

# *An Analysis of Political News from the Perspective of Graduation System within Appraisal Theory*

Mengzhu Xia

*Shanxi Normal University, Linfen, 041004, China*

**Keywords:** Graduation, Appraisal theory, Political news

**Abstract:** Appraisal theory is developed on the basis of interpersonal function, one of the three major functions of systemic-functional linguistics. It explores the lexical items used in oral or written texts through three dimensions of attitude, engagement and graduation, and reveals the attitude of the speaker/author. As one of the subsystems of appraisal theory, graduation function lies in adjusting the degree of attitude and engagement and focusing on typicality of category members. This paper analyzes the current political news with graduation system in order to understand the news deeply and the speaker's attitude and emotional strength.

## 1. Introduction

Appraisal theory is a kind of interpersonal functional system resource, which is divided into three sub-systems, namely, attitude, engagement and graduation, to respectively express the emotion, value traceability, attitude and intensity of Engagement in discourse. Among them, graduation includes two categories: force and focus. Force includes intensification and quantification. Focus refers to the typicality of members. Both attitude and engagement are hierarchical, so the graduation “occupies the central position in the whole appraisal system”. (Martin & White 2005:136) As a hierarchical mode of meaning from the perspective of typology, graduation takes force and focus as its basic semantic category, which includes the meaning branches such as quantity, volume, spatial and temporal distribution and quality, highlighting the convergent relationship between subcategories. At the same time, graduation serves as the topology perspective. In the system, the upscale and downscale is listed as a separate condition, with force and focus for the conjunction relationship. In addition, graduation divide into isolating and infusing, the former refers to the expression of differential significance by words alone. The latter refers to the simultaneous expression of the differential meaning and the conceptual meaning of vocabulary. The appraisal theory and the theory of interpersonal meaning in the classical theory of functional grammar are complementary. (Wang Zhenhua,2001;Li 2004, Hood 2004, Martin 2004, etc.)

Among them, there are many researches on attitude and intervention, but few on graduation. (Zhang Yan, 2008; Liu, 2011; Hood & Martin 2007) In this paper, the functions of graduation in discourse are sorted out, and their roles in the instantiation process of the appraisal system are also defined.

## 2. Literature Review

## 2.1 Previous Studies Abroad

Martin published a paper on appraisal theory at the 23rd Annual International Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference in 1996. Martin also published a paper in 2000 *Beyond Exchange: Appraisal Systems in English*. From the perspective of discourse semantics, this paper classifies appraisal resources into appraisal systems and creates Appraisal Theories. In 2003, Martin and Rose co-authored the book *Working with Discourse: Meaning beyond the Clause*, systematically introducing the Appraisal Theory framework, which consists of three branches: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, each branch can be sub-systematized. In 2005, Martin and White co-authored. The language of Appraisal: Appraisal in English, as the first monograph on Appraisal Theory. The book's research on Appraisal Theory is more standardized and systematic. In 2006, Martin read the Appraisal Analysis: Exploring Appraisal article at the 33rd Annual International Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference, marking the maturity of Appraisal Theory.

In addition to Martin and White, Caroline Coffin, Rickledema, Joan Rothery and Steng Lin are active scholars in the field. They focus on the applied research of Appraisal Theory, such as discourse analysis based on Appraisal Theory, and the realization of appraisal meaning from lexical and discourse perspectives. Thomson & White published the book "Communication Conflicts" in 2008, which is based on case studies from international media and shows the broad application prospects of Appraisal Theory.

## 2.2 Previous Studies At Home

Chinese linguists have made great contributions to the development of Appraisal Theory. The development of Appraisal Theory in China dates back to 1998. Zhang Delu published *On the Scope and Present of Discourse*. This article begins with the definition of discourse tone and analyzes the understanding of Halliday, Gregory and Martin's dialogue. Among them, when Martin defined the tone of the discourse, he made a detailed division of his sub-categories, which were divided into status, contact and emotion. Wang Zhenhua is the first person to introduce the Appraisal Theory in detail in China. In 2001, Professor Wang Zhenhua published a paper titled "New Developments in the System of Functional Linguistics in the System of Ratings and Its Operation" in *Foreign Languages*. It explains in detail the relevant content of the Appraisal Theory, such as the occurrence and development of the theory and the specific framework of the theory structure.

