

China's Ecological Image Construction in China Daily's Report on UN Climate Conference from the Perspective of Attitude System

Li Shiyu

School of English Studies Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an Shaanxi, 710128;

Abstract: In recent years, the rapid development of industry has led to a significant increase in carbon dioxide emissions and the rising global temperature has brought adverse effects to people's lives and nature. Climate change has become increasingly serious, therefore the news media widely report on it. the analysis of related news discourse can identify the ecological orientation and view behind the discourse. This study selects 15 news reports during the 29th Climate Change Conference reported by China Daily as the research objects, and applies the attitude system in the appraisal system to reveal the types of attitudinal resources and the ideology implied in the discourse in the reports.

Keywords: attitude system; ecological discourse analysis; UN Climate Change Conference; news report

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Introduction

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP) has spurred global attention to climate change, with associated natural disasters intensifying media focus on COP reporting. Despite China's significant climate contributions, its ecological image risks distortion in foreign media. Promoting ecological image of China internationally is thus essential. China Daily, as China's official external media, reflects national positive ecological stance.

Ecological discourse analysis examines language's role in ecosystems (under ecological linguistics). News discourse can embody culture, ideology, and values (Qian, 2010), enabling ecological reports to convey China's ecological concepts and image—a factor influencing international opinion and exchanges (Guo, 2010).

This study integrates the appraisal system to analyze China Daily's COP reports, using attitude resources to evaluate discourse values. Appraisal system reveals how language activates China's ecological philosophy of "diversity, harmony, interaction, and symbiosis" (He & Ma, 2020), thereby shaping its international ecological image.

1 Literature Review

This chapter first reviews studies on ecological discourse analysis. Then, the relevant studies on the attitude system under ecological discourse analysis are presented. Finally, studies of national image on news reports are reviewed.

1.1 Studies on Ecological Discourse Analysis

Ecological discourse analysis was the research scope of ecological linguistics. The task of ecological linguistics was to reveal the interaction between language and the environment by studying the ecological factors of language (Huang, 2016). Ecological discourse analysis depends on the critical discourse analysis (CDA) at the beginning. Carvalho (2005) studied the impact of the political tendency of media discourse on climate change. Alexander (2009) combined CDA with corpus analysis. These studies analyze the ecological significance of discourse from multiple perspectives, promoting the development of ecological discourse analysis.

However, CDA mainly explores the rights behind discourse, which is inconsistent with ecological discourse analysis centered on the environment. Exploring ecological context, language and the influence of language from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was a new attempt (Xin & Huang, 2013). The empirical, interpersonal and discourse

functional system in SFL could provide analytical tools for ecological discourse analysis (He & Zhang, 2017).

1.2 Studies on Attitude System under Ecological Discourse Analysis

Halliday (1985) proposed three meta-functions of language -- interpersonal function, ideological function and textual function. Among them, interpersonal function was concerned with negotiating social relations (Martin & White, 2005). Martin (2000) established appraisal system based on it, improving the applicability of discourse analysis. As a subsystem of appraisal system, attitude system is related to emotional responses, judgements of behaviors and assessments of things. It has been widely used in various fields, like law, advertising, and political discourse. Attitude was an important resource in legal trials (Shi, 2016). Shi (2017) utilized the attitude subsystem to analyze the attitude expression in criminal judicial verdicts. Jiang and Chen (2021) utilized the attitude system to explore the ecological perspective conveyed in advertisements. Yang (2021) investigated the attitudinal significance contained in the discourse on fighting the epidemic.

In terms of ecological discourse analysis, it required the guidance of ecological philosophical thoughts. Therefore, Zhang (2022) conducted an in-depth analysis of the attitude resources in the news discourse on climate change in China and the United States, and explored the ecological concepts and ecological value orientations reflected by the attitude resources.

1.3 Studies on National Image on News Reports

Previous studies mainly focused on the relationship between national image and individuals, with few studies on national ecological image. However, China's ecological image is at risk of being distorted by other countries' media. Xu et al. (2020) compared how smog issues in China and India are framed, revealing Western bias. Liu Ming (2023) demonstrated how to use the constructed corpus to assist the multidimensional analysis framework of ecological discourse research to carry out the multidimensional analysis of national image construction.

Although ecological discourse is receiving increasing attention, there are relatively few studies on how language builds national image, and based on appraisal system. Most of the existing analyses were based on reports of COP before 2023, while the 29th United Nations Climate Conference (COP29) was the first conference after COP28 completed its first Global Stocktake (GST), which shown that the progress of global emission reduction is seriously lagging behind. Therefore, COP29 had become a key platform for countries to compete for climate discourse power and shape a responsible international image.

