
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Positive Discourse Analysis of News Reports on “the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” on *China Daily*

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ABSTRACT

Based on the attitude system of Appraisal Theory, this study analyzes the news reports on “the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” on *China Daily*. Through the self-built corpus, the distribution characteristics of Attitude System are studied, and the discourse meaning of their construction is discussed. The results show that the proportion of judgement resources is the highest, showing a positive image of China-Africa cooperation; appreciation resources emphasize the importance and value of the summit; affect resources reflect the positive attitudes of the Chinese and African peoples. Positive words account for much more than negative words. The use of these Attitude System has realized the positive discourse meaning of the construction of harmonious social relations, and fully affirmed the important value of “the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”.

KEYWORDS

Appraisal Theory; attitude system; positive discourse analysis; “the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”

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1. Introduction

“Discourse” is a linguistic phenomenon in real social life that is influenced by power or belief systems and reflects interpersonal relationships. As an important method for studying language use, discourse analysis plays an important role in revealing social phenomena and reflecting power relations and ideologies (Huang et al., 2007). Positive Discourse Analysis aims to construct harmonious social relations through the analysis of “good news”, which is complementary to Critical Discourse Analysis. Appraisal Theory is a theoretical framework used to analyze discourse attitudes, judgments, and affective tendencies in systemic functional linguistics, including three subsystems: “Attitude”, “Engagement” and “Graduation” (Martin, 2005).

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a collective dialogue mechanism between China and African countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, and was established in 2000. In recent years, as an important platform for deepening friendship and expanding cooperation between China and Africa, the FOCAC news reports have not only recorded important moments and achievements in development, but also reflected the determination and confidence of China and Africa to work together to create a better future in the context of the new era. These cooperation results not only promote the development of both sides, but also provide new ideas and examples for global governance. In 2024, the Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) with the theme of “Jointly Promoting Modernization and Building a High-level China-Africa Community with a Shared Future” was successfully held in Beijing. Therefore, from the perspective of the attitude system of evaluation theory, this paper tries to select the news reports about the summit in *China Daily* as the research corpus, and analyze the discourse of the news reports of the “2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit”, so as to show what kind of discourse meaning is constructed through these news reports.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Positive Discourse Analysis

Martin (1999) proposed “Positive Discourse Analysis” in the article *Positive Discourse Analysis: Solidarity and Change*, arguing that it is necessary to conduct discourse analysis not only on bad news that contains inequality, but also on good news that advocates peace and equality. Positive Discourse Analysis is proposed by Martin to point out the shortcomings of Critical Discourse Analysis, and advocates a positive attitude to deal with various social contradictions, so as to promote the construction and development of a harmonious society (Martin, 2003). The research on Positive Discourse Analysis in foreign countries is earlier than that in China, and the introduction of Positive Discourse Analysis in China is relatively lagging behind, but domestic scholars have also carried out extensive attention and discussion on Positive Discourse Analysis. Zhu (2006) gave the first comprehensive introduction to Positive Discourse Analysis, and studied the similarities and differences between Positive Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis from the aspects of historical background, motivation, content, and methods. Huang et al. (2007) pointed out the importance of developing from deconstructive Critical Discourse Analysis to constructive and Positive Discourse Analysis. Yang and Zhao (2018) pointed out that Positive Discourse Analysis should be carried out in the context of multi-level, multi-disciplinary, and multi-theoretical paradigms. Positive Discourse Analysis is multi-modal, multi-layered, and multi-functional, and its discourse covers a wide range of fields.

