Analysis of the Attitude Resources in English News Reports About Xiong'an

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Abstract

Xiong'an New Area is designed to become a new economic hot point. So it is urgent for Chinese media to publicize it to the whole world. With Appraisal Theory as the theoretical framework, through the analysis of the distribution and frequency of attitude resources in English news reports about Xiong'an, the present study tends to explore what kind of images the attitude resources have established in readers' mind. It is found that Chinese journalists exquisitely employ attitude resources to create a forward-looking and down-to-earth international image of Xiong'an, which may contribute to its healthy development.

Key words: Attitude resource; Appraisal Theory; News report; Xiong'an

1. INTRODUCTION

Xinhua News Agency released authoritative news on April 1, 2017 that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council made a historic strategic decision to establish Xiong'an New Area in Hebei Province to relieve Beijing's non-capital functions. Shortly afterwards, the important guiding documents on the construction of the New Area, such as *The Outline of Hebei Xiong'an New Area Planning*, *The Regulatory Detailed Planning for the Initiating Area of Hebei Xiong'an New Area*, and *The Regulatory Planning for the Start-up Area of Hebei Xiong'an New Area*, continued to be issued. At the same time, various construction projects started one after another like mushrooms after rain. All of these have been demonstrating a thriving and prosperous image of Xiong'an to the public home and abroad.

The New Area is designed to become a model for attracting international innovation elements, including innovative talents, innovative enterprises and investment in innovative industry. Whether this goal will be achieved is closely dependent on international readers' impression towards this future economic hot point. However, common readers are more inclined to get information about Xiong'an from news reports, rather than from official documents. Therefore, the present study tends to explore what kind of images the attitude resources in the English news reports about Xiong'an have established in readers' mind.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Appraisal Theory is the main theoretical perspective in Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA), whose purpose is to demonstrate to readers the positive aspects of society and create a better world. It originates from systemic functional grammar. At the end of the 1990s, Martin (2006) proposed the concept of PDA in an international conference, and later gave a detailed explanation of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), which provides not only a systematic theoretical framework for researchers within the field of discourse analysis, but also some feasible practical methods to conduct detailed discourse analysis. In the past two decades, researchers have continuously applied it to the analysis and interpretation of various discourses.

Appraisal Theory mainly includes three systems: the attitude system, the engagement system and the graduation system, among which the attitude system is the core and has the largest number of researches. Attitude resources in many stylistic discourses have been investigated, including literary works (Chen &Wen, 2013; Han, 2014), teaching materials (He, 2013; Tang, 2019), academic monographs (Li & Jiang, 2017), business discourse (Dai & Qiu, 2012; Xu & Xia, 2013), oral discourse (Miao & Xu, 2020), etc., among which news report is one of the most widely studied styles.

Most studies on attitude resources in news reports examines a single text, while some studies select multiple texts with similar topics. The topics selected are mostly current affairs hot spots, such as news reports on Belt and Road Initiative (Liu & Zhang, 2020), news reviews on COVID-19 epidemic (Chen & Ma, 2022). In these researches, more emphasis is placed on analyzing the distribution characteristics and expressive effects of attitude resources, or exploring the author's position and attitude. Few researches have been done to investigate what kind of image of a certain event can be established by analyzing attitude resources.

New Area is designed to become a model of world-class city clusters and to attract international innovation elements. If attitude resources can be exquisitely employed in influencing interpersonal relations, they may contribute to the establishment of a good international image of the city, and be conducive to its future economic development.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the core of Appraisal Theory, attitude system projects human feelings. It can be divided into three systems: Affect, Judgment and Appreciation, which correspond to emotion, ethics and aesthetics respectively. Each system contains positive and negative expressions, and can be further divided into subsystems according to standards of human beings' most instinctive emotions, universal social norms and values respectively. Different from Systemic Functional Linguistics, which analyzes the personal relationship at the syntactic level, Appraisal Theory examines how lexical segments project human feelings.

To facilitate the annotation process, Martin and White (2005) provides several lists of a limited number of words corresponding to different subsystems. It is worthy of noticing that Martin and White's lists are not exhaustive. When words not listed in the lists are needed to be annotated, annotators can make reference to definitions of each subsystem and its subordinate minor groups.

It is very complicated and meticulous to annotate attitude resources. However, few previous studies provide practical instructions in annotating attitude resources. With the purpose to ensure the accuracy of the research results, the following two principles are suggested:

1) Annotations of the same word in different contexts may be different, so it cannot be mechanically copied;

2) The meaning of a word should be based on its English definition, not on the Chinese translation.

