

LINGUISTICS AND VIETNAMESE LINGUISTICS

**EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE IN NEWS BULLETINS
ON FLOODS IN VIETNAM****PHAM THI PHUONG***

ABSTRACT: As disasters are common in our modern life, news on them is also prevalent. In fact, disasters are framed in the news in particular ways, which as a rule reflects how severe the tragedy is. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Vietnamese newspapers report on disasters, specifically floods. The appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005) [7] was utilized in this study to implant and expose assessment in attitude features using the descriptive qualitative approach. The data was gathered from 30 articles from Vietnamese internet publications covering floods from 2019 to early 2023. The results illustrate that *Appreciation* is the most common source of all attitudinal characteristics, followed by Affect and Judgement. It demonstrates how newspapers prefer to highlight attitudes and interpret evaluations of floods rather than presenting the sentiment or emotions. It is also evident that the attitude of Vietnamese newspapers is geared towards emphasizing their negative attitude toward floods, and urging and praising actions to address the issue.

KEY WORDS: attitud; newspapers; floods; appraisal framework; evaluative language.

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1. Introduction

Although the newspaper chronicles every event that occurs in the globe, the account of a single occurrence might vary from one newspaper to another. Newspapers are like other discourses since they have been infused with ideologies that can influence how they present events and at the same time can substantially influence readers. They can serve as a means to alter their readers' behaviours, thoughts, or beliefs [8], [2], [10]. Therefore, news can be considered as a discourse, its communicative goal can be investigated via the lexical and syntactic aspects of language used by news reporters [2].

With this aim, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which focuses on language usage, the lexical and syntactic elements, is definitely suitable and practical for uses. However, the focus of the study is to understand the attitude of the writers revealed through the discourse. Thus, a more elaborate system is used to focus on the evaluative language. Among many systems, the Appraisal Framework created by Martin and White (2005) fits in well due to their clear cut between the types of attitudes as well as the level of engagement embedded in the discourse. This system also inherits the ideology of SFL; therefore, their advantage also lies in the emphasis on language use rather than forms.

In fact, numerous research has been conducted on news posted in newspapers to delve into the issues of appraisal language. These studies have examined separate sections in newspapers such as commentaries and editorials [1], [4], [5]. Others have scrutinised a variety of topics such as gender, education, culture, religion, politics and disasters [3], [6], [11], [12], [9].

However, few studies have been done on how appraisal theory is used to demonstrate newspaper attitude on other specific types of disasters. Besides, those conducted in the context of Vietnam on the evaluative language on disasters are scant. There exist no studies on the discourse of evaluative language on flood news. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to close the gap by responding to the following question: *How do the linguistic features employed to describe floods reflect the attitudes of Vietnamese newspapers?*

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2. Literature review

Appraisal language has been documented for a long time with different approaches. The one proposed by [7] has been used as a framework for research in this field, figuring out the polarity of attitude and degradation of engagement of the speakers/writers towards the subject being discussed. In addition, the Appraisal theory focuses on the language tools that are employed to communicate, negotiate, and naturalize certain inter-subjective relationships and ideological positions.

Three sub-systems, namely Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, make up the Appraisal theory. Our emotions, including emotional responses, behavioural judgements, and objectivity assessments are all part of our attitude. Engagement indicates how authors and speakers/writers put forwards their viewpoints as well as how they match with the opinions of others. Graduation addresses the phenomenon of grading, in which categories are muddled and emotions are heightened [7]. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the Appraisal system and its sub-systems are depicted. Each of these sub-systems has its own set of possibilities inside its own sub-categories and it may utilize many semantic and syntactic alternatives.

