommon sense words of shared community values. It is mainly aesthetically concerned with the evaluation of semiotic and natural phenomena based on the ways in which they are valued in a particular field. It is inconsistent with the purpose of the writer to attempt to evaluate the quality and value of the things related to Chinese events with the direct expression of attitude. However, from the statistical results presented in Table 1, it can be seen that affect resources only take up a small proportion, about 13.33%, ranking the lowest of all the attitude values, which shows that the writer is more inclined to avoid the direct expression of the emotions to ensure its objectivity.

Analysis of Affect Resources

Affect is the core part of attitude, and it can be positive or negative to express emotions such as joy or sadness, love or hatred, interest or boredom, carried by vocabulary, which can be expressed in the form of noun, verb, adjective, or adverb. It can be direct or figurative. Specifically, the affect system is used to explain the emotional responses of behavioral texts, processes, and phenomena by language users. A few examples of news
headlines in the Economist related to the affection are offered as follows. The words and expressions that contain appraisal meanings are italicized.

(1) The natural world may have less to fear than expected from China’s rise.
(2) Xi Jinping decides to abolish presidential term limits.
(3) Why the Communist Party wants to dial down the hype.
(4) The government wants to ban a pro-independence party. Democrats are worried.

The words of “fear”, “decide”, “want”, and “worried” in the above examples are all mental words that directly express people’s inner psychological activities and reflect their attitudes and thoughts on events. In Title (1), for example, “less to fear” is a positive, direct emotion. By using “less to fear”, the author expresses that the natural world is no longer so worried about China. The attitude of the natural world indicates that, with the rapid development of China’s economy, the Chinese government also pays more attention to environmental problems, which is a happy thing. Therefore, the writer’s agreement on Chinese actions on environment is reflected by expressing the natural world’s attitude. Take a Chinese headline “张开双臂，喜迎四海之宾” for example, the word “喜” in it means “happy”, which is a positive and direct emotional word, expressing the Chinese people’s warm welcome and happiness to friends from all over the world attending the world horticultural exposition.

The writer’s happiness is also emerged as a kind of positive attitude. As for the word “want” in Title (4), it is a verb that expresses the direct psychological process of need, desire. The author tries to express the fact that the government has a desire for a ban on the pro-independence party. However, this action will indeed cause panic among democrats. Therefore, it is problematic and disapproved. Correspondingly, there is another Chinese headline “完全没必要担心中国的前途：一个台商眼中的中国制造2025”. In this title, “没必要担心” is a positive psychological term, showing the author’s great confidence in China’s future development. With the Chinese system, definitely the biggest advantage, under the right leadership of the government, Chinese development can be very efficient.

**Analysis of Judgement Resources**

Judgment is the attitude of praising or criticizing, or condemning actions, deeds, words, beliefs, and motives. The judgment system belongs to the ethical category and evaluates the behavior according to the ethical and moral standards. In the research of news media languages, the evaluation system is divided into two parts, social sanction and social constraint (White, 1998). Social judgment has positive and negative meanings. The positive is admired, the negative is rightly criticized, but criticism is not the law, and the behavior criticized is not evil. Social constraints can be both positive and negative. Corresponding headlines are offered below with italicized words and expressions that contain appraisal judgement meanings.

(5) Chinese farming is changing profoundly, but gradually.
(6) A tech billionaire’s quest exposes gaps in Chinese genealogies.
(7) China’s ambitions in space are growing. America is keeping its distance.
(8) Ponzi schemes cause huge social harm in China. Crackdowns may not be working.
(9) The government is trying new ways of skimming housing-market froth.
(10) China will soon deploy aircraft and missiles that rival the west’s best.
(11) Debate about how to revive China’s north-eastern rust belt holds lessons for the country as a whole.
(12) The first of two articles about the long arm of Chinese law-enforcement looks at efforts to repatriate suspected criminals.
(13) Angry young city folk with rural backgrounds threaten social stability
(14) The government is trying to prevent the formation of a vocal Uighur Diaspora.
(15) On a tropical island, China seeks to evoke an Alpine town.
(16) By tightening censorship, the Communist Party is taking a risk.
(17) A reorganisation of the bureaucracy shifts power to the Communist Party.
(18) After an explosion in wealth comes a boom in wills.
(19) China’s ethnic-Korean enclaves are no longer so Korean.
(20) The Communist Party is trying to explain Xi Jinping Thought.

