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Interpersonal Rhetoric in
the Editorials of *China Daily*

A Generic Perspective



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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the interpersonal rhetorical patterns employed in editorials of *China Daily*. Editorials are the most important part of the newspaper; they aim to shape opinion and influence behavioral patterns. The research is principally based on systemic functional linguistics, CDA and genre theories.

Nowadays, mass communication plays a very important role in society. As an important means of mass communication and a form of discursive practice, the media has therefore acquired a significant position in society (Fowler et al. 1979; van Dijk 1987a, 1988 a, 1988 b; Fairclough 1998). For this reason, the last few decades have witnessed a great deal of research on media or print media language from various perspectives (Hartley 1981; Fowler 1991; van Dijk 1991; Fairclough 1995; Bell and Garrett 1998; White 1998; Martin and White 2005; Albakry 2005; Xin Bin 2000; Xin Hong 2000; Liu Chengyu 2002; Fan Hong 2002). Editorials, as one of the major discourse genres in the print newspaper, have also been investigated from various perspectives (Fowler 1991; van Dijk 1992; Bolívar 1994; Westin 2002; Morley 2004; Yang Xueyang 2001).

1.2 Significance of the study

We all know that mass communication has become more and more important in daily life. The same is true of editorials in the print media. Editorials carry much more weight than other genres since they are mainly used to express the newspaper's opinions and attitudes on current affairs. Through adopting positions and expressing opinions, editorials deliberately seek to influence and guide public opinions.

Therefore, editorials play an important role in shaping and constructing the communities from which their readers are drawn. Their success or otherwise in expressing their attitudes and opinions will significantly influence the efficiency with which they carry out this role. It is therefore entirely appropriate that they should command more attention in both sociological and linguistic studies. Their significance can be appreciated from the following examples.

Example One. In July 1943, Kuomintang (KMT), seizing the opportunity provided by the disbanding of the Communist International, launched a new attack on the Communist Party of China with the intention of overthrowing the Shanganning revolutionary government. The Central Committee of the Communist Party, on the one hand, made military preparations; on the other hand, it decided to beat back the KMT's attack with the help of a publicity strategy. Mao Zedong immediately took up his pen and wrote an important editorial for the *Liberation Daily* with the title 'Questioning the KMT,'¹ in which he exposed in detail the evil plot of KMT. This editorial then caught the attention of the public. Under pressure both from the international community and also back at home, KMT had to stop its conspiracy. It claimed its attack on the Communist Party was a "mistake" and ordered Hu Zongnan to withdraw his army.

Example Two. On 12 December 1936, generals Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng captured Chiang Kai-shek and forced him to terminate the war against the communists. Shortly after this incident, Zhang Jiluan, then editor-in-chief of *Da Gong Bao*, quickly wrote four editorials² entitled 'The aftermath of the Xi'an incident' (December 14), 'On the Xi'an incident again' (December 16), 'A public letter to the Xi'an military circles' (December 18), and 'The great victory of the nation's conscience' (December 20) respectively. Four hundred thousand copies of the editorial

1 The Chinese name for this editorial is zhiwen guomindang and it was published on July 12, 1943 in *Liberation Daily*.

2 A general name for genre of this kind is commentary. In the genre of press commentary, there are many different subgenres, and editorials or leading articles are among the most important ones. They are published under the name of the press and thus acquire the important position in the press. The Chinese titles of the four pieces of editorial written by Zhang Jiluan are: xi'an shibian zhi shanhou, zailun xi' an shijian, gei xi' an junjie de gongkai xin, and guomin liangzhi de weida shengli. In this research, we focus on the genre of editorial only.

‘A public letter to the Xi’an military circles’ were printed and flown to Xi’an for distribution. In this editorial Zhang Jiluan argued passionately for the release of Chiang and for a peaceful settlement. Although the fact that Zhang Jiluan and Chiang had very good relations at that time might have influenced Zhang’s opinion on this incident, the four commentaries written by Zhang played a very important role in resolving this matter (Hu 2002: 181).

Choosing editorials from *China Daily* as the focus of this study is not simply following a trend in current research. *China Daily*, first published in 1981, is the only national English language newspaper published in China. Its average daily circulation is more than 200,000 copies, one-third of which is abroad in more than 150 countries and regions. The importance of the newspaper can easily be discerned from reading the following from the newspaper’s website <<http://pub1.chinadaily.com.cn/point/aboutcd/>>:

Committed to helping the world know more about China and the country’s integration with the international community, *China Daily* is regarded as one of the country’s most authoritative English media outlets and an important source of information on Chinese politics, economy, society and culture. It is often called the “Voice of China” or “Window to China”. *China Daily* also serves as an important source for high-end Chinese readers who want to know more about the world.

Our readers are from all over the world. Domestic readers mainly include foreigners and high-end nationals, for example, diplomats and governmental policy makers. Overseas subscribers are mostly government officials, members of parliaments, staff members of international organizations and multinationals, professors, researchers and students in universities and institutes.

The editorial in *China Daily*, as one important means of commenting on current issues, functions as an important means of conveying the nation’s opinions and attitudes about the world. Therefore the linguistic strategies employed in editorials in *China Daily* will be key factors influencing the success of this opinion forming. Moreover, the study of editorials in *China Daily* has a role to play in discourse research worldwide. Blommaert (2005) made it clear that discourse analysts, especially critical discourse analysts, always pay more attention to discourse in “first-world” countries than in developing countries. The same is true of editorial studies. In the light of this, the study of editorials in *China Daily* acquires more significance.

