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Analysis of Reporting Verbs in Poverty Alleviation Reports in Chinese Mainstream Media--Based on China Daily

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Abstract: *China Daily* is a mainstream English-language media in China and The 13th Five-Year Plan period is the key period for China to eliminate poverty. In this period, there are many poverty alleviation related reports. This paper took the poverty alleviation news reports in *China Daily* during this period as the research object and build corpus with them. Through the reporting verb classification method proposed by Geis, this paper studied the frequency and proportion of positive and negative verbs appear in these reports and discussed the reasons. The study found that positive verbs accounted for more than 88% of the poverty alleviation-related reports in *China Daily*, taking up the majority of all reporting verbs, while negative verbs accounted for less than 12% of all reporting words. The results were also compared with previous related studies to analyze the political stance and self-constructed national image conveyed in politics-related reports in *China Daily*. The contrast between positive and negative verbs is explained with the help of Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis framework: description, interpretation and explanation. This study related the percentage of positive and negative reporting words with poverty alleviation achievements, China's sense of responsibility for the international community, and national governance capacity. At the end of the article, some shortcomings of this study were also suggested for futher study.

Keywords: Poverty Alleviation Reports, Reporting Verb, News Discourse Analysis, *China Daily*

1. Introduction

News discourse analysis is a field that has received considerable attention from many scholars in recent years. "On the surface, news production is carried out within a specific field and has a certain degree of independence and autonomy. But in fact, news production is suppressed by various social powers, so the concept and process of news production are often influenced and even controlled by various factors inside and outside the news field." (Zeng & Wang, 2014: 83) [30]. It can be seen that news discourse is the processed facts rather than the complete reproduction of facts. While reporting, different media outlets often represent different positions, attitudes and opinions on major events that occur in today's society. Xin (2007) emphasized the importance of reported speech in news reporting [26]. He pointed out that it was worth drawing attention to who the reporters quoted, who they did not quote, why they quoted them, and what kind of quotation method they used. Geis (1987) established a categorization of reporting verbs into

positive and negative verbs. What do the percentages of positive and negative verbs tell us? What meanings are conveyed? This paper took the poverty alleviation reports in *China Daily*, a mainstream English newspaper in China, during the 13th Five-Year Plan period as the research object, and analyzed the national image constructed in the reports, so as to provide some suggestions for future reports.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reported Speech and Reporting Verbs

The purpose of reported speech is to enhance the impartiality, objectivity and accuracy of reporting (Zhou & Hu 2010). Jia (2000: 36) defined reported speech as "As opposed to quotation, it is a fragment of discourse that has a guiding and introducing effect on the quotation" and he discussed its semantic and pragmatic functions. It plays an important role in the objectivity of news [8]. In many cases, reporting verbs are used to make news stories appear more objective. Huang

(2009) gave a detailed introduction to the act of paraphrase and reported speech, and explored the fidelity of reported speech [11]. In terms of empirical studies, many domestic scholars (Wang, 2011; Ma, 2013; Hao, 2014) have analyzed reported speech in English master's theses, providing a new perspective for the analysis of paraphrases [10, 18, 23]. In recent years, reported speech has often been placed in an interdisciplinary field for research, mainly focusing on the analysis of academic papers and news discourse analysis.

