A Comparative Study of Attitudinal Resources in the Coverage of the Syrian Situations by Chinese and Arab Mainstream Media

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Abstract: In the era of new media, political news enables the public to be informed about significant global political events and gain a deeper understanding of national policies and strategies. The ongoing turbulent situations in Syria is an international issue involving multifaceted interests, and its future trend of development will be highly complicated as it is influenced by factors such as geopolitics, religion, society and international relations. In this paper, news articles on the Syrian situations were collected from the English websites of Xinhua News Agency and AL Arabiya using "Syria" as the keyword. Adopting Attitude System and its subsystems—Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation in Martin's Appraisal Theory as the theoretical framework and basing on positive discourse analysis, the study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the interpersonal functions present in the coverage of the Syrian situations by these two media outlets. By comparing and analyzing the attitudinal resources in these reports, this paper examines the Syrian situations from the perspectives of China and an Arab country, aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of international affairs by breaking through the traditional focus on Western media through critical discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

With the continuous advancement of globalization, international news reporting has played an increasingly vital role for public to understand global events. The situation in Syria, characterized by its intricate complexity and urgency, has persistently captured global attention. In the context of the information age, the media serves not only as a crucial tool for influencing public perception but also as a significant force in forming international public opinion. News coverage profoundly influences public emotional responses to the interpretation of global events. As two influential media outlets in the China-Arab region, Xinhua News Agency and AL Arabiya's reporting on the Syrian situations not only reflects their nations' positions and values respectively but also shapes international societal cognition and policy-making. Therefore, a comparative analysis of the attitudinal resources in the reporting of these two media outlets holds great significance both in understanding differences in media coverage under diverse cultural and political contexts and in

constructing international relations.

Appraisal Theory, as a crucial extension of systemic functional linguistics in interpersonal function research, provides a theoretical framework for analyzing and interpreting attitudinal expressions in discourse. This theory focuses on negotiable attitudes including affect, judgment, and appreciation and explores how these attitudes are expressed and negotiated through linguistic resources. In the analysis of news discourse, the application of appraisal theory can reveal how reporters employ appraisal resources to conceal their inter-subjective stances in news writing [1].

This study employs comparative analysis to investigate the attitudes and resources in mainstream Chinese and Arab media coverage of the Syrian situations. Utilizing a compound methodology by combining content analysis and discourse analysis, the research interprets and quantitatively analyzes attitude resources in selected news samples. From the perspective of positive discourse analysis, the study conducts an in-depth comparison of differences in reporting techniques and content selection between the two media outlets, revealing their inclinations when reporting on major international events. Through detailed analysis of Chinese and Arab media content regarding the Syrian issue, the research explores how these strategies construct public cognition and positions on the Syrian situations.

This study carries significant academic value for revealing cross-cultural differences in media reporting, promoting mutual understanding and dialogue between nations, and enriching theoretical frameworks in international communication studies. It provides empirical research cases for international communication and cross-cultural exchange fields, demonstrating how media in different cultural contexts employ linguistic strategies to construct attitudes and positions on the Syrian situations. This study has practical significance in enhancing international mutual understanding, fostering dialogue and reducing misunderstandings and conflicts.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Appraisal Theory, originating from the research outcomes of the Write It Right project led by Professor J.R. Martin at the University of Sydney, focuses on the linguistic demands of reading and writing across various discourse types, including scientific, historical, fictional, geographical, and artistic domains [2]. Later in 2003 and 2008, Martin revised this theory which provides a systematic set of linguistic resources and comprises three subsystems: "Attitude" (expressing emotional and ethical stances), "Engagement" (negotiating interpersonal positioning through modality and speech functions), and "Graduation" (modulating the strength or intensity of attitudes) [3][4]. These subsystems enable systematic analysis of the perspectives, positions, and negotiated attitudes held by language users. The theoretical framework of Appraisal Theory is particularly valuable for examining and comparing the attitudinal resources embedded in the reporting of the Syrian situations by Xinhua Net and AL Arabiya's official English websites. A schematic overview of the theory's core framework can be presented in the following chart:
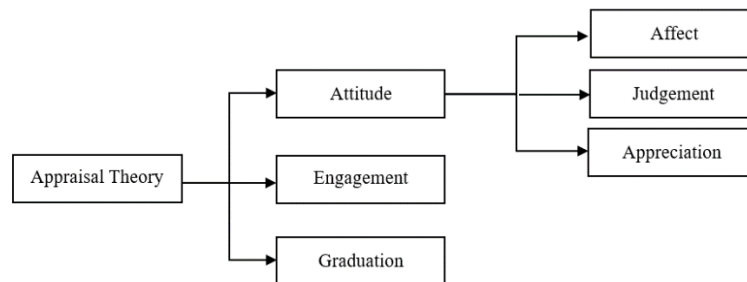

Figure 1: Appraisal Theory System.