Take the word "efficient" as an example. It has multiple meanings. When used to modify something, for example, efficient heating equipment, efficient use of energy, it means doing something well and thoroughly with no waste of time, money or energy. When used to modify a person, it means to be capable of organizing one's work in the way that gets the best results. Whether the efficiency is high or not can be calculated by scientific methods, containing no sensory elements, so its first usage cannot be annotated as any type of attitude resources. The adjective "capable" in the second usage is usually used to make a judgment on a person's ability to do things, which makes it reasonable to annotate the word "efficient" in its second usage to the "capacity" category of the judgment resource.

Taking "opportunity" as another example, its definition in English dictionary is: a time when a particular situation makes it possible to do or achieve something. Some English-Chinese dictionaries translate it literally into "good chance". Judging from the Chinese translation, "good" indicates that human beings make the judgment according to their intuitive feelings, which naturally makes it classified as a member of the "valuation" category of the appreciation resource. However, judging from its English definition, the word does not contain any touch of the meaning of "good", that is, it has nothing to do with human feelings and cannot be categorized as an appreciation resource.

4. METHODS

This study selected the news reports about Xiong'an New Area in the English version of *China Daily*, and used two databases in the search process: LexisNexis news database and *China Daily* global website.

Concentrating on what happens in China, *China Daily* represents the standpoint of the Chinese government, and it is one of the English newspapers published by China with the widest range of international readers. As a world-famous database, all news reports on LexisNexis are highly timely, and they are continuously updated 24 hours a day. Its accuracy is also very high. All news reports are authorized by the provider, so users do not have to worry about legitimacy and accuracy.

Since the news to establish Xiong'an New Area in Hebei Province to relieve Beijing's non-capital functions was released on April 1, 2017, English news reports about Xiong'an from *China Daily* during the period from April 1, 2017 to December 31, 2021 were selected.

Due to *China Daily*'s adjustment on January 2, 2019, LexisNexis does not include *China Daily*'s data from then

on, so news reports after that time were mainly selected from the official website of *China Daily* Global Edition: www.chinadailyglobal.com.

With Xiong'an as the key word, 416 news reports were found in the search results. After reading each piece of news, those that are not mainly about Xiong'an were removed from the corpus. When Xiong'an appears in the title, it is certain to be selected. When Xiong'an appears in the lead part, there is a higher possibility that this piece of news is mainly about this city. When it appears only in the body part, sometimes, Xiong'an is not the main topic. Such news reports were removed from the corpus. Finally, 142 news reports remained, with 56740 English words.

This study mainly takes the attitude resources as the subject, so the latest version 6.2e of UAM Corpus Tool was selected, which has excellent annotation, retrieval and statistics functions. When annotating, Layers of Attitude Resources provided by UAM Corpus Tool were adopted. In order to minimize the subjective factors of the annotation, the annotation was completed by three researchers. After completing the annotation independently, the three researchers discussed the discrepancy and determined the final annotation. The entire annotation process lasted for almost half a year. More than 20 meetings were convened to confirm the annotating results.

The three annotators are all native speakers of Chinese. Because the annotation process requires careful discrimination of the context and specific emotional meaning, definitions in *Oxford Advanced Leaner's English-Chinese Dictionary* (8th edition) are employed as the criteria. In certain cases, when the three annotators cannot reach an agreement, more materials were employed as the annotating criteria, such as British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English.

5. RESULTS

5.1 General Distribution of Attitude Resources

The establishment of Xiong'an New Area is called the "Millennial Plan", which is likely to become a new growth point of China's or even the world's economy in the future, and a model of world-class city clusters. In addition to the strong support of the Chinese government, its construction at all stages is inseparable from international investment, advanced technology and innovative talents. Therefore, it is urgent for Chinese media to publicize Xiong'an to the world and establish its good international image.

Language is an important means of personal communication, by which author/speaker can transfer his subjective attitude to the reader/listener, thus affecting their cognition and emotion towards something. By employing attitude resources in English news reports about Xiong'an, journalists can influence readers' cognition of this city, which is now not so popular among international readers, and help them establish an appropriate image about Xiong'an.

Table 1
General Distribution of Attitude Resources

Resource types	Subsystems	Number	Subtotal	Percentage	Percentage subtotal
Affect	Un/happiness	20		1.5%	
	Dis/satisfaction	100		7.7%	
	In/security	42	372	3.3%	28.5%
	Dis/inclination	209		16%	
Judgement	Normality	24		1.8%	
	Capacity	103		7.9%	
	Tenacity	43	192	3.3%	14.7%
	Veracity	20		1.5%	
	Propriety	2		0.2%	
Appreciation	Reaction	188	736	14.4%	56.4%

Table 1 shows the overall distribution of attitude resources reflected in 142 English news reports about Xiong'an New Area in *China Daily*. It is obvious that the proportion of appreciation resources is the highest (56.4%), more than the sum of emotional resources (28.5%) and judgment resources (14.7%). The sharp contrast indicates that journalists tend to appraise relatively objective texts, processes or natural phenomena in English news reports about Xiong'an New Area.