The focus on reporting verbs has been long held, and they played an important role in the construction of news discourse. Volosinov (1973) pointed out that the meaning of reporting words can be determined only by referring to their context [7]. Therefore, the analysis of reporting verbs should also focuses on their pragmatic functions, and scholars are also supposed to interpret them from multiple perspectives in relation to their contexts and relevant social backgrounds. In 1987, Geis classified reporting verbs into two categories, positive and negative, according to their semantic effects. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a proliferation of studies on reporting verbs, and many scholars (Bergler S, 1993; GEOFF THOMPSON, YE YIYUN, 1991; Sarah Thomas, 1994; Nor Azma Manan, Noorizah Mohd Noor, 2014) have conducted macro-theoretical discussions and investigations, empirical studies, etc [1, 5, 19-20]. The scope of their research also mainly includes dissertation discourse analysis and news report discourse analysis. Many scholars (Jirapanakorn N, 2012; Yilmaz M, Özdem Erturk Z, 2017; Un-udom S, Un-udom N, 2020) have applied a corpus-based method while conducting discourse analysis [9, 22, 29]. In studying national attitudes and policies, news discourse contrast is a very important perspective. Xin (2008) comparatively studied the reporting verbs in *China Daily* and *New York Times*, with the focus on different attitudes of different countries towards the same news event [27]. Liang (2014) compared the reported speech in *People's Daily* and *Washington Post* on Diaoyu Island Incident [15]. Many scholars (Li 2014; Zhao 2018) analyzed reporting verbs in Master's dissertations, with their research angles focusing on reporting verbs' tenses and classification; Liu (2017) compared reporting verbs in social science and natural science dissertations, aiming to help Chinese English speakers use reporting verbs more accurately and construct appropriate academic discourse [13, 17, 31]. It can be seen that the comparison of reporting verbs and the analysis of reported speech are instructive in the fields of political position researches and academic paper writings. In recent years, scholars have continued to broaden the analytical perspective of reporting verbs and attempted to combine the study of reporting verbs with other theories. Yang and Lv (2016) analyzed reporting verbs and discourse structure from a meta-linguistic linguistic perspective so as to help writers of academic papers to improve their ability to use reporting verbs [28]. In terms of comparative analysis, reports of the same social event are often the subject of attention of many scholars. Li (2014) pointed out that when analyzing reporting verbs and information sources for specific case studies, it can be seen

more clearly that there were different ideologies and tendencies behind the choice of reporting verbs, and the choice of reporting verbs usually affected the reading of news readers [12]. Overall, most of the current researches on paraphrase verbs have been integrated with other subject areas to provide an analytical perspective.

2.2. A Study of Poverty Alleviation News Discourse in China

Van Dijk (1988) pointed out that discourse analysis was no longer confined to grammar and linguistics, but belonged to an interdisciplinary field. News discourse analysis, as an interdisciplinary field, is closely related to politics and culture. China has just completed its poverty alleviation plan in 2020, and the discourse analysis of poverty alleviation reports have become one of the hot spots of research. For example, Xiao (2018) analyzed the narratives of poverty alleviation reports in *People's Daily* and *Sichuan Daily*, concluding that both media outlets aimed to build a positive and active image of poverty alleviation work, but it did not pay enough attention to the civil perspective; Li (2020) analyzed China's poverty alleviation policy discourse from the perspective of pragmatics since the reform and opening up, analyzing the policy discourse and its role in different contexts; Ma (2020) used Fairclough's discourse analysis theory to interpret Xi Jinping's discourse on poverty alleviation since the 19th National Congress, discussing its embedded discursive power in terms of the construction of social facts, social identity, and public opinion, pointing out its positive effect on poverty alleviation. Analysis of reports on poverty alleviation events can help us better understand China's national image as a big country [14].

Currently, the analysis of reporting verbs in news discourse is increasing, and scholars are increasingly concerned with discourse analysis and national image building as well as national policy making. However, there is still a gap in the analysis of reporting verbs in *China Daily*'s coverage of poverty alleviation in China, so this study analyzed the reporting verbs in the English version of *China Daily* in order to offer some suggestions for subsequent coverage.

3. Research Content

3.1. Research Object

By the end of 2020, China completed the task of poverty eradication on schedule, the population benefited from poverty reduction accounted for more than 70% of global poverty reduction population in the same period, and China's achievements in poverty alleviation are evident to the whole world. It is a great miracle created by China that the education, health care, and network communication of the people in the areas out of poverty have been greatly improved, and the quality of life of the people has been significantly upgraded. China's poverty alleviation efforts date back to 1949, and the 13th Five-Year Plan period is the decisive stage in the fight against poverty, which finally achieved the poverty reduction goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development ten years ahead of schedule.

