# How the Arrangement of Attitude Resources Can Strengthen the Objectivity of News Reports

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## Abstract

As Xiongan New Area in China is designed to attract international innovation elements, its publicity to the international community has become a prerequisite for the realization of its designed goal. Innovative talents who have a higher critical thinking ability constitute one essential part of the target readers of English news reports about Xiongan. In order to convince them of the brilliant future of the city, reporters need to arrange attitude resources in an objective way when expressing reporters' appraisal about this city. Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis, the current study finds that reporters attempt to use attitude resources to modify inanimate things in present and past tenses, as well as in passive voice. In addition, there is no attitude resources in expressing the essential concept guiding the construction of the city. All of these are considered to contribute to the enhancement of the objectivity of news reports and be of great help to present a more convincing image of Xiongan.

**Keywords:** attitude resource, Appraisal Theory, news report, Xiongan

## 1. Introduction

On April 1, 2017, Xinhua News Agency released authoritative news: the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council made a historic strategic decision to establish Xiongan New Area in Hebei Province to relieve Beijing's non-capital function. As soon as the news came out, Xiongan New Area immediately attracted the attention of not only domestic people, but also overseas media, governments, organizations, institutions, enterprises, etc. One of the main reasons is that it is designed to become a model for attracting international innovation elements, including innovative talents, innovative enterprises and investment in innovative industries. Against this backdrop, international publicity of Xiongan New Area has become a prerequisite for the realization of its designed goal.

Innovation elements are inseparable from people with innovative spirit and ability. In *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, "innovative" is defined in this way: introducing or using new ideas, ways of doing something, etc., which indicates that innovative talents can usually find out the weaknesses of existing methods, make improvements and solve a problem by using a more optimized method. In short, they are good at critical thinking.

After the news of the establishment of Xiongan New Area was launched, there is still a long way to go before China can complete the construction of this city. At all stages, it needs the support of innovative talents, innovative enterprises and funds, especially at the initial stage. So how to convince innovative talents to believe in Xiongan's bright future and persuade them to work in the new area now is one of the important tasks for journalists of English news reports in China. On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of 142 English news reports about Xiongan New Area from *China Daily*, the current research tendes to explore how attitude resources are arranged to persuade innovative talents with superior critical thinking ability.

## 2. Literature Review

Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA), which takes a friendly and positive attitude to the society, is one of the paradigms of discourse analysis (Martin, 2005). And Appraisal Theory is the main theoretical perspective in PDA. The reason why this study chooses Appraisal Theory as the theoretical framework is determined by the nature of the discourse. English news reports about Xiongan New Area aims to establish a good international

image of this future innovative city, and attract such innovation elements as foreign investment, talents, technology, which will help Xiongan develop rapidly and healthily. It is clear that the purpose of this kind of discourse is to demonstrate to readers the positive aspects of society and create a better world, so Appraisal Theory is appropriate for the current study.

Appraisal Theory originates from systemic functional grammar. The latter focuses on analyzing interpersonal meaning from the grammatical level, while the former focuses on analyzing interpersonal meaning from the lexical level (White, 1998). The two complement each other. At the end of the 1990s, Martin (2006) proposed the concept of positive discourse analysis in an international conference, and then gave a detailed explanation of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), which provides not only a systematic theoretical basis for scholars, but also some feasible operating methods for scholars to conduct discourse analysis.

After the establishment of Appraisal Theory, it has been appreciated by many well-known scholars (Thompson, 2004, p. 76; Hunston & Thompson, 2000, p. 142). In the past 20 years, scholars have continuously enriched the theory at the theoretical level and applied it to the analysis and interpretation of various texts at the practical level.