From Fig. 1, it can be seen that Attitude system includes three dimensions: Affect, Judgement and Appreciation which deals with emotional responses and ethical evaluations. Affect system mainly examines emotional reactions (either positive or negative) and dispositions, often realized through psychological processes. It includes the two categories, such as Authorial affect (first-person emotions) and Non-authorial affect (second-person or third-person emotions). According to Martin and White, affect system mainly includes words or expressions like: words or expressions showing unhappiness or happiness, e.g., like/dislike, laugh/cry, love/hate; words or expressions showing insecurity or security, e.g., secure/insecure, assured/uncertain, confident/unconfident or dis/satisfaction, e.g., satisfied/unsatisfied, praise/criticize, interested/bored, etc.

Judgement system evaluates behaviors based on societal norms, focusing on moral, legal, or ethical acceptability. White divides judgement into Social esteem and Social sanction. The former refers to conformity to norms, which can cover normality, capacity and tenacity. Normality assesses whether actions align with customs, words and expressions t like unusual/customary falls into this category; Capacity evaluates competence or intelligence including words or expressions like competent, clever and insightful; and Tenacity is concerned with words or expressions to show determination or reliability, for example dependable, lazy and rash. The latter, Social sanction is related to moral/legal compliance, including Veracity (to show honesty and truthfulness like words honest, deceptive and Propriety (to show ethical or moral appropriateness like words ethical, fair or moral).

Appreciation system involves aesthetic evaluations of objects, phenomena, or artistic works, reflecting the speaker's aesthetic stance. It includes Reaction, Composition and Value. Reaction deals with emotional impact on the audience like words arresting, stunning or dull; Composition is related with words or expressions to show structural coherence, e.g., unified, symmetrical, convoluted; And Value, concerning with societal significance, may include words like significant, crucial or damaging.

As a significant branch of systemic functional linguistics, Appraisal Theory has gained significant international attention and there has seen a steady rise in international research concerning this theory in recent years, particularly after 2013, there has been a notable increase in the number of published papers and monographs, reflecting its interdisciplinary expansion across fields such as media studies and sociolinguistics. Bednarek conducts an in-depth analysis of evaluation in media discourse, examining the appraisal resources and expression patterns in newspaper texts [5].

Introduced to China shortly after its development, the theory has been extensively studied. Wang Zhenhua studied attitude resources in Chinese and English hard news corpora. The author found that in Chinese and English reports on the same earthquake event, judgment resources consistently outnumbered affect and appreciation resources. Thus, humans express largely consistent attitudes toward natural phenomena like earthquakes, which are beyond human control [6]. Zhang Keding &Miao Xingwei respectively examined the appraisal function of English thematic structures, in which the appraisal meaning is concerned with a topic and positioned as the starting point for information organization [7][8]. Li Yarong&Fan Weiwei reviews the research status of Appraisal Theory in SSCI-indexed journals, explores its evolving research trends and provides valuable references for further enriching and expanding Appraisal Theory related studies [9]. Jiang Yan reviews domestic theoretical and applied research achievements on Appraisal Theory from 2015 to 2020 and proposes potential directions for future research [10].

3. Research Methodology

This study employs Martin's Appraisal Theory, focusing on the Attitude System and its sub-systems--the Affect System, Appreciation System, and Judgement System--as the theoretical framework. From the perspective of Positive Discourse Analysis, a compound approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis is adopted. By comparing attitudinal resources in news reports, this study explores the differences in interpersonal functions between the two media outlets in reporting on the Syrian situation. It breaks away from the conventional scope of Critical Discourse Analysis and adopts the perspectives of China and an Arab country to analyze the Syrian context. This dual perspective aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of international affairs.