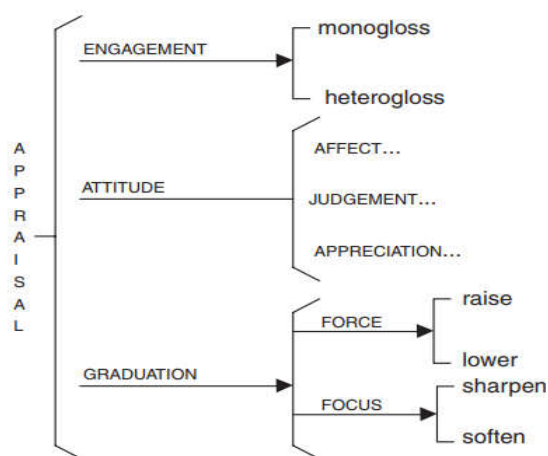


Figure 1. An overview of appraisal resources (Martin & White, 2005, p.38)

This research focuses on the attitude domain of the Vietnamese newspaper attitude in floods due to the limited time scale and that attitude domain is the core of the framework. The theoretical framework is adopted from [7]. In this framework, Attitude encompasses the emotions of the participants, the Judgement of behaviours and things. The Attitude is also investigated by polarity which means the negative and positive aspects of emotions, Judgement and valuation. Table 1 is a list of the attitude subtypes diagrammed by the author based on the Attitude features in [7].

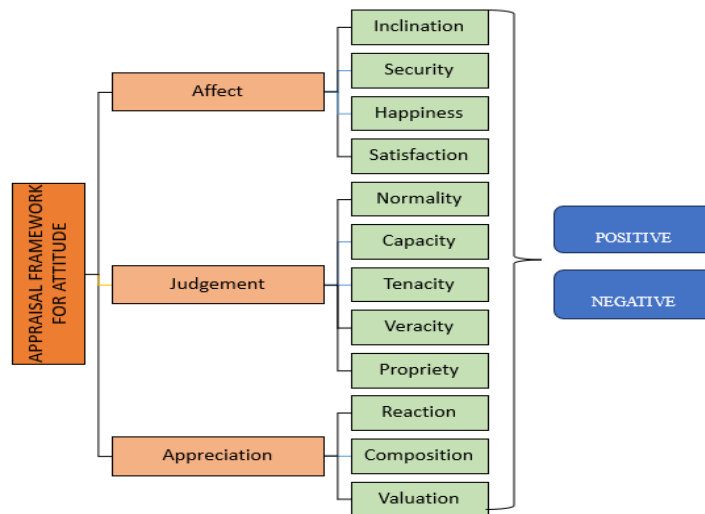


Figure 2. Attitude breakdown (adapted from Martin and White (2005, pp.42-91))

Affect deals with the construction of the emotions of the emoter. Affect is subcategorized into four major aspects namely security, inclination, happiness and satisfaction seen in polarity. The inclination reflects how the participants feel, security concerns whether the participants feel safe or unsafe, happiness is related to the feeling of joy or boredom, and satisfaction refers to whether the participants are content or dissatisfied with the trigger.

While Affect concerns with the way somebody feels, Judgement is related to the feeling about someone else's behaviours. Definitely, in order to judge someone's behaviours, the context, culture or the social norm must be taken into consideration. That is why it is codified into social esteem and social censure. Social esteem embraces a person's normality, tenacity and propriety. These criteria assess how common they are, how competent they are, how persistent they are and how sincere they are correspondingly. Like Affect, Judgement is also examined by polarity.

Appreciation is concerned with the assessments of things, phenomena or events. It also comprises subtypes, i.e. reaction, composition and valuation. Reaction expresses the attraction of the things, composition is related to the balance of things, and value refers to how meaningful the things are.

3. Methodology

This study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to reach the goal. Firstly, this study used a qualitative approach because the texts were analysed by the author based on the resources for appraisal language. The features of resources in light of the Appraisal Framework [7] were coded appropriately and systematically. The newspaper articles were taken from Vietnamnews.com (a popular mainstream website in Vietnam which comprises a large amount of data for this research). A total of 30 articles taken were from 2019-2023 to ensure the diversity of time range and to deduce the newspaper position appropriately. Secondly, the data was quantified to calculate the percentages of the attitudinal occurrences and find out the significant figures. The analysis was restricted to the investigation of the attitude subtypes of Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. The prime goal of the lexical distribution analysis was to show how catastrophic occurrences are described in Vietnamese newspapers on a textual level. It is thought that attitude, which is considered as the fundamental value, contributes significantly to the expression of solidarity by revealing one party's attitude toward things and people. It influences how individuals interact with and react to various points of view [7].