Attitude resources are an important constituent of Appraisal Theory. By analyzing attitude resources, scholars can explore the potential interpersonal relationships hidden behind attitude resources. Through the analysis of attitude resources, Miao and Xu (2020) discussed the identity construction methods and effects of American presidential candidates, hoping to provide feasible prediction to the election result. In order to avoid contradictions or conflicts, the discourse of international current political news should not adopt a more explicit way to express emotions, but this does not mean that such news does not express any emotions, but that such news need to express emotions in a more implicit way (Li, 2022).

English news reports about Xiongan New Area mainly target at innovative talents. They have higher critical thinking ability and are not easily affected by language filled with subjective emotions, but prefer to base their own judgments on objective information. New Area may become one of the places with significant economic potentials and investment values in China, even in the whole world in the future. If attitude resources can be exquisitely employed in influencing interpersonal relationships, they may contribute to the establishment of a good international image of the city, and be conducive to its future development.

However, previous studies on attitudinal resources mainly focuses on the role of attitudinal resources in expressing subjective emotions, ignoring how the arrangement of attitudinal resources can enhance the objectivity of the discourse. In view of this, by collecting English news reports about Xiongan New Area, the current study attempts to explore how to make news more objective by the arrangement of attitude resources, so as to attract the attention of innovative people.

Given the shortcomings in the literature with respect to the possible objective functions of attitude resources, the current study aims to explore how the distribution and arrangement of attitude resources can strengthen the objectivity of news reports. The purpose of this study is to provide insights into attitude resources' functions in helping readers with higher critical thinking ability to establish the positive image of the objective world in an implicit way. The study tends to investigate the following three research questions:

1) What is the general distribution of attitude resources in English news reports about Xiongan?

2) Why certain expressions are presented without the involvement of attitude resources?

3) How attitude resources are grammatically arranged to strengthen the objectivity of news reports?

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Appraisal Theory focuses on how to build a community with common feelings and values through texts, and how to share feelings and tastes through language mechanisms, or evaluate human behavior according to norms (Martin & White, 2005). It mainly includes three systems: the attitude system, the engagement system and the graduation system. The attitude system is a mapping of people's feelings, and is the core of Appraisal Theory. It can be subdivided into three subsystems: affect, judgment and appreciation, which correspond to emotion, ethics and aesthetics respectively. All of the attitude sources are related to subjective feelings of human beings to a certain extent.

Word lists of attitude resources are not exhaustive (Martin & White, 2005). Therefore, it is very complicated and meticulous to unanimously annotate attitude resources. Scholars have different standards in annotating. The same word in similar contexts may be annotated differently. Researchers may even annotate attitude resources at different levels. Most annotating has been done at lexical level. But a few has been done at phrasal or even

clausal level (Deng & Yang, 2022). This kind of confusing performance reflects that scholars have different understandings towards the categorization of attitude resources. However, few previous studies provide practical instructions in classifying attitude resources. With the purpose to ensure the accuracy of the research results, the current study presents the following five principles:

1) Polysemy is very common, and the annotator needs to judge the meaning of the word according to the specific context (Martin, 2005);

2) Annotations of the same word in different contexts may be different, so it cannot be mechanically copied (Martin, 2005);

3) It is necessary to annotate a word according to its own denotative meaning, rather than associative meanings, because words may have different associative meanings in different people's view points;

4) No matter to which classification a word can be annotated, all words must express meanings related to feelings. If their meanings need to be calculated by scientific and technological means, they do not belong to attitude resources;

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

The last three principles of the above are drawn from the author and its group's experience of annotating with UAM Corpus Tool. When there is still a lack of exhaustively lexical lists of attitude resources, as well as a lack of practical operating standards to annotate each word of attitude resources, they can temporarily be a helpful guidance for non-English researchers, who may not perfectly discriminate subtle emotional differences hidden in words. It is hoped that future researches may improve the annotating principles.

## 4. Methods

This study selected the news reports about Xiongan 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.

LexisNexis is a world-famous database that mainly provides data on law, patent, tax and business information. In the United States, more than 1500 higher education institutions use it, and its total number of information sources of global information and local information has reached more than 5 billion. *China Daily* concentrates on what happens in China and is one of the English newspapers published by China whose reports are forwarded by foreign media at the highest rate.

