

Ecological Discourse Analysis of News Reports about East Lake

—from a Systemic Functional Perspective

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Abstract: The ecological discourse analysis, by conducting discourse analysis about ecological issues, is targeted at uncovering the implied ecological philosophy and the relationship between language and ecology. In doing this, it can help to improve people's ecological awareness and change their life style, thus contributing to the green and harmonious world. As a vital public discourse, the news report can deeply influence people's thoughts and actions. Halliday's Systemic Functional linguistics (SFL), which highlights the close relationship between language and ecology, holds that the use of language can deeply affect the environment. What's more, SFL, which contains the tendency for Marxist, offers several practical analytical tools to explore ecological discourses. With Marxist ecological concept as the ecosophy, this study, by adopting the analytical tools of cohesion and appraisal of SFL, analyzes the language features in 10 news reports selected from China Daily about East Lake. Through analysis, the study is aimed at digging out how the Marxist ecological concept is revealed, and discussing how the reporter influences people's ecological awareness through language.

1. Introduction

With the growth of economy and improvement of people's material life, various environmental problems emerge, which are mainly caused by over-exploitation of natural resources. The water and soil are seriously polluted, some species are in danger of extinction, and the ecological balance is heavily damaged. In turn, the living and survival of humans is affected negatively. While the environment is deteriorating, people begin to realize the importance of ecological protection and such ecological actions also follow.

Under the context of China's ecological civilization, Wuhan, the famous National Central City, strives to build it into a modern, international, and ecological city. East Lake, also called Donghu Lake, as the biggest scenery tourist attraction in Wuhan and also the largest lake within a city in China, has become one of the focuses of ecological construction for Wuhan. The local authorities have taken measures such as building the greenway, water restoration to protect and promote this lake, which has brought amounts of benefits for the people. Thus, it increasingly attracts attention of the media.

This study, through doing an ecological discourse analysis of news reports about East Lake in Wuhan, aims to uncover the hidden Marxist ecological concept, figure out how news reports influence the public's values and actions by language.

2. Research Background

With the ecological problems worsening, many linguists try to cope with the environmental issues by making use of language. Thus, the interdisciplinary ecolinguistics occurred. Generally speaking, there are two approaches for ecolinguistics: Haugenian approach and Hallidayan approach. The former focuses on the interaction between a certain language and its environment aimed to raise the concern for language diversity and balance. It views language as part of a larger ecology and argues that language has its own "ecology". Obviously, this is a metaphor. By contrast, Hallidayan tradition is a non-metaphor, which argues that language and environmental degradation are closely related. That is, some unecological behaviors partially result from the anthropocentric

nature of language, so it holds that language use can deeply influence people's ecosophy and their actions. What's more, social responsibility is strongly advocated.

Halliday clearly pointed out it was the theory and method of Marxist that he adopted to study language (Liu and Yu, 2019). In the 16th World Congress of Applied Linguistics in 1990, he proposed that ecological problems should not only be the concern of ecologists, but also of the linguists. According to Marx and Engels, on the one hand, humans, as a part of ecology, can never survive without nature, which, by providing means of production, benefits humans. Therefore, they should respect and conform to nature. On the other hand, people have subjective initiative to change the environment, which may do the surroundings good or harm. Thus, Marxist ecological concept, while attaching great importance to people's subjective initiative, highlights that humans should shoulder the responsibility of protecting and caring the nature.

News discourse, an important way for the public to know this world, plays a significant role in leading and changing people's values and actions. As it alleges the principle of objectivity, it can never be value-free since every piece of news implies the reporter's preferences for what is transmitted and how. According to Fowler (1991:12), "news is the end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories." Therefore, news published in different social, political and economic context will differ in the way of reporting, which will undoubtedly generate different influence on the public attitudes towards the things.

