

Discourse Analysis of School Bullying News: A Study based on the Appraisal Theory of Attitude Systems

-- A case study of China Daily reports in the past year.

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Abstract: In the past year, school bullying issues in China and globally have become a focal point of widespread concern and worry. This harmful behavior not only inflicts significant harm on the physical and mental well-being of affected adolescents but also has the potential to negatively impact the overall school environment and society at large. Media coverage on school bullying not only provides the public with access to information and understanding of the issue but also triggers public attention and discussion, driving collaborative efforts across various sectors of society to address the challenges of school bullying. This study selected five news articles with the theme of "school violence" from the English version of China Daily website as the corpus. From the perspective of the subsystem of Appraisal Theory - attitude resources, the articles were annotated using corpus tools to explore the attitude tendencies towards school violence and the construction of identities related to "school" and relevant government departments in the process of addressing school violence. This research aims to assist education departments and schools in finding directions to address school bullying, attract more social forces to engage in the prevention and control of school violence, and promote the healthy development of adolescents in schools.

Keywords: School Bullying, News Discourse Analysis, Attitude System in Appraisal Theory, Prevention and Control Measures, Protection of Minors.

1. Research Background

In recent years, school bullying has attracted widespread attention and concern in China and globally. School bullying refers to the deliberate verbal, physical, or psychological attacks, threats, or harm inflicted by one or more students on others within a school environment. This behavior not only causes significant harm to the physical and mental well-being of the victims but can also have a negative impact on the overall school atmosphere and students' learning environment.

News reports on the theme of school bullying are frequently seen in the media, and these reports hold significant importance in revealing the prevalence, impact, and related issues of bullying. News coverage not only provides the public with access to information and understanding of school bullying but also triggers public attention and discussion, driving collaborative efforts across various sectors of society to address the issue of school bullying.

News reports can encompass various attitudes, viewpoints, and comments, including condemnation of bullying behavior, sympathy and support for the victims, as well as evaluation of relevant policies and measures[1]. These diverse discourses and perspectives reflect society's understanding and attitudes towards school bullying and are of great significance in gaining an in-depth understanding of the public's attitudes towards school bullying and the level of societal concern for this issue.

Appraisal Theory, as a major advancement in Systemic Functional Linguistics, provides a new theoretical framework for discourse analysis and has been widely applied by scholars from various perspectives, such as critical discourse analysis, translation studies, in the study of political speeches,

literary works, advertising language, and news discourse. [2]The Appraisal Theory's attitude system is a commonly used research method that, based on psychological evaluation theory, helps researchers reveal people's attitudes and evaluations towards specific topics through discourse analysis. Therefore, using the attitude system from Martin's Appraisal Theory as the semantic analysis framework, the author adopts a combined qualitative and quantitative approach to study the use of attitude resources in China Daily's news reports on the theme of "school violence" over the past year. The analysis aims to analyze the media's reporting and discover the significant achievements in the prevention and control of school bullying by schools and relevant departments. It also examines the construction of a combined structure guaranteeing the physical and mental safety of minors through the integration of family, school, and society. Additionally, the study identifies the image of schools in incidents of school violence within the corpus. This method can identify and understand people's emotional tendencies and attitudes towards school bullying and related governance measures by analyzing elements such as emotions, evaluative words, and logical relationships in discourse.

Considering that China Daily is a media organization with a wide readership and authority, it is appropriate to select China Daily reports from the past year as the research object for discourse analysis of the school bullying issue. Analyzing these news reports using the Appraisal Theory's attitude system can reveal China Daily's and its readers' attitudes towards school bullying, the level of concern, and evaluations of relevant policies and measures. This research further promotes understanding and resolution of the school bullying issue. It contributes to providing more accurate information and references to relevant decision-makers and various sectors of society, facilitating the improvement of the school

environment and ensuring the healthy growth of students.

2. Framework of Appraisal Theory

Halliday and other systemic functional linguists believe that language has three meta-functions: interpersonal function, ideational function, and textual function. [3] However, they did not conduct a detailed study on the semantic evaluative means within the interpersonal function until 2003 when Martin and Rose provided a systematic exposition of the evaluative theory framework. [3] They argued that evaluation is an interpersonal semantic system that is realized through textual resources, including vocabulary and grammar, for negotiating interpersonal relationships. Evaluative theory can be divided into three main parts: the attitude system, the engagement system, and the graduation system, which are used to study speakers' emotional tendencies, the connections between subjects, and their ideologies. Among these systems, the attitude system plays a dominant role and is the focus of this study. It refers to an individual's verbal reflection of their psychological reactions, judgments, and appreciations towards actions, texts/processes, and phenomena after experiencing something. The attitude system can be further divided into affect, judgment, and appreciation.