4. Results and discussion

This section discusses the Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation aspects of attitudinal resources that were discovered from the result. Table 1 shows the allocation of the attitudinal resources.

Table 1. Distribution of the attitudinal resources

Type	Percentage	Type	Percentage	Type	Percentage
Affect	34.00%	Judgement	10.45%	Appreciation	55.22%

Table 1 delineates the distribution of the altitudinal resources. It is evident that all three types of evaluation were present in the data, with Appreciation taking the lead and Judgement being in the bottom rank. This shows the focus on the severity of the floods and the efforts to reconstruct the Affected areas. This result is similar to other research [9], [12] in that it concludes that news reporters do not focus on the emotion of the participants. However, this result is also different from other studies [9], [12] as in their research finding, Judgement took the lead. This shows different attitudes towards the occurrence of disasters in different countries.

4.1. Analysis of Affect Resources

Affect covers different kinds of feelings and emotions experienced by the emoters or appraisers [7]. A summary of the analysis of Affect is offered in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Types and percentages of Affect resources

TYPE	PERCENTAGE	TYPE	PERCENTAGE
INCLINATION - POSITIVE	61%	HAPPINESS- POSITIVE	0%
INCLINATION - NEGATIVE	0%	HAPPINESS- NEGATIVE	4%
SECURITY- POSITIVE	4%	SATISFACTION- POSTIVE	0%
SECURITY- NEGATIVE	31%	SATISFACTION- NEGATIVE	0%

As can be seen from the table, the Inclination Affect took the lead with 61% of the total. Looking closely at the data, the author discovered that the appraisers of such Affect are the authority (the prime minister), which implies the urgency of the flood and the concern and action of the authority towards this disaster. Besides, the percentage of Insecurity Affect was also prevalent, at 31% (half of the Positive Inclination). This data also invokes the severity of the flood. In other words, the flood caused damage and negative feelings for the people involved. This also invoked sympathy from the readers to the victims and may entail the appropriate actions to help the Affected. It is noted that Satisfaction Affect, Negative Inclination and Positive Happiness were not present in the data.

Below are some sample analyses that show how the Affect resources are located in the text and will help to better explain the Affect analysis.

(1) “The PM ordered building projects and allocating resources for sustainable projects aimed (inclination-positive Affect) at preventing and mitigating landslides.”

(2) “Hiệp also highlighted (inclination-positive Affect) the challenges faced by Đắk Nông as well as the Central Highlands as the forest areas continued to grow, and the impacts on hillside areas increased in most localities.”

(3) “Earlier, the PM had also issued a dispatch to request (inclination-positive Affect) strong efforts to respond to floods, subsidence and landslides, and ensure the safety of dams in the Central Highlands region.”

In these examples, the appraiser was the prime minister who aimed at preventing the disasters and mitigating the possible damage by urging actions from all people involved. Therefore, “aimed”, “highlighted” and “request” can be ascribed to the sub-category of Inclination Effect. Therefore, the news was not only about informing the public of the event but also showed the responsibility and concern of the government toward the Affected areas.

(4) “Mà Sa Phìn hamlet is the most remote area of Năm Xây Commune, and is among six hamlets that continue to be isolated from other parts of the commune by floods.”

(5) “The lives of thousands of farmers in the Mekong River Delta that depend on “rising-water” season are threatened by the possibility that the floods will not come this year.”

(6) “Doctor Dương Văn Ni from Cần Thơ University said the risk of erosion in the Mekong Delta would be higher if floods did not return.”

In the example (4), (5), and (6), the appraisers were the Affected or the potential victims of the floods. Definitely, they felt insecure when facing disasters. The words “isolated”, “threatened” and “risk” are the realisation of this kind of Affect.

