
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Literature Review of News Discourse from Different Theoretical Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study reviews the literature on news discourses from the perspectives of theoretical frameworks as explored by scholars both domestically and internationally. The study reveals that scholars have predominantly utilized theories of transitivity, appraisal, modality systems, and discourse-historical approaches to investigate news discourse. Through literature review, it is believed that future research can further explore the theories of news discourse and strengthen the study of news discourse practices.

KEYWORDS

News discourse, theoretical framework, literature review

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 12 February 2024

PUBLISHED: 03 March 2025

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2025.8.3.2

1. Introduction

Both domestic and international scholars primarily employ theories such as Transitivity Theory, Appraisal Theory, Modality Systems Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to study news discourse. Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA), a branch of Critical Discourse Analysis, has seen a growing trend in its application to news discourse in recent years. And These theoretical frameworks—Transitivity Theory, Appraisal Theory, Modality Systems Theory, CDA, and DHA—focus on different dimensions of language, and they are capable of complementing and integrating with one another. This paper will provide a detailed discussion of each of these theories.

2. Research on News Discourse from the Perspective of Transitivity Theory

Transitivity Theory has provided new perspectives and methods for discourse analysis, enabling researchers to explore the hidden information behind the surface forms of discourse. In recent years, both domestic and international research have focused on using Transitivity Theory to analyze the construction of diplomatic relations, personal identities, and national images in news discourse. This chapter will review the literature in which domestic and international scholars have applied Transitivity Theory to the analysis of news discourse in recent years.

Haq, Muhammad Fida Ul, et al. (2024) explored news coverage by Medcom and Media Indonesia on Anies Baswedan's activities ahead of the 2024 presidential election. The study found a tendency in the four articles to present Anies Baswedan in a positive light. Shi Kang (2021) analyzed typical clauses from news reports in The New Straits Times covering the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, using the perspectives of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Transitivity Theory. The study examined how Malaysian media represent the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), revealing the Malaysian government's attitude and perceptions toward the initiative. The findings indicated that Malaysian media primarily used material processes, verbal processes, relational processes, and mental processes to represent activities related to the BRI. The Malaysian government expressed strong support for the initiative, highly evaluating the China-Malaysia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and the broad cooperation between the two countries within the BRI framework. Ma Weilin and Cui Yanjie (2020) applied Transitivity Theory to analyze The Guardian's coverage of China from 2000 to 2020, exploring how British media constructs China's national image.

International scholars often focus on issues of feminism within news discourse. Fatinova, Dede, et al. (2024) explored how Arab media represent gender equality when reporting on government policies concerning women's rights. The study found that Arab media adopt a positive stance toward changes in Saudi Arabia's women's rights policies, portraying them as significant expressions of gender equality and the women's liberation movement.

In contrast, domestic scholars tend to focus more on the concept of "community of shared future for mankind" and, when analyzing ecological news, combine Transitivity Theory with ecological discourse analysis, resulting in significant research outcomes. Miao Xingwei and Liu Bo (2023) explored the discourse construction in People's Daily's climate change news coverage. The study found that these reports constructed a climate change response narrative centered on China, through the processes, participants, and environmental components of the transitivity system. Sun Ju and Guo Jinhui (2022) conducted an ecological discourse analysis of China Daily on the Amazon rainforest fires, revealing the ways in which ecological meanings and orientations are represented in the news discourse. Cao Jin and Yang Mingtuo (2022) analyzed the ecological orientation in the ecological discourse of People's Daily. They found that the online news ecological discourse, by configuring ecological factors within the transitivity system, described ecologically significant stories with practical implications.

3. Research on News Discourse from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory

The exploration of evaluative meanings in news discourse by both domestic and international scholars primarily focuses on genres such as hard news, editorials, and columns. By analyzing media reports on individuals, corporations, and significant events, scholars aim to reveal the underlying attitudinal tendencies reflected in these texts.

Sun Chengzhi and Wang Chengyi (2023) conducted a study using a self-built corpus of Japanese mainstream newspapers focused on "Chinese technical trainees." The research found that "Chinese technical trainees" are primarily represented as three collective identities: "workers," "learners," and "challengers to social order." The identities of "workers" and "learners" are often mixed, with clear semantic conflicts, resulting in an overall predominantly negative and neutral image of the group. Wu Rangyue and Zhao Xiaojing (2022) constructed a corpus of poverty-related news reports from the English edition of Xinhuanet. Utilizing appraisal theory within the framework of harmonious discourse analysis, they examined the dissemination patterns of poverty alleviation narratives. Their research revealed that Xinhuanet predominantly employs positive attitudinal resources in its international communication on poverty reduction, aligning with the principles of harmonious discourse analysis.

4. Research on News Discourse from the Perspective of Modality Systems Theory

In news discourse, scholars have focused on modality in translation studies, particularly analyzing its use in translated news texts through contrastive analysis. These studies explore how modality shapes meaning in different linguistic and cultural contexts, helping to convey the intended tone, certainty, and responsibility of the original text.

Institutional news translation typically follows the principle of "political priority", with the main goal of reinforcing ideology and shaping the national image. Translators in such institutions often act as mediators, localizing international news to make it align with both the audience's expectations and the social values of the target language. To achieve this, institutional translators frequently make linguistic adjustments to international news, including changes in modality. Modality systems carry rich ideological significance, and alterations in modality, such as additions, deletions, or shifts in orientation and values, can deconstruct or construct ideologies.

Xu Ying (2018) analyzed a year's worth of news translation data, focusing on coverage of the South China Sea issue, to explore the relationship between modality choices and ideological shifts in institutional news translation. The study found that changes in modality, such as additions, deletions, shifts in orientation, and value alterations, often lead to the deconstruction or construction of the original text's ideology, impacting the construction or deconstruction of specific ideologies and national identity in the news. The translated texts in Reference News reflected the translation institution's attitudes and viewpoints through these changes, reinforcing China's discourse power while deconstructing the Western-centric narrative in U.S. media.

5. Research on News Discourse from the Perspective of Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

Foreign scholars often focus on issues such as racism, discrimination, and national identity. The corpus for such studies primarily includes speeches, pamphlets, and news reports published by European politicians and media. These studies analyze how discourse portrays negative images and behaviors of foreigners, immigrants, and asylum seekers, thereby revealing the role of political discourse in constructing ideological biases (Richardson & Wodak, 2009; Bates, 2023).

Wodak, Ruth, and Salomi Boukala (2015) explored the ambiguity of the concept of "European identity" and its redefinition. Since the 2008 financial crisis, debates about European identity have been intertwined with concerns about race, culture, and economic

security, creating a new distinction between "us" (true Europeans) and "them" (the others), thus challenging Europe's socio-political unity once again.

Domestic scholars primarily focus on hot topics such as the China-US trade war, with some paying particular attention to the issue of discourse legitimization construction. Hu Yuanjiang and Li Yan (2023) explored the similarities and differences in the discourse legitimization construction in the coverage of trade friction by mainstream Chinese and American media. These differences reflect the contrasting political stances and ideologies of the two countries.

6. Assessment

This study reviews the literature and finds that theoretical perspectives on news discourse research have become more diversified. Scholars, both domestically and internationally, are gradually shifting from a single theoretical approach to a more integrated, multi-theory perspective. This indicates that researchers are attempting to break free from the limitations of traditional single-theory frameworks and are seeking deeper insights by combining various theories. Through literature review, it is believed that future research can further explore the theories of news discourse and strengthen the study of news discourse practices.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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