

A Positive Discourse Analysis of Reports on “Guangxi Floods” from the Attitude Perspective of Appraisal Theory

Shanshan Jiang

Nanning Normal University, Nanning, China

Abstract

From the attitude perspective of appraisal theory, this paper conducts a positive discourse analysis on the news related to “Guangxi Floods”, aiming to explore the characteristics of attitude resources’ distribution in relevant news and China’s national images constructed by them. The research results indicate that judgment resources appear most frequently among the reports, followed by appreciation resources, and finally, affect resources. These resources collectively construct a positive image of China. It is foresighted, united and helpful, efficient and responsible, people-oriented, actively responding to crises, and possessing social cohesion and emergency response capabilities. This study helps to enhance Chinese citizens’ sense of identity and belonging to the country, but also contributes to improving the international community’s understanding and support for China.

Keywords

Appraisal Theory; Attitude resources; Positive discourse analysis; China’s national images.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

In today’s information era, news reports not only serve as a medium for information dissemination but also play a pivotal role in guiding public opinion, particularly in shaping and presenting national images. This importance is particularly evident when it comes to sudden events like natural disasters, as news reports directly reflect and influence the public’s emotional reactions. With the characteristics of objectivity and timeliness, news reports can truly capture the whole events and reflect a country’s response capabilities at the same time. In recent years, due to global climate change, extreme weather events have occurred frequently. The flood disaster caused by heavy rainfall in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in June 2024 was particularly severe, with flood levels in many areas reaching beyond the historical records, attracting widespread attention from domestic media.

The *appraisal theory* proposed by Martin comprises three subsystems, attitude, engagement, and graduation. Among them, the attitude system is the most significant and the core component of *appraisal theory*. The attitude system can be further subdivided into three categories, affect, judgment, and appreciation resources, which are used to analyze the emotions expressed by the reporter or speaker, value judgments made about people’s characters and behaviors, and the appreciation and evaluation of all things.

Therefore, this paper employs *appraisal theory* as the perspective to conduct a positive discourse analysis of the attitude resources in news reports concerning “Guangxi Floods” in June 2024. The purpose is to explore the distribution characteristics of attitude resources in those reports and China’s national images presented.

1.2. Research Significance

This study selects relevant news reports from China's English-language official media, China Daily, People's Daily, and Ecns.cn, as the research corpus, focusing on "Guangxi Floods" that occurred in June 2024. Theoretically, this study helps further expand the application of *appraisal theory* in news reports analysis, provide new case studies for researches in this field, and offer theoretical support for discourse strategies for media in reporting disasters. Practically, by analyzing the images China portrays in the face of natural disasters, this study aims to bring hope, confidence, and positive energy to Chinese people, strengthen their courage and resolve to overcome difficulties, enhance a common sense of national identity, and promote the construction of a harmonious society. Simultaneously, by revealing the positive images of China presented in news reports, it can foster international community's better understanding about and show more support for China.

In summary, conducting a positive discourse analysis of news reports related to "Guangxi Floods" from the attitude perspective of *appraisal theory* is not only necessary but also has significant theoretical and practical implications.

2. Literature Review

To better support this research, related key terms, theoretical basis and research status in this field at home will be presented in this chapter.

2.1. Theoretical Basis

Appraisal Theory was put forward by Martin. The focus of this theory lies in "appraise" which suggests that the evaluation does not merely stay on the superficial meaning of language, but delves into the deeper meaning. The appraisal system consists of three subsystems, engagement, attitude, and graduation.

This paper primarily focuses on the attitude resources in news on "Guangxi Floods". Attitude resources are further categorized into affect, judgment, and appreciation resources. Among them, affect resources fall within the realm of psychology, representing emotions at and feelings of texts, behaviors, etc., for example "I felt extremely excited because it was my first time participating in such an event." Judgment resources belong to the ethical category, evaluating the behaviors of language users according to ethical and moral standards, for example, "I believe this decision is extremely wise and responsible." Appreciation resources are of aesthetic category, referring to the evaluation of texts, processes, etc., for instance, "The plot of this novel is tight and engaging, with vivid and lively characters."