The study aims at applying attitude system to explore the ecological national image of China in the news reports about COP29, and the research questions are:

What kinds of attitudinal resources are employed in the environmental discourse on COP29?

What ecological images are conveyed with the use of appraisal resources in the environmental discourse on COP29?

2 Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

The study selects news reports about the COP29 on the China Daily. China Daily is the largest English information portal in China, playing an essential role in telling the world about China. As a national mainstream newspaper, China Daily can shape national image and ensure the reliability and authenticity of the data.

COP29 was held from December 11th 2024 to December 22nd 2024. Therefore, the author collects in China Daily with "COP29" as the keyword. Forty-four news reports are collected. After excluding the news reports with less relevance to China's ecology and those with the same content, 15 target news related to China's ecology are obtained.

2.2 Research Procedures

Firstly, after collecting appreciate data, the data are annotated manually on appraisal resources to explore the main type of appraisal resources employed in the environmental discourse on COP29. Secondly, the author conducts a qualitative analysis of the ecological image of China shaped behind the appraisal resources.

3 Results and Discussion

This chapter will explore the presentation of attitude resources, and the ecological images shaped by appraisal system in COP29 news.

3.1 Attitudinal Resources in COP29 News Reports

Attitude system contains several attitudinal resources, namely affect resources, judgement resources and appreciation resources and the realization of them will be discussed.

3.1.1 The Realization of Affect Resources in the News

Affect is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings. affect groups emotions into four major sets having to do with un/happiness, in/security, dis/ satisfaction and dis/ inclination.

Un/happiness covers emotions concerned with ‘affairs of the heart’ – sadness, hate, happiness and love.

Example 1: He added that the sentiment has been echoed by the EU, and he is glad to see the differences are gradually being set aside for now.

Here the word “glad” is a happiness resource, which shows that Chinese envoy is very happy because urging the EU to focus more on the ongoing climate negotiations are effective.

In/security covers emotions concerned with anxiety, fear, confidence and trust.

Example 2: "...We are still confident that, with accelerated actions from all parties, the conference may still possibly yield good results," he said.

The word “confident” belongs to the category of security. It describes that countries have made efforts such as South-South Cooperation. Therefore, China firmly believes that the meeting will achieve good results.

Dis/satisfaction covers emotions concerned with the pursuit of goals –displeasure, curiosity, respect.

Example 3 : COP29 is considered a climate financing conference to address the long-term imbalanced funding problems that have been hindering global efforts to combat climate change.

This example conveys the dissatisfaction attitude towards the imbalanced funding problems. Developed countries should provide financial resources to assist developing countries with responsibility.

Dis/ inclination refers to fear or expectation aroused by non-real triggers.

Example 4: China is willing to work with all countries to advance the implementation of the United Nations' Early Warnings for All initiative...

In this example, “willing” belongs to the inclination resource, which conveys the desire of China to cooperate with other countries.

3.1.2 The Realization of Judgement Resources in the News

Judgement is divided into social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem concerns with admiration and criticism without legal implications. Social sanction deals with praise and condemnation with legal results. What’s more, illustrative realizations for social esteem include normality, capacity and tenacity and for social sanction include propriety and veracity.

Example 5: In recent years, climate change has had an increasing impact globally, with frequent extreme weather events

Here “extreme” refers to normality, which depicts the abnormality of weather caused by serious climate change.

Example 6: ...electronic product designs, ensuring they are easily and efficiently disassembled to maximize resources that can be recovered.

Here “can” shows the capacity of electronic products recycling to promote Chinese circular economy.

Example 7: China will work with all parties..., make concerted efforts to protect Earth, our common home, and jointly build a clean and beautiful world.

Here “efforts” belongs to tenacity, which conveys Chinese determination to promote cooperation to protect the world.

Example 8: ..., highlighting it as a testament to the largest developing nation's role as a significant and responsible world power.

This example shows how ethical China is, which belongs to propriety. It shows the key role of China in climate protection based on China’s financial support.

Example 9: Liu said some developed countries argued that China should also contribute to the commitment. The argument has no legal support at all

“No legal” shows the untrustworthiness of foreign countries to demand that China plays as a climate fund role, which belongs to veracity.

3.1.3 The Realization of Appreciation Resources in the News

Appreciation refers to our evaluations of ‘things’, especially things we make and performances we give, including natural phenomena. There are three subcategories, namely reaction, composition and valuation.

Reaction refers to our emotional reaction to things. or whether they attract or grab our attention.

Example 10: Strengthening early warning systems and enhancing climate adaptation capacity have become increasingly important and urgent.