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

With Xiongan as the key word, 416 news reports were found in the search results. After reading each piece of news, those which are not mainly about Xiongan were removed from the corpus. Finally, 142 news reports remained, with 56740 English words.

This study mainly took 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 the corpus, Layers of Appraisal Theory provided by UAM Corpus Tool were used. 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 discrepancies and confirmed the final annotation results.

The three annotators are all native speakers of Chinese. Because the annotation task requires careful discrimination of the context and specific emotional meaning, definitions in *Oxford Advanced Leaner's English-Chinese Dictionary* (8th ed.) were employed as the criteria.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Objectivity in the General Distribution of Attitude Resources

News report is supposed to describe what is happening in the objective world. At the same time, it also uses attitude resources to complete the interpersonal interaction between news writers and readers. The author's appraisal of the reported characters, behaviors, events and things is reflected in the coding of attitude resources. Through the decoding of attitude resources, news readers may have a common understanding with news reporters. It is through this method that news reports complete interpersonal interactions and have an impact on readers. However, readers with higher critical thinking ability may not be easily influenced by subjective attitude resources, because they prefer to base their reasonable judgement on objective information. In order to make an impact on readers with higher critical thinking ability, authors need to adopt imperceptibly implicit approaches.

Table 1. General distribution of attitude resources

| Resource Types | Subsystems | Number | Subtotal | Percentage | Percentage Subtotal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Affect** | **Un/happiness** | 20 | 372 | 1.5% | 28.5% |
| | **Dis/satisfaction** | 100 | | 7.7% | |
| | **In/security** | 42 | | 3.3% | |
| | **Dis/inclination** | 209 | | 16% | |
| **Judgement** | **Normality** | 24 | 192 | 1.8% | 14.7% |
| | **Capacity** | 103 | | 7.9% | |
| | **Tenacity** | 43 | | 3.3% | |
| | **Veracity** | 20 | | 1.5% | |
| | **Propriety** | 2 | | 0.2% | |
| **Appreciation** | **Reaction** | 188 | 736 | 14.4% | 56.4% |
| | **Composition** | 146 | | 11.2% | |
| | **Valuation** | 402 | | 30.8% | |

Table 1 shows the overall proportion of attitude resources reflected in 142 English news reports about Xiongan New Area in *China Daily*. The overall distribution of the three types of resources shows 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%). Appreciation resources reflect people's appraisal of inanimate things such as texts, processes or natural phenomena, including not only manufactured things, but also natural phenomena, which do not involve human beings, while both affect and judgement resources involve human beings who have subjective initiative.

The objective world consists of two parts, living creature and inanimate things. Among living creatures, only human beings have subjective initiative. The much higher proportion of appreciation resources over attitude and judgment resources indicates that journalists tend to appraise relatively objective texts, processes or natural phenomena in English news reports about Xiongan New Area. Affect resources focus on the inherent emotional expression of human beings, and judgment resources demonstrate views towards human behaviors. If these two types of resources account for a relatively larger proportion, readers may think that such news reports are too subjective. When appreciation resources occupy a much larger proportion, they can enhance the objectivity of news reports. English news reports about Xiongan New Area target readers with higher critical thinking ability, who prefer to base their own judgement on objective information. So, a natural conclusion can be drawn that in this regard, the English version of *China Daily* is successful to a certain degree.

*5.2 Objectivity in Illustrating Essential Concept*

The Chinese version of the essential concept in designing and constructing Xiongan New Area is expressed by 16 Chinese characters, which are divided into four groups, each with 4 Chinese characters. As is widely acknowledged that the four-character structure of Chinese is catchy and easy to remember. Essential concept expressed in symmetrical syntactic patterns can facilitate readers' memory of this concept in a short time.