The object of this study were *China Daily'*s poverty alleviation reports during the 13th Five-Year Plan period. The 13th Five-Year Plan period was a critical period for China's poverty alleviation efforts, and the final achievements were remarkable. During this period, *China Daily* provided comprehensive and multifaceted coverage of poverty alleviation efforts under the leadership of the Party and the government. As one of the mainstream English newspapers in China, its reports have considerable authority and credibility.

Using poverty alleviation and poverty reduction as keywords, the web version of *China Daily* was searched with a date range of January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2020 (i.e., the 13th Five-Year Plan period), and the corpus was built with the search results, named by date in the format of 2016010101. If there were multiple reports, they were numbered as 02, 03, etc. after the date, and 1250 reports were finally identified after artificial reading and screening the relevance of the reports. Since this study used Antconc 3.5.8.0 as the corpus processing software to search for relevant reporting verbs and to calculate their word frequencies, and only the texts were analyzed, so invalid information such as pictures, audio and video were excluded and only the text was kept. Finally, a total of 518,503 morphological characters were counted by Antconc 3.5.8.0.

3.2. Research Method

This study was based on a self-built corpus, using AntConc 3.5.8.0, to count the positive and negative verbs appearing in the corpus; with the help of Excel, the classification of the reporting verbs was based on the classification method proposed by Geis. This study took Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis framework: description-interpretation-explanation to analyze the reporting verbs that appear in them. Based on statistical results, emotional bias and self-constructed national image in the reports on poverty alleviation were discussed [6].

3.3. Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the reporting verbs with Antconc 3.5.8.0, focusing on the following three questions.
1. What affective tendencies are reflected in the reporting verbs in *China Daily*?
2. What national images are shaped by these emotional tendencies?
3. What can be improved in the current coverage?

3.4. Analysis of the Results

Geis divided reporting verbs into two categories, positive and negative verbs in *The Language of Politics*. In this book, he pointed out that positive verbs would impress the readers by "cautious, persuasive, successful, accurate and calm", while negative verbs by "rash, weak, unsuccessful, inaccurate and excitable" (Geis, 1997:130). With this classification, the corpus was searched by inputting the corresponding positive and negative verbs. Then their frequencies were counted, and finally the results were ranked by word frequency. The results were as follows (word frequencies in parentheses).

***Table 1.** Positive verbs.*

assert (2)	caution (3)	assure (3)	explain (5)	reaffirm (7)
endorse (9)	praise (10)	repeat (10)	predict (12)	acknowledge (15)
cite (15)	reiterate (16)	indict (17)	invite (31)	recall (32)
advise (33)	detail (34)	review (40)	draw (48)	propose (50)
suggest (63)	maintain (90)	agree (91)	note (148)	stress (183)
inform (244)	continue (244)	know (284)	offer (314)	term (316)
add (835)				

***Table 2.** Negative verbs.*

accuse (1)	confess (1)	extol (1)	mutter (1)	trumpet (1)
vilify (2)	slash (3)	brag (4)	shrug (4)	tout (4)
blame (5)	attack (6)	argue (9)	complain (9)	appeal (11)
insist (13)	crack (26)	claim (39)	Label (59)	call (291)

[*]: There are forty words in each category under the Geis classification criteria, and those with a frequency of zero do not appear in the tables above.

According to Geis' classification criteria, the number of both positive and negative verbs was forty [4]. After inputting and searching by Antconc 3.5.8.0, it was found that 31 of the positive verbs were found in the poverty alleviation reports. With a frequency of 3204, they account for 77.5% of the total reporting words. While at the same time, only 20 of the negative verbs were found in the reports, accounting for 50% of the total and their frequency were 490. The frequency of the positive verbs was about 6.5 times higher than that of the negative verbs. The total number of positive and negative verbs was 3694, of which positive verbs accounted for 88.3% and negative verbs accounted only for 11.7%.

