

Appraisal Analysis of Attitude Resources in Russian “Belt and Road Initiative” News

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Abstract

As an obligatory stop of “the Belt and Road Initiative”, Russian true attitude on the implementation of this strategy is of great significance. Based on appraisal theory, this paper makes a qualitative and quantitative research of the composition of attitude resources of 15 news reports in ITAR-TASS which are randomly selected from January to June of 2017, aiming to explore the image that Russian mainstream media built of “the Belt and Road Initiative” and the ideology behind it. This paper expects to raise readers’ awareness of paying attention to China’s national image in the foreign media as well as to make journalists attach more importance to the discursive construction of national image in news reports.

Keywords: *the Belt and Road Initiative; appraisal theory; ideology; national image*

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1. Introduction

During the visit to Central Asia and Southeast Asia in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping has put forward “the Belt and Road Initiative (B&R initiative)”, which unites two projects: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (Alexander, 2017: 9). It focuses on connectivity and cooperation between Eurasian countries, as well as embodies the spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit. This initiative has caught the international limelight and caused a heated discussion of what it is all about. The supporters appreciate the principles of co-consultation, co-construction and sharing, while the opponents hold the idea that it is a threat and provocation.

As an obligatory stop of B&R initiative as well as one of the countries holding discourse power, Russian true attitude on the implementation of this strategy is of great significance. Seemingly objective and impartial, news reports have implied the particular ideology. The analysis of news discourse, especially political news, can be a great understanding of a country's ideology (Fairclough, 1995). As the largest state news agency, ITAR-TASS is undoubtedly one of the main way for the spread of Russian national ideology. In view of this, this paper is going to make a qualitative and quantitative research of the composition of attitude resources of relevant news reports in ITAR-TASS, aiming to explore the image that Russian mainstream media built of B&R initiative and the ideology behind it.

2. Theoretical Framework

Based on Systemic-Functional Grammar, James Martin raised appraisal theory in the 1990s, which concerns with interpersonal meaning in language, with the subjective presence of a writer/speaker in the texts as he/she adopts stance towards both the materials he/she presents and those with whom he/she communicates (Martin & Rose, 2003: 23). Appraisal System consists of three sub-systems: Attitude System, Engagement System and Graduation System, and each of them has its own sub-systems. Attitude System is the core content of appraisal theory, with covering three semantic regions - Affect, Judgement and Appreciation, which have expressed the language users' attitude and standpoint (Thompson, 2000). Affect is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings. Judgement deals with attitudes towards behavior, which we admire or criticize, praise or condemn. Appreciation involves evaluation of semiotic and natural phenomena, according to the ways they are valued or not in a given field (Hu Zhuanglin, 2005).

According to Painter, appraisal meaning is similar to that of emotion, that is, to express our feelings by using words which hold the favorable or contradictory meanings. In his point of view, most of what people say in the daily life is not telling the facts, but constantly evaluating the situation, people or discourse around them (Hu Zhuanglin, 2005). Therefore, appraisal theory is always used as a tool for analyzing newspapers or speeches. Based on appraisal theory, this paper is going to divide the attitude resources in the selected news reports into three categories - Affect, Judgement and Appreciation according to their semantic meaning; and then to analyze the implications conveyed by these words.

3. Research Design

From the perspective of Positive Discourse Analysis, this paper makes a qualitative and quantitative research of the composition of attitude resources according to appraisal theory. Firstly, 15 news reports published from January to June of 2017 in ITAR-TASS website are randomly selected. The materials are about 3000 words; therefore, the artificial method is used to mark the attitude resources. Secondly, attitude resources are divided according to the positive and negative semantic features. Then, attitudes resources are sorted again based on the classification of Attitude System. Finally, the composition of attitudes is analyzed to explore the image that Russian mainstream media built of B&R initiative and the ideology behind it.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

After analyzing the selected materials, there are totally 127 attitude resources. Divided them according to positive and negative meaning, the results are listed as Table 1. It is easy to find that positive attitude resources are much more than negative ones - the former is 81.9% while the latter is 18.1%.