This perspective provides a powerful analytical framework for uncovering the psychological state, moral evaluation, and aesthetic evaluation of language users behind language itself.

Positive discourse analysis was also proposed by Martin. He believes that the subject of linguistic analysis should not only be limited to "bad news" containing phenomena of inequality, but also include "good news" that advocates peace and friendliness. Positive discourse analysis guides people to create a harmonious atmosphere with positive languages, while also requires researchers to adopt a positive and friendly attitude, and promote the spirit of unity, inclusiveness, and mutual assistance, which provides a new perspective for discourse analysis.

2.2. Research Status at Home

The author has conducted a search on cnki with the key term "positive discourse analysis" and has summarized the current research status and trends in China in the past five years as follows. In terms of the number of papers, based on the visual analysis of the search results from cnki, the author finds that although there have been certain fluctuations in the academic field regarding "positive discourse analysis" in recent five years, the overall trend is increasing.

In terms of research perspectives, the author has observed that 53% of the studies related to “positive discourse analysis” are based on the perspective of *appraisal theory* and attitude resources.

For instance, in the analysis of news reports, scholars have conducted many researches on attitude resources in news, for example, Dong Dan (2019: 17-23) conducted a positive discourse analysis of the attitude resources in Italian mainstream media’s coverage of the opening ceremony of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (NCCPC), exploring the Italian mainstream media’s attitude towards the 19th NCCPC. Guo Ming and Sun Rui (2021: 61-66) explored the positive meanings conveyed by explicit and implicit attitude resources in news related to the “Chinese Dream”. Liu Lihua and Meng Fanrong (2024: 78-88) analyzed the distribution and presentation of attitude resources in African media’s reports on China’s targeted poverty alleviation policy, revealing African media’s perception of and evaluation on China’s poverty alleviation policy.

In the field of literature, Lu Yang (2020: 88-93) analyzed the positive meanings of Gu Hongming’s English translations of *The Analects of Confucius* and *Doctrine of the Mean* under the framework of *appraisal theory*, focusing on the three major appraisal resources of attitude, engagement, and graduation. Huang Fang and Zeng Lei (2022: 264-271) analyzed the attitude resources in *The Land Ethic* and verified the applicability of *appraisal theory* to discourse analysis on literary works.

In the analysis of political texts, Ma Jingjing and Zhan Quanwang (2021: 112-120) conducted a positive discourse analysis of the attitude resources in the English version of *Energy in China*, analyzing the construction of China’s national images. Wei Maohui (2022: 165-169) analyzed the attitudes and opinions expressed in the speech delivered by South Korean President Moon Jae-in at the United Nations General Assembly based on *appraisal theory*, exploring Moon Jae-in’s personal images and South Korea’s national images.

In addition, a few scholars have explored positive discourse analysis from perspectives such as “proximization” and multimodal ecological discourse analysis, for example, Wu Yuanzheng and Feng Dezheng (2022: 677-684) proposed a multimodal ecological discourse analytic framework based on attitude meaning and oriented towards ecological value construction, analyzed multimodal elements in public service advertising on environmental protection and explored the construction process of attitude meanings in ecological discourses. Luo Xuanmin and Cao Yunzhi (2023: 103-113) conducted a positive discourse analysis of Zhu Ziqing’s famous prose *Spring* from the perspective of “proximization”, verifying the feasibility of this approach to positive discourse analysis.

It can be seen that positive discourse analysis based on *appraisal theory* and its attitude resources occupies a prominent position, providing scientific basis and detailed references for this study to conduct positive discourse analysis using the attitude system in *appraisal theory* as the theoretical foundation.

In terms of research contents, the author found that 24% of the researches on positive discourse analysis focus on presenting China’s positive images by exploring positive attitude resources in texts, for example, Xu Jing (2019: 70-74) and Zhou Xiaochun (2023: 12-25) conducted positive discourse analyses of news reports related to “the Belt and Road initiative” and the “Carbon Peaking and Carbon Neutrality” respectively, exploring the shaping of China’s national images.

According to the author’s search results on cnki, researches on national image in the field of foreign languages have maintained a high level of popularity in the past five years.

