

*Analysis on Mixed Discourse from the Perspective of Proximization—Taking the Change of Life and Death Concept in *At Kinosaki* by Shiga Naoya as an Example*

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Abstract: Proximization theory has applicability not only in critical discourse analysis and positive discourse analysis, but also in mixed discourse analysis. This research takes Shiga Naoya's representative mood novel *At Kinosaki* as an example, analyzing the author's mood changes upon witnessing the deaths of a bee, a mouse, and a salamander from the dimensions of space, time, and value. This research aims to make new explorations and developments in the proximization theory from the perspective of mixed discourse analysis. The findings indicate that approachability, at its core, involves legitimizing the speaker's own behavior through discourse construction. Consequently, the interpretation of the positive and negative properties of ODC (Outside Deictic Center) relies on the speaker's cognitive choices and value orientations. It is important to note that ODCs with negative properties do not necessarily result in negative effects on IDC (Inside Deictic Center), and conversely, positive ODCs may also lead to negative perceptions of IDC. In discourse analysis, proximization theory should be understood dynamically.

1. Introduction

Critical cognitive linguistics emerged as a result of combining cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis, presenting a novel theoretical approach to discourse analysis. This approach encompasses various new methods, including critical metaphor analysis, critical cognitive pragmatics, and proximization theory. Proximization theory, which is rooted in Chilton's discourse space theory, posits that individuals tend to establish the relationship between themselves and other entities based on three axes: time, space, and modality. The intersection of these axes serves as the reference center.[1] Within this center, the spatial axis represents pronouns such as "I", "we", and "here", which encompass the speaker and their social group. The temporal axis represents the present moment, while the modal axis represents notions of correctness and truth. External entities are positioned along the spatial axis, including second and third person pronouns like "you", "they", and directional pronouns like "there". The temporal axis encompasses the past and future, while the modal axis presents a value orientation opposite to the reference center. However, Chilton's theory does not account for the dynamic convergence of external entities towards the reference center.

Consequently, discourse space theory primarily focuses on noun phrases and pronouns, lacking a comprehensive understanding of verbs and failing to clarify lexical and grammatical representations in discourse. This limitation hinders the quantitative analysis of real-world discourse. Building upon Chilton's perspective, Cap proposed the STA model in 2008, which introduced proximization theory. This theory incorporates the dynamic convergence process and the "value axis", situating discourse analysis within a three-dimensional space composed of spatial, temporal, and axiological elements.[2] Specifically, proximization theory establishes two opposing central points within the discourse space: the Outside Deictic Center (ODC) and the Inside Deictic Center (IDC). As the ODC approaches the IDC from spatial, temporal, and value dimensions, it elicits perceptions of threat and danger in the IDC. This prompts the IDC to take measures to resist the perceived threat, while simultaneously legitimizing its own behavior and emphasizing the illegitimacy of others' behavior. Due to its negative connotations, proximization theory is often employed in critical discourse analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Negative and positive Proximization

Proximization theory has been extensively studied by scholars as a comprehensive analytical approach. It has emerged as a novel perspective in discourse analysis and holds significant practical significance. Previous studies have transitioned from initial theoretical investigations to applied research. The application of proximization theory can be broadly categorized into two paths: critical discourse analysis and positive discourse analysis.

"Proximization" embodies and intensifies threats, thereby legitimizing the defensive strategies and actions taken by the speaker (Zhang Hui, Zhang Tianwei, 2022).[3] Simultaneously, it reinforces the illegitimacy of external entity actions. Consequently, proximization theory is frequently utilized in critical discourse analysis. For instance, in mediation discourse, Ke Xianbing and Zou Shiqian (2023) explored the use of proximization strategies in mediators' discourse during court mediation and their effectiveness.[4] In the realm of ecological discourse, Zhang Hui, Lin Zhengjun, and Dong Xiaoming (2021) conducted a proximization analysis of ecological discourse in news reports on climate change by Chinese and American media.[5]

As proximization theory evolved, it has expanded beyond its negative connotations and has been applied to positive discourse analysis. Scholars have highlighted the positive impact of convergence in various contexts, Luo Xianxuan and Cao Yunzhi (2023) take Zhu Ziqing's essay "Spring" as an example to describe the positive effects of spring on individuals, animals, and plants. They believe that "convergence" can be used not only as a negative discourse strategy for critical discourse analysis, but also as a positive discourse analysis. At this time, ODC and IDC coexist harmoniously.[6] However, currently, research on the application of proximization theory is mostly focused on critical discourse analysis, while research on positive discourse analysis using proximization theory is still in its early stages and holds significant potential for further development.

