Appraisal Theory

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The appraisal framework, developed by Martin and White and their colleagues in the 1990s and 2000s (see, for example, Iedema, Feez, & White, 1993; Martin & White, 2005), provides for analyses of those meanings by which texts convey positive or negative assessments, by which the intensity or directness of such attitudinal utterances is strengthened or weakened and by which speakers/writers engage dialogistically with prior speakers or with potential respondents to the current proposition. These meaning-making resources are grouped together as the "language of evaluation" on the grounds that they are all means by which the speaker's/writer's personal, evaluative involvement in the text is revealed as they adopt stances either toward phenomena (the entities, happenings, or states of affairs being construed by the text) or toward metaphenomena (propositions about these entities, happenings, and states of affairs).

Early work on the appraisal framework largely focused on evaluative meanings in English, with this literature noting that no assumptions should be made as to whether the evaluative categories proposed for English necessarily operate in other languages. Subsequently, researchers have employed the descriptive principles that underlie the framework in work on other languages and in work that compares and contrasts evaluative meanings across languages (see, for example, Thomson & White, 2008).

The view of language adopted by the architects of the appraisal framework is that of the systemic functional linguistic theory of Halliday and his associates (Halliday, 1994). Accordingly they hold that meaning-making can usefully be divided into three broad modes, or what Halliday terms "metafunctions": (1) "ideational" meaning by which language construes the world of experience, (2) "interpersonal" meaning by which speakers/writers enact social roles, personas, and relationships, and (3) "textual" meaning by which these ideational and interpersonal meanings are organized into coherent texts appropriate for a given communicative setting. The evaluative meanings described by the appraisal framework provide some of the mechanisms by which the "interpersonal" metafunction operates, in that they present speakers/writers as revealing their feelings, tastes, and opinions with greater or lesser degrees of intensity and directness, as construing propositions as more or as less contentious or warrantable, and as thereby aligning or disaligning with value positions in play in the current communicative context.

Within the model of the interpersonal metafunction proposed by Martin (1997) these resources of "appraisal" operate alongside two other interpersonal systems: those communicative resources by which speakers/writers perform speech functions such as asserting, questioning, responding, commanding, advising, and offering,

and the system of meanings by which speakers indicate greater or lesser degrees of "involvement" with those they address—for example via the use of slang, jargon, specialist terms, and the informal lexis associated with social intimacy. Thus in this model, full accounts of the interpersonal workings of a text, that is, full accounts of the social roles, identities, and relationships being enacted will attend simultaneously to patterns in the speech functions being performed, to patterns in how "involvement" is managed, and to patterns in the use of the evaluative positionings dealt with under the rubric of "appraisal."

Attitude: Positive/negative assessments

Within the appraisal literature, the term "attitude" is used to reference the subsystem of evaluative meanings by which addressees are positioned to adopt a positive or negative view vis-à-vis experiential phenomena or propositions about those phenomena. A taxonomy of these positively or negatively attitudinal meanings is provided which is sensitive to such issues as the basis for the attitudinal assessment, the nature of what is being assessed, what is at stake socially, and whether the attitude is conveyed explicitly or implicitly. Via this taxonomy, attending as it does to parameters of evaluative variability, an account is offered of what is at stake when one subtype of attitudinal meaning, rather than another, is employed. Thus the framework offers an account of the "valeur" relations which operate in this semantic space.

More specifically, the appraisal literature divides attitudinal meanings into the following three broad subtypes: (1) positive/negative assessment presented as emotional reactions (labeled "affect"), (2) positive/negative assessments of human behavior and character by reference to ethics/morality and other systems of conventionalized or institutionalized norms (labeled "judgment"), and (3) assessments of objects, artifacts, texts, states of affairs, and processes in terms of how they are assigned value socially (labeled "appreciation"), that is, in terms of their aesthetic qualities, their potential for harm or benefit, their social salience, and so on. These three higher level categories are then further divided into more delicate subcategories. For example judgment (assessments of human behavior by reference to social norms) is subclassified into those assessments that involve breaches or upholding of ethical and legal values (termed values of "social sanction") and those that put at risk one's esteem in the community but which are not of an ethical or moral nature (assessments of psychological disposition, capacity, and normality, termed "social esteem"). For a full account of these attitudinal categories and subcategories, see Martin and White (2005, ch. 2).

Examples of these three broad categories of attitudinal assessment are provided. *Attitude: Appreciation* (assessment of artifacts, entities, happenings, and states of affairs by reference to aesthetics and other systems of social valuation).

> Thirty years ago this week, Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy set out for work at the White House in a brand-new suit, the *nicest* [*Appreciation—positive assessment by reference to aesthetic impact*] one he'd ever owned. (http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-03-27/news/ct-met-mccarthy-reagan-shooting-20110327_1_secret-service-tim-mccarthy-new-agents)

Attitude: Judgment (assessment of human behavior and/or character by reference to ethics and other social norms).