However, there are not many relevant researches about the graduation. There are ten research literatures about graduation in CNKI, which can be divided into three categories: literature, practical and introduction.

Among them, there are 4 literature articles, 3 of which are related to the graduation in translation, and 1 of which is related to the graduation in English and Chinese language review. They are, respectively, Liang's *Financial News Translation based on Graduation within Appraisal* in 2018; Jing Ling's *Rebound in the Vocabulary of Children's Literature Translation Studies* in 2017.

The practical category involves Yu, "Analyzing the Inaugural Speech of the President of the United States from the Perspective Graduation" in 2013, and Qiu, Hu's *Research on Graduation of Tourism Advertising* in 2011.

Introduction category including Gao's *the Function of Graduation in the Term Papers* in 2014, Yue's *the Discourse Function of Graduation*" in 2012 and Yue's *Appraisal Theory Source and Development of the Graduation* in 2014, He's *the Development and Source of Graduation Theory* in 2011.

Therefore, the research on graduation needs to be further developed by scholars.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 The Introduction to Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory is an interpersonal functional category developed by Professor Martin and his colleagues at the University of Sydney's Department of Linguistics since the mid-1980s to show how we use language to express or communicate degrees and emotions. The theory starts with "evaluative lexis" and promotes the study of interpersonal meaning within the framework of discourse semantics.

The appraisal theory is divided into three subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation. Among them, attitude is the appraisal resource of communicative participants and process through emotional response and value system, and the status of the graduation system is very special, which runs through the entire appraisal system, providing grading resources for the degree and intervention system. "We can say that the Attitude and Engagement system belong to the level Graduation, but the meaning of the classification is essentially different" (Martin & White, 2005: 136).

#### 3.2 The Introduction to Graduation System

The third subsystem of appraisal is discussed in this paper which runs through the whole appraisal system. Martin and White (2005) once pointed out that the graduation occupy a central position in the whole appraisal system. To a large extent, the value of appraisal is the graded according to high and low intensity. Graduation is used to indicate the degree of attitudes and engagement. Its biggest characteristic is gradability. Systematized into force and focus, these two subsystems can be subdivided into up-scale and down-scale two meaning choices. Firstly, according to the applicable objects, force is divided into quantification and intensification. Quantification is used to evaluate the characteristics of the quantity, volume, weight and spatial and temporal distribution of entities, involving both specific entities and abstracting entities. Intensification is used to evaluate quality and process. Secondly, the main expression of force still can be divided into isolating and infusing. Quantitative and intensification have two kinds of expression. In addition, linguistic trend can be reflected by repetition, metaphor and other rhetorical devices. Isolation expression of force have both grammar (very greatly) and lexical meaning (amazingly, rapidly), changed the past practice focus on a single resource. Finally, up-scale and down-scale are integrated into separate entry conditions, which have relations with linguistic potential and focus. Martin & White (2005) presented the level difference as a graphical representation of the system network as shown in the figure below.

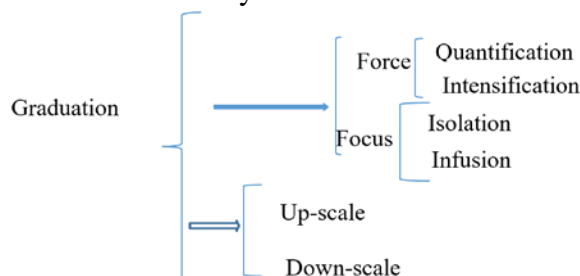


Fig.1 The Level Difference as a Graphical Representation of the System Network

### 4. Analyses of Political News

In graduation systems, force and focus has two directions, respectively, sharpening which is to enhance and softening which is to reduce. Both of them represent semantic value of high and low. The

author usually use the semantic value of graduation as a means of persuasion to highlight one aspect of the event by using the high level graduation and weaken the other aspects by using the low level graduation, so as to attract the reader's attention to the place the author expects. Burke (1989), a new American rhetorician, uses the terministic screen to describe the nature of linguistic construction of facts, that is, words are both a reflection and a departure of reality. The choice and deviation in the process of language use are mainly driven by communicative motivation. The examples are as follows:

