

Research on the Implicit Evaluation in “Sina Weibo” Discourse

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Abstract—As an emerging social media, microblog has quickly become a popular communication platform since its birth. There are a large number of implicit evaluation resources in microblog, which explicitly or implicitly reflect the author's views and attitudes. Microblog media expresses its opinions by using the large number of seemingly neutral but explicit attitudinal resources to evaluate the positioning and ally the readers. Through the analysis of the microblog report about Shanghai Import Expo, we conclude that the selection of lexical metaphor, graduation resources and ideational meaning is an important embodiment of implicit evaluation in media discourse; the identification and exploration of implicit evaluation resources behind the microblog media is of great significance.

Keywords—*microblog discourse; implicit evaluation; lexical metaphor; graduation resources; selection of ideational meaning*

I. INTRODUCTION

As a new way of information issuance, microblog's involvement and penetration into various fields of Chinese society has become increasingly popular, and it has attracted public attention and has a great impact on the Chinese public opinion. The we-media era led by microblog allows everyone to become a citizen reporter through it. Fowler points out that the media are often concerned about the reports and comments which show hidden attitude to coordinate positions and ally readers with the certain language resources.^[1] Through these apparent expressions, news discourse can guide readers to accept their viewpoints, construct inter-subjective relations, and establish interpersonal relationships. Therefore, exploration of the attitudes, positioning and ideologies in Weibo discourse plays an important role in constructing and understanding interpersonal relations in society. The appraisal system theory provides a powerful theoretical analysis tool for the study of Weibo discourse. In recent years, using this theory for discourse analysis has won the approval of linguists at home and abroad, and has achieved great results. J.R. Martin's systematic evaluation theory is based on the systemic functional linguistics in the practice of discourse analysis. The appraisal theory aims to study the attitude, emotion and judgment embodied in language resources. There are many kinds of evaluation resources in Weibo discourse, but in recent years, most of the research has focused on its explicit evaluation, paying no attention to the implicit evaluation. The attitude and positioning in Sina Weibo texts can be identified through the interpretation of the implicit evaluation, which is therefore fully presented to the reader.

II. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS RESEARCH FROM THE EVALUATION PERSPECTIVE

The appraisal system theory studies the various attitudes negotiated in the discourse, the intensity of the emotions involved, and the various ways of indicating the value and the readers of the alliance.^[2] Evaluation system can be summarized into three subsystems: attitude, engagement and graduation. The three subsystems can be divided into multiple subsystems respectively. The evaluation is divided into explicit evaluation and implicit evaluation. Explicit evaluation refers to expressions of attitudes represented by such words as happy, angrily and hate, which clearly indicated the author's attitude. Implicit evaluation is expressed by semantic structures that appear to be neutral but imply the author's attitude. With the application of appraisal system theory to analyze media discourse, to explore the attitudes and positioning behind the text is increasingly valued by linguists. After entering the 21st century, scholars at home and abroad have also discussed the application of evaluation system theory in media discourse from different aspects, but mostly focused on explicit evaluation. Media discourse often expresses the position of the media group with implicit language resources that have no obvious emotional expression. Wang Tianhua pointed out that news discourse uses the implicit evaluation resources to dynamically construct news discourse and locate readers^[5]; Zhang Lei and Miao Xingwei believe that the evaluation resources in discourse have the function of discourse construction^[7]; Ran Zhihan believes that the transitive structure in English news discourse has the evaluation function^[3]. Therefore, it is of great significance to analyze the evaluation resources in news discourse and explore the hidden attitude behind it. Sina Weibo is the most influential information-sharing and communication platform and has become one of the important sources of issuing news and comments in China. Therefore, this article takes the 2018 Shanghai Expo as an example, and uses the related microblog discourse as the corpus to analyze the manifestation of implicit evaluation and explore its evaluative function.

III. IMPLICIT EVALUATION IN DISCOURSE

A. *Lexical Metaphors Inspire Implicit Evaluation*

The idea that vocabulary provokes evaluation refers to stimulating the reader's attitude through the analogy between different conceptual domains in the discourse. This

metaphorical language reinforces the emotional resonance of the evaluation. In the following description, the use of lexical metaphors serves to stimulate evaluation:

(1) We were bought **like a market**. We was all lined up in white dresses, and they'd come round and pick you out **like you was for sale**.....I remember all we children being **herded up, like a mob of cattle**, and feeling the humiliation of being graded by the color of our skins for the government records.^[2]