2.2 Attitude System in Appraisal Theory

Founded by the Australian linguist Martin in the 90s of the 20th centuries, Appraisal Theory is the main theoretical basis of Positive Discourse Analysis, which complements and expands the study of interpersonal function in systemic functional linguistics (Martin, 2003). It focuses on the various attitudes in discourse, the emotional forces involved, and the sources of attitudes (Martin, 2005). Appraisal Theory includes three subsystems: “Attitude”, “Engagement” and “Graduation”, among which the attitude system is at the core and is also the focus of this study. Attitude is related to emotion, including the reaction to emotion, the judgment of behavior, and the evaluation of things (Li & Sun, 2007), and attitude refers to the judgment and appreciation of human behavior, text/process, and phenomena after psychological influence (Wang, 2001). It includes three resources: “Affect”, “Judgment” and “Appreciation”. Affect resources refer to the various emotional tendencies or reactions that the speaker has to judge the person or thing he sees based on his or her personal liking. Martin and White argue that since emotion is an innate resource of expression, it is at the center of the three areas of meaning of the attitude system (Martin, 2005). Affect resources are mainly divided into four subcategories, Dis/inclination, Un/happiness, Dis/satisfaction, and In/security. Judgement resources belong to the category of ethics, which evaluates the behavior of language users according to ethical and moral standards, which is mainly divided into social esteem and social sanction (Liu & Zhang, 2020). Social esteems are divided into normality, capacity and tenacity, that is, whether things are extraordinary normative discourses, whether things are capable of doing things, and whether they are persevering and tenacity. Social sanctions are divided into veracity and propriety, that is, honest discourse on whether the act is sincere and reliable, and appropriate discourse on whether the behavior is justified (Wang, 2001). Appreciative resources belong to the category of aesthetics, which refers to the evaluation of texts/processes and phenomena with both positive and negative meanings. It has three subcategories: reaction, composition, and valuation (Liu & Zhang, 2020).

In addition to the research on the attitude system of Positive Discourse Analysis and Appraisal Theory, many scholars have applied it to different types of discourse analysis in recent years, such as news discourse and educational discourse. Specifically, in recent years, Dong (2019) has used Appraisal Theory to analyze the reports and attitudes of Italian mainstream media towards the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Xu et al. (2021) analyzed the appraisal resources embodied in energy discourse, further clarifying the attitudes adopted by Chinese enterprises in energy cooperation; Hu (2023) explored the application of attitude resources and their discursive meanings conveyed in news coverage concerning the dual carbon goals from the perspective of positive discourse analysis.

In summary, due to the keywords of “China-Africa cooperation” and “discourse analysis”, only 27 relevant papers were found on CNKI (search time June 24, 2026), and even fewer papers were found for the keywords of “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit”, in view of the great significance of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit to be held from September 4 to September 6, 2024 to the development of bilateral relations, this article selects news report about “2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit” from the Chinese mainstream media *China Daily* and the attitude system of Appraisal Theory will be selected to explore the discursive meaning of news discourse.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

This paper focuses on two questions:

- (1) What resources does *China Daily's* news report on “the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” use in the attitude system? How is it distributed?
- (2) What kind of discursive meaning does the resources used by these attitude systems construct?

3.2 Research Corpus

As an important English-language daily newspaper in China, *China Daily's* news reports have extensive international influence and authority, providing rich and diverse corpus resources, this study is based on the search term “the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” on the official platform of *China Daily*, and collects the period from August 31 to September 10, 2024 (The official date of the event is September 4-6, 10 days before and after the center point), a total of 119 related news, excluding the photos and videos involved in the news report, 30 texts were selected by random sampling method for processing, and a small corpus was built. AntConc3.2.1w retrieved 22605 tokens and 3409 types.

3.3 Research Tools and Methods

This paper uses a combination of qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis to analyze the positive discourse of news corpus, and summarizes the attitude of Chinese mainstream media towards the FOCAC Summit and the discursive significance constructed by the “2024 FOCAC Summit”. The quantitative research combines the three major resources embodied in the attitude system in the UAM Corpus Tool 3.3x to annotate the text, and uses the SPSS statistical tool to organize and analyze the data to ensure the objectivity and correctness of the analysis results. Qualitative research is to refer to affect, judgment, and appreciation resources of the attitude system in Appraisal Theory for discourse analysis, and elaborate on the polarity in it, so as to combine data and description more deeply.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Total Distribution of Attitude System and Polarity

According to Attitude System, there are three sub-resources: affect, judgment and appreciation. In this study, UAM Corpus Tool 3.3 was used to annotate the text multiple times. The data were labeled by multiple people and the reliability value reached 0.815. the SPSS statistical tool was used to make data to calculate the distribution characteristics of the three major resources of the attitude system, the polarity distribution of the attitude system and part of word list in news reporting at the 2024 FOCAC Summit (see Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 for the statistical results).