(1) The remarks came after reports saying the United States will take all necessary measures to support the opposition party in Venezuela to send humanitarian aid into the country on Saturday. Geng said at a daily news conference that the Venezuelan government has maintained calm and restraint in recent times. The Venezuelan government has been safeguarding peace and stability in the country and avoiding large-scale conflicts, he said. If the so-called humanitarian aid were forcefully sent into Venezuela, there would be serious consequences, he added. (China Daily, Feb 22, 2019)

This news use 'all' and 'necessary' to embellish 'measure'. 'All' applied quantification which stresses the number of measures and 'necessary' applied intensification which stresses the degree of measures. Both of them have the role of highlight the United States tries his best to intervene in the military of Venezuela. 'Recent' applied intensification which highlight the accuracy of time. 'Large-scale' applied quantification to highlight the scope of conflicts. 'Forcefully' applied intensification to highlight the United States regardless against to send humanitarian aid. 'Serious' applied intensification to highlight the severity of consequences.

(2) He added that the relevant laws and regulations are open to all personnel and do not target any immigrant group. Whether it was a large company or a small enterprise, if there is a tax problem, it will face control, he explained." In practice, there may be problems such as improper understanding of the policy by the bank and excessive operation," he said. (China Daily, Feb 25, 2019)

'Any' applied quantification to weaken the number of immigrant. 'Improper' applied intensification to weaken the understanding of banker to express their probable mistake. While 'excessive' applied quantification to highlight the operation of bankers beyond what they should do.

(3) Hernandez de Cos said: "The Bank of Spain is willing to communicate with relevant commercial banks on this issue in the near future and issue instructions to correctly understand the policy and avoid affecting the legitimate rights and interests of customers during the implementation process." (China Daily, Feb 25, 2019)

'Relevant' applied intensification to highlight the kinds of commercial bank. It makes readers clearer about the bank. 'Correctly' applied intensification to highlight the accuracy of the banker's understanding of the policy, which indicate the decision of the speaker.

(4) Thousands of Chinese people living in Spain have found their bank accounts blocked or cancelled without notification. Most of the customers are with Spanish bank BBVA, but some affected are with Santander and La Caixa. The issue has lasted for more than six months, with some larger Chinese accounts blocked during the recent Chinese Spring Festival holiday period. (China Daily, Feb 25, 2019)

(5) Such achievements were made as the autonomous region has been staunchly and resolutely safeguarding the authority of the CPC Central Committee, promoting bold reforms, as well as effectively improving ethnic unity and people's livelihood, he said. (China Daily, Sept 21, 2018)

In the example 4, 'thousands of' used quantification in order to highlight the number of Chinese people. A high graduation word 'most of' to highlight the high number of customers from Spanish bank. The median number of words "some" is used to reduce the extent of customers. It indicates so many Chinese people suffer such problems. The phrase 'More than' used quantification in order to

highlight the time of this issue. The fifth example applied force to highlight the achievement of the autonomous region.

(6) WASHINGTON -- US President Donald Trump has unveiled a bold plan to stop spread of HIV within a decade in the United States despite challenges posed by his lack of action to improve the healthcare system.( China Daily, Feb 7, 2019) This sentence does not directly criticize the unenforceability of trump's plan. Instead, it indirectly expresses the negative judgment by reminding readers of the lack of practical action in the plan through the infusion of force.

(7) In the United States, more than 1 million people aged 13 and older are living with HIV infection, with an estimated 15 percent unaware of their status, and approximately 56,000 new infections occur each year, according to National Institutes of Health (NIH). (China Daily, Feb 7, 2019) On the surface, this sentence provides fact- based information, whose objectivity is mainly derived from figures. However, the author used quantified figures to highlight that the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS in the United States. This is obviously incompatible with trump's plan, thus indirectly criticizing trump's plan as empty talk.

(8) “By taking the lead in swearing the oath, the president is telling the public that everyone is equal in front of the law, and there is no exception,” said Xiao Shengfang, an NPC deputy and president of Guangdong Lawyers Association. “It shows commitment by the Chinese leadership to rule of law, which will ensure China's journey toward modern. (China Daily, March 17, 2108) In this example, ‘show’ and ‘ensure’ applied focus to highlight the high degree of accomplish. Which indicate the appreciation.