Based on what has been discussed, it can be seen that while the researches on positive discourse analysis have grown increasingly rich, studies using it to construct national image are still not enough. Chinese President Xi Jinping has emphasized the need to continuously build a

shared spiritual home for the Chinese nation, promote national spirit centered on patriotism and the spirit of our times built upon reform and innovation and increase Chinese people's sense of identity and pride in the Chinese nation. This indicates that it is necessary to help Chinese people gain a deeper understanding of China's positive images. Also, with the increasing development of the globalization, building a positive and favorable image of China and promoting a deeper understanding and recognition of China's images for the international community are particularly important.

Additionally, within the realm of "positive discourse analysis" researches, studies on social major emergencies are relatively few, though there are some researches on the discourse related to China's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, Chen Xianhong and Chen Kexin (2020: 49-52) as well as Li Ziyin (2022: 116-121) conducted positive discourse analysis on the texts of China's anti-epidemic actions, domestically and worldwide respectively.

In summary, the application of *appraisal theory* in positive discourse analysis has become increasingly widespread in China in the past five years, but its use in exploring China's national images is relatively limited, especially when faced with social major emergencies. In the future, the application of positive discourse analysis in constructing and disseminating national images can be further expanded.

Therefore, this paper adopts the perspective of attitude resources in *appraisal theory* combining with positive discourse analysis to analyze news reports related to "Guangxi Floods". It aims to explore and interpret the positive information conveyed by these attitude resources and discuss China's national images constructed by them.

3. Research Design

This study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative design. This chapter covers the research questions, subjects and instruments.

The present research is made to investigate the answers to the following two questions:

What are the characteristics of attitude resources' distribution in the news reports related to "Guangxi Floods"?

What kind of national images does the attitude resources present in the above news reports when China was responding to "Guangxi Flood"?

Due to the recent heavy rainfall, Guangxi has suffered severe flood disasters, with Guilin and Liuzhou being the most severely affected areas. This event has attracted widespread attention. Given that China Daily, People's Daily, and Ecn.cn are leading comprehensive English media websites in China, their reports have extensive influence and authority. Therefore, this study decides to collect relevant corpus from those platforms. In order to improve the comprehensiveness and representativeness of the research corpus, the author selects "Guilin", "Liuzhou", and "Guangxi" as keywords and set the time range from June 16, 2024, to June 27, 2024, to conduct searches. The author randomly selected 15 relevant reports from the retrieved news as the research corpus.

To conduct the research more efficiently, this study utilizes the corpus software UAM Corpus Tool 6 to create a corpus of news reports related to "Guangxi Floods". This software provides annotation and data statistical tools, which will provide support for subsequent quantitative and qualitative research.

4. Data Analysis

In news reports concerning "Guangxi Floods", there are abundant attitude resources that play a significant role in shaping China's national images.

4.1. A Quantitative Analysis of Attitude Resources

Using the software UAM Corpus Tool 6, the author manually annotates the corpus concerning “Guangxi Floods”. Through careful annotation, the author has identified the distribution characteristics of the three subsystems of attitude resources in the news, judgment resources, appreciation resources, and affect resources. As shown in Table 1, judgment resources account for the highest proportion in the text, appearing 67 times, accounting for 62.0%. The second is appreciation resources, with a total of 30 occurrences, accounting for 27.8%. However, affect resources are relatively fewer, with only 11 occurrences, accounting for 10.2%. These data demonstrate the frequency and importance of the three resources in shaping China’s national images. Next, the author will conduct further qualitative analyses on the overall situation of attitude resources and the three subsystems.

Table 1: Distribution of Attitude Resources in News Reports about “Guangxi Floods”

Attitude Resource	Quantity	Frequency
Affect Resources	11	10.2%
Judgement Resources	67	62.0%
Appreciation Resources	30	27.8%
Total	108	100%

4.2. A Qualitative Analysis of Attitude Resources

In news reports about “Guangxi Floods”, there is an obvious imbalance in the use of attitude resources by reporters. Specifically, judgment resources dominate the reports, appearing 67 times, significantly more than the other two types. Affect resources, on the other hand, are relatively scarce, used only 11 times. While appreciation resources are not as frequent as judgment resources, they still play an indispensable role in the reports, occurring 30 times. This strategic allocation of resources indicates that in utilizing attitude resources, news reporters focus on both objective judgments and aesthetic appreciation of facts, while they are striving for restraint on emotions to ensure the fairness, objectivity, and persuasiveness of news. The application of this strategy not only enables news reports to accurately convey facts, but also guides the public to form value judgments and aesthetic preferences based on objective facts.