Table 4.1 The Total Distribution of Attitude System

Attitude System	Number of Times	Percentage
Affect	127	16.39%
Judgement	328	42.32%
Appreciation	320	41.29%
Total	775	100.00%

The statistical results (table 4.1) show that in the selected 30 news reports about the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, a total of 775 attitude words are marked, in terms of the distribution of Attitude System, judgment resources account for the most, accounting for 42.32%, appreciation resources account for 41.29%, and emotional words are relatively few, accounting for 16.39%, emotion is generally the direct embodiment of the subjective attitude of speech, lack of objectivity, and *China Daily*, as China's mainstream media to the outside world, Statements are often made on political topics, so the wording needs to be more rigorous and objective.

Table 4.2 The Distribution of Attitude System Polarity

Polarity	Number of Times	Percentage
Positivity	719	92.77%
Negativity	56	7.23%
Total	775	100.00%

In terms of the polarity distribution of Attitude System (table 4.2), positive words accounted for more than negative words in the text, with positive words accounting for 92.77% and negative words accounting for 7.23%. The use of positive words mainly reflects the remarkable achievements and beautiful visions of China-Africa cooperation in the context of the new era.

4.2 The Distribution of Judgement Resources

The proportion of judgment resources and appreciation resources is relatively similar, which involves the evaluation of human behavior or quality, and is often associated with social norms, which is both positive and negative (Li, 2004).

Table 4.3 The Distribution of Judgement Resources

Judgement Resources	Number of Times	Percentage
Normality	85	25.91%
Capacity	114	34.76%
Tenacity	47	14.33%
Propriety	45	13.72%
Veracity	37	11.28%
Total	328	100.00%

According to table 4.3, the number of resources in social esteem is more than that of social sanction, and the proportion of competence in social evaluation is the highest, accounting for 34.76%, and words such as “strengthen”, “empower”, “provide”, “enhance”, “improve”, “create”, and “enable” mostly express China’s support and assistance to African countries, showing positive significance. The second is normality (25.91%) and tenacity (14.33%) resources, such as “continue”, “steadfast”, “sustainable”, “cooperate”, “firm”, “adhere to” and other words to express China’s positive image in the process of China-Africa cooperation, and China is willing to work with African countries to seek development. For the resources of propriety (13.72%) and veracity (11.28%) in social sanction, it is biased towards objective legal evaluation, that is, when the attitude emphasizes the value of human behavior, such as “true”, “aligned with”, “sincerity”, etc. These words show the deep friendship between China and Africa, and China’s image as a great power of friendship and mutual trust. For example:

(1) The BRI, which has become a **central** (Normality) element of China’s foreign policy, is a **key** (Normality) vehicle for this sharing of development experience.

(2) As China and Africa continue to deepen their cooperation, they are not only **advancing** (Capacity) their own development goals but also **contributing** (Capacity) to the broader process of global modernization.

(3) On digital economy, China has been actively **supporting** (Tenacity) African countries in building their digital infrastructure. Since the launch of the FOCAC, Chinese companies have **helped** (Tenacity) African countries provide network services to nearly 700 million users, said Sun Xiao, secretary-general of the China Chamber of International Commerce.

(4) Over the 24 years since the establishment of the FOCAC, particularly in the new era, the forum has always **adhered to** (Propriety) the principles of planning together, building together and benefiting together, with the two sides advancing their mutually beneficial cooperation toward higher-quality development.

(5) **True** (Veracity) friendship transcends time and distance, built on **sincerity** (Veracity) and mutual respect on an equal footing.

In example (1), the report mentions the Belt and Road initiative, using “central” and “key” to reflect the help and support of China’s main foreign policies to African countries, affirming the achievements of the Belt and Road initiative, and China has truly shared the fruits of development with African countries. In example (2), the report uses “not only... but also...”, the words “advancing” and “contributing” indicate that the summit is building a bright plan for the future development of China and Africa. In example (3), China has actively helped and supported African countries in the field of digital economy, such as “supporting” and “helped”, which highlight China’s responsibility as a major country and contribute to China-Africa cooperation in the digital economy, and spoke highly of the importance of the “2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit”. In example (4), the report uses “adhere to” to show that FOCAC has helped and supported the development of both sides over the past 24 years, and that FOCAC has always adhered to bilateral joint decision-making, mutual benefit, and common development in a better direction, which also shows that the construction of FOCAC is reliable and beneficial to the development of both sides, and at the same time implies support and evaluation for the “2024 FOCAC Summit”. In example (5), “true” and “sincerity” are used to describe the friendship between China and Africa, sincere friendship can transcend time and distance, and bilateral friendship is built on the basis of mutual trust between the two sides, which highlights the sincerity of the two sides of China-Africa cooperation, and the word “steadfast” further demonstrates the solidity of China-Africa relations, and both sides are determined to carry out friendly exchanges and seek common development.

