An Analysis of Current Research on the Appraisal Theory[i]

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Abstract   The purpose of this article is to review the current research of Appraisal Theory both at home and abroad with a focus on the application of the Appraisal Theory. This analysis shows that Appraisal Theory is an effective framework for analyzing attitudes expressed and interpersonal meanings in various types of discourse such as literary works, news, legal, scientific and academic discourse. There are still some arguments about the theory itself and future studies are recommended to focus on the identification and classification of appraisal resources.

Keywords   Appraisal Theory, Current Research, Application

1. Introduction

The Appraisal Theory (AT) framework has emerged from a project—"Write it Right" — led by linguist James R. Martin in the 1990s along with other scholars such as Peter White, Rick Iedema and Joan Rothery in Sydney. It has been regarded as a development in the study of interpersonal meaning as described by Systemic Functional Linguists (SFL) (Wang [1]). According to White [2], the AT framework is a particular approach to exploring, describing and explaining the way language is used to evaluate, to adopt stances, to construct textual personas and to manage interpersonal positioning and relationships. Since the creation of AT and its subsequent development, it has been applied in various areas of discourse analysis. This article focuses on previous studies conducted from an AT perspective and comments on the analyses presented.

2. Overview of AT

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, we find the beginnings of AT in the form of a project called "Write It Right" conducted by a group of scholars led by linguist James Martin from the University of Sydney. Those who contributed significantly to the development of this theory are Peter White, Rick Iedema and Joan Rothery. Traditionally the study of interpersonal meanings was undertaken from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics which mainly puts emphasis on clausal level phenomena and based on the Mood and Modality system (Halliday, [3]). However, Martin and his colleagues worked mainly with monologic texts and found SFL less helpful as far as interpersonal meaning study was concerned. Martin [4] also pointed out that "The research methodology of SFL made no reference to the interpretation of evaluative meaning—the speakers' feelings, estimations, and their judgments on the values of various phenomena or experiences." Therefore, they found it necessary to shift their focus from grammar to lexis and, accordingly, developed a systemic lexico-grammatical framework called Appraisal Theory. Instead of examining the clause level of interpersonal systems such as Mood and Modality, AT examines evaluative lexis expressing the speaker or writer's opinion on the good/bad parameter (Huston & Thompson [5]).

'Appraisal' is an umbrella term used to refer to the semantic resources including words, phrases and structures which speakers or writers employ to negotiate emotions, judgments and valuations. Martin [4]indicated that the emphases of AT is on the ways to evaluate the negotiable attitudes and the intensity of affect in discourse, and the ways used by the writers or speakers to present their positions and to align putative readers and listeners. In other words, what AT basically explores is how speakers and writers generally pass judgments on people, other writers/speakers and their utterances, material objects, happenings and states of affairs and thereby form alliances with those who share these views and distance themselves from those who don't (White [2]).

AT has been considered as a development of the interpersonal function of language described in SFL (Wang [1]). To express an attitude regarding one thing or matter, speakers and writers employ evaluative language in their utterances. By indicating our own positive or negative attitudes, we are actually negotiating our relationship with others. In other words, we align with those who hold to the judgment or valuation being advanced. However, we disalign ourselves from those holding alternative views.

From the perspective of semantics, AT can be seen as

composed of three interacting domains: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. Attitude takes a central position. It is concerned with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgments of behavior and evaluation of things; Engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse; Graduation attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred (Martin & White [6]). These three systems can be further subdivided. Attitude can be divided into three domains of feelings depending on the nature of the appraised, namely, Affect, Judgment and Appreciation while Engagement, consists of two: Monoglossia, and Heteroglossia. Graduation also has two subsystems: Force and Focus. The whole framework of AT is given below:
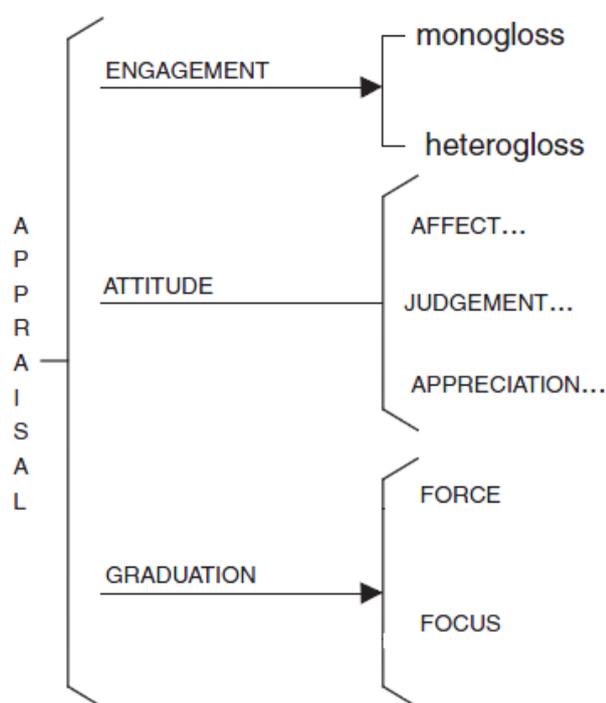