News articles related to the Syrian situation were collected from the English websites of Xinhua News Agency (https://english.news.cn/) and AL Arabiya TV (https://english.alarabiya.net/) using "Syria" as the keyword to search for the coverage of Syrian situations. The former website displayed 2483 results while the latter displayed 1047results.Given the extensive volume of news reports, this study collected 15 news articles from each media outlet (Xinhua News Agency and AL Arabiya TV respectively) covered on the same dates. The compiled news documents were first analyzed for attitudinal resources using KIMI, followed by manual verification and annotation. Attitude-oriented vocabulary, phrases, and clauses in the corpus were manually coded into sub-systems under the Affect, Judgement, or Appreciation systems. After annotation, statistical analysis was conducted to compare the frequency and percentage distribution of attitudinal resources between Xinhua and AL Arabiya's Syria-related coverage, laying the groundwork for subsequent qualitative analysis. Corpus tools such as AntConc were employed for word frequency analysis, exploring the distribution patterns of attitudinal resources in the news texts from the perspective of Positive Discourse Analysis.

4. Analysis and Discussion

1) The distribution of the three types of attitudinal resources in Xinhua News Agency's Syria-related coverage are shown in Table 1 (total word number: 3,523).

Table1: Attitudinal Resource Distribution of Xinhua News Agency's Syria Coverage.

Types of attitudinal resources	Number	Percentage
Affect	6	0.17%
Judgement	18	0.51%
Appreciation	0	0%
Total	24	0.68%
Types of features	Number	Percentage
Positive attitude	8	0.23%
Negative attitude	16	0.45%
Total	24	0.68%

As shown in Tab.1, the distribution of the three types of attitudinal resources in Xinhua News Agency's 15 Syria-related news reports (total word count: 3,523) reflects the complexity and sensitivity of the Syrian situation. Affect resources, though limited in quantity, convey concern and worry about the turmoil through phrases like *"expressed concern"* and *"voiced concerns"*. Words such as *"relief"* and *"glimmer of hope"* capture the Syrian residents' longing for an end to the war, while *"fretting"* highlights public anxiety about the future, indirectly reflecting the psychological toll of instability. The absence of Appreciation resources indicates a lack of direct value-based judgments in these reports, as the focus remains on political and military conflicts, reflecting the objectivity and strictness in journalistic reports. Comparatively speaking, Judgement resources are

highly prominent, serving as key attitude expression carriers. Military-oriented terms like *"neutralize"* and *"decisive response"* highlights the hardline stances and confrontational approaches of involved parties. Political intent-related words such as *"legitimize"* and *"exploit"* reveal underlying geopolitical maneuvering motives. Reconstruction-focused terms like *"reforms"* and *"stability"* signal efforts by new regimes to bring hope, while chaos-related terms such as *"sedition"*, *"chaos"*, *"violent incidents"*, and *"security vacuum"* paint a stark picture of Syria's current plight.

Positive attitudinal resources, such as *"Iran seeks calm in Syria"*, *"Syrians call for unity"*, and *"The new regime pledged reforms and stability"*, represent the driving forces and goals for Syria to emerge from its crisis. These phrases highlight efforts toward reconciliation, unity and reconstruction.

In contrast, negative attitudinal resources—such as *"106 people were killed..."*, *"violent incidents persist..."*, *"Three judges were shot dead..."*, and *"An ambush in Syria's Tartus kills 14 interim gov't officers, wounds 10"* --document the escalating crime, violence, and casualties in Syria since the transfer of governments. Descriptions of attacks on judges, ambushes targeting officers, and persistent unrest underscore the instability and chaos. Phrases like *"The 'seditionists' sought to legitimize the occupation of Syrian territory especially by Israel and the United States"* and *"justify foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs"* accuse external factors of territorial occupation and meddling. Meanwhile, statements such as *"The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said in a statement that its air force on Friday struck 'infrastructure' at the Janta crossing on the Syrian-Lebanese border"* and *"The Turkish army neutralized 20 members of the outlawed Kurdish Workers' (PKK) and Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria"* illustrate military actions by Turkey and Israel, which intensify regional tensions. These negative factors, such as external occupation, interference, and military interventions pose significant obstacles to Syria's peace and stability. Such actions exert deep impacts on Syria's political, social and economic directions, triggering growing global alarm regarding Syria's ongoing crisis."