4.2.1. A Qualitative Analysis of Affect Resources

Affect refers to the speaker expressing the emotional impact of something on him or the speaker’s emotional evaluation of something, which can be divided into four categories, happiness or unhappiness, safety or insecurity, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, willingness or unwillingness. The distribution of affect resources in the text is not common, with only 11 occurrences. To enhance the fairness, objectivity, and persuasiveness of news reports, reporters intentionally reduce excessive emotional renderings. Although the use of affect resources is not common, the integration of that can better evoke the reader’s resonance. This emotional resonance not only enhances the infective force and attractiveness of news reports, but also allows readers to understand and feel the stories and characters behind the news more deeply. Meanwhile, the use of affect resources is also an important means to shape China’s national image.

Example 1: Meanwhile, other rivers and tributaries connected to the Lijiang River that run through the Guilin urban area, ... threatening the safety of the lives and properties of the residents... “We never expected to be struck by such a catastrophic flood...,” Long said. “Fortunately, we made advance preparations, and all the villagers have been relocated.”

This example describes that due to the rising water level, there is a significant threat to the safety and properties of the residents. Long Qizhen, the Party chief of the village affected by the disaster, said in an interview that the villagers were well protected as they had made timely preparations.

First, the description in the first half of the sentence, “other rivers and tributaries connected to the Lijiang River that run through the Guilin urban area, ... threatening the safety of the lives and properties of the residents,” is filled with tense and fearful emotions. The word “threatening” clearly indicates the direct threat posed by the flood to the lives and property safety of residents, causing readers’ concern and sympathy. This emotional rendering enables readers to more intuitively feel the severity and urgency of the flood disaster.

Secondly, in the latter half of the sentence, “We never expected to be struck by such a catastrophic flood...,” Long, also the affected resident, expressed shock and helplessness towards the sudden disaster. “Never expected” highlights the unpredictability and helplessness of people in the face of disasters, enhancing readers’ sympathy and understanding for the affected residents. However, he then shifted his tone, saying, “Fortunately, we made advance preparations, and all the villagers have been relocated.” Here, the positive response and adequate preparation are demonstrated. This not only reflects the self-rescue ability of local residents and their awareness of disaster response, but also reflects the guidance and support provided by the country in disaster prevention and response.

Long’s words and the severe situation portrayed in the first half of the sentence form a stark contrast, creating a responsible and proactive national image, demonstrating China’s prompt response in the face of disasters and providing necessary guidance and support for the people.

4.2.2. A Qualitative Analysis of Judgement Resources

Judgment resources are used to judge something according to ethical and moral standards or rules and regulations, such as whether an action is ethical, reliable, or brave. The author finds that judgment resources account for 67% of attitude resources in the text, the most frequently used one. This high frequency of use not only reflects the reporters’ or speaker’s evaluation of specific behaviors, but also profoundly reveals the multi-dimensional characteristics of China’s images.

Example 2: Authorities in Guilin, a popular tourist destination in South China’s Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, have been going all-out to combat the city’s most severe flooding since 1998, with priority given to minimizing casualties and economic losses.

In this instance, when Guilin faced its most severe flooding since 1998, the government has taken “all-out” measures to tackle the disaster, demonstrating the country’s emphasis on protecting citizens’ lives and property. Furthermore, the use of the present perfect continuous tense “have been going all-out” highlights that the government doesn’t respond to the flood in a short-term, but actively prepares for long-term stability and recovery, reflecting a positive and responsible national image.

Moreover, the text specifically mentions “with priority given to minimizing casualties and economic losses,” which shows that when dealing with natural disasters, the country always puts people’s lives first while also considers economic stability. This exemplifies the fundamental principle of the party and the country, which is “serving the people wholeheartedly”.

In conclusion, this example portrays China as a responsible country that serves the people and actively faces challenges.