The English version of the essential concept is "world vision, international standards, Chinese characteristics and high goals", which appears 7 times in the corpus. Both the symmetrical pattern and the high occurring frequency show that the four criteria expressed in the essential concept play an important role in the design and construction of the Xiongan New Area.

The things appraised in the concept include: vision, standards, characteristics, and goals, all of which belong to inanimate things. In order to enhance the objectivity of this concept, all of the four modifying adjectives: world, international, Chinese and high, do not belong to attitude resources and carry no subjective tastes.

English definitions of world, international, Chinese and high respectively are: the earth, with all its countries, peoples and natural features; connected with or involving two or more countries; from or connected from China; at a level which is a long way above the ground or above the level of the sea. The first three definitions all involve the concept of "country", which is defined by international law and confirmed by all countries. It can be said that it is an objective concept without any subjective elements. "Hight" is measured by means of physical devices. Undoubtedly no subjective elements are involved here. Not only are meanings of the four words objective, but also their measurements are acknowledged all over the world. No matter what culture one lives in or what language one speaks, he needs to agree with these definitions.

The essential concept serves as a guidance to the design and construction of the new area. If it were expressed by subjective attitude resources, readers with higher critical thinking ability may not be deeply convinced of

Xiongan's prosperous future.

*5.3 Objectivity in Implicit Linguistic Devices*

People live in two worlds: an ideal world and a real world. As a tool of thinking, language can not only help people establish a virtual ideal world in their minds, but also help them build a virtual real world, realizing the transfer of time and space.

In English, the presentation of the ideal and the real world can be divided into two types: explicit and implicit. The former refers to the presentation of the ideal and real world through grammatical means, like tenses, voices; the latter refers to the presentation through lexical means, like the word "imagination".

Tenses in English grammar can be divided into three major categories: past tense, present tense and future tense. Each major category includes several subcategories. For example, the present tense includes the simple present tense, the present progressive tense, the perfect present tense, the perfect present progressive tense, etc. Sentences in the past tense describe what happened in the past and present the real world; sentences in the present tense demonstrate what happens at present and present the real world as well; sentences in the future tense indicate what will happen in the future and present the ideal world. Information presented in the past tense and the present tense is more reliable than that in the future tense.

**Example 1**

"It's a **good** (appreciation-reaction-quality) thing for us locals that everything is changing to a **better** (appreciation-reaction-quality) state, especially the environment of Baiyangdian," said Yang Bingjun, 54, a deputy to the Hebei Provincial People's Congress from Anxin county in Xiongan who grew up at Zhainan village bordering the lake.

**Example 2**

The new area—about 100 kilometers southwest of Beijing—was established in 2017 as a **major** (appreciation-valuation-specialty) step in the almost six-year **coordinated** (appreciation-composition-balance) development effort of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei.

Example 1 is expressed in two kinds of present tenses: the simple present tense (it's) and the present progressive tense (is changing). Appreciation resources are arranged in a hierarchical way here. First, they present the positive appraisal (good) of the current changes by the local people, and then give the reason (better) why they give a positive evaluation: each change is developing towards a better direction, especially in the aspect of environmental change. Simple present tense explains the frequency, state of existence, or habitual action, which can only be concluded after a period of observation and multiple verifications. The present progressive tense presents the current state at that time. Conclusions expressed in the simple present tense are drawn according to observation results of different times. Only when current states selected randomly for many times are consistent, the final conclusion can be drawn. The predicate verb "is changing" in the present progressive tense represents the current state of a random selection: is changing. The appreciation resource "better" in Example 1 is the comparative form of the adjective "good". If the state expressed in the appreciation resource "good" in the simple present tense (is) remains for a long time, while the process of drawing a conclusion (is changing to a better state) is missing, in this case, the reliability of the conclusion (good) may decrease. The subtlety of Example 1 lies in that journalists not only transmit the conclusion (is good) to the readers in an implicit way, but also demonstrate the process of reasoning (is changing to a better state), which not only improves the reliability of the conclusion, but also strengthens the readers' confidence in Xiongan New Area.

