

# Harmonious Discourse Analysis and Its Application in CCTV Documentary *Amazing China*

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**Abstract:** This thesis aims to present Harmonious Discourse Analysis (HDA) and its application in CCTV documentary *Amazing China*. HDA is a new attempt embedded with Chinese characteristics. The theory was first proposed by Huang Guowen on the basis of reviewing and comparing western dominant approaches, and the necessity of localizing linguistic theory in a Chinese context, as well as the emphasis of developing ecolinguistics from a transdisciplinary perspective. Combined with ecological philosophy and linguistic theory, the analytical framework of HDA is designed as an integrative one. On the one hand, HDA places harmony at its core position, and the whole research is conducted under its general assumption (human-orientedness) and three principles (conscience, proximity and regulation). On the other hand, Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceafter SFL) is taken as the theoretical basis of HDA, and the language system also takes three variables of the register (field, tenor, mode) as the entry point of the research to analyze the ecological discourses. The transitivity analysis of documentary field exhibits the rationality of ecological behaviors guided by the conscience principle. The identity-status analysis of documentary tenor exhibits the authority of ecological discourses guided by the proximity principle. The word-sentence-paragraph analysis of documentary mode exhibits the effectiveness of publicity communication guided by the regulation principle. This thesis has realized its research values of exploration localization, data publicity, and image ecologicalization in the ecological discourses analysis of overseas publicity documentary. It is expected that this study can provide some necessary references for discourse analysis of overseas publicity documentaries in the future, and with wider application of HDA, the ecological consciousness will see its further development in our society, which also undoubtedly benefits ecological protection in various contexts.

**Keywords:** Overseas Publicity Documentary, *Amazing China*, Ecological Discourse, National Ecological Image, Harmonious Discourse Analysis

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## 1. Introduction

The world has witnessed the emerging and flourishing of industrial revolution in the past decades. However, the relationship between human and nature has become even worsen because of excessive exploitation without proper protection. The whole academic world has been vexed with severe environmental issues. Therefore, Stibbe believed that an “ecological turn” in various disciplines was an inevitable result of the development of society and science [13]. Aimed to be problem-oriented, applied linguistics also found its place in the group of “eco” disciplines, which then gave birth to

ecolinguistics.

Alexander and Stibbe described “Ecological Discourse Analysis as a central approach in the discipline of ecolinguistics” [2]. The early development of EDA shaped two paradigms, namely Haugen’s model [8] and Halliday’s model [6], and both of them were well recognized and accepted as classic models of ecolinguistics studies before the 21st century. The Haugenian model is metaphorical that explores the relationship between language and the speech community; and the Hallidayan model is non-metaphorical

that examines the impact of language on environmental problems.

In recent years, ecolinguistics has been dominated by western ideologies and thus been analyzed from a critical perspective, which was then called eco-critical discourse analysis [4, 1, 13]. However, this critical perspective seems not practicable to uncritically apply to the Chinese context. In addition, scholars tend to conduct ecolinguistic research from a transdisciplinary perspective, as “ecolinguistics should increasingly include even more diverse philosophical traditions from all parts of the world which have emphasized the interdependence of living beings and their environment” [5]. Following such a trend, Huang Guowen put forward the notion of Harmonious Discourse Analysis (henceafter HDA) on the basis of traditional Chinese philosophy and national contemporary trajectories [9].

The purpose of the research is to introduce the theory of HDA and present its application in CCTV documentary *Amazing China*, thus exploring the linguistic features lying in that officially-published ecological documentary and the impact of its discourse on the social ecological ideology.

The research is carried out under the analytical framework of HDA. The framework is constructed on the basis of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), whose systemic functions can help reveal ecological meaning embedded in

the discourse, namely ecological experiential meaning, ecological interpersonal meaning and ecological textual meaning. Therefore, the three questions of this research are as follows: What linguistic features does *Amazing China* use to realize the experiential/interpersonal/textual meaning of the discourse and how does the meaning exert an influence on social ecology? Given the connections between the three variables of the context of situation (field, tenor, mode) and three semantic meanings, this research is to provide three answers respectively by conducting the transitivity analysis of documentary field, the identity-status analysis of documentary tenor, and the word-sentence-paragraph analysis of documentary mode.