In terms of the comparison between positive and negative verbs, positive verbs are absolutely dominant in *China Daily*'s poverty alleviation reports, which is consistent with the results obtained by Xin (2008) when comparing *China Daily* and *New York Times*, which pointed that the frequency and proportion of positive verbs in *China Daily* were higher than those in *New York Times*, while the frequency and proportion of negative verbs are lower than those in *New York Times* [27]. The frequency and proportion of positive verbs in *China Daily* are higher than those in *New York Times*, while the frequency and proportion of negative verbs are lower than those in *New York Times*. China is the largest

developing country in the world and is on the path of socialism under the leadership of the Party. Achieving a moderately prosperous society is a big step toward national rejuvenation, and the predominant use of positive words in the report is consistent with the contribution of this historic achievement to the Chinese people and the world. The lack of negative verbs highlights the nature of poverty alleviation as a positive event for the benefit of the country and the people on the one hand. On the other hand, it reflects China's recognition and pride in its own poverty alleviation achievements.
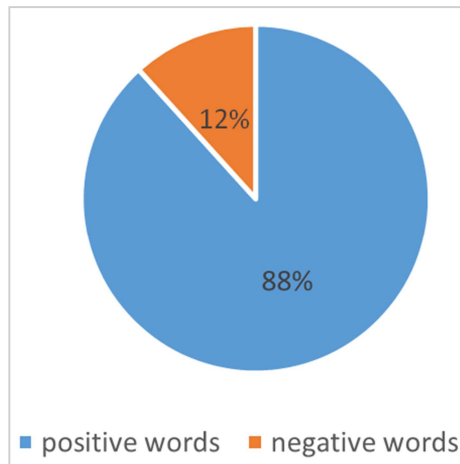

Figure 1. Distribution of positive and negative verbs in China Daily's poverty alleviation reports.

Among the positive verbs, the first five in frequency are add, term, offer, know, continue and inform (where continue and inform are the same in frequency). And example sentences as follows show the use of positive verbs in the context.

Example 1: Areas that are suffering from extreme poverty should be prioritized to ensure that the targets can be met on time, he added. (2017022301)

This was stated by President Xi when he chaired a collective study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. Sun (2015) pointed out that precise poverty alleviation emphasizes poverty alleviation in a "localized and realistic" manner, which means that on the basis of accurate identification of poverty targets, the guidance is classified according to different regional conditions, different poverty attributes, different causes of poverty and different poverty needs [21]. As early as 2017, President Xi reminded relevant leading cadres not to underestimate the difficulty of poverty alleviation and to give sufficient attention to areas of extreme poverty. His action showed the great attention poverty alleviation has received at the national level and China's determination to alleviate poverty.

Example 2: Xia Gengsheng, deputy director of the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, said the country's poverty alleviation undertaking should have a clear direction, its achievements should be consolidated and a long-term mechanism to resolve

relative poverty should be established. (2019112601)

Poverty alleviation is a long and arduous task that requires great patience. To achieve better results, it's necessary to classify the causes of poverty. In the process of helping people to get out of poverty, some major diseases have become roadblocks. In order to effectively promote the progress of poverty alleviation, the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development and other related departments have launched medical poverty alleviation programs to help individuals and families who were impoverished due to illness. The efforts, scope and scale of China's poverty alleviation is great and the results of poverty alleviation are world-renowned. China's experience in poverty alleviation is worth learning from for many other developing countries and China is willing to share experience with them.

Example 3: Bai Enze, manager of an agricultural company called Hexing, said with the support of the government, the company cut the prices of agricultural supplies by 15 percent and offered farmers free soil tests to optimize their fertilizer formula. (2020031001)

In 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 halted the production of factories, and the income of villagers in Inner Mongolia was affected considerably as a result. In order to reduce the losses of local farmers, with the help of the government, agricultural companies lowered the prices of agricultural appliances, bringing tangible benefits to contemporary farmers. The year of 2020 is the last year of the battle against poverty, and despite the negative impact of the epidemic, poverty alleviation efforts were still carried out in an orderly manner under the leadership of the government, which showed that the country cared for its people in every aspect.