Hood & Martin (2007) believed that the focus in academic discourse is mainly reflected in two aspects: the focus on entity expresses the degree of generalization or the degree of concreteness. For example, 'The general thrust of 'The conclusion is that'...It may either praise the strong correlation of the research or criticize the limitations of the research. In other words, this usage can be used to flag positive or negative meanings, depending on the context. On the other hand, the focus of academic discourse on process indicates the degree of completion, and knowledge is not as sure as show. Structuring scientific research activities as a scalable phenomenon enables discourse to convey attitudes while maintaining objectivity. Based on the differential function, the authors point out that differential attitude “tag” is a general solution (attitudinal token) of one of the mechanisms.( Zhang Yan 2008, Martin & White 2005)

(9) The Federation Drought (1895–1903) saw Bourke in western New South Wales record an average temperature of 44 degrees for three weeks in 1896, with four consecutive days over 48 degrees and 160 people dying of heat and disease. By the end of the drought, nearly half (54 million) of the nation's 106 million sheep had died. (News Weekly, Feb 23, 2019) This example use the specific figure which is quantification to describe the disaster that drought bring, thus trigger the sympathy attitude.

(10) Harris (1940) in the United States found evidence to suggest that younger students tended to obtain better degree results. Similar findings have been made in Britain by Malleson (1959), in Australia by Flecker ( 1959) and Sanders ( 1961) , in Canada by Fleming ( 1959) and in New Zealand by Small ( 1966). (Hood Martin 2007:753) This example highlights the research value by means of spatial distribution in quantization. “A growing body of research has examined...”, “Very few studies have benefited...And other examples are through the quantification of the flag to show the significance of appreciation. In general, some words cannot be graded, such as school, husband, etc., but if such words are placed in the focus category, they are likely to be endowed with attitude meaning. Martin &White (2005) finds that sharpening focus often leads to positive comments, such as a real husband, an authentic text. Softening and focusing comes from sorts like jazz of sorts, a sanctuary of a kind. The motivation of this usage is related to face theory and politeness principle.

This research takes different aspects on the instantiated continuum as research objects, among which the research results on tone are the most abundant. For example, news discourse represented by mainstream media in China and America is composed of writer voice and reporter voice. In general, readers expect an objective and impartial tone in news reporting, so reporters use less isolation and more infusion. For example,

(11) BEIJING - China on Monday expressed stern opposition to participation by the United States and other countries in Taiwan's submarine production project. (China Daily, Jan 14, 2019)

(12) Ghosn, widely recognized as the brains and brawn behind Nissan's rapid turnaround since 1999, has rigorously maintained that he has in no way violated financial regulatory laws in relation to reporting his earnings, and that Nissan incurred no losses from his private investment dealings that have led to allegations of breach of trust. (China Daily, Feb 13, 2019)

In the example 10, the reporter applied isolation force to express China's strong attitude to this issue. Compared with isolation force, the meaning of infusion force expression is clearer. In the example 11, explicit intensification and inscribe attitude usually appear in the context of the appraisal source. This is because the appraisal is a subjective judgment made on the behavior and personality of the characters, so it is classified as an external voice, which separates the journalist from the appraisal. On the contrary, the writer's voice includes the voice of the communicator and the voice of the commentator, allowing the appraisal. The writer is also responsible for explicit intensification and inscribes attitudes.

(13) At a recent regular news conference, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying made it clear that the Chinese mainland firmly opposes arms sales by any country to Taiwan. She urged the relevant countries to fully understand the sensitivity of the issue, and properly deal with Taiwan-related matters in order to avoid jeopardizing bilateral ties. (China Daily, Jan 21, 2019). In this example the reporter applied infusion intensification to express the strong will of China.

(14) In secular Australia, Christmas is principally a season of giving, both to our loved ones and to those less fortunate. In this respect, it is radically different from other days of national celebration, which mark unique events in our history, like Australia Day or Anzac Day. (News Weekly, December 15, 2018) In this example, the reporter use intensification to flag appreciation of Christmas and express the difference of Christmas between Australia and other countries.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Major Findings

Since 20 century the appraisal theory was put forward in the 1990s, it has been widely concerned by the linguistic circle. It has been studied extensively and deeply and made great achievements. The appraisal theory provides a basis for discourse analysis. Effective analytical tools and guiding ideology, especially the application of evaluation theory in the study of news discourse has made remarkable achievements Results.