2) The distribution statistics of the three types of attitudinal resources in AL Arabiya TV's Syria-related coverage are shown in Table 2 (total word number: 6,071).

Table 2: Attitudinal Resource Distribution of AL Arabiya TV's Syria Coverage.

Types of attitudinal resources	Number	Percentage
Affect	14	0.23%
Judgement	27	0.44%
Appreciation	0	0%
Total	41	0.67%
Types of features	Number	Percentage
Positive attitude	10	0.16%
Negative attitude	31	0.51%
Total	41	0.67%

As shown in Tab. 2, among 15 news reports on the Syrian situation by AL Arabiya TV, 14 instances appeared as affect resources. Terms such as *"concerned"* were used to express the Arab League's apprehension about the Syrian situation; *"hoped"* conveyed expectations from various parties regarding solutions to the Kurdish issue and regional stability; *"welcomed"* reflected positive attitudes toward certain actions or initiatives; *"celebrations"* demonstrated some people's stance on the fall of the Assad regime; and *"support"* highlighted the supportive positions of Iran, China and others toward Syria. The analysis also revealed a notable absence of appreciative resources, while judgmental resources were abundant across multiple dimensions.

In international affairs, terms like *"destructive interference"*, *"illegal immigration"*, and *"terrorist"* indicated negative judgments toward certain behaviors or organizations. Regarding

domestic Syrian affairs, words such as *"stability"*, *"sovereignty"*, and *"reforms"* reflected expectations and judgments about Syria's developmental direction. Meanwhile, terms like *"war crimes"* and *"violent suppression"* served as negative evaluations of the Assad regime's past actions.

Positive attitudinal resources mainly include expressions showing support from various nations toward Syria, advocacy for peaceful transitions and cooperation, and calls for the lifting of sanctions. For example, in report *"The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ...emphasizing the need for economic empowerment of Syria and urging the lifting of international sanctions on the war-torn country... The GCC called on ...to provide support to the Syrian people, reaffirming the council's commitment to ongoing humanitarian aid."* all parties are called on to provide support and humanitarian assistance, demonstrating a constructive approach to international cooperation; in *"A delegation from Turkey's main pro-Kurdish DEM on Saturday visited jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan... DEM's co-chair Tuncer Bakirhan said he hoped the talks with Ocalan would 'open a new era' for a democratic settlement to the Kurdish problem.",* the parties concerned expresses their hope to usher in a new era of democratic resolution to the Kurdish issue, reflecting a constructive attempt at peaceful conflict resolution and report *"...We expressed our full support for the Syrian authorities in the success of the important transitional phase."* may facilitate the stabilization and progressive evolution of Syria's situation.

Negative attitudinal resources are primarily centered on descriptions of conflict, interference, and criminal acts, as well as concerns over Syria's chaotic situation. These reflect the complexity and severity of the Syrian conflict and its turbulent reality, while also highlighting the diverse attitudes and positions of the international community on the Syrian issue. For example in report *"A car bomb exploded late Friday in the centre of the flashpoint northern Syria town of Manbij... On Tuesday, bombs in a car killed two people in Manbij... clashes have intensified between the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Turkish-backed "Syrian National Army (SNA)."* Multiple car bomb explosions and intensified armed clashes have further highlighted the turbulent situation in Syria. This phrasing aligns with negative attitudinal resources in discourse analysis, emphasizing chaos and urgency. These resources collectively indicate that Syria faces external interference and threats, exacerbating regional instability.

5. Analysis of Attitudinal Resources using PDA

Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) is an analytical approach that focuses on positive aspects of discourse, such as cooperation, support, solidarity, and hope. It examines texts through three dimensions: description (analyzing linguistic features), interpretation (exploring contextual meanings), and explanation (contextualizing discursive strategies).