Example 4: "We don't want to help poor people by only offering them fish, but enable them to be self-reliant so they know how to fish for themselves," Ma said. (2017120201)

This was said by Jack Ma, the founder of the Ali Foundation for Poverty Alleviation. As a representative of private enterprises, he wanted to make people below the poverty line learn to get out of poverty by themselves. In addition to the government's efforts, it can be seen that many private companies were also actively involved in poverty alleviation and making their own contributions. Poverty alleviation in China is a great cause that concerns everyone's life and a great number of people are involved in this process.

Example 5: Antonio Guterres, UN secretary-general, also sent a congratulatory letter to the forum, saying China's experience in poverty relief can provide valuable lessons, and encouraged China to continue its leadership in global poverty reduction. (2018110201)

In the process of poverty alleviation in China, milestones had also been achieved. In 2018, when summarizing the past work on poverty alleviation, General Secretary Xi said that in the past four decades, China has created a miracle, lifting more than 700 million people out of extreme poverty. In the future, China is willing to make its own contribution to global poverty reduction efforts and advance the global poverty reduction process, which reflects China's will to

make contribution to the whole world as the largest developing country and its active promotion of building a community of human destiny. China's achievements have won the attention of the international community, and its experience in poverty alleviation is worth learning by the other countries.

Example 6: "The approach was speaking of tangible results," he said. "I think this informed the whole strategy. This is indicative of the seriousness of these efforts." (2019031301).

This was the comment of Monia, director of the Africa-China Research Center at the University of Johannesburg, after seeing the outcome of China's poverty alleviation efforts. China's poverty alleviation efforts, after all the hardships, have finally achieved substantial results. With people's living standards rising, the government's efforts to alleviate poverty have been recognized worldwide. Dang (2019) summed up the experience of poverty alleviation since China's reform and opening up [2]. In her opinion, poverty is one of the main development problems faced by the international community. Effective governance and getting rid of poverty is an important embodiment of the government's ability to govern the country. China's poverty alleviation achievements speak volumes about the government's governance capacity and people in the country all benefit from it.

The proportion of negative verbs is small among all reporting verbs, but they still deserve attention. If the proportion of positive verbs in the report is too high, the objectivity and truthfulness of the report will be affected. Among the negative verbs, the most frequent ones are call, label and claim. They can also be analyzed in the context.

Example7: He also called on the region to develop modern equipment manufacturing, modern services and other emerging sectors like new material, biomedicine, electronics and information, energy conservation, and environmental protection to lend fresh growth momentum. (2018030601)

China's economy has transitioned from a rapid growth phase to a high quality development phase. The economic development mode advocated now is intensive, in which technology plays a big role. Improving the quality of economic development can achieve greater development results, and is also in line with the development concept of "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" advocated by the state. President Xi encouraged the development of emerging industries under the premise of saving resources and protecting the environment, which aims not only to improve people's living standards now, but also for the long-term interests of the country.

Example8: Moreover, each of those counties that had been labeled impoverished now has a healthcare service center, a public service center and public schools, meeting specific goals of the nation's poverty alleviation efforts. (2020111801)

In November 2013, General Secretary Xi Jinping first proposed precise poverty alleviation during his inspection in Xiangxi, Hunan Province, and it has achieved good results since then. Precise identification and precise help are the important reasons why China has achieved great results in poverty alleviation. There were indicators by which the government could identify poor areas and there were standards to judge whether the areas were out of poverty. With the multi-faceted support for poor areas, the level of education, medical care and public services being improved, people's "sense of gain" in development has been effectively enhanced. On the road to overall prosperity, China has not let anyone fall behind.