2.2. Proximization of a Blend of Negativity and Positivity

According to Martin (2004), critical discourse analysis is characterized by its deconstructive nature, while positive discourse analysis is characterized by its constructive nature. However, it is important to note that deconstruction and construction are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they should be seen as interconnected and complementary.[7] Hu Zhuanglin (2012:6) argues that within the same discourse, certain aspects may require positive discourse analysis, while others may

require critical discourse analysis. Both approaches can coexist within the same discourse.[8] Wang Pin (2018) suggests that constructive positive discourse analysis can serve as a supplement to deconstructive critical discourse analysis.[9]

Previous research has generally posited that when discourse has a negative nature, it is suitable for critical discourse analysis, whereas when it has a positive nature, it is suitable for positive discourse analysis. However, when examining proximization theory, it becomes evident that a single analytical approach is insufficient. In order to fully understand proximization theory, it is necessary to combine critical discourse analysis and positive discourse analysis, as well as conduct mixed discourse analysis based on specific contexts. In the background of mixed discourse analysis, the interpretation of the positive and negative attributes of discourse depends on the cognitive perspective of the interpreter. Even negative discourse can elicit positive perceptions and vice versa. This finding not only supports the application of proximization theory in mixed discourse analysis, but also represents a novel exploration of this theory.

3. Case Analysis of Mixed Discourse Proximization: At Kinosaki

Shiga Naoya was a novelist of the Taisho and Showa periods, hailed as the “God of Novels” in Japan. One of his representative works, *At Kinosaki*, is based on a traffic accident Shiga experienced in 1913, with the protagonist serving as Shiga's alter ego. The story depicts the protagonist, who, after being struck by a tram on the Yamanote Line, retreats to the hot springs of Kinosaki alone for recovery. During his time there, he witnesses the deaths of a bee, a mouse, and a salamander, leading Shiga to engage in transcendent contemplation and gain insight into the relationship between life and death, ultimately forming a unique perspective on life and death.

This study follows the STA model and vocabulary grammar standards proposed by Cap (2008) to manually annotate Naoya Shiga's mood novel *At Kinosaki*. It analyzes the impact on IDC as ODC approaches from spatial, temporal, and value perspectives.

3.1. Spatial Proximization

After being injured by a Yamanote Line tram, the protagonist comes alone to Kinosaki Hot Springs for convalescence, where he witnesses the deaths of three animals. In the physical space, the protagonist, as the subject implementing the approach behavior, should bear the efficiency of the ODC. However, this notion does not apply in the context of “people approaching things, things influencing people”. The proximization theory posits two central points: the “Outside Deictic Center” and the “Inside Deictic Center”. This dual-cente mode demonstrates the transformation of the ODC and the IDC based on different reference frames. In other words, when the ODC moves towards and approximates the IDC, it can also be viewed as the IDC approximating the ODC. Therefore, in this text, although the protagonist is the subject performing the proximation behavior, the true ODC comprises Kinosaki and the bee, the mouse, and the salamander. The protagonist assumes the role of IDC, and the convergence of ODC and IDC is primarily achieved through noun phrases. In addition, the text contains numerous shift verb phrases and directional verb phrases, such as “proceed to,” “descend to,” “walk to,” and “aim at,” which demonstrate the approximation of the ODC towards the IDC (see Table 1).

Table 1: Spatial Proximization Strategies in *At Kinosaki*.

| Spatial Proximization category | Projects | Specific characterization |
|----------------------------------|----------|---|
| Noun phrase is understood as ODC | Bee | One morning, a dead bee is observed on the roof of the main entrance. The bee's legs are curled up under its belly, and its antennae hang loosely on its face. |
| | Mouse | A mouse swims desperately in the water, attempting to escape. The mouse has a fish |

| | | |
|---|-----------------|--|
| | | stick inserted in its neck, measuring approximately 7 inches long. |
| | Salamander | There is a small black object on a stone, which is identified as a salamander . |
| Noun phrase is understood as IDC | The protagonist | I was hit by a Yamanote Line tram. |
| Shifting verb phrases and directional verb phrases recognized as markers for ODCs moving towards IDCs | / | I proceeded to the Kinosaki hot springs in Tajima The bee squeezed its body out from between the wall panels and then descended to the roof of the main entrance. I stepped out of my residence and plans to go to Dongshan Park.....witnessing a large mouse, which had been thrown into the river, struggling in the water and attempting to escape. I walked to the river by myself from the street. I did not specifically aim at the salamander. |
| Behavioral verb phrases understood as markers of ODCs exerting influence on IDCs | / | It gives a sense of tranquility . It feels very lonely . A sense of tranquility and loneliness is associated with the presence of dead bees on the roof tiles. I feel a sense of closeness to this silence. The mouse manages to escape but eventually dies, leaving me with a feeling of desolation and disgust towards the scene. Similarly, the accidental killing of the salamander evokes a sense of disgust in myself. I feel pitiful and desolate as a creature. |
| The expected impact of ODCs on IDCs by recognizing noun phrases that express abstract concepts | / | For this kind of quietness . It is terrible to have such pain in front of the quiet I've yearned for. I still find the commotion before death terrifying. Although I pondered whether it was a mortal wound , I was hardly attacked by the terror of death. I won't be attacked by the terror of death as I usually think. |
| The impact of recognizing noun phrases expressing abstract concepts as ODCs on IDCs | / | The expectation of death and the urge to survive are both real. |