The affect system can be categorized into "quality" affect expressed through adjectives, "process" affect expressed through clauses, and "comment" affect expressed through adverbs, modals, and adverbials. According to Martin and White's research classification, the affect system includes four primary affects: happiness/unhappiness, safety/unsafety, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and inclination/disinclination. The judgment system is used to interpret the moral judgments made by the speaker based on ethical standards and can be divided into social constraint and social dignity. Social constraint belongs to the realm of legality and includes legitimacy and veracity, while social dignity belongs to the realm of morality and includes conventionality, capacity, and tenacity. The appreciation system aims to explain the speaker's aesthetic value judgments towards texts, processes, and phenomena and can be further divided into reaction, composition, and value. Reaction encompasses both affect and quality aspects. Composition includes balance and complexity. Value refers to whether something has social significance, and in the discourse analysis of news discourse, its value mainly depends on the social significance of the event and its harmfulness.

Within different systems, different evaluative resources can have positive or negative meanings and can be ranked from low to high based on their intensity and degree.[9] Although some discourses may not contain explicit evaluative vocabulary, it does not mean that they do not contain the speaker's viewpoints and positions. Purely conceptual meanings can also have evaluative functions in actual contexts. In short, affect is the emotional response to actions, judgment is ethical and evaluates actions, and appreciation is aesthetic and evaluates phenomena. Judgment and appreciation are institutionalized outcomes that influence the center of the attitude system.

The attitude system provides a theoretical foundation for analyzing news texts. News reports not only objectively present the facts and processes of events but also reflect the media's stance and the attitudes they wish to convey to readers, which can vary in perspectives and judgment criteria. People have both supportive and opposing attitudes. [9] In order to minimize the psychological distance between themselves and

readers and regulate interpersonal relationships with those who hold conflicting opinions, editors use explicit expressions, concise implications, or assumptions and inferences in news discourse to convey attitudes. This study collects and organizes attitude resources in news discourse to infer and interpret the emotional attitudes held by the parties involved and editors towards school violence and the current status of related governance measures, thereby revealing the interpersonal meanings implicitly contained in the discourse and the constructed image of schools.

3. Analysis of Attitudinal Resources in News Discourse on the Theme of "School Violence"

3.1. Data Sources and Research Methodology

The English version of China Daily website is highly authoritative and capable of delivering news in a genuine, objective, targeted, and concise manner. It has strong timeliness and serves as a window for external communication. Therefore, selecting news from this platform as a data source can provide materials for future comparative studies with foreign news websites on the same topic. Using "school violence" as a keyword, I searched for five relevant news reports published in the past year and created a small-scale corpus. The attitudinal vocabulary in the corpus was manually annotated, and data analysis and organization were conducted using the UAM Corpus Tool 6 software. The author adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine the distribution of attitudinal resources in the news reports, as well as the implied social values and policy orientations conveyed through the attitudinal discourse.[9]

3.2. Analysis of Attitudinal Resources

From the data in this table, we can also observe that a total of 136 instances of attitudinal words, phrases, and clauses were extracted from the corpus. The distribution of the three types of attitudinal resources is relatively even: judgment appears most frequently, accounting for 47.06%; affect comes next with a total of 42 occurrences, accounting for 30.88%; appreciation ranks last with 30 occurrences, accounting for 22.06%. Among them, expressions related to security, veracity, and capacity are the most frequently used.

Regarding evaluative orientation, each category of attitude usually has both positive and negative aspects. In the corpus, positive and negative attitudinal discourse are balanced. Various sectors of society, as well as affected students and their parents, express dissatisfaction with the perpetrators of school violence, but they are satisfied with the timely intervention of school, family, and education authorities as well as public security departments. Government news media also hold a positive attitude towards the current development status of measures to prevent and combat school violence, advocating for the continuous expansion and deepening of these measures. However, the objectivity and truthfulness of the news require media professionals to accurately report the factual situation. Issues raised by school-age youth, students, and their parents, as well as ongoing problems in addressing school violence discovered by journalists, will be objectively and impartially addressed.