(2) This story's right, this story's true
I would not tell lies to you
Like the promises they did not keep
And how they fenced us in like sheep
Said to us come take our hand
Sent us off to mission land
Taught us to read, to write and pray
Then they took the children away...^[2]

The use of lexical metaphors has emerged in both paragraphs above. In the example (1), the government's action indicated does not show the non-human behavior of the government in the discourse, but "the treatment of the original inhabitants is like treating goods", especially the use of three analogy - like a market, Like you was for sale, like a mob of cattle - clearly shows the government's disregard and indifference in the reader's mind. Example (2) is a song that reflects the portrayal of true life of Australia's "stolen generation". The "stolen generation" is a tragic group in the history of Australia. At that time, the Australian government forced the mixed-race indigenous children to be taken from their families and adopted in the nursery school on the grounds of improving the lives of indigenous children and accepting human culture education. "And how they fenced us in like sheep" expressed the opposition and denunciation of the "stolen generation" to the government's barbaric policy, because the psychological trauma caused by the government cannot be bridged. There are also examples of lexical metaphors in Sina Weibo, such as:

(3) Shànghǎi jìn bó huì kāifàng jiēdào jū wěi de tuántí cānguān, jiéguǒ zhè bāng dàniáng, dàsǎo, dànmā, dàyé yī jìnzhǎn guǎn nǎlǐ wén xiāng jiù wǎng nǎlǐ chōng. zhǐwào kàn dào yǒu shíwù shì chī de, **xiàng è láng bān de fēng yǒng ér shàng**, zuǐ diāo shǒu zhuā, shènzhì hái ná chū zì dài gòuwù sùliào dài zhuāng, bǎ měi yīgè yǒu shì shí de tānwèi gěi yī sǎo ér guāng.

(4) Qīn niáng hé tā lǎo huǒbàn lǎo qīngzǎo páiduì líng lái de jìn bó huì ménpiào. qīn niáng shuō tā xiǎo huǒbàn hái gěi tā tíqián zhànduì zhè piào jiānjué bùnéng yún gěi wǒ, **3000 wàn** de xiézi kàn bù dào.

The lexical metaphor of **xiàng è láng bān de fēng yǒng ér shàng** (floating like a throng of hungry wolf)" in example (3) highlights the reader's resentment towards the attitude of "some women who are eager to snab the imported food displayed at the Expo". However, on the other hand, it also shows that China's hosting of the Expo has indeed achieved great success and attracted many exhibitors and citizens to participate actively. The exaggerated expression of **3000 wàn**

(30 million pairs of shoes) in the example (4) shows that their exaggerated language expression highlights the number of merchants participating in the Expo, which also confirms that the Expo attracts attention from all over the world.

B. Graduation resources flag implicit evaluation

Graduation is a common linguistic phenomenon that quantifies things, qualities, behaviors, etc., and expresses the strength of attitudes. The graduation semantic part is at the core of the evaluation system. It can not only express the ideational meaning, but also have the functions of emphasizing and mitigating the strength of the attitude in the interpersonal communication. The grading of the ideational meaning can be flagged. To flag means that the speaker uses the graduation resource as a signal to imply the existence of the attitude shown to the reader. The force and focus are the two sub-categories of the graduation. The former involves the quality, the intensity of the process and the number of entities, respectively called intensification and quantification; the latter refers to the classification of the typicality of things in certain category. Focus refers to the fact that the evaluated object is a core member or a peripheral member of the category. According to the strength of the semantic value, the focus can be refined into sharpening and softening. Please see the examples below:

(5) Yīdàn quánmiàn kāifàng, yǒng rù de rèqián, **yīyè zhī jiān** [force:intensification] Kě jiù **quándōu** [force:intensification] zǒu diào, zhōngguó jiù biàn chéng **dì èr gè**[force:quantification] rìběn.

(6) Tè lǎng pǔ **jiǎo jǐn nǎozhī** [force:intensification] Zǔzhǐ jìnkǒu. Zhōngguó què wèi hé **Dà zhāng qí gǔ**[force:intensification] Huānyíng jìnkǒu?

(7) Jùxī, běn jiè jìn bó huì zhōngguó dàlù shǒufā xīn chǎnpǐn, xīn jìshù huò fúwù **570 yú jiàn** [force:quantification], Gòngyǒu **4100 duō míng** [force:quantification] Jìzhě cān huì bàodào. OK qū kuài liàn gōngchéngyuán shǒuxí wánjìyùyuán lìjìyuè rènwéi, jìn bó huì duì qū kuài liàn qǐ dào **jiào dà de** [focus: sharpening] Tuīdòng zuòyòng.