“Important and urgent” shows the urgency to implement climate governance, aiming at calling on developed countries to help developing countries cope with climate change.

Composition includes balance and complexity, which is the evaluation of the textual organization.

Example 11: Through detailed data and interpretations of construction paths, it showcases in a concentrated manner Jiangsu's explorations in

Here “detailed” shows that the data and interpretations can help us understand Jiangsu’s contribution to climate action.

Valuation is a judgment on the social significance of something.

Example 12: Within this group dynamic, major nations wield significant influence, Liu said

Here “significant” evaluates China’s efforts for international cooperation, which can yield influence.

3.2 The National Ecological Image in COP29 News Reports

Through the analysis of these attitudinal resources, the study finds that COP29 news reports have mainly self-shaped three kinds of ecological images of China.

3.2.1 A Driving Force for Climate Action

China has been a major promoter for international cooperation in climate negotiations through analysis.

Example 13: The climate envoy, however, stressed that China will continue to support climate-related tasks in other developing countries via South-South cooperation channels. (affect)

Example 15: China has been a major driving force for international cooperation in climate negotiations over the past 30 years. (judgement)

Example 13 belongs to inclination and insecurity. It positively describes China's willingness to provide continuous assistance through climate action commitments, like South-South cooperation. confirmed China's leading role as a developing country in improving climate change. Example 15 is social esteem resource, conveying the admiration of Chinese contribution. It highlights China's action and reliability in negotiations over the past 30 years has directly shaped China's image as a "key promoter".

As an active promoter of climate action, internally we can improve China's climate environment, and externally we can safeguard global cooperation and multilateralism on climate governance.

3.2.2 A Contributor of Global Green Product

China Daily positions China as the contributor of green career through some case studies analysis.

Example 16: He called on the government to establish standards aimed at enhancing the regulation of electronic product designs, ...to maximize resources that can be recovered. (Affect)

Example 17: ...will focus on the "Sai Shang Green Power" brand of State Grid Ningxia Power, continue to fulfill due social responsibilities, promoting clean and low-carbon transformation and development. (Judgement)

Example 18: This remarkable milestone signifies that China has achieved the promised installed capacity to the international community more than six years ahead of schedule, he continued. (appreciation)

In example 16, it indicates that the sustainable reuse of the electronic product promotes the green circular economy and thereby contributes to country's overall carbon emission reduction. Example 17 indicates that State Grid Ningxia Power, as a

local green industry, contributed Chinese solutions to global green energy development, and can also provide references for the development of green industries for other regions at home and abroad. In example 18, we can know that China has made a significant progress in China's renewable energy sector, which boost the accessibility and innovation of green and low-carbon products and technologies.

3.2.3 A Divider of Ecological Responsibility

There exists imbalance responsibility between developed countries and developing countries. Therefore, China made measures to lead developing countries to stresses common but differentiated responsibilities in strengthening global climate governance.

Example 19: ...said some developed countries argued that China should also contribute to the commitment. The argument has no legal support at all, he emphasized. (judgement)

Example 20: Rather, it is the obligation of developed countries to support developing economies in this matter... (judgement)

In example 19 and 20, "No legal" applies legal weapons to highlight the illegality and absurdity of the demands for financial support from developing countries. And "obligation" emphasizes the "obligations" of developed countries and construct an implicit criticism of their lack of moral responsibility.

China Daily's shaping of China's ecological image focuses on the positive aspects. Among them, the image of "a driving force for climate action" and "a contributor of global green product" highlight China's leading role in global ecological civilization construction and its increasing international ecological discourse power. The image of "a divider of ecological responsibility" has helped China and other developing countries distinguish between responsibilities and obligations. These self-shaping images help to break the long-term distortion of China's ecological image in other countries' media.

4 Conclusion

This study employs the attitude subsystem to analyze China Daily's COP29 reports, revealing China's ecological image as a driving force for climate action, a contributor of global green products, and a divider of ecological responsibility. These images portray China as a responsible actor in ecological governance—clarifying national responsibilities while advocating differentiated international leadership.

The findings broaden perspectives of news discourse research and enrich ecolinguistic studies, confirming the attitude system's utility in ecological discourse analysis. Practically, they highlight media's influence on public perceptions of China's ecological governance, underscoring the need for eco-conscious reporting practices.

There are still some limitations in the study. Only 15 reports during COP29, insufficient to capture the conference's full temporal impact. Methodologically, reliance solely on the attitude system restricts analytical depth. therefore, future research should incorporate broader data (spanning pre/post-conference periods), and explore other subsystems like engagement or graduation system to make ecological discourse analysis more comprehensive.

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