2. HDA Analytical Framework

HDA serves as a new analytical mode to evaluate ecological progress in China, including the establishment of philosophical guidance, theoretical basis, research assumption and analysis principles. However, its connotation, especially how the elements involved interact with each other needs further analysis. Therefore, Zhao and Huang proposed a Hallidayan framework for HDA (Figure 1) in order to analyze linguistic features of the discourse and to explore how language affects people's thought and behavior [15].

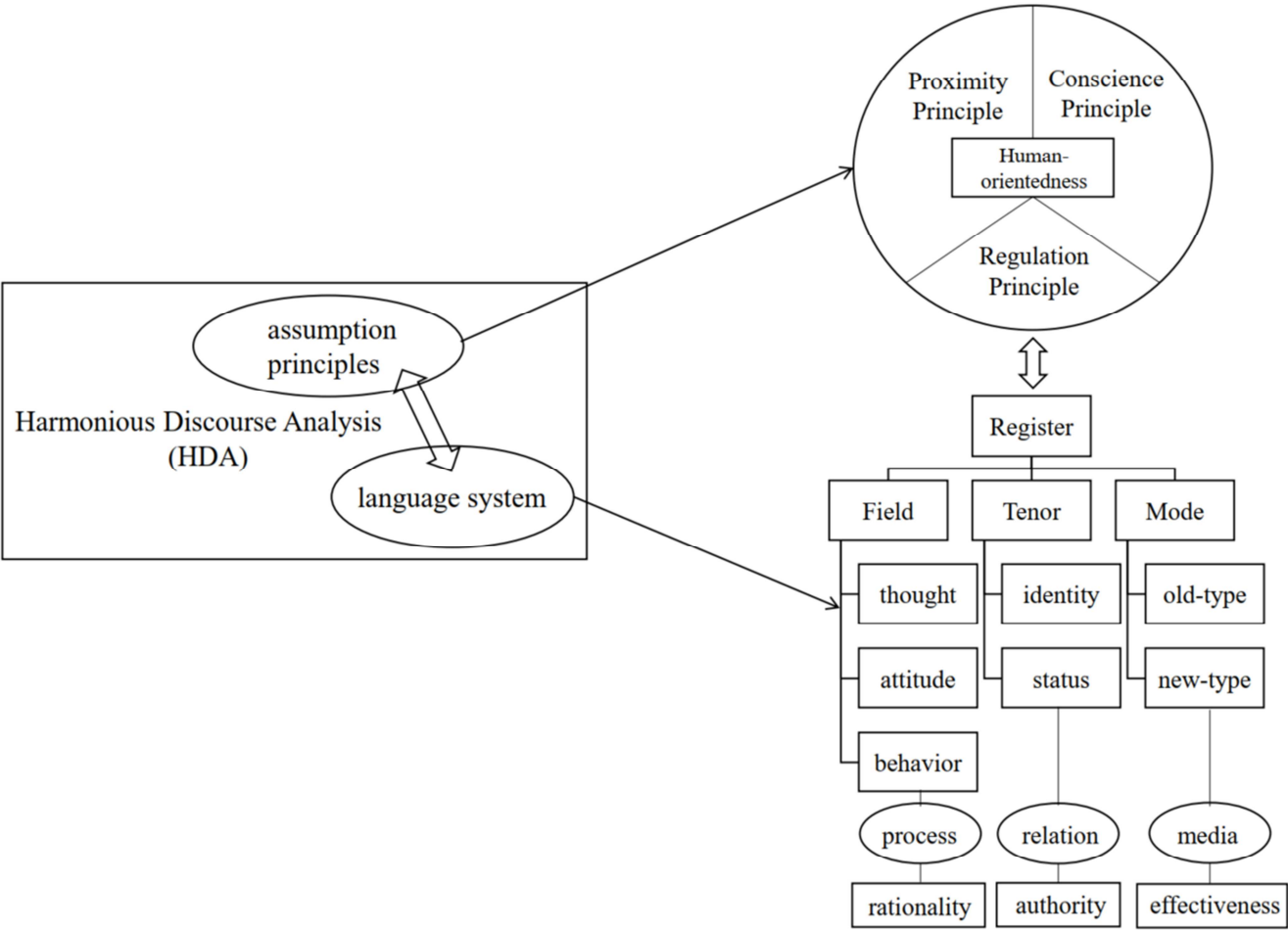


Figure 1. HDA Analytical Framework [15].

## 2.1. Harmonious Ecosophy

The term “ecosophy” reflects people's ecological ideologies, which suggests the way how they treat the natural world. Under the influence of Chinese culture, Huang innovatively inherits and practices Chinese harmonious philosophy, and regards “harmony” as the ecological philosophy of HDA centering on the relationship between man and nature [10].

## 2.2. Assumption and Principles

The upper part of the figure shows the general assumption and three principles of HDA. Inspired by Confucianism, HDA places harmony at its core position, and takes human-orientedness as the general assumption in carrying out ecolinguistic studies. Human-orientedness, as its name suggests, emphasizes the integration of human with nature so as to realize the internal value of nature and to underline the responsibility for sustaining the ecosystem other than satisfy people's need.

Based on the general assumption, three rules are also proposed as the analytic principles of HDA, namely Conscience Principle, Proximity Principle and Regulation Principle [15]. First, Conscience Principle is extended from innate quality to external practices, and acts as a way to achieve the unity of knowing and doing in HDA, since “only when knowing and doing are united can humans' good nature be truly realized and a person be said to act in accordance with their conscience” [15]. Second, Proximity Principle connotes the existence of diversity and distance in the ecosystem, since HDA recognizes a differentiated love for things so as to promote seeking harmony without uniformity [11]. Finally, Regulation Principle can be graded into three layers, namely self-discipline from individuals, local rules in communities and laws of countries.