4.2. Analysis of Judgement Resources

Judgement involves attitudes toward people and their behaviours. There is no doubt that victims, rescuers, government officials, etc. are included in disaster news coverage. It is consequently hard for the reporters to refrain from passing either direct or indirect judgment on those concerned. A summary of the analysis of Affect is offered in Table 2 below.

Table 3. Types and percentages of Judgement resources

TYPE	PERCENTAGE	TYPE	PERCENTAGE
NORMALITY-POSITIVE	17%	TENACITY-NEGATIVE	0%
NORMALITY-NEGATIVE	0%	VERACITY-POSITIVE	0%
CAPACITY-POSITIVE	25%	VERACITY-NEGATIVE	0%
CAPACITY-NEGATIVE	25%	PROPRIETY-POSITIVE	0%
TENACITY-POSITIVE	33%	PROPRIETY-NEGATIVE	0%

Table 3 illustrates the proportions of the tokens constructing different types of Judgement. As can be seen from the table, Positive Tenacity accounted for one-third of the Judgement, followed by Positive and Negative Capacity with equal percentage of realisation (25%). Positive normality constituted almost one-fifth of the total whereas negative tenacity, veracity of all kinds and property of all kinds were not present. This demonstrates the tenacity of the victim to survive the flood and overcome the difficulties in the aftermath.

Below are some sample analyses that show how the Judgement resources are located in the text and will help to better explain the Judgement analysis.

(7) “People in HCM City struggled (tenacity-positive) to commute on the flooded streets as the city witnessed heavy rainfall and high tides late yesterday afternoon.”

(8) “He then had a working session in Cần Thơ City with leaders of several ministries, sectors and localities on the erosion of river banks and coastlines as well as efforts (tenacity-positive) to overcome the erosion and flooding in the Delta region.”

(9) “This has added to the woe of farmers in the delta who have endured (tenacity-positive) the most serious drought in 60 years that has damaged 200,000ha of rice, about 9,000ha of orchards and 2,000ha of aquatic farms.”

In the example (7), (8) and (9), all the involved participants were included (the authorities, the localities, and the victims). It is also noticeable that the Judgement is all positive, which demonstrates the tenacity of the victims, and their endurance when facing with disasters, which provokes the feeling of Appreciation from the readers. Besides, the positive polarity also reflects the concern of the authorities towards the victims of the flood.

(10) “Nguyễn Thị Kiều, deputy director of Cần Thơ City’s Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, said the department coordinated with the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs to open vocational training classes for fishermen so they could change their jobs more easily (capacity – positive).”

(11) “Hundreds of drivers had to tow their motorbikes, unable (capacity – negative) to ride them on Nguyễn Hữu Cánh Street since half the wheel was submerged in the water.”

In the example (10), and (11) the capacity of the people involved was described, showing the difficulties of the victims and the possibility of rehabilitation.

4.3. Analysis of Appreciation Resources

Appreciation is realized by resources for determining the value of things like objects, natural events and other phenomenon. This attitude can be broken down into three categories, our ‘reaction’ to things (whether they catch our attention); their “composition” (whether they are balanced or complex), and their “value” (whether they are important). The appraisers and appraised of the judgment resources are also included in this part, much like Affect and Judgment. Table 4 below provides a summary of the statistical outcomes.

Table 4. Types and percentages of Appreciation resources

TYPE	PERCENTAGE
REACTION-POSITIVE	5%
REACTION-NEGATIVE	0%
COMPOSITION-POSITIVE	5%
COMPOSITION-NEGATIVE	32%
VALUATION-POSITIVE	32%
VALUATION-NEGATIVE	24%

The table illustrates the occurrences of different types of Appreciation with polarity. It is obvious from the table that Positive Valuation and Negative composition comprised the largest segment of the total (32%), followed by Negative Valuation. Positive Reaction and Positive Composition accounted for the same percentage (5%) while there was no occurrence of negative reaction. This implies the complexity of the flood, the difficulties in rehabilitating after the flood and the significance of the reconstructions in the aftermath. The following examples demonstrate the manifestation of such evaluations.