Figure 1. The Framework of Appraisal Theory (Adapted from Martin, 2005)

3. AT Studies in China

AT in China can be traced back to 1998 when linguist Zhang Delu [7] published his paper—"On the Scope of Tenor of Discourse and its Realization". However, it attracted little attention among scholars because of the immaturity of the theory itself. It did not come to be known by Chinese scholars and arouse their interest until 2001 when linguist Wang Zhenhua [1] gave a detailed introduction of the AT framework in his work: "APPRAISAL Systems and Their Operation: A New Development in Systemic Functional Linguistics". The author presented some background information about AT, compared it with SFL and considered it as a development of the interpersonal

meta-functions as presented in SFL.

According to the types of research involved, we can divide previous studies into two main categories: the theoretical study of AT and the application of AT in discourse analysis.

3.1. Theoretical Studies of AT

Instead of a total and uncritical acceptance of AT, Chinese scholars recognized its innovative aspects on the one hand and its limitations on the other, for which they suggested possible solutions.

Wang [8] puts forward a framework of Engagement which is different from Martin's Engagement system of monogloss and heterogloss. He states that Engagement refers to the language user's adjustment of what they say and subdivides it into three systems: 'the first voice', 'the second voice' and 'the third voice'. Wang and Ma [9] explore the attractions of AT, i.e., its innovative aspects, the consistency within its three subsystems and its applicability. They also point to such problems as the obscurity of certain terms and how to decide the direction of attitude, as well as the distinction between Judgment and Appreciation and offer suggestions for solving these problems.

Li [10] summarizes the application of AT to the following three types of discourse: commercial, historical and autobiographical. He then indicates four problems in the application. First, when we analyze the interpersonal nature of attitudes, we need to take reader positioning into consideration. Second, context is an essential factor in distinguishing appraisal categories. Third, he investigates the division of interpersonal and ideational meanings. Fourth, he probes into the relationship between appraisal and genres. By analyzing the discussions of appraisal types suggested by Martin and Lemke, Li [11]finds continuity from mood to modality to appraisal.

When analyzing appraisal features in news discourse, Liu and Han [12] discuss the limitations of AT. They observe that AT is partial because it only focuses on intra-textual appraisal and ignores extra-textual appraisal. Moreover, they believe that there is a lack of an appraisal standard in the AT framework. In 2011, Liu [13] claimed that Appreciation was a kind of appraisal of aesthetics from the perspectives of axiology and psychology and should be included in the Judgment category.

3.2. Application of AT in Discourse Analysis

In a number of previous studies, AT has been applied in the analysis of various discourse types such as literary works, news, legal, scientific and academic discourse (Xu [14]).

Most of the literary studies focus on English literary works. For instance, using appraisal resources at three different levels, namely word, clause, and discourse level, Guan and Wang [15] analyzed the power relation between the characters in "Blackmail" from *Hotel* from an AT perspective. Zhao and Chen [16] focused on the interpretation of interpersonal meanings expressed by

Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* by exploiting the Attitude system to analyze her attitudes. It was found that attitude resources could be used to express interpersonal meanings effectively and to portray characters.

Other studies are concerned with the application of AT to news discourse analysis, including news at home and abroad, editorials, and TV interviews. Wang [17] discussed the Attitude resources in two hard news items about an earthquake in China in 1998. The author indicated that although hard news emphasizes objectivity and fairness, the news reporters will find a way to express their attitudes, some of which are implicit. Another study of news discourse was conducted by Liu and Han [12] in 2004. They comprehensively analyzed the three systems of AT and their features as they appear in news discourse. Apart from this comprehensive analysis, they also put forward a new method of reading news: "evaluative reading". Li [11] studied the Attitudinal meanings of English political column texts from the perspective of AT. The analysis showed the existence of a strong preference across all the texts for attitudes expressed as Appreciation and Judgment rather than Affect.

