

Harmonious Discourse Analysis of News about the Conservation of Biological Diversity in China Daily

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Abstract

On October 8, 2021, the State Council Information Office released the white paper "Biodiversity Conservation in China". In recent years, the country has attached unprecedented importance to biodiversity and its living environment, and news reports about the protection of biodiversity have emerged one after another. From the perspective of ecolinguistics, this paper conducts a harmonious discourse analysis of a news report on biodiversity conservation in China Daily. The results show that the sentences in the report embody and conform to "one assumption" in harmonious discourse, namely, "people-orientedness" and "three principles", namely "principle of conscience", "principle of proximity" and "principle of regulation". At the same time, it also reflects China's determination to protect biodiversity and protect the ecological environment at the individual, social and national levels.

Keywords

Harmonious Discourse Analysis; Biological Diversity; People-Orientedness; Principle of Conscience; Principle of Proximity; Principle of Regulation.

1. Introduction

In his keynote speech at the 15th Summit of the Leaders of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on 12 October 2021, Chinese President Xi Jinping said, "Biodiversity is vital for the earth and the foundation for human survival and development. Protecting biodiversity helps preserve our planet and promote sustainable human development." Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core has put forward a series of new ideas on ecological civilization construction. Judging from the number of reports and publicity efforts of China Daily, China has made remarkable achievements in biodiversity conservation.

Researches related to biodiversity focuses on "how to do", with research disciplines ranging from economics, philosophy, biology, geography and agriculture, etc. There are few studies on analyzing the discourse of news reports related to biodiversity, and the related studies are mainly from the perspective of ecolinguistics. As China attaches increasing attention to biodiversity conservation, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly stressed the important link between biodiversity conservation and human development at the conference. In recent years, there have been more and more news reports about biodiversity in China, and there are abundant language materials for research. New corpus calls for new research perspectives. Foreign eco-linguistics Stibbe (2015) distinguishes three types of discourse: destructive discourse, ambivalent discourse, and beneficial discourse. Professor Huang Guowen summarized the research theory of ecolinguistics and based on Chinese local characteristics, he put forward a new theory: harmonious discourse analysis.

China Daily's coverage of China's efforts to protect biodiversity is full of Chinese characteristics, reflecting the traditional Chinese philosophy of "harmony between man and nature" and "people-orientedness". These exactly fit the model of harmonious discourse analysis proposed

by Professor Huang Guowen (2017) in his follow-up research, that is, "One assumption, three principles". It is not only beneficial to more intuitive feeling of China's achievements in terms of biodiversity conservation and its determination, but can help people set the ecological idea of natural and harmonious coexistence.

2. Theoretical Framework

As a new perspective of ecological linguistics, harmonious discourse analysis was put forward by Huang Guowen and Zhao Ruihua (2016). In the past, ecological discourse was mainly analyzed by critical discourse analysis or positive discourse analysis. Harmonious discourse analysis is based on Chinese local culture and the new situation of national development in the new era, which is a supplement to the previous discourse analysis mode.

Harmonious discourse analysis takes systemic functional linguistics as the framework to analyze ecological discourse, discourse ecology and language system in Chinese context from the perspective of the whole (Huang, 2017). The analysis of harmonious discourse in Chinese context combines China's political, economic and social development with historical and cultural factors, highlighting the harmony of language system and natural ecosystem, as well as the harmony of discourse in a specific cultural context. The analysis of harmonious discourse is rooted in Confucianism and Taoism, which stress on the "unity of man and nature" and "balance of nature". Confucianism insists on "people-orientedness", centering on human problems. Confucianism "does not seek natural harmony in general, but seeks the unity of natural harmony and differential order". Therefore, the basic assumption of harmonious discourse analysis is "people-orientedness" which recognize and accept of the moral laws and order in real life. From this basic assumption comes the "three principles", namely the principle of conscience, the principle of proximity and the principle of regulation. This is also the analytical model and theoretical framework of harmonious discourse analysis.

3. Harmonious Discourse Analysis of the News in China Daily

This paper selects the news report "Xi's Letter Calls for Action to Protect Nature" published by China Daily on June 6, 2022 to study harmonious discourse. The news consists of 533 words and 14 paragraphs. The followings are the embodiment of "one assumption" and "three principles" in the harmonious discourse analysis in this news.

3.1. Embodiment of "people-orientedness" in the News

To analyze ecological discourse and behavior, we must first accept the basic assumption of "people-orientedness". Take the human original intention as the survival of human beings as the fundamental, attach importance to human needs. Marxist philosophy believes that the fundamental attribute of man is social attribute, that is, man is the production of society. Human beings can be divided into human individuals and human groups. Individuals develop into human groups under the influence of common interests, beliefs and geographical environment, which is why there are different countries, religious sects, social organizations, etc., which are the symbols of human-beings.

This news report has a total of 17 sentences, of which 14 subjects are served by human individuals, human organizations, or the names of the country to which human beings belong, such as "President Xijiping", "China", "Executive Secretary", etc. And the subjects served by non-human sentences were "the natural environment", "World environment Day" and "celebratory event". In addition, both the starting point and foothold of human behavior and non-human behavior are the interests of human, or for the sustainable development of human. For example:

“The natural environment provides the very foundation for human survival and development, and having a sound natural environment is the common wish of people of all countries.” (China Daily, 2022)

In this sentence, the subject is “the natural environment”, and what it has done is providing the very foundation for “human survival and development”. And it is people’s common wish to have a sound natural environment. This sentence shows that whether human beings formulate a policy or take a certain action, it is based on human self-interest. The protection of biological diversity is for the sustainable development of human beings and the protection of the ecological environment, for our descendants can also live on the earth with “blue sky” and “clear water”. It can be said that this report reflects the basic assumption of “people-orientedness” everywhere.