Example 9: The central government plans to spot-check 283 counties which claimed they had been lifted out of poverty last year, a senior official said at a news conference on Tuesday. (2019070203)

This is a scene of the central government's inspection work in the process of poverty alleviation, from which people in China can see that the Party and State's high concern for people's livelihood. The efforts of poverty alleviation cannot be faked, and the quality of life of the people in the areas out of poverty must be really improved. China's poverty alleviation process and results are real and effective, and the governmnets also make sure that the areas out of poverty cannot return to poverty again. The state has supervised the whole process and the results of poverty alleviation, thus ensuring that all people were benefited on the road to a well-off society and solidly improved the people's sense of achievement.

Dong (2013) pointed out that "Because it is a journalistic rule to maintain the objectivity and neutrality of news reporting, the objectivity of news is explicit while the subjectivity is implicit". In many cases, readers believe that the news they read is objective and unbiased [3]. However, in the actual news reporting, different positions also tend to influence the use of news language. Xin (2008) pointed out that the content and purpose of news reports and the stance and attitude of the reporters have an impact on the use of reporting verbs [27]. *China Daily*, as one of China's important foreign propaganda channels, generally tends to construct a positive national image of leading people to alleviate poverty in terms of the actual use of positive and negative verbs in poverty reduction-related reports. China's poverty alleviation is one of the world's great miracles, and in the process, people's standard of living has been actually improved. The reporting verb used by *China Daily* in making its report is dominant by positive words. On the one hand, this is in line with China's overall process of poverty alleviation and the goals it has achieved. On the other hand, it is a positive outreach to the outside world, highlighting the advantages of the socialist system and China's responsibility and role as a great power in global governance.

4. Conclusion

This study has classified the reporting verbs in *China Daily* based on a self-constructed corpus, and then their emotional tendencies and the constructed national images in the reports on poverty alleviation were discussed. Liu & Han (2004) thought in news discourse, the author's direct

involvement as a participant in the message conveyed by the discourse can make the news report highly subjective [16]. It was found that in news reports, features, and commentaries, author often adopted the role of the participant. Xin (2005) pointed out that language and ideology were inextricably linked. While analyzing the language of Chinese news report, scholars were also exploring the political stance of China [25]. At the end of 2020, China has achieved full prosperity, and people's living standards have improved significantly. China is a socialist country with the unique institutional advantages of socialism. The extensive use of positive verbs among *China Daily*'s poverty alleviation reports has helped to highlight the advantages of socialism and build a positive national image, which is consistent with the findings of Xin (2008), and Xiao (2018): *China Daily* is the representative of the mainstream English newspapers in China, which portrays a positive image of the country [24, 27]. Meanwhile, the proportion of positive verbs is much higher than that of negative verbs, creating an image of a political party that wholeheartedly serves the people in the reports and reflecting the national situation where people's living standards have actually been improved.

While reporting on China's poverty alleviation process, *China Daily*, as a mainstream English-language newspaper in China, has a disproportionately high frequency of positive verbs. The frequency of negative verbs can be increased appropriately, thus the truthfulness and objectivity of the reports can be further improved. At the same time, there are some limitations in this study. First, the time period of the corpus in this study is only five years during the 13th Five-Year Plan period, while the process of poverty alleviation in China has been promoted for many years. The time period of the study can be extended in the future to help readers better understand the achievements of poverty alleviation in China. Scholars can compare the poverty alleviation discourses of China and foreign mainstream media in different periods, such as before and after the reform and opening up, and analyze the attitude and viewpoint conveyed in these reports. What's more, the corpus was built based on a single newspaper, *China Daily*. In the future, further research can be conducted on poverty alleviation reports by using domestic and foreign mainstream English newspapers as corpus sources for comparison. Through comparative studies, scholars and readers can understand poverty alleviation in China more comprehensively and more objectively. Finally, this paper only adopted Geis' classification criteria for positive and negative verbs, and the study of verbs can be classified from more perspectives to futher increase the reliability of research.

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