It is founded that the previous studies on ecolinguistics mainly include research review (Fill, 2001; Huang, 2016), the critical analysis on the non-ecological factors in linguistic system (Halliday, 2003), the theoretical framework and research approach (Zhou, 2017; Steffensen & Fill 2014), the ecological analysis on a certain discourse (Stibbe, 2012 & 2015; He, 2018) as well as language planning (Fan, 2011). As for the chosen discourses, the themes cover advertisement, environmental report, poem, cyber language, news about smog, ecological city and so on.

To date, no ecological discourse analysis on news reports about East Lake has been conducted. Based on above analysis, the news report may have a deep influence on the public environmental awareness through its language. Definitely, the related ecological analysis can be of great significance to improve the public's ecological awareness and promote the practice of East Lake's protection.

Through carrying out this ecological discourse analysis from the perspective of Systemic Functional linguistics, this article tries to further prove language can affect people's values and actions, and the language and ecology are deeply connected. What's more, it is expected that this study can enhance the public environment awareness, thus, make a contribution to protecting East Lake and the ecological construction of Wuhan.

3. Research Methodology

Based on above analysis, this study tries to answer the following two questions: (1) what specific ecosophy is implied in the news reports, (2) What and how linguistic features are used to communicate the Marxist ecological concept to influence the public's values and actions in terms of cohesion and appraisal.

Since this study mainly focuses on finding out what and how the reporter's ecosophy is communicated to influence people's opinions and actions on East Lake, the news reports about East Lake are chosen to be analyzed. In recent years, East Lake, a national 5A scenic area, has become more and more popular due to its lake ecosystem and Chu culture. And it has also attracted the attention at home and abroad. The present study is to collect the news reports on East Lake in newspaper and investigate the reporter's ecosophy. In order to ensure the credibility of the data, China Daily is selected as the source of this research. As the only officially recognized international newspaper, China Daily enjoys a large circulation at home and abroad, becoming the "voice of China" as well as a key channel for both Chinese and foreigners to know China.

The data to be analyzed are all from the official website: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/> for China Daily, which can enhance the authority of research result. The data is acquired by the

following steps. First, the Keywords “East Lake” or “Donghu” were input in the search bar and those news items released after 2011 before September, 2019 are selected. Second, the irrelevant news that was not closely related to the ecology of East Lake was filtered out. Last, ten reports are picked out and tagged for analysis.

4. The Ecological Analysis of News Reports

In the following part, the study will analyze how the report deploys the analytical tools, including cohesion and appraisal, to reveal the Marxist ecological conception, thus, to arouse the environmental awareness of the public.

4.1. Cohesion

According to Thompson (2013), Cohesion is the linguistic devices used by the speaker to signal the experiential and interpersonal coherence of the text, which mainly includes three cohesive devices: references, ellipsis and conjunctions. By using cohesive devices, the author can make the text logical, organized and reasonable.

(1) *Before*, the road was used mainly by cars and big trucks that made the road bumpy and dusty. *Now* it has entirely changed.

(2) *A couple of years ago*, there were many cars in the East Lake area and it was *dangerous* to run on the side of the road. *Now*, vehicles have been *banned* and we feel free to run across the entire area.

(3) *Once* people experience *healthy ways* of getting around, *it* will be easier for them to maintain a *greener lifestyle*.

In the example (1) and (2), the reporter uses such conjunctions as “before” “ago” “now” to indicate the adversative relation and the great change due to people’s environmentally friendly actions. In the past, the lake road was dusty and bumpy resulted from cars and big trucks. However, by banning the vehicles, the lake now is free and safe. By contrast, the reporter reinforces the well-being brought about by the change of human’s behaviors. Therefore, the public will be influenced to maintain their green life.

In example (3), through using the conditional cause, the impact of healthy ways of getting around the lake is highlighted, that is, it can guide people to lead a greener life. In this way, the complementary relationship between nature and humans is showed.

In a word, through cohesion, the current good life is featured, which can motivate the public to stick to their environmental actions. Also, it is proved that nature and humans are deeply related. What’s more, the humans’ subjective initiative towards nature is revealed. In addition, through logical and coherent statements, the reporter’s views appears powerful and convincing. We can see the chosen reports complies with Marxist ecological concept.