1.3 Research questions

The research is focused on interpersonal meaning in editorials in *China Daily*. This kind of meaning is employed by the author to evaluate things, people and events. Thus evaluation will be the focus of this study. In this research I adopt a separating approach towards evaluation studies (Swann et al 2004; Halliday 1994) and define evaluation in the editorials roughly as attitude and modal expressions, which in turn form the linguistic realizations of the evaluation. At the discourse level, evaluation is packaged as generic structures; while from the dialogistic perspective, evaluation functions to negotiate power and solidarity. In my research, I carry out my study of the evaluation in the editorials in *China Daily* from three independent but closely related levels: linguistic, discoursal and dialogistic.

These research perspectives are then manifested through the following four concrete research questions:

- 1) What is the attitudinal pattern in editorials in *China Daily*?
- 2) What is the distributional pattern of modal expressions in the editorial discourse?
- 3) What is the generic structure of editorials?
- 4) How is power and solidarity negotiated in editorials?

In order to achieve these research goals, I will first establish a synthesized model of editorial analysis. Within this analytical model, I will first try to work out the attitudinal pattern in editorials and the distributional pattern of modal expressions. With these findings in mind, the generic structures of editorials for evaluation will be worked out from typological and topological perspectives. Finally, I will try to find out how power and solidarity is negotiated in different subgenres of editorials.

1.4 Data and methodology

Editorials are usually published in order to comment on important events or news. In order to cover a wide range of topics, I first collected all the editorials published in *China Daily* from 2004 to 2005. These comprise 514 pieces, among which 68 are from 2004 and the remainder from 2005. The editorials were first photocopied and then downloaded from the internet <<http://www.chinadaily.net/>>. I then selected editorials published on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays of the first week in every month as data for analysis. My choice was motivated by the desire to select at random and achieve easy grouping and analysis. There were 18 editorials for the Monday group, 23 for the Wednesday group and for the Friday group. Therefore altogether there were 60 editorials with a total of 31535 words.

As far as methodology is concerned, I have undertaken concrete editorial discourse analysis in two stages. First, I have described the realization of evaluation in editorial discourse. Secondly, I have interpreted this linguistic phenomenon. This attitude and modality transcription answers the first two research questions (see the previous section). I have then made a statistical analysis of every case of attitude type and every instance of modal expression (see the tables in Chapters Four and Five). On the basis of this detailed description of the linguistics features of evaluation in editorials, I have then analyzed the connection between linguistics features and their social meaning.

1.5 Organization of this research

The research is divided into four major parts composed of eight chapters. Part One (Chapter One) is introductory, presenting the purpose, significance and methodology of the research. Part Two (Chapters Two and Three) aims to establish an analytical model based on the review of related theories. In Chapter Two, systemic functional linguistics, CDA, genre theories and some thoughts on communication theory are revisited with the purpose of establishing a theoretical foundation for further

research. Following this literature review, in Chapter Three, I propose a synthesized analytical model for editorial analysis in which the attitudinal meaning, modal expressions and the generic structure of editorials are foregrounded. Part Three (Chapter Four to Seven) is the main body of the analysis. Chapter Four describes the attitudinal patterns in editorials with the help of statistical analysis; Chapter Five is concerned with the distributional pattern of modal expressions in editorials with reference to Biber et al.'s (1999) discussion of modal expressions; based on the findings in Chapters Four and Five, I treat attitude and modal expressions, especially the modal expression of obligation & necessity, as the parameters for defining the type of editorials. In Chapter Six, the generic structure of editorials is reviewed both from a typological and topological perspective; and in Chapter Seven, I describe how power and solidarity is negotiated in editorials based on the findings of the previous chapters and engagement analysis.

Part Four (Chapter 8) concludes the research, points out its limitations and suggests directions of further research.

Chapter by chapter, the organization of the dissertation is as follows:

Chapter One Introduction: gives an overview of the purpose, significance, and methodology of this research.

Chapter Two Theoretical Foundation: presents the starting point of this research. In this part, Communication theories, systemic functional linguistics, CDA, genre studies, etc. will be brought together with the aim to establish the foundation for the establishment of a synthesized model of editorial discourse analysis.

Chapter Three Towards a Proposed Framework: proposes an analytical framework based on the theories we brought together and the characteristics of the editorials in *China Daily*. This new model balances the tension of text and context, focuses on the constructive role of the genre, and helps to explain the social functions the editorials perform through linguistic resources.

Chapter Four Attitude in the Editorials: reports the distributional pattern of the attitudinal meaning in the 60 pieces of editorials in *China Daily*, suggesting that the attitudinal meaning functions as the presentation of the ideology and as the linguistic means to manipulate the audience.

Chapter Five Modal Expressions in Editorials: indicates how the modal expressions distribute in the data, and points out modal expressions of obligation/necessity are one of the important semantic elements in the

editorial discourse. On the one hand they can form the textual element and function as the defining feature of the subgenres of editorials and on the other, they function more locally, thus spreading through the whole discourse.

Chapter Six Editorial as the Social Action: views the editorials in *China Daily* from the typological and topological perspectives with the finding that editorials are located in the continuum with the macro proposition and macro proposal at the polarities.

Chapter Seven Rhetoric Alignment in the Editorial: tries to describe the rhetoric alignment in editorials, that is, how the audience is positioned with the unfolding of the text. Our findings in this chapter suggest that more monoglossic and dialogistic contractive formulations are employed to show the authority and power of the editorials. This monoglossic and dialogistic contraction suggest the power and authority encoded in the editorials. From a dialogistic perspective, the above finding may indicate that the author always takes for granted that the audience would agree with the positions referred in the formulations proposed by the author of the editorial.

Chapter Eight Conclusion: summarizes the findings in this research first, and then reemphasizes that power and solidarity is the nature of discourse and in the editorials in *China Daily*, power and authority are much more foregrounded than solidarity and difference.