Example 3: The Ministry of Finance, together with the Ministry of Water Resources, has issued 916 million yuan (\$126 million) for flood control in southern China and for drought resistance efforts in the north.

This example primarily describes the allocation of 916 million yuan by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Water Resources for flood control in the south and drought relief efforts in the north.

As the important departments responsible for major natural disasters in the country, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Water Resources have demonstrated their efficient resource allocation capabilities by quickly allocating such a significant amount of funds in a short period after the disasters occurred. This shows the professional ability of China in handling emergencies, giving the people and the international community a glimpse of its commitment to people's lives and property and its sense of social responsibility. Doing so, the Chinese government has formed an image of a country that cares deeply for its people's well-being, is people-oriented, and is actively responsible.

Example 4: Feng Deliao, a police officer...who was busy helping villagers relocate on Sunday afternoon, said the station, which serves four townships, had sent 12 of its 14 officers to assist in flood relief efforts.

In Example 4, police officers actively responded and devoted themselves to the flood relief efforts. As a part of China's law enforcement, they embody the country's concern for people's safety and well-being. They sacrificed their valuable free time to engage in flood relief work, demonstrating the country's emphasis on public safety and the interests of its citizens. Additionally, the police station dispatched a majority of its officers to participate in the rescue efforts, indicating that government agencies and public servants can work together and collaborate in the face of challenges. This team spirit reflects the country's cohesion and social stability.

4.2.3. A Qualitative Analysis of Appreciation Resources

Appreciation resources are an essential subsystem within attitude resources, used to evaluate natural objects, artifacts, or abstract concepts such as policies and plans, which include reaction, composition, and valuation subsystems. There are a total of 30 appreciation resources in this text, accounting for 27.8% of the attitude resources. These resources not only reflect the reporters' evaluation of things but also further embody the images of China

Example 5: The supplies included daily necessities and adequate drinking water and food, according to the county government.

This sentence describes the government's provision of supplies, including daily necessities, adequate drinking water and food. The appreciation resources are reflected by the word, "adequate". This word not only demonstrates that the food and water for disaster relief are sufficient to meet the needs of the affected people, but also reflects the government's foresight and preparation before disasters. This evaluation reflects the government's efforts in ensuring people's livelihood supplies, thus embodying a responsible and people-oriented national image.

Example 6: Upon receiving a report of the student falling into the water, the local government mobilized the public security... to conduct a full-scale search and rescue operation.

In this example, the government's ability to assume responsibility in emergencies and conduct a full-scale search and rescue to ensure people's safety reflects a responsible and accountable national image. Additionally, the word "full-scale" underscores the wide scope and high intensity of the search and rescue, indicating that the flood relief efforts were comprehensive and large-scale. This reflects the strong organization and mobilization capabilities of the party and government in the face of sudden natural disasters, as well as the unity within society. Overall, the word "full-scale" in this sentence embodies a national image that is efficient, humane, responsible, strong, and united.

In conclusion, through the skillful use of affect, judgment, and appreciation resources, the news reports successfully portray a national image that is proactive, united, efficient, people-oriented, and capable of responding to crises with social cohesion and emergency response capabilities.

This image further promotes the brave, dedicated and selfless spirit of the Chinese nation in the face of difficulties.

5. Conclusion

This study conducted a research on news coverage on “Guangxi Floods” from the perspective of the attitude resources. The research finds that the relevant reports not only present objective news facts but also embody positive characteristics of China’s images, which is conducive to enhancing the public’s confidence in and identity with China, as well as fostering a deeper understanding and support from the international community towards China.

While the findings of this study provide valuable insights, there are still limitations. Firstly, regarding data accuracy, as the data in this study mainly relies on subjective judgments. Even though the author has checked for multiple times during the analysis process, distinguishing between these three types of resources still remains a matter of personal opinions, which to some extent affects the objectivity and accuracy of the data. Secondly, the corpus size is limited. This study only analyzed 10 pieces of news. The relatively small corpus size may limit the breadth and depth of the research, thus affecting the universality and representativeness of the conclusions. It is hoped that future researchers can improve in these aspects and contribute more valuable achievements to related fields of research.