## 2.3. Language System

The bottom part of the figure displays the language system HDA interacts with. In HDA, Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceafter SFL) is taken as its theoretical basis mainly for two reasons. The first is that HDA takes human problems as the starting-point for research. With its unlimited application in many fields, SFL has always been characterized as “a problem-oriented theory” [7], which serves as the analytical root of HDA. The second reason lies in the due attention SFL pays to the relationship among language, context, and reality. Since context is one of the central concerns of SFL, HDA “takes from SFL the conceptualization of context and of the relationship between language and the world” [11] so as to realize linguistic functions and social meanings of context. Therefore, Register, known as the context of situation and the entry point of HDA research has three variables, namely *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*, which have their significance in interweaving the elements throughout the analysis.

*Field* refers to what is going on, and is concerned with the social activities taking place. By conducting the transitivity

analysis of documentary field under the guidance of Conscience Principle, we can realize its ideational metafunctions and examine the rationality of ecological cognition, attitude and behavior.

*Tenor* focuses on who is joining in, and is concerned with identity and status. It figures out relationships and interactions between human and nature in terms of choices of mood, modality, and pronoun. By conducting the identity-status analysis of documentary tenor under the guidance of Proximity Principle, we can realize its interpersonal metafunctions and figure out the authority embodied in the discourse.

*Mode* centers on how language is operating, and is concerned with the channels or media of communication where language is at play. By conducting the word-sentence-paragraph analysis of documentary mode under the guidance of Regulation Principle, we can figure out in what structure can language achieve its effectiveness and thus realize its textual metafunctions.