Graduation is very common in everyday language use, but only appraisal theory provides a descriptive framework for it. From the analysis, it can be seen that news writers or speakers use diversified intensification resources to show strong feelings to readers and emotion aiming to unite and persuade the reader to agree with his or her point of view. In addition, news writers or speakers prefer to use quantification to specialize what has been said, thus to make sentences pervasive. In a word, in the graduation system the author use linguistic resources to strengthen their own views, with quantitative concrete explanation, make news discourse more objective and credible.

### 5.2 The Limitation of This Research

There are some shortcomings in the analysis process. First of all, only 10 news is selected in this paper. News texts are selected as linguistic data, which will more or less influence the analysis results. Secondly, this paper has analyzed the examples given in the program are all words and phrases, but few are paragraphs. In addition to analyzing the news discourse of the news, positive discourse analysis can also be used to analyze the text.

## References

- [1] Burke, K. *On Symbols and Society*[M]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- [2] Gao Yin. The function of “gradation” of appraisal system theory in learning terminology [J]. *Modern communication*, 2014, (02):37.
- [3] He Zhongqing. The category of gradation in appraisal theory: development and theoretical source[J]. *Journal of Beijing International Studies University*, 2011. 33 (06):10-18.
- [4] Hood, S & J. R. Martin. *Invoking Attitude: The Play of Gradation in Appraising Discourse*[A]. In R. Hasan, C. M. I. M. Matthiessen & J. Webster. *Continuing Discourse on Language*[C]. London: Equinox, 2007.
- [5] Jin Ling. A Study on the Translation of Lexical Gradation in Children's Literature -- A Case study of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland [J]. *Journal of Harbin Institute*, 2017, 38(11):127-129.
- [6] Li Zhanzi. The application and Problems of appraisal theory in discourse analysis[J]. *Foreign language study*, 2004, (5).
- [7] Liu Yueming. An Analysis of the appraisal significance of quantifiers in modern Chinese [J]. *Journal of foreign languages*, 2011, (1).
- [8] Liang Juntong. Translation of financial news based on the gradation system of appraisal theory [A]. *Northeast Asian Foreign Languages Forum*. Shenyang Dongshi Ripu Education Technology Co. LTD, 2018, 4 (5).
- [9] Martin, J. R. *Macro-proposals: Meaning by Degree*[A]. In W. C. Mann & S. Thompson. *Discourse Description: Diverse Analyses of a Fund-Raising Text*[C]. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1992.
- [10] Martin, J. R. & P.R.R. White. *The Language of Appraisal: Appraisal in English* [M]. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- [11] Martin J. R. & D. Rose. *Working with Discourse: Meaning Beyond the Claus*[M]. London: Continuum, 2003.
- [12] Martin, J. R. *Mourning: How We Get Aligned*[J]. *Discourse and Society*, 2004.
- [13] Martin, J. R. & P. R. R. White. *The Language of Appraisal: Appraisal in English* [M]. London: Continuum, 2005.
- [14] Qiuqing & Hu Yong. Research on Tourism Advertising Gradation based on Appraisal Theory -- Taking the four Tourism Advertisements in Jiangxi Lu as an Example [J]. *Journal of Jiangxi Institute of Education*, 2011,32 (06): 161-163.
- [15] Wang Zhenhua. *Appraisal systems and their operations: New developments in systemic-functional linguistics* [J]. *Foreign Language*, 2001, (6).
- [16] Yu Qing. *An analysis of the Inaugural address of the American president from the perspective of gradation in appraisal theory* [D]. Nanjing Normal University, 2013.
- [17] Yue Ying. The origin and development of “gradation” in appraisal theory [J]. *Journal of Heilongjiang Institute of Education*, 2014. 33.
- [18] Yue Ying. An overview of textual function research on gradation in appraisal theory [J]. *Journal of foreign languages*, 2012, (01): 84-88.
- [19] Zhang Delu. The scope and embodiment of keynote speech [J]. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 1998, (2).
- [20] Zhang Yan. The categorization of gradation in academic discourse and its Rhetorical Persuasion construction[J]. *Foreign Language*, 2008, (6).