References

- [1] Martin, J. R.: Positive Discourse Analysis: Solidarity and Change, *English Studies*, Vol. 4 (2006) No.4, p.21-35.
- [2] Martin, J. R. & P. R. R. White: *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (Palgrave Macmillan, United States of America 2005).
- [3] X. H. Chen, K. X. Chen: A Positive Discourse Analysis of International Perceptions and Narratives on China’s COVID-19 Pandemic Response, *International Communications*, (2020) No.7, p.49-52. (In Chinese)
- [4] D. Dong: A Positive Discourse Analysis of Italy’s Mainstream Media’s Attitudes Towards the 19th NCCPC from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory, *Foreign Language and Literature*, Vol. 35 (2019) No.4, p. 17-23. (In Chinese)
- [5] M. Guo, R. Sun: Discourse Analysis of “Chinese Dream” in News Reports of Xinhuanet Based on Appraisal Theory, *Journal of Changchun University*, Vol. 31 (2021) No.11, p.61-66. (In Chinese)
- [6] Z. L. Hu: Complementarity between PDA and CDA, *Contemporary Foreign Language Studies*, (2012) No.7, p. 3-8+76. (In Chinese)
- [7] F. Huang, L. Zeng: The Attitudinal Meaning of Nature Writing Discourse and Its Interpretation in Historical Context: A Case Study on “The Land Ethic” in A Sand County Almanac, *Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing*, Vol. 38 (2022) No. 3, p. 264-271. (In Chinese)
- [8] Z. Y. Li: The Cultural Dimension of Chinese Anti-epidemic Discourse: an Analysis of Positive Discourse Based on Evaluation Theory, *Lingnan Journal*, (2022) No.1, p. 116-121. (In Chinese)
- [9] L. H. Liu, F. R. Meng: Discourse Representation of China’s Targeted Poverty Alleviation in African Media from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory, *Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing*, Vol. 40 (2024) No.3, p. 78-88. (In Chinese)
- [10] Y. Lu: Out of Moral Dilemma: A Positive Discourse Analysis of Gu Hongming’s English Translation of Confucius Classics, *Journal of Hefei University of Technology Social Sciences*, Vol. 34 (2020) No.1, p.88-93. (In Chinese)
- [11] X. M. Luo, Y. Z. Cao: “Proximization” as a Positive Discourse Strategy: A Case Study of Zhu Ziqing’s Essay “Spring”, *Contemporary Foreign Language Studies*, (2023) No.3, p.103-113. (In Chinese)
- [12] J. J. Ma, Q. W. Zhang: Discourse Strategies in the Construction of National Image from the Perspective of Attitude Resources : A Case Study of the English Version of “Energy in China’s New Era”, *Journal*

- of Henan University of Technology Social Science Edition, Vol. 37 (2021) No.5, p. 112-120. (In Chinese)
- [13] Z. H. Wang: Appraisal Systems and Their Operation: A New Development in the Systemic Functional Linguistic, *Journal of Foreign Languages*, (2021) N0.6, p. 13-20. (In Chinese)
- [14] X. Z. Si, T. T. Xu: Exploring the Ideology behind Newspaper Editorials from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory, *Contemporary Foreign Language Studies*, (2011) No. 11, p. 17-20. (In Chinese)
- [15] M. H. Mao: A Positive Discourse Analysis of Moon Jae-in's Speeches from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory, *Journal of Western*, (2022) No.17, p.165-169. (In Chinese)
- [16] Y. Z. Wu, D. Z. Feng: The Attitudinal Meaning and Value Construction in Multimodal Ecological Discourse——A Case Study of Environmental Public Service Advertisement, *Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing*, Vol.38 (2022) N0.6, p.677-684. (In Chinese)
- [17] J. Xu: The Construction and Promotion of China's National Image: Analysis on Positive Discourse in "The Belt and Road" News, *Journal of Zhongzhou University*, Vol. 36 (2019) No.5, p. 70-74. (In Chinese)
- [18] X. C. Zhou: A Corpus-based Positive Discourse Analysis of China's Image Constructed by the Domestic Mainstream Media in the Context of Carbon Peak and Carbon Neutrality, *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University (Social Sciences)*, Vol. 24 (2023) No. 4, P.12-25. (In Chinese)