The above explanation shares the scientific features of HDA analytical framework. Its general principle of human-orientedness embodies the wisdom in Chinese philosophy and its three principles are applicable in social development. Therefore, by applying HDA to the analysis of local ecological data, we can have a closer look into the linguistic features it bears and the ecological spirits it expresses. Hence our research takes *Amazing China* as our linguistic data.

## 3. The Application of HDA in *Amazing China*

*Amazing China*, a newly-produced documentary in 2020 by CCTV, shows the natural beauty and miracles in China through its 57 episodes. The documentary, therefore, acts as an important window for foreign publicity by spreading the ecological value embedded with Chinese values. Nevertheless, current researches on Chinese overseas publicity documentaries mainly focus on strategies for translation and communication and other similar studies. That's why we see the point of analyzing its 57 episodes from the perspective of HDA, through which we can have a better understanding of harmonious relations between language and nature, language and human, and human and nature from the ecological images the documentaries try to spread.

As the first step, we carry out the transitivity analysis of documentary field, based on Conscience Principle. In addition, to ensure the results are quantitative and scientific, we analyze the transcript with UAM Corpus Tool 3.0, a transitivity labeling software designed by linguist Mick O. Donnell relying on theories of Transitivity System Network (TSN). Data show that there are 1346 transitivity processes in total in 57 collections of *Amazing China*, aiming to represent the ecological process in a Chinese context. Here in the research, we take the 45th episode as an analytical example, which is a

home coming story of Milu deer.

First, the relational process is to identify the attributes, through which we learn about species characteristics and status. Then, the existential process is to convey the existence of an entity or an event that happens, through which we come to realize the current ecological situation and make reflection on it. Third, the verbal process is related to speaking, through which we get to know the direction and initiative of Chinese ecological construction and development. The fourth step comes to the material process, through which we see the physical and practical action the government takes to protect and promote our natural environment. Finally, the mental process conveys perception related to seeing and hearing, affection linked with liking and fearing and cognition associated with thinking, knowing and understanding, through which we can see the efforts the official devoted to improve the ecological awareness and ideology.

As the second step, we carry out the identity-status analysis of documentary tenor, based on Proximity Principle. First, we study the narration of the documentary, for such is a process that enables narrators themselves to interpret the text and to deliver the artistic value and cultural spirit in a more audience-friendly way. Here in an intuitive but symbolic plot, the narrator interprets it in an emotional and informative tone. When he says “These are Milu deer, a species native to China” (*A Home Coming Story of Milu Deer*, Episode 45), we can feel he is proud that the Milu deer species is endemic to China. But when saying “But it disappeared from China, for nearly 100 years”, his deep and low voice explains his regret about the fact that they have been absent in China for nearly 100 years. And the last sentence “The fact that they have now returned to China is the result of a remarkable century old animal protection collaboration between two countries” fully expresses his heartfelt appreciation for China's determination of wildlife protection.

Second, the choices of modal verbs can reveal the speaker's attitude towards the proposition and play a role in coordinating relations and expressing position. According to Halliday's theory, the value of modality is divided into 3 levels to express judgments of different degrees as well as the identity and status of the participants in discourse. Among them, *may*, *might*, *can* and *could* belong to low-value modal verbs; *will*, *would*, *shall* and *should* belong to middle-value modal verbs; *must*, *ought to* and *need* belong to high-value modal verbs. The given statistics show that totally 115 modal verbs are used in documentary discourse, among which low-value modal verbs account for 59.14%, middle-value modal verbs account for 13.92%, and high-value modal verbs only account for 4.35%. Generally, the higher the magnitude of the modal verbs, the stronger the attitude and the firmer position is expressed, and the smaller the space for the reader or audience to negotiate. Here, the relatively small proportion of high-value modal verbs does not mean the loss of authority. Instead, it shows that when describing environmental status quo, expressing attitudes and making suggestions, the official intends to communicate with the target audience in a calm and clear tone and together shares equal status. Thus, acting in this

way can be of great help to shape an eco-friendly image of China.