Table 1. Distribution of Positive and Negative Attitude Resources

| | Positive Attitude Resources | Negative Attitude Resources |
|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Amount (N) | 104 | 23 |
| Percentage (%) | 81.9% | 18.1% |

The following conclusions can be drawn from the synthesis of Table 1 and the original text of the news reports, that is, the relevant news reports in ITAR-TASS shows its positive attitude towards B&R initiative. They believe that the implementation of B&R initiative not only can promote economic development in Asia and Europe, but also has important significance for regional stability; therefore, Russia should firmly grasp the opportunity. The future is full of unpredictability. Russia will experience the challenges and risks when it participates in it, but it is obvious that joining this initiative do more good than harm; thus, the news reports actively promote Russia to join it and stress that President Putin will attend the Belt and Road international economic forum.

The research further analyzes the proportion of attitude resources that express Affect, Judgement and Appreciation in the news reports, and then divides them into positive and negative according to their different semantic implications, as shown in Table 2. Among the selected materials, the higher frequencies are Judgement and Appreciation attitude resources, accounting for 49.6% and 32.2% respectively, while the frequency of Affect attitude resource is low, only 18.1%.

Table 2. Distribution of Attitude Resources

| | Affect | | Judgement | | Appreciation | |
|----------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------|
| | Positive | Negative | Positive | Negative | Positive | Negative |
| Amount (N) | 18 | 0 | 50 | 13 | 36 | 5 |
| Percentage (%) | 18.1% | / | 39.4% | 10.2% | 28.4% | 3.9% |
| Total | 18.1% | | 49.6% | | 32.3% | |

4.1 Affect Attitude Resources

The value of Affect attitude resources is to directly express the speaker's evaluation and attitudes towards an event (Halliday, 2004). By using a large number of emotional words, the author can express his intention more clearly and invite the reader to share his emotion. When the reader accept such an invitation, the common emotions and contacts between the author and the reader are strengthened and reader will be more open to the author's follow-up view. However, the news reports in ITAR-TASS represent Russian official attitudes and need to maintain its objective and impartial. Too much emotional words will make the news more subjective, therefore, the frequency of Affect attitude resources is low.

Among these Affect attitude resources, they are all positive meanings, which directly express Russia's support for B&R initiative and the recognition that President Putin will take part in the Belt and Road forum. It is fully demonstrated that Russia accepts this initiative with an open mind. For example,

(1) Russia supports One Belt, One Road project and will participate actively in it, as it is important that integration in the Eurasian space is based on generally recognized rules and transparency, according to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

(2) Putin also noted cooperation in space and aviation industries, and highly appreciated the military and technical partnership, saying that "this cooperation is getting more and more advanced."

(3) Russia is not afraid of China as a competitor in the global economy, when cooperating with Beijing, Moscow accepts only what is good for it, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at a press conference as part of the Belt and Road international economic forum in Beijing.

4.2 Judgement Attitude Resources

Judgement deals with the evaluation of human behavior according to social norms (Halliday, 2004). When we make judgement, we judge an act as moral or immoral, legal or illegal, socially acceptable or unacceptable, as well as normal or abnormal. According to appraisal theory, Judgement System usually has three sub-categories, that is, Capacity (how capable someone is), Tenacity (how resolute someone is) and Normality (how unusual someone is).

Among the selected materials, Judgement attitude resources appears 63 times in total, accounting for 49.6%; and the positive terms are totally 50 which are much more than negative ones.

Based on the original texts, it is easy to find that the news reports rarely evaluate whether B&R initiative is ethical or not, but have used more words related to social dignity. In other words, it has mostly used words belonging to Capacity. For most of the attitude words are positive, it shows that the Russian media is optimistic about China's economic strength, and holds the idea that China has the economic ability to implement "the Belt and Road Initiative" and can lead the cooperative countries to achieve global success. For instance,

(4) "Of course, the implementation of the plans of social and economic development in the world, in its separate regions should undoubtedly have a favorable effect on the situation in problem areas on our planet," the Russian leader said at a press conference.