3.2. Temporal Proximization

After being hit by the tram, the protagonist faces the imminent risk of his wound worsening within the next two to three years, which signifies the proximity of death. In other words, the past event of nearly being killed by the Yamanote Line tram and the future potential threat of the wound deteriorating into a fatal spinal abscess are both approaching the present, creating a sense of urgency that forces the protagonist to take immediate preventive measures.

He travels to Kinosaki Hot Springs for recuperation and witnesses the deaths of three animals. The temporal proximization strategies in *At Kinosaki* are referenced in Table 2. Overall, the use of temporal proximization strategies is less frequent than spatial proximization, which supports the notion that "the concept of time requires the concept of space as a source domain to construct our understanding of time" (Zhang Hui, Yan Bing, 2019:15). [10] The protagonist first encounters a dead bee, which later disappears due to rainwater. Subsequently, the protagonist encounters a mouse in distress, followed by an encounter with a salamander. These events occur in a sequential manner, with the conclusion of one event leading to the beginning of the next, creating a continuous timeline that drives the plot's development through the passage of time. Additionally, the time of encountering these three animals is in the morning, mid-morning, and evening, corresponding to the dead bee, the struggling mouse, and the accidental death of the salamander. The time of the day goes back and forth with the rise and fall of the sun, exemplifying the idea that death is akin to death, and there is a cyclical nature to life and death on Earth, with no absolute boundary between the two. They exist in a perpetual state of interconnection.

After three weeks of recovery, the protagonist leaves the area, and three years later, his wound has not deteriorated into a fatal spinal abscess. The use of "recall" and other techniques in the text creates a complex interplay of tenses, weaving threats from past events into the future and evoking past memories in current events. For example, "What happened to the dead bee?..... What happened

to the mouse? Perhaps it went into the sea with the waves, at which point the soaked and swollen body washed up on the shore with the rubbish. And the undead me is walking like this right now.” [11] As time moves forward, present events not only trigger recollections of past occurrences, but also serve as a precursor to future events. These current events intersect with past events to create a potential risk factor for the future.

Table 2: Temporal Proximization Strategies in *At Kinosaki*.

| Characters | Main body of Proximization | The main characteristics of ODC | Proximization effect |
|---|----------------------------|--|--|
| Non-restrictive noun phrases considered to represent the actual behavioral influence of ODCs over different time periods | Bee | I observed a dead bee on the roof of the main entrance in the morning . | Signifies the time of encountering the bee. |
| | Mouse | The bodies of the mouse and the bee were later washed away by the rain, temporarily disappearing from my sight. On another morning , as I left my residence to go to Dongshan Park. | The absence of the bee sets the stage for the appearance of the mouse, meanwhile indicates the time of encountering the mouse. |
| | Salamander | Shortly after the incident involving a struggling mouse, which I witnessed alongside a salamander, I walked alone along the street by the small river one evening . | The conclusion of the mouse incident marks the time of encountering the salamander. |
| The use of tense and verb forms constructing a sense of threat stemming from past events that extends from the past into the future | / | During my stay in the Kinosaki, where I went alone to recuperate at the Kinosaki Hot Springs (there's no need to worry about the injury worsening if it's okay within two to three years), I often contemplated my injuries. I pondered that even a slight mistake could have led to me lying on my back beneath the soil of the green mountains at present . Such thoughts used to evoke a sense of a distant future . How are the dead bee and mouse now? I, who escaped death, keep walking right now . | The threat generated by past events continues to persist in the present and future. |
| | | I cannot help but liken myself to a mouse. When I was injured, as I did everything within my capacity to the best of my ability. | In the dual center mode, the threat arising from current events can also evoke memories of the past. |
| The Impact of Modal Verb Phrases (VPs) Construction on ODCs from Present to Future | / | May potentially become a mortal wound. If injury hasn't worsen within two to three years. Now I contemplate what actions I would take if I were to encounter a situation similar to that of a mouse. | Continuous interaction |

