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**Lecture 4**

Linguistic features of political discourse

As an important component of Systemic Functional Linguistics, Appraisal Theory (Martin & Rose, 2007; Martin & White, 2005/2008) provides a systematic approach to exploring the interpersonal meaning at the level of discourse semantics (Andrew & David, 2020), which makes up the deficiency of Hallidayan approach in paying too much attention to mood and modal systems. Appraisal Theory centers on the evaluative system, which com- prises Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Attitude refers to the semantic resources that are used to express subjective evaluations, while Engagement and Graduation engage with the source and amplification of various evaluations (see Martin & White, 2005: 38). Since the emergence of Appraisal Theory, scholars have been working on refining the evaluation system, which is accomplished either within the domain of interpersonal meaning, or at the intersection of the three meta-functions. As a result, the overall evaluation system (Liu, 2007), Attitude (Cheng, 2007, 2010; Dong & Li, 2021; Martin & White, 2005), Engage- ment (Wang, 2003; Wang & Lu, 2010; Wei & He, 2019; White, 2003; Yuan, 2008), and Graduation (Yue, 2012; Zhang, 2008) have been refined, to varying degrees. At the same time, more evaluation resources have been found, lexically, syntactically (Bednarek, 2008; Hunston, 2003), and phonologically (Guan & Wang, 2006; Zhao & Li, 2012). However, more attention has been given to explicit evaluation, with implicit evaluation being largely ignored (Li & Liu, 2019; Shaw, 2004; Wang, 2012; White, 2006). Implicit evaluation is prevalent in discourses (Hamouda, 2003; Ma, 2009: 18), which is more context-dependent and more difficult to identify.

In addition to theoretical exploration, appraisal theory has also been widely used in vari- ous discourse analyses (Macken-Horarik, 2004; Martin, 2004; Butt et al., 2004; Jin, 2009a; Tang, 2010; Achugar et al., 2013; Feng & Qi, 2014; Lin, 2015; Tian, 2015; Jiang, 2020; Wang & Qu, 2020), among which political discourse is of particular interest (Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2012; Al-Saeedi, 2017; Hoffmann, 2018). As a basic type of political discourse, political speech contains rich evaluative meanings, by which the speaker can align the audience to accept his political views (idea, proposal, or stance) or legitimize his actions. Previous studies have been conducted mainly at the micro level, concentrating on the summary of various lexical evaluation resources (Bandhar, 2011; Hu & Chen, 2018; Miao & Yang, 2021; Pang, 2013; Zhu, 2015); studies conducted at the macro discursive structure are limited, let alone qualitative studies that incorporate both micro and macro dimensions.

Evaluation is essentially an intersubjective phenomenon, the fundamental purpose of which is persuasion (Tang, 2006). This is especially true of political speech, which is a form of political persuasion organized through the functional differentiation of dis- courses (Kramsch, 2020). In political speech, evaluation is a crucial strategy that is employed by a speaker to achieve political persuasion. In a sense, the persuasive power of a political speech largely depends on the speaker’s strategic utilization of evaluative resources to “naturalize” or “neutralize” an “ideal reader” position. As an audience, his ability to properly interpret and evaluate the discourse mainly depends on his capacity to recognize the operating mechanism of evaluation as well as deconstruct the "natu- ralization" process of discourse. Therefore, an in-depth qualitative analysis that encom- passes both micro and macro dimensions is necessary for comprehensively dissecting the constructive process of evaluative meanings. Only in this way, can we clarify how the evaluative meanings are being constructed, with what kinds of evaluative devices: Do they work alone or cooperate? If the latter, how is the cooperation realized? An

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elaborate investigation of these questions is of great academic value for making the appraisal framework more comprehensive and refined, therefore more instructive and applicable.

With these considerations in mind, the SUA will be taken as data for this study, and the realization mechanism of evaluative meaning will be examined in detail within the framework of Appraisal Theory. Specifically, this study aims to investigate how evalu- ative meanings are realized and reinforced within a discourse by examining both micro and macro dimensions, with the former mainly involving the orientation of evaluation (positive vs. negative), the object of evaluation (self vs. others), and the realization of evaluative resources (explicit vs. implicit; lexical vs. syntactic; intraclause vs. inter- clause, etc.) (as shown in Fig. 1), and with the latter concerning the macro semantic pattern of a discourse (as shown in Fig. 3).

Evaluation is inherently gradable (Martin & White, 2005: 37). Gradation, which is used to regulate the intensity of evaluation, consists of Focus and Force. Considering that Hood and Martin’s (2007: 394) network of GRADUATION (as shown in Fig. 2) is finer and more operative compared with that of Martin and White (2005), this study will be conducted with reference to the former.

This study has six sections, which are arranged as follows. Following the introduc- tory section, the research object––The State of the Union Address (SUA) and Donald Trump as well as his language style––will be emphasized. Then, the research design (including data collection, annotation and research method) will be outlined. Next, an in-depth appraisal analysis will be applied to the data to explore how evaluative mean- ings are realized in the economic issue of Trump’s first SUA. Following this, the evalu- ation mechanisms that Trumps prefers to employ will be summarized, which results in the summary of Trump’s evaluation models. The last section concerns the findings and research significance.

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