(12) “Measures are needed (positive valuation) to decrease the water level at the Đắc N’ting reservoir in Quảng Sơn Commune, Đắc G’long District in Đắc Nông Province.”

(13) “Regarding the landslides at the Đắc N’ting reservoir, the inspection team suggested that immediate (positive valuation) measures should be taken to lower the water level in the reservoir. This action was essential to reduce the risk of dam breaches and proactively respond to upcoming rounds of heavy rains and floods.”

As illustrated in examples (12) and (13) the measures taken to address the problem of the floods were taken positively. It is in accordance with the target of the authority in assisting the Affected participants to bounce back as fast as possible.

(14) “Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Nguyễn Hoàng Hiệp requested Đắk Nông Province to prioritise the safety of people amid the complex and unpredictable (negative composition) developments of flooding and landslides triggered by prolonged heavy rains.”

(15) ‘People in HCM City struggled to commute on the flooded streets as the city witnessed heavy (negative composition) rainfall and high tides late yesterday afternoon.’

Most Negative Composition can be found to collocate with the incidence of the flood, i.e. “heavy” describing the rainfall and “complex and unpredictable” describing the development of flooding and landslides. This definitely showed the negative attitude of the writer toward the disaster.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the attitude of the Vietnamese newspaper in describing floods by using the evaluation theory and focusing on attitude structures. Based on the research and conversations, two conclusions are reached. First, this study demonstrates that all characteristics of the attitudinal source may be found in newspapers. The most frequent one was Appreciation, followed by Affect and Judgement. As a result, it may be said that while reporting on floods, Vietnamese publications prefer to highlight the attitude toward the intricacy of the disaster and the urgency of the rehabilitation works rather than expressing the feelings or emotions experienced by the emoter (Affect).

This study also made a substantial contribution to the development of the appraisal theory by representing its applicability and illuminating values. In essence, this study also captures insights into the framing and narration of flood news. The research conducted for this paper aims to investigate the systemic functional nature of assessing flood news bulletins in Vietnam; however, certain aspects still require improvement. Future studies should take into account compiling a larger corpus of catastrophe news data that covers a variety of catastrophic situations.

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Ngôn ngữ đánh giá trong bản tin về lũ lụt ở Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Thảm họa là một vấn đề đang được quan tâm của công chúng, nên những tin tức về thảm họa trên báo chí thường xuyên xuất hiện. Trên thực tế, các thảm họa được miêu tả trong tin tức theo những cách cụ thể, theo quy luật, và phản ánh mức độ nghiêm trọng của thảm kịch. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là tìm hiểu cách báo chí Việt Nam đưa tin về thiên tai, cụ thể là lũ lụt. Lý thuyết đánh giá (Martin & White, 2005) đã được sử dụng trong nghiên cứu này đánh giá về các đặc điểm ngôn ngữ chỉ thái độ bằng cách sử dụng phương pháp định tính và định lượng. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ 30 bài viết trên ấn phẩm internet của Việt Nam về lũ lụt từ năm 2019 đến đầu năm 2023. Kết quả cho thấy rằng sự đánh giá (Appreciation) là nguồn gốc phổ biến nhất của tất cả các đặc điểm thái độ, tiếp theo là Thái độ (Affect) và phán xét (Judgement). Điều này chứng tỏ nhà báo có xu hướng nêu bật thái độ về lũ lụt hơn là trình bày những tình cảm hay cảm xúc. Bên cạnh đó, ngôn ngữ đánh giá cho thấy thái độ của các nhà báo Việt Nam hướng tới việc nhấn mạnh việc chỉ trích lũ lụt, đồng thời kêu gọi và ca ngợi các hành động đề đối phó và giải quyết tai họa này.

Từ khóa: thái độ; báo chí; lũ lụt; khung đánh giá; ngôn ngữ đánh giá.