In reports from Xinhua News Agency, frequent mentions are made of the efforts by Syria's new authorities to restore order. These efforts aim to rebuild national stability, safeguard citizens' security, and lay the foundation for the country's sustainable development. The reports describe multiple events, including meetings between Libyan officials and Syria's new leadership, a car bomb explosion in the northern Syrian town of Manbij, and warnings from Iran's Foreign Minister about Syria's future. These events are framed as highly significant and urgent, reflecting the critical challenges and complexities of Syria's ongoing crisis. For example, in report *"Syria's interim administration-imposed curfews... announced a security campaign targeting...",* the pursuit of stability is demonstrated through specific actions depicting concrete efforts while in "*Citizens staged demonstrations... calling for national cohesion"* descriptions of public appealing for unity are shown. Those descriptions can be interpreted as manifestations of social cohesion, fostering collaboration among diverse parties to push national progress. They emphasize the responsibilities

and capacities of different nations and organizations in addressing the Syrian issue, and highlight the role of the international community in resolving the crisis. The reports not only condemn violent incidents but also express hopes for a peaceful transition, adopting an earnest tone that shows deep concern over the issues. Actions that violate norms of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international cooperation are criticized.

In news reports of AL Arabiya TV, similar expressions exist as well, such as: *"We expressed our full support for the Syrian authorities in the success of the important transitional phase"*, in which Libyan officials expressed support for Syrian authorities and in "*Iran's supreme leader... predicted on Sunday 'the emergence of a strong, honorable group' that would stand against 'insecurity' in Syria"*, Iran stressed respect for Syrian sovereignty. At the diplomatic level, positive stances are demonstrated through news reports emphasizing support from Libya and other nations, which facilitates Syria's international recognition and resource acquisition to advance its economic and political reconstruction. Meanwhile, Iran's declaration upholding Syria's sovereignty reinforces the principle of territorial integrity, thereby stabilizing regional international relations.

In Xinhua News Agency's reports, the actions of Syria's new authorities are rooted in the need to maintain legitimacy of governance and fulfill responsibilities to safeguard citizens following the regime change. Public unity is driven by aspirations for peaceful and stable lives and a sense of national identity. In contrast, AL Arabiya TV's coverage frames Libya's support for Syria as stemming from regional stability interests, where Syria's stability facilitates economic exchanges and security assurances for neighboring countries.

Xinhua focuses on domestic affairs, emphasizing domestic conflicts and the new government's responses, with in-depth exploration of Syria's social and political dynamics. Its positive attitudinal resources center on domestic reconstruction. Conversely, AL Arabiya TV adopts a global perspective, prioritizing external forces' stances and actions toward Syria, with international cooperation and conflict as key themes.

From the above analysis, both Xinhua and AL Arabiya TV highlight political transformations in Syria, such as regime change and new government policies, while reporting on Syria's diplomatic relations with countries like Iran, Turkey, China and Gulf states. Both emphasize security challenges and the new government's efforts to restore order. Their discourses share positive expectations for Syria's future stability and peace, alongside international support and willingness to cooperate with the new Syrian regime.

Moreover, both narratives not only describe current realities but also interpret the intentions and goals of stakeholders, revealing deeper motivations and potential consequences behind these discourses.

6. Conclusion

Through the guidance of Appraisal Theory, this study employs both quantitative and qualitative analyses to compare attitudinal resources in Xinhua News Agency's and AL Arabiya TV's coverage of the Syrian crisis. The findings reveal that both media outlets have been closely following the Syrian situation. Xinhua cites official sources and international organization statements more frequently, whereas AL Arabiya TV incorporates regional state and non-governmental organization perspectives to a greater extent. Their focal points differ in that Xinhua emphasizes Syria's internal political transformations and international reactions, while AL Arabiya TV prioritizes regional conflicts and humanitarian issues. As China's official media, Xinhua's reporting reflects China's stance in global affairs, whereas AL Arabiya TV, as a media outlet for Arab states, embodies perspectives from the Middle East. This study enhances understanding of attitudinal differences between Chinese and Arab media in international news reporting and offers new insights for

fostering international understanding and dialogue.

The limitations of this study primarily include:

1) Theoretical Framework: The research focuses on attitudinal resources within Appraisal Theory but does not explore the Engagement system or Graduation system.

2) Corpus Constraints: Only 15 news reports from Chinese and Arab media were selected for analysis, with significant disparities in word count, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings.

For future research, expanding the sample size to include more reports and a longer time span could enhance the applicability of results. Additionally, this study remains largely textual, lacking in-depth exploration of underlying motivations, editorial policies, political-economic factors, and the impact of cultural differences between China and Saudi Arabia on media narratives.

Regarding methodology, attitudinal resource annotation relied on manual coding, raising questions about standardized accuracy. However, advancements in big data and artificial intelligence could enable future studies to adopt automated tools for more efficient and precise analysis of news content.

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