3.3. Axiological Proximization

The author creates a tense atmosphere by portraying imminent danger, thereby stimulating the audience's concerns for safety, territoriality, survival, and health. This strategy aims to garner support from the audience and encourage them to take actions that align with the speaker's stance, thus establishing legitimacy (Luo Xianxuan, Cao Yunzhi, 2023:105). The value orientation in the STA model is not solely determined by the nature of ODC, but rather depends on the cognitive choices made by IDC. When IDC determines that ODC does not pose any harm or threat, regardless of whether the nature of ODC itself is positive or negative, IDC tends to perceive it as positive. Furthermore, negative ODCs may not only have negative impacts on IDC, but can also bring about positive effects. Therefore, proximization theory can be applied not only to critical discourse analysis research, but also to positive discourse analysis. Proximization theory encompasses both deconstructive and constructive aspects. This part will analyze the axiological proximization strategies in *At Kinosaki* (see Table 3).

Table 3: Axiological Proximity Strategies in *At Kinosaki*.

| Proximity subjects | Category | Specific characterization of ODC or IDC | Axiological Proximity effect |
|---|----------------------------|--|---|
| Go to Kinosaki for the first time, approaching death | IDC's "positive" values | Mood has displayed an unprecedented sense of calmness, stability, and tranquility in recent years. Despite harboring gloomy and lonely thoughts, the protagonist's mood remains calm and composed . | IDC interprets the negative values of ODC as positive values, which can be seen as a concealed negativity. |
| The dead bee | IDC's "positive" values | The death of the bee is distressing for the protagonist who had hoped for a peaceful environment . | The dead bee intensifies the protagonist's psychological inclination towards the "death instinct". |
| A mouse that is bound to die but still struggles to survive | The negative values of ODC | It's terrifying that the mouse endures significant suffering in the face of death which has the tranquility the protagonist desires. Although the protagonist feels a connection to the stillness after death, the commotion preceding death remains terrifying . | The protagonist's aversion towards the struggling mouse ultimately awakens their consciousness of the "survival instinct". |
| | IDC's "positive" values | No sooner had the doctor announced the injury was not fatal than I was cheerful followed by my exhilaration . | |
| Accidental death of a salamander | The negative values of ODC | The silent death further unsettles the protagonist. The silence generates a sense of unease . | Explain the background environment before encountering the salamander. The protagonist's fear of silence contrasts with their initial affinity towards silence upon arriving in Kinosaki (which can be interpreted as the silence after death). |
| | IDC's "positive" values | The protagonist feels he ought to appreciate them, but they do not elicit joy . | |
| Left Kinosaki and approached towards life | IDC's "positive" values | The protagonist leaves Kinosaki. It has been three years since then, and the protagonist expresses gratitude for not developing a spinal ulcer. | Life instinct is strengthened. |

Whether the wound worsens into a mortal wound or chooses to self destruct, the protagonist originally came to Chengqi with the idea of dying, and at this time, "going to Kinosaki" also metaphorically means "approaching death". During his time in Kinosaki, the protagonist's perception of life and death gradually changed by witnessing the deaths of three animals. Firstly, upon arriving at Kinosaki and encountering a dead bee, the protagonist harbors a sense of closeness towards death. Therefore, ODC's approach to IDC did not cause IDC's panic or resistance, but instead felt tranquility on the dead bee, which is a manifestation of the protagonist's "death instinct". After the disappearance of the dead bee's corpse and encountering the struggling mouse, the protagonist feels irritated by the noise before death. The positive value of the ODC provokes resistance from the IDC. At this moment, while the protagonist seemingly remains close to death and resents life, in reality, life and death are in the process of intersecting, with death gradually receding and life infinitely approaching. The mouse, despite being seriously injured, continues to desperately strive for escape. Even if it manages to reach a safe place, its chances of survival are slim. The value conveyed by the ODC mouse at this point is the "natural instinct"- the desire for life. However, the protagonist finds the mouse's desperate struggle for survival repulsive, as written in the book: "I feel lonely and disgusted", "The need to go through that kind of suffering before the serenity I was looking forward to came was horrendous. Even though I have an affinity for the silence that comes after death, I still find the clamour that precedes it horrifying", implying that the protagonist hopes for peace after death but is disgusted by the commotion preceding death. This psychology reflects the "death instinct" of IDC (the protagonist). When the positive "life instinct" approaches the protagonist, it is instead perceived as danger and threat, placing pressure on the protagonist. When the mouse, as an ODC, approaches the protagonist, it essentially represents the "natural instinct" that infinitely approaches the protagonist. Although the protagonist currently dislikes the chaos of survival, it also awakens their deep "instinct for survival". The protagonist recalls that, after being hit and injured, they, like the struggling mouse, choose to go to a hospital,