Third, the uses of pronoun reflect the power status of both parties. CCTV, producer of *Amazing China*, undoubtedly enjoys a high discourse status and authority. However, in the analysis of the documentary commentary text, a large number of third-person words are used, which accounts for about 74.9%. In this way, the official communicators intend to arouse the resonance of overseas audiences from a third-party perspective so as to better protect natural environment and witness ecological development with them.

As the third step, we conduct the word-sentence-paragraph analysis of documentary mode, based on Regulation Principle.

Words in *Amazing China* satisfy their analytical value in two aspects. On the one hand, to find out whether the words are consistent with three principles, we collect the data of word frequency. With 110 occurrences of “China” and 40 occurrences of “people”, it reflects that the discourse conforms to the research assumption of “people-orientedness” in HDA. In addition, most adjectives also reflect the three principles respectively. For example, adjectives such as *amazing*, *beautiful*, *charming*, *elegant*, *fantastic*, *graceful*, *incredible*, *unique*, and *wonderful* express people's wonder and admiration for the unique landscape of China, echoing Conscience Principle. *Harmonious*, *friendly*, *connected*, *closed* and other adjectives reflect the friendly and close connection between people and nature, echoing Proximity Principle. *Protective*, *untouched*, *inaccessible*, *renewable* and *sustainable* convey people's awareness of nature, echoing Regulation Principle. On the other hand, we intend to figure out to what extent the words used in *Amazing China* mirror the ecosophy of our country. We still try to draw some reliable conclusion based on the word frequency data. Results show that the ecological nouns that are frequently used in documentary are as follows: *mountain* (116 times), *river* (54 times), *forests* (26 times), *terraces* (12 times), *lake* (83 times), and *grassland* (14 times), which happens to match the fourth principle of ecological civilization construction proposed by President Xi [10]: Mountains, rivers, forests as well as farmlands, lakes, grasslands and deserts all make indivisible parts of the ecosystem. *Amazing China*, thus, can be seen as a vivid practice of Xi's ecological ideology.

Sentence patterns in *Amazing China* are diverse. They are not only beneficial to enriching the expression of the content in varied forms, but conducive to emphasizing the points from multiple dimensions. In this way, the audience can understand as many ecological concepts and images of documentary as possible in a limited time. The genre of documentary has determined the large use of declarative sentences that objectively state concepts, accurately explain viewpoints, and fully show the facts. Other than declarative sentences, a certain number of adverbial clauses of concession can also be seen in the text, the turn of which within a sentence often leaves the audience in surprise. What's more, the existence of virtual conditional sentence suggests the potential power within the nature itself and people's desires to live in harmony with our mother nature.

In order to delve deeper to discourse analysis, this study has expanded from clauses to paragraphs, in which the theory of Thematic Progression (henceafter TP) first proposed by Danes in 1974 plays quite an important role. *Theme*, *rheme*, and *progression* are three key elements of the TP theory. Linguistically, *theme* embodies what is being talked about, while *rheme* explains further details about the topic. In an independent sentence, *theme* and *rheme* are fixed. But in a discourse, they are changing, the process of which is called *progression*. Since the changes are connected with form and meaning, we value the employment of thematic progression theory when analyzing the ecosophy expressed in *Amazing China*. Danes established four types of thematic progression, namely simple linear progression, continuous progression, derived progression and continuous gap. The former three are comparatively common, and are taken as the guidance to identify organization and meaning of the discourse.

In linguistics, *register* is defined by the way a speaker uses language. In *field* analyses, the transitive processes of expression connote the Chinese ecosophy of “unity of man and nature”, which exhibits the rationality of ecological behaviors. In *tenor* analyses, the changing mood linked with interpretation, the classified modality related to obligation, and the third-party objective pronouns tended to arouse the emotion are all for investigating the closeness between human and nature, which exhibits the authority of ecological discourses. In *mode* analyzes, its lexical, syntactic and structural features sensibly denote the theme and rheme of the discourse, which exhibits the effectiveness of publicity communication. Therefore, with those three variables, we can have a better understanding of the documentary from different patterns the language adopts, different roles it plays and different functions it delivers in *Amazing China*.