Affect resources focus on the inherent emotional expression of human beings, and judgement resources demonstrate views towards human behavior. If these two types of resources account for a relatively high proportion, readers may get the impression that such news reports are too subjective. When appreciation resources occupy a much larger proportion, they can enhance the objectivity of news reports.

It takes Shenzhen Special Zone, the world international innovation industry center, several decades to flourish from a small fishing village. The construction of Xiong'an New Area is in the initial stage. After realizing its bright future, more and more workers, talents and investors may come to this city to realize their dreams. What Xiong'an can do now is to make preparations and show the world its

great potential with actual actions. The highest proportion of appreciation resources also indicate that Xiong'an has prepared a variety of materials for future development, such as infrastructure, facilities, and a pleasant environment. And those are what start-up companies, talents and investors just need.

5.2 Affect Resources

Although the proportion of affect resources (28.4%) ranks second in the general distribution of attitude resources, it covers only a small share, just over a quarter. Affect resources focus on human's inborn emotional expression, which embodies people's response to certain behavior, text, process or phenomenon. The analysis of the affect resources of English news reports about Xiong'an New Area can help us to examine what kind of behavior, text, process or phenomenon people have responded to, what kinds of responses they have, and understand what cognitive and emotional consensus the author tends to convey to readers.

Table 2
Distribution of Affect Resources

Resource subtypes	Positive/negative	Number	Number subtotal	Percentage	Percentage subtotal
Un/happiness	Positive	18	20	4.85%	5.4%
	Negative	2		0.54%	
Dis/satisfaction	Positive	85	100	22.91%	26.8%
	Negative	15		4.04%	
In/security	Positive	14	42	3.77%	11.3%
	Negative	28		7.55%	
Dis/inclination	Positive	202	209	54.45%	56.3%
	Negative	7		1.89%	

Table 2 shows the quantity and proportion of the four types of affect resources. Statistics clarifies that the proportion of dis/inclination resources (209, 56.3%) is the highest, accounting for more than half of the attitude resources. Among them, inclination resources account for the vast majority (202), while disinclination resources include only 7 words. Xiong'an New Area has not been completely constructed yet and is in the stage of planning and construction. Dis/inclination resources express people's feelings of hoping something to happen. Because Xiong'an is currently in the stage of planning and construction, people hope that the planning and future development of this city can meet the requirements of high standards in terms of economy, society, science and technology, environment, etc. This is why dis/inclination resources account for a larger proportion.

The three words with the highest frequency in attitude resources include: expect (68), need (49) and focus on (21). The former two are inclination resources, while the latter is a satisfaction resource.

The verb "expect" appears in four main forms: expect, expects, expected, and expecting, and "something is expected to" is the most frequently used structure, with a total of 60 occurrences. In this structure, "something" represents what people expect to happen. "Need" can be used as both a verb and a noun. Not all of the various meanings can be annotated as inclination resources. After annotating with reference to specific context, 49 cases were confirmed as inclination resources.

From the collocations of the two inclination resources, the demand of Xiong'an is mainly divided into the following categories: economic development potential, reform and opening up, innovation, non-capital functions, coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, continuing the achievements of other special zones, infrastructure, telecommunications, transportation, environmental protection, tourism, educational institutions, scientific research institutions, hospitals, financial institutions, large enterprises, and foreign investment.

Journalists employ these words not only to describe the specific planning of Xiong'an in all aspects, but also to stimulate resonation from readers, making them believe that when Xiong'an is completed, it will ease some of Beijing's non-capital functions, and at the same time, it can make good use of the advantages of its geographical location to have a coordinated development with Beijing and Tianjin. Xiong'an will not only have a beautiful environment and rich tourism resources, but also lead the economic development with its innovative strength and become a pioneer in opening up. With excellent local infrastructure, convenient transportation, advanced communication facilities and the support of financial, educational and scientific research institutions, it is more likely that Xiong'an will continue the glory of Shenzhen Special Zone and Pudong New Area, and even surpass them.

By analyzing the words collocating with "focus on", we can divide the things Xiong'an is concerned with into the following categories: reform, innovation, infrastructure, telecommunications, transportation, environmental protection, and high-end industries. These fields represent the future development direction of Xiong'an. At the current stage, the central and local governments have paid high attention to these fields and issued corresponding preferential policies to support the development of these fields.

There are many overlaps between the words collocating with "expect" and "need" on one hand, and words collocating with "focus on" on the other. It suggests

that elements expressed by the two inclination resources are basically focused on by Xiong'an. The two types of attitude resources have built a positive image of Xiong'an, forward-looking and down-to-earth.