The graduation resources can be divided into two poles of rising and falling according to the semantic value. The rising semantic values mean the author's positive evaluation, while the falling semantic values indicate the author's negative evaluation. In the example (7), the number of **570 yú jiàn** (indicating rising strengths), **4100 duō míng** and sharpening focus words **jiào dà de** (highly), highlighting the author's positive evaluation which shows the large-scale of national fairs. The intensification of the words **jiǎo jǐn nǎozhī** (rack one's brain) and **Dà zhāng qí gǔ** (openly) indicating rising strength in example (6) and the expression of **yīyè zhī jiān** (overnight) and **quándōu** (all the whole) in example (5) demonstrate the fact that Shanghai Import Expo is welcomed and recognized by people all over the world.

C. The selection of ideational meaning affords implicit evaluation

Ideational meaning (function) is the subsystem of the three major linguistic functions in the systemic functional

linguistic theory. It attempts to describe what happens in the surrounding world and the human's inner experience. The affording of implicit meaning refers to the fact that in a discourse the author expresses his or her attitude through the selection of the different ideational meaning. White pointed out that evocation and provocation are the most important implicit evaluation methods in the news discourse [6]. Evocation mainly occurs through the pure ideational meaning in the discourse to arouse the positive or negative emotional response of the reader or listener, as in the following example:

(8) Jīntiān cóng guójiā huìzhǎn zhōngxīn (shànghǎi) liǎojiě dào, yīn jìnkǒu bólanhuì zhǎnqí yǒuxiàn, kǎolù dào shimín réng yǒu qiángliè de guān zhǎn xūqiú, wéi jìnyībù kuòdà jìnkǒu bólanhuì de yíngxiǎng hé yìchū xiàoyìng. zì jīntiān qǐ zhì 11 yuè 24 rì, jìnkǒu bólanhuì kāimù shì zhǔ lùntán huìchǎng, píngxíng lùntán huìchǎng, guójiā zhǎnshì guǎn, nán guǎngchǎng jiāng xiàng shèhuì kāifàng, shimín kě píng cānguān quán miǎnfèi cānguān, huānyíng shimín péngyǒu qiánwǎng cānguān.

In the clause of example (8), the author of the discourse does not use words that clearly indicate the meaning or emotional attitude. However, this clause only presents a statement of the fact that, in order to satisfy the majority of people in the world, the Chinese government holds the Shanghai Import Expo and meets the good expectations of the eager citizens and people of all countries. The people are enthusiastic to take part in the expo, and then the main forum venue, parallel forum venue, national exhibition hall, South Square will be open to the public. So the public can visit these exhibition halls for free. However, the information of this clause can arouse the positive emotional reaction of the reader. The arousal of this emotional reaction mainly stems from the value orientation in the reader's mind and the judgment of the social and cultural orientation. Look at the following example:

(9) Shànghǎi jìn bó huì kāifàng jiēdào jū wěi de tuántǐ cānguān, xiǎng ràng **nàxiē tuìxiū, xiàgǎng hé wàidì zài hù zhànshí jūzhù de rén** nénggòu kāi kāi yǎnjiè, liǎo jiè yīxià shìjiè xiānjìn de dōngxī.

In the example of (9), **nàxiē tuìxiū, xiàgǎng hé wàidì zài hù zhànshí jūzhù de rén** (those who retire and temporarily reside in Shanghai) are structures of nominalization. The sentence in this example is transformed from a material process clause into a noun phrase, which is a transformation of a proposition to an entity, and omits the actor and modality components. Systemic functional linguistics believes that in the material process clause, the actor is the participant

component responsible for the process, and exerts a certain influence on the subsequent goal. Therefore, such statement expression proves that the Expo is welcomed and recognized by people all over the world, implying the author's positive evaluation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Evaluation is the core of all discourses and media reports, and evaluation can be classified into explicit and implicit poles. Media discourse often uses the linguistic resources that appear to be neutral but implicitly evaluate the voice and indicate positioning of the certain media group. This paper analyzes the manifestation of implicit evaluation from three aspects: lexical metaphor, selection of ideational meaning and graduation resources, and explores its evaluative function in discourse. The identification and interpretation of implicit evaluation resources in microblog discourse needs to be activated by the situational context and related social and cultural background knowledge. Finally, it is pointed out that the evaluation resources in the discourse are very abundant, so the research perspective in this paper is far from satisfactory. Therefore, the evaluation of Weibo discourse is worthy of further discussion by scholars at home and abroad.

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