From Title (5) to Title (20), a large number of critical words appear. The words “profoundly”, “gradually”, “huge”, and “no longer” are the judgement of adjective and adverb series. They themselves have positive or negative judgement with or without any judgement, but in the specific context, they bear certain judgement. For example, in Headline (5), “profoundly” and “gradually” are the evaluation of the quality and speed of China’s agricultural transformation, indicating that the author believes that China’s agricultural transformation is thorough and gradual, and expresses a positive affirmation. The words “expose gaps”, “growing”, “keeping its distance”, “may not”, “trying”, “skimming”, “deploy”, “hold lesson for”, “look at efforts to”, “try to prevent”, “seek to prevent”, “seek to evoke”, “taking a risk”, “comes a boom”, and “trying to explain” are generally negative terms. In Headline (6) the writer uses “expose gaps” to express constructing an accurate lineage could be tough. With the biggest movement of people in recent decades away from their ancestral homes in the country, genealogical records are inevitably patchy. By using this verb phrase, the writer expresses the attitude of dissatisfaction. Similar devices can be seen in Chinese news headlines. For example, in the title “‘一带一路倡议有助于直接和平’”, the word “有助于” is a positive evaluation word that expresses the author’s full affirmation of the One Belt and One Road initiative. “有助于” shows that Chinese proposal to build One Belt and One Road is correct and will drive the development of the world, which is also recognized by the world.

Returning to Headline (13), the author uses “try to prevent” to indicate that the Chinese government’s action against Uyghur voices has a negative impact and is inappropriate. The authorities are quieter about their equally successful campaign to repatriate Uighurst but with increasing restrictions on their personal and religious freedom. Therefore, the writer is opposed to the Chinese government’s action. Similarly, in Title (16), the author uses “taking a risk”, which indicates that the behavior of the Chinese government has aroused public dissatisfaction, and the writer holds a negative attitude of opposition. The same device also appears in Chinese headlines. In “别再‘狂吹’5G了”, the word “狂吹” means to describe something in a way that makes it seem more important or serious than it really is. It is a negative term in the title, suggesting that the authors are unhappy because 5G’s role has been overplayed. In fact, there is no such urgent need for 5G in human society. The development of 5G must be slow. We are on the way forward, but the road is long and difficult. Only by working hard on the ground can we truly realize our vision. The writer therefore expresses the opposition to this phenomenon.

Analysis of Appreciation Resources

Appreciation is a resource to express the value of things, including reaction, composition, and value. The appreciation system also has the positive significance and the negative significance. Corresponding examples are listed below with evaluative words italicized.

(21) In the former Portuguese enclave, the colonial tongue is back in vogue.
(22) A fashionable aesthetic puzzles parents and the party.
(23) Frequent protests by former soldiers alarm the authorities.
(24) Prejudice against an influx of mainlanders is rife.
(25) Gauging public opinion is hard.
(26) A change to the blood-donation system is bungled.
(27) A firefighter and a brain box win important posts.
(28) As regulations are tightened, unregistered congregations steel themselves.
(29) Taboos make it hard to provide good end-of-life care.

In the above examples, the words “hard”, “good”, “back in vogue”, “puzzles”, “alarm”, “rife”, “bungled”, “important”, “tightened”, and “unregistered” express the nature of the results of events and the resulting influence, and, according to the context, are mostly negative appreciation resources. For example, the word “hard” in Title (29) indicates that the author thinks the existence of taboos is inappropriate and seriously goes against the will of the public. Talking about death has long been a taboo which severely impedes the development of end-of-life care. Therefore, in writer’s perspective, this problem is necessary to be removed. Accordingly, in the Chinese title “经济全球化的中国方案深得人心”, the word “深得人心” means that economic globalization is widely supported, and it is a positive term, expressing that the economic globalization develops as a trend with unshakable determination of the world. The reverse operation of the United States, resulting in economic globalization and the sharp intensification of the contradiction between anti-globalization, causes widespread concern in the international community. Therefore, “深得人心” expresses China’s opposition to the US approach and its continued support for economic globalization. There is another example, which is shown in Title (23). The author uses the word “alarm” to imply that there has been a problem in the resettling work of Chinese ex-service men. The relevant policies are not clear, resulting in a large number of ex-servicemen with very different treatments. Therefore, the writer thinks that the Chinese government should take responsibility to solve this problem. It is a kind of negative attitude towards this event.

**Conclusion**

Combing the quantitative analysis with the qualitative analysis, based on dozens of news headlines, and with the guide of the appraisal theory, this study has made a tentative exploration with respect to the attitude resources in the commentary of news headlines of the Economist to deepen our understanding and recognition in the application of the appraisal theory into the news headlines which ultimately proves feasible and enlightening. The Economist is inclined to choose judgement resources to express attitude, which is consistent with the previous studies. The western media is not as fair and objective as it claims to be. When writing news headlines, they tend to choose a large number of critical words to express their attitudes towards Chinese events and mostly have a negative attitude rather than positive attitude adopted by Chinese headlines. Additionally, with much more value of judgement, the author constructs the image of China as problematic, immature, and relentless, as the author thinks the developing China still has a lot to improve. This is to some extent consistent with the long-standing self-worship of westerners and their jealousy of China’s development. Therefore, further study of news headlines may be needed with great theoretical and practical significance for revealing the interaction of language, power, and ideology.
References