5.3 Judgement Resources

Judgement resources indicate views towards human behavior. This kind of sense is conventional rather than innate. Although the proportion of judgment resources (14.7%) is the lowest, it can demonstrate to readers what kind of talents Xiong'an needs and what is the attitude of Xiong'an towards its constructing process.

Table 3
Distribution of Judgement Resources

Resource subtypes	Number	Percentage
Normality	24	12.5%
Capacity	103	53.6%
Tenacity	43	22.4%
Veracity	20	10.4%
Propriety	2	1.0%

Table 3 shows the quantity and proportion of five subtypes of judgement resources. Among the five subtypes, capacity resources (103, 53.6%) accounts for more than half of the judgement resources, which suggests that capacity is one of the important criteria for selecting talents in Xiong'an.

Capacity resources includes talents in many aspects, such as influence, physical condition, experience, humor, IQ, rationality, judgement, education, talent, achievement, etc. After all judgement resources were classified into different aspects, it was found that the largest number of capacity resources focus on talents (e.g. talent, expert, expertise, researcher, professional, high end, professional achievements, talented, top), followed by influence (e.g. active, entrepreneurial, innovative) and IQ (e.g. resourceful), while other categories of words do not appear.

Sentences containing these talent resources are mainly used to describe the characteristics of the talents required by Xiong'an. "Talent" is defined as people or a person with a natural ability to do something well. The definition illustrates that Xiong'an needs not only talents who can do things, but also talents who can do things well, which emphasizes one's executive ability. Perfect policies need to be implemented by people. Only those with strong executive ability can perfectly implement good policies, rather than leave them high in the shelf. Xiong'an is currently in the initial stage, and relevant policies have been launched successively. Only by implementing these policies seriously can Xiong'an develop better, and only by developing well can it attract more talents and form a virtuous circle. From the distribution of judgement resources and its subtypes, general standards for selecting talents and what kinds of staff are working in Xiong'an have been illustrated vividly.

5.4 Appreciation Resources

Appreciation resources demonstrate people's appraisal of inanimate things such as texts, processes or natural phenomena, including not only things we make, our performance, but also natural phenomena. By analyzing these appreciation resources, readers can understand what things, performances and natural phenomena Xiong'an has appraised, and what standards these appraisals are based on.

Table 4
Distribution of Appreciation Resources

Resources subtypes	Minor groups	Number	Number subtotal	Percentage	Percentage subtotal
Reaction	Impact	29	188	3.9%	25.5%
	Quality	159		21.6%	
Composition	Balance	110	146	14.9%	19.8%
	Complexity	36		4.9%	
Valuation			402		54.6%

It can be seen from Table 4 that among the three subtypes of appreciation resources, valuation resources accounts for the largest proportion, more than half of the appreciation resources. In their word lists, Martin and White (2005) further divide valuation resources into 7 minor groups: depth, innovation, specialty, practicality, authenticity, timeliness, value in money. In the corpus of the current study, total frequency of words indicating specialty is the highest. And "major", the individual word with the highest frequency, also indicates specialty.

"Major" is defined as "very large or important". Words collocating with "major" demonstrate what are important to the new area. The establishment of Xiong'an is a major choice of the CPC Central Committee and is of great significance to the development of the whole country. For Xiong'an at the initial stage, it is a major task to enable enterprises and institutions that have just moved there to take root. During the development period of this city, the government gives strong support to major projects in transportation, ecology, water resources protection, energy and public services. Environmental protection is one of the characteristics of Xiong'an, and the related industries also become the major beneficiaries after the establishment of Xiong'an.

The second most frequently occurring word is "coordinated", which derives from the verb form "coordinate". The English definition of the verb is: to organize the different parts of an activity and the people involved in it so that it works, which emphasizes integrity of the whole, so the adjective coordinated should be

classified as a balance resource. The word appears 33 times in the corpus, and there is basically only one modified component, namely: development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, or its abbreviation.

The high frequency of the word and the same modified ingredient clearly show that Xiong'an New Area is an important link in the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. In terms of popularity, Xiong'an is far less well-known in the world than Beijing and Tianjin. If Xiong'an New Area is juxtaposed with Beijing and Tianjin, two world famous cities, which have been designed to development in a coordinated way with Xiong'an, it may not only improve its popularity of this city, but also enhance readers' confidence in Xiong'an.

6. CONCLUSION

Attitude resources in the Appraisal Theory are annotated according to human's instinct and universal feelings. Even though the culture of readers may be different from the culture of the author, their instincts and universal feelings are the same. Therefore, the use of such resources can reduce misunderstandings and help readers build three-dimensional and specific images by reading two-dimensional text symbols. Through analyzing the distribution and frequency of different attitude resources, researchers can analyze what kind of image a text establishes for its readers.

Due to the limited conditions, the current study only studies attitude resources. Future studies can conduct more in-depth research on engagement and graduation resources in English news reports about Xiong'an New Area.

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