## 4. Significance

The fourth part is mainly about the significance of the research. This research aims at promoting wider applications and further studies of HDA, and devotes to extending new perspectives to carry out the studies of overseas publicity documentary in the future.

With that excellently combined unity, this research has realized its values of exploration localization, data publicity, and image ecologicalization in the ecological discourses analysis of overseas publicity documentary *Amazing China*. These three values can also be viewed as responses to the three questions that Zhao and Huang mentioned when they first constructed the analytical framework of HDA in 2021 [15].

The first is exploration localization, which answers the question of the relationship between the research assumption and its three principles. HDA is a breakthrough by localizing ecolinguistics in a Chinese context where Harmony, a key concept in Chinese philosophy, is emphasized. Therefore, human-orientedness is set up as the research assumption to advocate the coexistence of human and nature. By decoding the discourse under the framework of HDA, it seems that the theory works as if one principle exclusively corresponds to

one aspect. But that's not the fact. They are divided apart to serve respectively as the guidance to *field*, *tenor* and *mode* in that each of the principle embeds different highlights. The three principles are actually in the same vein, and are unified under the general principle of human-orientedness. Zhao and Huang argue that Conscience Principle serves as its basic premise of self-consciousness, Proximity Principle serves as specific way to establish connection, and Regulation Principle serves as particular restrictions on interaction [15].

The second is data publicity, which answers the question of the way how HDA theory interacts with SFL system and thus spread Chinese ecosophy. The research takes *Amazing China*, an overseas publicity documentary with Chinese ecological characteristics, as the research object. The documentary is aimed at introducing amazing ecological scenes in China, and its being short in length but clear in structure enables the public to grasp the core information within a limited time, and thus helps earn its fame on the live-streaming platform home and abroad. To find out how its contents are effectively embodied in forms that are both limited in time and space, transitivity analysis, identity-status analysis, and word-sentence-paragraph analysis are respectively conducted under the guidance of the research assumption and three principles, and the combination of the three elements of the register theory (*field*, *tenor*, *mode*). The results presented above illustrate that China is in the continuous pursuit of harmony and unity between language and nature, language and human, and human and nature.

The third is image ecologicalization, which answers the question of the effectiveness achieved through interactions. This research witnesses the value of shaping national ecological image in various ways. Three aspects are concluded from this research. Firstly, the application of the theory of HDA and the system of SFL are mentioned in the previous paragraph. Secondly, the combination of images and texts are presented in documentary *Amazing China*. Thirdly, the sceneries are compared between home and abroad, such as Jiuzhaigou and “Eden”, Siguniang Mountain and “Alps”, and Salim Lake and “Atlantic Ocean”. These links aim to activate the cognition of foreign audiences, to leave unforgettable images in their mind, and to attract them to explore the beauty of nature on their own. It is believed that the publicity of form and content helps us to convey the real China to international friends, let them know more about our domestic ecological culture, and thus promote international ecological harmony. The three ways together conform to a peaceful and eco-friendly position that China has always set to her development. With further building and spreading, it embodies that China will, in the new era, shoulder her responsibility for ecological civilization construction more actively and to have a higher level of self-cognition, self-position, self-education, self-reflection, and self-development.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, HDA is the product of discourse analysis mode

in Chinese context, and is worth advocating and applying to more actual context analysis. The framework presented in this paper combines the research assumption, three principles, and three elements of register theory to analyze the transcripts of *Amazing China*. Its research values of exploration localization, data publicity, and image ecologicalization highlights the realistic necessity of constructing a national ecological image through positive discourse in the new era. It is hoped that this study can provide some necessary reference for discourse analysis of overseas publicity documentaries in the future.

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