decide on the route to the hospital, and contact a doctor in advance. Therefore, ODCs with positive attributes may also be perceived as threatening by IDC, and the nature of ODCs depends on IDC's cognitive choices. Then, after the mouse incident ended and accidentally killed the salamander, the protagonist realized the impermanence of life and death and strengthened his confidence in surviving. The negative value of ODC did not provoke IDC's resistance, but instead triggered the protagonist's deep thinking about life and death. Deconstruction and construction occurred simultaneously and ultimately achieved a positive value orientation. Finally, the protagonist leaves Kinosaki. Although this departure represents a gradual distancing in terms of time and space, leaving the death-associated Kinosaki also signifies an infinite approach toward life.

After observing the demise of a bee, a mouse, and a salamander, the central character underwent a series of transformative realizations regarding the nature of mortality and existence, as depicted in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

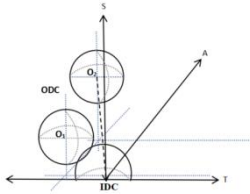


Figure 1: Three dimensional space-meeting a bee.

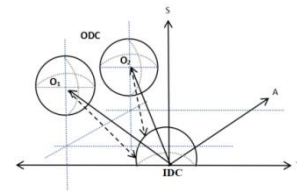


Figure 2: Three dimensional space-meeting a mouse.

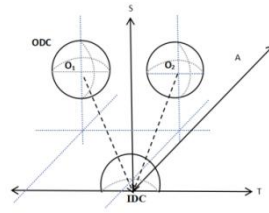


Figure 3: Three dimensional space-meeting a salamander.

O_1 symbolizes mortality, while O_2 symbolizes resilience. The main character (referred to as IDC) experiences a profound connection to mortality when he journeys to Kinosaki. Consequently, upon discovering the lifeless body of a bee (referred to as ODC), the protagonist experiences an unprecedented sense of tranquility and serenity. However, there is also an underlying subconscious fear of death, and both mortality and survival are perceived as external entities beyond the realm of IDC. The distinction is that IDC is near O_1 , which symbolizes death, while O_2 (survival) is distant from the origin in both physical and conceptual dimensions. The preceding event before encountering a mouse is the washing away of a bee corpse by rainwater, signifying that death is distant and life is drawing near. Despite being weary from the noise preceding death, the mouse's struggle also triggers the protagonist's (IDC) unconscious memory of survival. Both the "death instinct" and "life instinct" are genuine, and the debate between life and death continues. In the end, the protagonist (IDC) perceives the unity of life and death through the accidental death of the salamander. The two are both contradictory and harmonious, and the value orientation gradually tends toward reconciliation. The protagonist (IDC) leaving Kinosaki, which symbolizes death, signifies an infinite approach toward life. In the three-dimensional space of proximization theory, space is the foundational structure, time is the external driving force, and value is the cognitive manifestation. The temporal dimension is metaphorically embedded within the spatial dimension, together driving the development of the value dimension.

4. Conclusions

In contrast to single critical discourse analysis and positive discourse analysis, proximization theory should be approached dynamically and applied to mixed discourse analysis. The novel *At Kinosaki* utilizes the writing technique of “changing scenery” to depict the protagonist’s gradual contemplation of the true meaning of life through the observation of the deaths of three animals. This research defines ODC (Outside Deictic Center) and IDC (Inside Deictic Center) as dual focal points in a state of dynamic transformation, which serves to elucidate the unique dynamic of “people approaching objects and objects influencing people”. As the protagonist (IDC) encounters the deceased bee, the struggling but ultimately dying mouse, and the accidental death of the salamander (ODC), the silent search for death, the hustle before the death, and accidental death by the three elicits distinct emotional experiences and value impacts on the protagonist. Proximization theory, which is rooted in cognitive linguistics, emphasizes that the value experience brought by the outside deictic center (ODC) largely depends on the IDC’s understanding of it, rather than the nature of ODC itself. Negative ODC can trigger IDC’s identification psychology, while positive ODC may be rejected by IDC. Overall, proximization theory in mixed discourse analysis is rooted in cognitive psychology, with the dual center mode as its reference background, the construction of the speaker’s discourse as its essential attribute, the iterative development of time and space as its polarity advancement, and the selective understanding of oneself as its outward manifestation of value. In discourse analysis, proximization theory should be approached dynamically, organically, and comprehensively.

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