In addition to the simple present tense and the present progressive tense, tenses describing past events can also present the real world. The simple past tense describes actions or states that occurred at a certain time in the past, and also indicate habitual and regular actions and behaviors in the past. Because the event happened in the past, there is no doubt about its reality. On the surface, in Example 2, there is only one simple past tense that describes the establishment time of Xiongan New Area (2017), while in fact, there is another expression hidden in the noun phrase (almost six-year) that represents the past, which indicates that the time interval between the proposed coordinated development strategy of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei and the news release of Example 2 is six years.

The establishment of Xiongan New Area is set against the backdrop of the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. It is not enough to rely on news reporters to build an ideal world only by words. If readers know that the construction of Xiongan New Area has been really supported by the central government, has risen to the national strategic level and it is under construction now, target readers may have full confidence in the bright future of the New Area.

"Coordinated" derives from the verb "coordinate" which is defined: to organize the different parts of an activity and the people involved in it so that it works well. The adjective "coordinated" belongs to the "composition-balance" subtype of appreciation resource, emphasizing that each component of an activity should be organized to achieve the goal of a smooth operation of the whole. "Coordinated" modifies the development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. To achieve coordinated development, the central government of China is undoubtedly the organizer, who needs to draw up a plan for the coordinated development of the capital economic circle in the top-level design, define the functional orientation, industrial division, transportation system and other issues of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei Province, and provide support in finance, projects arrangement and other aspects.

If the top-level design of the coordinated development still stayed on paper, it will be a description of the ideal world, not helpful in enhancing readers' confidence in Xiongan New Area. If it is expressed in the past, the top-level design becomes a fact in the real world, helpful to enhance readers' confidence in Xiongan New Area. Since the topic of this news report is not the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, but Xiongan New Area, "the most six year coordinated development effort of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei" is placed in the position of an adverbial. In this way, the establishment of the New Area is placed in the context of the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. In addition, the past time alone is not enough to reflect the emphasis on facts. The reporter also adds a definite time "six-year" to indicate the length of time, emphasizing that the top-level design of coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei is not only an established fact, but also has been operating for six years.

The definition of "major" is: very large or important. As an appreciation resource, the word shows that Xiongan New Area is an important link in the coordinated development strategy of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. In addition, it appears in the past tense sentence. All of the two implicit methods are combined to demonstrate that the concept that Xiongan New Area is an important link in the coordinated development strategy of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, which may be recognized by target readers as an established fact. The two appreciation resources "major" and "coordinate" in the past tense sentences can not only help readers to clarify the relationship between Xiongan New Area and Beijing, Tianjin, two world-famous metropolises, but also enhance readers' confidence in the new area by providing objective information.

## 6. Discussion

Based on English news about Xiongan New Area, this study explores how to arrange subjective attitude resources to enhance the objectivity of the information. English news reports need to be subtly composed to adapt to the requirements of target readers. Most of the target readers of this study are innovative talents with certain professional knowledge and skills. They may not know much about China, especially Xiongan New Area. This requires sufficient background knowledge in the text. In addition, such readers possess a higher critical thinking ability, and prefer to base their judgement on objective information. Although attitude resources are mostly subjective, things stimulating subjective feelings can be objective. In order to help target readers establish a positive image of Xiongan New Area and convince them that this city will have a bright future, most attitude resources are employed to modify inanimate things. And the essential concept of the construction of the new area is expressed without any attitude resources. Reporters also need to place attitude resources in implicitly objective syntactic structures.

Due to limited conditions, the current study is not comprehensive enough. Future researches can be conducted to investigate engagement and graduation resources in English news reports about the Xiongan New Area. It is hoped that this study may play a certain role in the international publicity of Xiongan New Area.

## Acknowledgements

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