3.2. Embodiment of “Principle of Conscience” in the News

The concept of “conscience” comes from “Mencius”, but Wang Yangming, a great ancient Chinese philosopher, gave it his own understanding and interpretation, the most important of which is that conscience is the consciousness of sexuality and the subject of moral judgment. In dealing with species in the ecosystem, our principle of conscience mainly refers to ecological conscience. Ecological conscience is a kind of concept of caring, protecting nature, conscious and voluntary ‘goodness’ arising from the gradual awareness of the existential relationship between man and nature (Wang, 2005).

As mentioned above, the protection of biodiversity by human beings is first and foremost out of consideration for human self-interest. This shows that there is an inseparable connection between human beings and nature, and that human beings are protecting themselves by protecting biodiversity. Based on this premise, the actions of human beings to protect biodiversity are not entirely because of the mandatory requirements of social rules and laws, but also because of the natural, conscious and voluntary “goodness” of human beings to protect biodiversity. For example:

“China will devote more efforts to pollution control, ecological conservation and tackling of climate change to build a beautiful China and to help build a clean and beautiful world, Xi said.” (China Daily, 2022)

These words show China's determination to protect the ecology and build a more beautiful world. By making such a commitment, the Chinese government shows a real sense of responsibility as a major country. It is not only to fulfill the requirements of the United Nations to protect biodiversity, but also to act out of conscience and care for all living things. Traditional Chinese culture advocates the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. We should always be grateful for the gifts given by nature. The Chinese government and people are in line with the principle of conscience when it comes to protecting biodiversity.

3.3. Embodiment of “Principle of Proximity” in the News

As we mentioned earlier, the “natural harmony” that Confucianism pays attention to is not natural harmony in the general sense, but seeks the unity of natural harmony and inferior order. “Harmony” inherently includes “differentiation” is more essential to Confucianism. This concept of “differential” leads Confucianism to identify and accept the real ethical laws and hierarchical order. Therefore, various life forms in nature (self, close relatives, friends, passers-by, beasts, vegetation, mountains and rivers, etc.) are understood as a sequence from near to far, from close to distant (Huang, 2017). It is reflected in the news as follow:

“He said continued efforts should be made to address acute environmental problems at people's doorsteps, and the security of energy, grain supply, the industrial supply chain and people's normal lives must be ensured when the country endeavors to cut its carbon emissions.” (China Daily, 2022)

Based on the basic assumption of "people-orientedness", human beings will be ranked according to their relationship with other living or non-living entities in nature. In other words, human beings will pay more attention to people or things that are important to them. In this sentence, "the security of energy, grain supply, the industrial supply chain and people's normal lives" is very important for the survival and development of human beings. Therefore, even in order to protect biodiversity, the implementation of "carbon emissions" needs to first consider these things that are more "proximity" to humans.

3.4. Embodiment of "Principle of Regulation" in the News

The biggest difference between human beings and other animals is that they have ideas, rationality, morality, hierarchy, social organization, and behavioral rules. The "regulation" mentioned here has three levels: one is the regulation imposed by the individual's conscience and self-cultivation, the second is the regulation by the "township rules and regulations" of the association, and the third is the regulation by the legal system of society and institutions (Huang, 2017). The regulation of the three aspects (individuals, associations, and countries) are all necessary, they complement each other and interact with each other. A person's conscience and self-cultivation will regulate his behavior, and an association that pursues peace is resregulated by "township rules and regulations". Everyone's behavior, a civilized society has laws and mechanisms to resregulate and manage itself. It can be reflected in the following:

"World Environment Day, observed each year on June 5, was also designated a national environment day for China in 2014 when the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, adopted an amendment to the Environmental Protection Law." (China Daily, 2022)

"Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, China has emphasized that the strategy of building an ecological civilization is vitally important to the sustainable development of the Chinese nation." (China Daily, 2022)

Protecting the ecological environment and biodiversity not only requires human beings to be people-oriented and think from people's own interest, but also requires regulation. Because not everyone can be "conscience", and be grateful to nature and voluntarily protect the environment on which we live. Moreover, due to the existence of the second "principle of proximity", some people may completely ignore the survival of other creatures because of their proximity degree. At this time, social regulations are needed to supplement the gap caused by "proximity". In these two sentences above, "the National People's Congress", China's highest legislative body, and "the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China", one of the most important conferences of the Chinese Communist Party, both of them embody regulation principle. "the National People's Congress" "adopted an amendment to the Environmental Protection Law", using the most binding form of law to draw human attention to ecology and biodiversity. "the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China" also put forward a strategic plan to protect the ecological environment.

4. Conclusion

To protect the ecological environment and promote the development of biodiversity, it is necessary to abide by the ecological concept of "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping. The progress of human society is inseparable from nature, and the sustainable existence of nature is also inseparable from the protection of human beings. From the perspective of ecolinguistics, this paper uses the harmonious discourse analysis proposed by Professor Huang Guowen to analyze a report on the protection of biodiversity in China Daily. It is found in the report that many sentences conform to the "one assumption" and "three principles" in the analysis of harmonious discourse, that is, the assumption of "people-orientedness" and the three principles of conscience, proximity and

regulation. This also fully demonstrates that the "people-orientedness" assumption and three principles are the core elements of harmonious discourse analysis in the Chinese context, which can be used to guide our ecological discourse and behavioral analysis.

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