Although few applications of AT have been found in the field of legal discourse, those that exist are thought-provoking and practical (Xu [14]). Wang [18] studied voluntary surrender from the perspective of the three meta-functions in SFL and AT. Yuan [19] did a forensic linguistic study on interpersonal meanings in police interrogation from the perspective of Engagement. Specifically, he analyzed three Chinese criminal cases from three different perspectives: word selection, mood and conversation structure. The results show that the police use different modes of Engagement and take differing stances when interacting with different types of criminal suspects.

A large number of studies involving the application of AT are also found in the field of scientific and academic discourse. For example, Li [20] discussed the interpersonal meanings of epistemic modality in academic discourse based on AT and SFL. Xu [21] conducted a quantitative analysis of 90 scientific research articles in order to find the distributional patterns of Attitudinal resources among them. An uneven distribution was found among the four main parts of research articles, namely, the introduction, methodology, results and conclusion sections, most such resources being found in the conclusion.

4. AT Studies Abroad

Since its establishment, AT has been applied to various genres of discourse, including media discourse, secondary school English critical writing, history writing, legal discourse, academic discourse, argumentative writing, infant language, narratives etc. These studies of different types of discourse have both theoretical and practical significance. The wide application of AT proves it to be an effective framework for analyzing attitudes and interpersonal meanings. Several important studies are listed below and the focus is on Judgment analysis.

Coffin [22] applied AT to the analysis of secondary school history writing and found Judgment resources as the main appraisal resources used in chronicling genres. Writers employ more implicit Judgment resources in the first two stages (presenting the background and recording events) and tend to use more explicit Judgments in the deduction stage. The function of this interplay of explicit and implicit Judgment resources is to make the record of the past objective, factual and logical, while constructing a particular and therefore subjective perspective which is mainly presented in the deduction stage.

Korner [23] discussed the dialogic features of common law judgments based on AT, particularly on the Engagement system and Graduation system. In the judgments, generally speaking, the judges use Engagement and Graduation resources to "foreground certain meanings and to background others, to align themselves with other texts and with the evaluation of other texts and to establish degrees of similarity and differences between previous decisions and between previous decisions and current decisions" (Korner [23]).

Drawing on AT, Wu and Desmond [24] conducted an exploratory study of appraisal resources in students' argumentative essays. This is a corpus-based study with 40 essays in three different categories ranging from high-rated to low-rated. It was found that even if there are differences concerning the degree and manner of appraisal resource usage, they were not decisive in the overall success of an essay.

A diachronic study of the development of children's Attitude resources was conducted by Painter [25], who observed and recorded her two sons' language development in the first few years. As for Judgment, she found that the vocabulary used by her two sons was limited and most of the initial lexical forms expressing Judgment were related to the child's own behaviors. Although both subcategories of Judgment (social esteem and social sanction) have been found in infant language development, social sanction judgments appear only in certain aspects. Moreover, he also compared the features of inscribed (explicit) judgments and evoked (implicit) judgments through ideational expressions. In summary, to some extent, "learning one's mother tongue is inescapably a process of learning to perceive experience in the evaluative terms relevant to the learner's meaning group" (Painter [25]).

With the purpose of exploring the differences of Attitude resources between genders, Page [26] analyzed the evaluations offered by women and men on the topic of the experience of childbirth. 23 sets of evaluations were obtained from an informal interview of nine pairs of women and men who had recently had children and an additional five women who acted as birthing partners. In the analysis of Judgment, the author found that Judgment resources appeared less than Affect and Appreciation resources in both the men's and women's narratives. They also tended to judge themselves instead of other participants. The author also

found that all the Judgment resources belonged to the category of social esteem.

With the aim of developing a theoretical framework to explain the evaluative strategies encoded in the introductory sections of academic research papers, Hood [27] made a detailed study of interpersonal meanings based on the Appraisal framework. She chose both undergraduate dissertations and published research papers and analyzed and compared the appraisal resources used. The findings show that both published and student writers personalize their texts by using attitudinal expressions and that they prefer to use more Appreciation resources than Affect or Judgment resources. However, there is a difference between their rhetorical strategies, which are of four types: problematization, persona, citation and argument. Student writers tend to use more Affect and Judgment than published writers do, which shows that they are more inclined to comment or argue on emotional and ethical grounds.

5. Conclusions

AT has been widely recognized by Chinese scholars even though there are still some questions about the theory itself. It is a development of the interpersonal metafunction and is acknowledged as an effective framework for analyzing attitudes and interpersonal meanings in Chinese and English discourse. The application of AT has been applied in types of discourse including literary works, news, legal, scientific and academic discourse. It is recommended that future studies focus on the identification and classification of appraisal resources since there has, to date, been little research in this area.

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