The application of judgment resources in news reports reflects that China has always attached great importance to the friendly relations established in Africa, has been committed to better promoting the development of the two places, and is willing to take the initiative to help African countries improve their living conditions and build a China-Africa community with a shared future.

4.3 The Distribution of Appreciation Resources

The appreciation resource belongs to the category of aesthetics, which refers to the evaluation of texts/processes and phenomena with both positive and negative meanings. It has three subcategories: valuation, composition, and reaction (Wang, 2001). Table 4.4 shows the distribution percentage:

Table 4.4 The Distribution of Appreciation Resources

Appreciation Resources	Number of Times	Percentage
Valuation	159	49.69%
Reaction	87	27.18%
Composition	74	23.13%
Total	320	100.00%

Among the appreciation resources, the words indicating valuation appeared the most, accounting for 49.69%. Valuation is often used as a social criterion to see the importance and value of a text. For example, the words key, "successful", "important", "crucial", "largest", "contribute", "milestone", "great" and other words in the article highlight the smooth convening and social significance of the 2024 FOCAC Summit. Reaction resources accounted for 27.18%, and the object of reactive evaluation is a thing or process, involving two aspects: impact and quality. In other words, one type indicates the degree of attractiveness of the subject being evaluated, and the other group indicates the emotional influence of the subject (Wang & Zhan, 2023). For example, words such as "crucial", "positive", and "solid" in the article all reflect the positive impact of China-Africa cooperation on both sides. Composition resources accounted for 23.13%, and since the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) involves the interests of both sides, there are many words that highlight the nature of cooperation in the text, such as "mutual", "shared", "jointly", "together", "common", "win-win", "comprehensively", etc., which reflect the beautiful vision of intertwined interests and win-win cooperation between China and Africa. Here are some examples:

(6) Over the 24 years since the establishment of the FOCAC, the forum has become a **"golden brand"** (Valuation) of China-Africa cooperation.

(7) The 2024 FOCAC Summit is more than just a meeting of leaders; it is a **milestone** (Valuation) in the ongoing effort to build a community with a shared future for humanity.

(8) China Geo-Construction (CGC) is another example of a Chinese company making a **positive** (Reaction) impact in Comoros.

(9) The two sides should work **together** (Composition) to **jointly** (Composition) defend multilateralism and the free trade system, should staunchly oppose protectionism, unilateralism, bullying and the harmful and erroneous theory of a clash of civilizations, and advance the democratization of international relations.

In example (6), the term "golden brand" fully recalls the important value and significance brought to China-Africa cooperation by the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) over the past 24 years, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation is an important bridge for China-Africa friendship and cooperation. In example (7), the word "milestone" is used to demonstrate the important value of the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit (FOCAC) in further building a China-Africa community with a shared future. In example (8), the sentence mainly describes China's contribution to the development of the African country Comoros, and uses "positive" to show the important impact of Chinese enterprises on the economic development of the Comoros, and this is just an example, the Chinese government has made practical achievements in China-Africa cooperation and promoting the development of the African region; In example (9), the sentence states that China and Africa should work together to resist the development challenges brought about by Western countries, which regard China's participation in Africa as an economic and strategic competition, and the words "together" and "jointly" reflect that China and Africa should stand shoulder to shoulder, be defenders of multilateralism, and make greater contributions to promoting the establishment of a fairer international order and a more effective global governance system, which also echoes the theme of the summit - working together to build a China-Africa community with a shared future.

In today's world, seeking development through peace and win-win results can bring greater benefits to China and the world, fully affirming the main significance of "the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation" and making prospects for China-Africa bilateral development.