(5) The Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China will contribute to boosting Russia's economic security, Program Director of the Valdai International Discussion Club Timofei Bordachev told TASS on Tuesday.

(6) "One Belt, One Road will contribute to strengthening Russia's economy" and regional stability in Eurasia, he said.

The negative Judgement resources have also appeared in the news reports. By analyzing the original texts, we find that all these words are used to describe the events which make the international community turbulent, including the internal political struggle in the United States and Brexit. Russian media hopes that the implementation of B&R initiative can promote peace and stability in Eurasian area. President Putin said that Russia still believes and supports the implementation of B&R initiative although it is facing unpredictable difficulties. Comparing the turbulent external situation with Chinese new development strategy, the optimistic attitude of Russian media has been highlighted. Examples are listed as follows.

(7) Internal political struggle in the US, Brexit and other issues create nervousness in the world economy while the One belt project brings stability, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at a press conference as part of the Belt and Road international economic forum in Beijing.

(8) The tasks formulated by the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping within the framework of the project are large-scale, but also difficult in implementation, Putin said at a roundtable on the second day of the Belt and Road Forum.

4.3 Appreciation Attitude Resources

Appreciation is the evaluation of the value of things which is related to aesthetics (Halliday, 2004). It contains three sub-categories, that is, reaction to things, their composition and their value. Among the selected materials, Appreciation attitude resources appears 41 times in total, accounting for 32.3%; and the positive terms are totally 36 which are much more than negative ones.

In the specific news writing, Appreciation is a semantic category which is often used by journalists to express the evaluation of things. Through this way, the reader can find out the attitude of the news media to a specific event quickly. The use of such resources by ITAR-TASS shows that Russia is aware of the importance of B&R initiative for the world economy and regional stability, with seeing it as another opportunity for development. It has also expressed its supports and active

participation, for example,

(9) "All that is proposed follows the trend of modern development, and is extremely necessary and highly demanded. That is why Russia not only supports One Belt, One Road project, but will also actively participate in its implementation together with Chinese partners and, of course, with all other interested countries," Putin said.

(10) ...creation of a belt of economic development and mutually beneficial trade between Asia and Europe seems to be an urgent and important initiative that takes into account the current trends in the world economy.

The small number of negative Appreciation attitude resources expressed by the Russian media on B&R initiative shows its concerns about the difficulties of implementing this initiative, pointing out that B&R initiative can bring a lot of benefits but also will face many challenges for it involves so many countries with covering a wide range of industries. The examples are listed as follows.

(11) ...developing such partnership is a long and painstaking process, demanding different depth, speed and level of integration...

(12) Simultaneously, Russia and China develop bilateral relations, and this is a rather complex and multifaceted process," he said.

In spite of this, the Russian media still believe in China's strength and believe that B&R initiative do more good than harm. Even if the countries have their different ideologies, the B&R initiative is able to bring more benefits to Russia and to the development of the world, so Russia has a good reason to join it. Overall, the Russian media hold the idea that the implementation of "the Belt and Road initiative" is coexistence of opportunities and challenges and believe its prospect is promising with showing its willingness to participate in it actively.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, the following conclusions are drawn from the analysis of the composition of attitude resources of "the Belt and Road initiative" news reports in ITAR-TASS, that is, all three kinds of attitude resources have been used, which are all dominated by Judgement and Appreciation, but with less use of Affect; and also, the positive semantic attitudes are far more than the negative ones. In general, the Russian media regard B&R initiative as the coexistence of opportunities and challenges. It has been attracted by its promising prospects although there might be unpredictable difficulties, and believes that this initiative will benefit the world economy and the regional stability. For Russia's concerns including interest distribution and coordination problem among so many countries, the publicizing and reporting of our domestic media should be targeted to make "the Belt and Road initiative" obtain more national support and recognition.

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