4.2 Appraisal

Appraisal is the expression which indicates the thought of whether something is good or bad, right or wrong. It is usually indicated by lexical choices. Appraisal system can be divided into three categories: attitude, engagement, and graduation. In this study, only attitude will be chosen to be analyzed. Attitude can be further classified into three types: affect, judgement and appreciation.

Affect, talking about how the speaker feels about the things, always expresses a person’s feelings, emotions and mood, which can be realized by such emotional expressions as “love” “hate” “like” and so on. By contrast, judgement and appreciation focus on the qualities of the appraised. Judgement, which evaluates a person from the point of social esteem and social sanction, has something to with social morality and legality. However, appreciation, concerning whether the things or phenomena are positive or negative, is complicated and the values vary greatly.

By appraisal, we can know the attitude or standpoint of the speaker. In the collected data, abundant appraisal resources are used mostly from two aspects: the initiative of humans and the harmonious relationship between human and nature. In the subsequent part, the study will choose some typical examples to analyze their attitudes implied and how they influence the public’s

awareness.

(4) Greenways have enabled citizens in big metropolitan cities to *enjoy* nature by connecting the once isolated green spaces.

(5) ...the quiet greenway makes people *feel close to nature* and he hopes it doesn't become commercialized.

(6) Many people come here to *enjoy* orchid in spring...

In the above three examples, the reporter uses affect like “enjoy” “feel close to” to show that the visitors’ feelings to the improved East Lake. They really love the beauty and peace of the lake. Obviously, the close relationship between the nature and the people is expressed. Moreover, it proves that people can benefit from their environmental behaviors.

(7) ...saying they(*the local government*) have played an *active* role in developing greenways, which *helps to protect* environment by changing people's lifestyles.

(8) ...*many years of effort* have turned the site into an *international attraction* for Wuhan.

(9) Developing greenways along the river or lake banks *helps protect* environment as well as *serve* as leisure destinations.

Marx and Engels hold that human beings have the responsibility to protect the environment. In example (7) and (9), the reporter adopts such judgement as “help to protect” “play...role” to communicate that the government and the common people should carry the responsibility to protect the environment. Besides, the reporter use “active” to appraise the actions of the local government while in example (8), the reporter employs “many years of effort” to show that the difficulty and sufferings that human beings have experienced during the process of improving the ecology. Finally, their efforts reward, for the lake brings amounts of benefits and becomes an international attraction. Therefore, humans’ conscious activity is pointed out and highlighted, which accords with Marxist ecological concept.

(10) Liang Jing, who oversaw the second phase of greenway construction, said they made ecological protection a *priority* and *allowed native plants to remain*...adding that they also designed 13 culverts for *small animals* like rabbits and squirrels to pass beneath the road.

(11) --orchids and cherry blossoms in spring, lotus in summer, osmanthus in autumn, and plum blossoms in winter - is also *admirable*.

In example (10), the speaker puts ecological protection in the place by using the appreciation “priority”. What’s more, the plants and animals are all taken into consideration when constructing the lake. Obviously, the harmonious relationship between humans and other species are revealed. In example (11), by using the appreciation “admirable”, the reporter depicts the public’s yearning for the beauty of nature and East Lake’s positive influence on people’s life.

In summary, through lexical choices and cohesive devices, the chosen data uncover the harmonious relationship between humans and the nature, including other species. Also, the subjective initiative, which conforms to the natural rules, is appraised and advocated. The ecosophy hidden in the text accords with Marxist ecological concept. There is no doubt that the public environmental awareness will be enhanced.

5. Conclusion

According to the above analysis, it can be concluded that the chosen reports about East Lake, by using cohesion and appraisal to describe the human beings’ positive actions towards the improvement of the lake, the benefits followed by such behaviors and the good ecology, to indicate the harmonious relationship between humans and the nature as well as humans’ initiative. Thus, we can see, in Chinese context, the reports is in keeping with Marxist ecological outlook, which can finally improve the public’s ecological awareness and contribute to the construction of ecological Wuhan.

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