4.4 The Distribution of Affect Resources

Compared with the other two sub-resources, the proportion of affect resources is relatively small. It mainly refers to the speaker's personal emotional reaction to an object or event, which can be expressed directly or indirectly, which not only expresses the speaker's inner feelings, but also affects the reader's attitude and reaction to something or something. The distribution of affect resources in "the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation" news report are shown as follows (table 4.5):

Table 4.5 The Distribution of Affect Resources

Affect Resources	Number of Times	Proportion
Dis/inclination	68	53.54%
Un/happiness	4	3.15%
Dis/satisfaction	25	19.69%
In/security	30	23.62%
Total	127	100.00%

The four dimensions all have positive and negative implications. The negative connotations are mostly reflected in in/security resources, accounting for 23.62% of the total and contain positive meanings, such as “trust”, “ensure”, “confidence”, “believe” demonstrate the mutual trust between the two peoples of China-Africa cooperation. In the use of dis/inclination resources, resources that express will are also the majority, accounting for 53.54%, such as “call for”, “encourage”, “put forward”, “emphasize”, “look forward to”, “would like to”, showing the willingness and desire of China-Africa cooperation, and call for support and help. Dis/satisfaction resources accounted for 19.69% of the news reports of the FOCAC Summit, which shows the positive meanings such as “speak highly of”, “grateful”, “value”, “praise”, “thank”, etc. Less of a resource for pleasure is reported in the news, mainly in the sense of pleasure expressed by non-state students studying in China about what they have learned and seen in China. For example:

(10) Xi said he **looks forward to** (Dis/inclination) more research being made by the scholars on the development paths of the Global South countries, China-Africa cooperation and South-South cooperation.

(11) I am **glad** (Un/happiness) to see that you have bonded with China through this road to **happiness** (Un/happiness).

(12) In their letter, the scholars **spoke highly of** (Dis/satisfaction) the historic achievements of the forum and said they expect the upcoming summit to write a new chapter in building a China-Africa community with a shared future and promoting the modernization of the Global South.

(13) Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit comes at an opportune time, the scholars applauded China’s strong commitment to China-Africa academic exchanges and voiced **confidence** (In/security) that they **believe** (In/security) the building of a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future will bring tangible and lasting benefits to Africa, China, and the world at large.

In example (10), the phrase “look forward to” shows expectation for more achievements in China-Africa cooperation, and also reflects the Chinese government’s concern for the development and South-South cooperation of countries in the Global South, and China hopes that more developing countries can achieve greater development together with China. In Example (11), this is a reply to a Kenyan student studying in China, in which the words “glad” and “happiness” are both associated with joy. This type of vocabulary appears only here in the text, showcasing President Xi’s welcome towards African students studying in China, and also praising their contributions to promoting China-Africa cooperation. The application of affect resources in news reports profoundly demonstrates the positive attitude of the Chinese and African people towards China-Africa cooperation, and the application of these resources will make readers more willing to pay attention to China-Africa cooperation and support the long-term development of China-Africa cooperation and the Forum on China-Africa cooperation, which is also conducive to promoting and strengthening China-Africa relations, and working hand in hand to look forward to the future. In example (12), the report uses the word “spoke highly of” to illustrate the significance of the establishment of FOCAC from the perspective of scholars, which has been highly praised by scholars, which is a positive emotional attitude, showing the scholars’ affirmation and satisfaction with the achievements of FOCAC in recent years, and using the word “expect” to show a good outlook for the upcoming FOCAC Summit in 2024. In example (13), the report uses the words “confidence” and “believe” to show that scholars are full of trust in building a higher level of China-Africa cooperation, and have a bright prospect for the common development of China and Africa and the substantive development of the people on both sides.

5. Conclusion

Based on Appraisal Theory and taking the attitude system as the starting point, this study explores the discursive significance of the three major resources of the attitude system and its construction in *China Daily*’s news report on “the 2024 Summit of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”. Through the above data analysis and vocabulary annotation, the use of these Attitude System reflects the theme of this summit – “Jointly Promoting Modernization and Building a High-level China-Africa Community with a Shared Future”, realizes the positive discourse significance of the construction of harmonious social relations, fully affirms the important value of the “2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit”, and shows the beautiful vision and expectation of China-Africa cooperation.

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