Table 1. Attitude Resource Distribution in News Reports on School Bullying

attitudinal resources		Frequency of occurrence	Percentage	
Affect	happiness/unhappiness		10	7.35%
	security/insecurity		26	19.12%
	satisfaction/dis-		11	8.09%
	inclination/dis		5	3.68%
	Total		42	30.88%
Judgement	Social esteem	Normality	9	6.62%
		Capacity	23	16.91%
		Tenacity	5	3.68%
		Total	27	19.85%
	Social sanction	Veracity	31	22.79%
		Propriety	6	4.41%
		Total	37	27.21%
	Total		64	47.06%
Appreciation	Reaction	Impact	4	2.94%
		Quality	6	4.41%
		Total	10	7.35%
	Composition	Balance	3	2.21%
		Complexity	7	5.15%
		Total	10	7.35%
	Valuation		20	14.71%
	Total		30	22.06%
Total		136	100.00%	

1) Affect

After experiencing something, people often use language to express and discuss their emotions.[3] From Table 1, it can be observed that in the context of "school violence" news reports, affective resources have the second-highest frequency of occurrence. This type of article has a wide audience, including schools, students, and parents. All of these groups would feel outrage when faced with incidents of school violence. Through empathy, the articles enable readers to truly sense the harmfulness of school violence.

a) "The bullied boy suffered(dissatisfaction) severe harm to his physical and mental condition, so legal penalties must be implemented," he said in an article released on Wednesday.

b) "Also, as the case has triggered widespread anxiety and worries(+dissatisfaction+insecurity) among the public and parents, we see a need for the whole of society to prevent bullying at school."

c) Two primary school students in Datong, Shanxi province, who bullied and physically assaulted a fellow classmate have been ordered to receive psychological counseling and behavioral correction(+tenacity,+propriety), and several managers and teachers at the school have been fired(+tenacity,+propriety) after their horrid(+dissatisfaction+insecurity) actions riled the internet, local authorities said on Tuesday.

d) Wan Li, vice-chairman of the All China Lawyers Association and a national legislator who has been paying attention to school bullying in recent years, said prevention is far more meaningful(satisfaction) than punishment.

School violence has attracted attention from various sectors

of society. Sentences a-c express dissatisfaction with acts of school violence and sympathy for the affected students from the perspectives of the news industry, parents, and the internet. Sentence d expresses the assessment of the legal profession on existing measures to prevent school violence, indicating that the existing mechanisms and awareness for preventing school violence are commendable and should be promoted, as opposed to solely resorting to punishment for the perpetrators of school violence.

2) Judgement

The judgment system belongs to the ethical domain and evaluates the actions of language users based on ethical and moral standards. [4]News reports with the theme of school violence primarily aim to criticize acts of school violence and other forms of harm towards minors, as well as evaluate corresponding responses (including preventive and punitive measures).

a) Local authorities have been ramping up efforts(ability) to prevent and punish(+tenacity,+propriety) school bullying amid heated(inclination) discussions about several incidents involving teenagers.

b) In Shanghai, measures to prevent and identify student bullying were introduced in 2019 with the publication of a guidance manual(composition) for preventing and controlling(ability) bullying among primary and secondary school students.

c) It also highlighted nine abnormal behaviors (normality) in student conduct and language as indicators of student bullying, which parents should be aware of.

In accordance with policy requirements, acts of school

violence will be subject to long-term supervision and punishment. Currently, due to the diverse and complex nature of school violence involving minors, the legal regulations are relatively inadequate. It requires joint efforts from all sectors of society to provide guidance and suggestions based on specific circumstances to address these issues effectively.

3) Appreciation

The process of appreciation consists of three components: response, composition, and value[5]. Response is related to emotions and can be divided into impact and quality.[6] Composition is related to our visual perception and includes elements such as balance and complexity. Value is associated with our beliefs and cognition.[7]

a) For severe cases of school bullying, the manual emphasized (reaction) the involvement of public security and judicial authorities.

b) "We need to impose strict penalties (valuation) for criminal behavior committed by juveniles involved in bullying. Even if their actions do not lead to criminal liability, we must follow legal procedures (composition) to solve the issue, thereby strengthening (valuation) legal education for juveniles," Xiong said.

The process of appreciation, which includes "response, composition, and value," can indeed be applied to the legal profession's perspective on school bullying and their values regarding addressing it. It provides valuable guidance for us in tackling the issue of school bullying.

4. Conclusion

Based on the above data statistics and case analysis, it can be observed that in the context of "school violence," news editors utilize attitudinal resources to make positive or negative attitude evaluations, highlighting the severe harm caused by school violence as a factual news event. Additionally, they shape a positive government image by emphasizing timely detection and resolution of the problem. On one hand, this approach accurately reflects the basic facts of school violence and juvenile delinquency. On the other hand, strategic use of attitudinal coding vocabulary by news editors can subtly influence readers to interpret the discourse in line with the evaluator's expectations and accept the

underlying ideology. This can encourage more social forces to actively engage in preventing and addressing school violence, thereby ensuring the healthy development of minors.

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