> The *quick-thinking* [*Judgment—a positive assessment of human capacity*] and incredible *heroism* [*Judgement—positive assessment of human tenacity*] of Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy probably saved the 70-year-old President Reagan from taking another bullet. (http://deadpresidents.tumblr.com/post/50800949929/there-is-that-saying-that-secret-service-agents-are)

Attitude: Affect (assessment as an emotional reaction).

> Asked if he ever wished the coin toss had gone the other way, McCarthy gives an uncharacteristic—but still brief—pause before answering.
>
> "No," he said. "I'm *glad* I got to do it. I'm *glad* [*Affect—positive assessment via emotional reaction of satisfaction*] I got to do what I was trained to do. I wouldn't want it another way." (http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-03-27/news/ct-met-mccarthy-reagan-shooting-20110327_1_secret-service-tim-mccarthy-new-agents/2)

The appraisal framework also makes a distinction between the explicit "inscription" of attitudinal meanings by means of positively or negatively attitudinal expressions of the type just exemplified and the conveying of attitude via various mechanisms of implication and association, termed "attitudinal invocation." Such invocation is exemplified in the following:

> George W. Bush delivered his inaugural speech as the United States President who collected 537,000 fewer votes than his opponent. (*The Observer*, January 21, 2001, leader page)

There are no explicitly negative (or positive) terms in this utterance and yet it has the potential to activate negative assessments of the US presidential election processes and/or the Bush presidency, at least for those readers who bring to their interpretation of the text certain expectations as to how elections should be decided in democracies such as the United States. These attitudinal assessments are "invoked" rather than "inscribed" in that they arise via processes of implicature, and not via explicit assertion of attitudinal values.

A key point made in the appraisal literature about such attitudinal meaning-making is that individual lexical items typically do not have fixed attitudinal meanings that are stable across all textual settings. Rather, attitudinal meanings are activated by combinations of words in particular cotextual settings. Accordingly the same term can be associated with different attitudinal meanings in different settings. This point can be illustrated by considering the following two uses of the term *retro*.

> In Blur's respect for The Kinks, Elastica's fondness for art-punk, and Oasis's wide-eyed Beatles-worship, there was a clear sense of the arrival of a generation steeped in a new classicism—what came to be maligned as "*retro*."

> We could have a carnival queen competition in the village hall and they'd all wear bikinis and I could be the judge! It would be brilliant—all *retro* and very villagey and totally wonderful. (Collins Word Banks corpus of English, http://www.collins.co.uk/page/Wordbanks+Online)

Graduation: Force and semantic focus

A key parameter of variation in interpersonal meaning-making is the degree of the speaker/writer's personal investment in the propositions being advanced in the text. The appraisal framework deals with this parameter by reference to notions of "force" (meanings by which propositions are strengthened or mitigated) and of "focus" (meanings by which the boundaries of semantic categories can be blurred or sharpened). A distinction is made between intensifications/mitigations where the scaling semantic is fused with another meaning in a single lexical item and those where the scaling is conveyed via an isolated term.

Force (intensification/mitigation): fused.

> Agent McCarthy, … in a *superhero* [*intensified judgment*] move, used his body as a shield. (http://deadpresidents.tumblr.com/post/50800949929/there-is-that-saying-that-secret-service-agents-are)

Force (intensification/mitigation): isolated.

> "It was a *very* [*intensified appreciation*] new suit, so it wasn't one of those cheap suits I had." (http://www.voanews.com/content/victims-recall-reagan-assassination-attempt-30-years-later-118953314/174624.html)

Focus (sharpening/blurring of semantic boundaries).

> Agent McCarthy has shifted his body into a wide stance and is *literally* [*Focus — indicating a sharply focused concept of "shielding" applies here*] shielding President Reagan. (http://deadpresidents.tumblr.com/post/50800949929/there-is-that-saying-that-secret-service-agents-are)

For the further, more delicate subclassifications of "Force" proposed in the appraisal literature, see Martin and White (2005, ch. 3).

Engagement: Resources of dialogistic positioning

Under the appraisal framework all the following formulations are analyzed as involving mechanisms by which speakers/writers adopt different stances vis-à-vis the attitudinal propositions being advanced and are accordingly dealt with as instances of dialogistic "engagement." (The utterances have been invented for the purpose of demonstrating the range of meanings included in this category.)

1. The media has been lying in its coverage of the gun-control debate.
2. Obviously the media has been lying in its coverage of the gun-control debate.
3. Admittedly the media has been lying …
4. The facts of the matter are that the media has been lying …
5. The media, of course, has been lying …
6. It's probable the media has been lying …

7. In my view the media has been lying …
8. It seems that the media has been lying …
9. In the report of his investigation he proves that the media has been lying …
10. Some people believe that the media has been lying …
11. The author contends that the media has been lying in its coverage of the gun-control debate …
12. The author claims that the media has been lying …
13. Supposedly the media has been lying …

By such formulations speakers/writers indicate greater or lesser degrees of personal investment in the proposition and mark it as more or as less contentious, agreed-upon, or otherwise dialogistically problematic.

These, of course, are formulations which have variously been dealt with elsewhere in the literature under such headings as metadiscourse (for example Instances 2, 4, and 5) evidentiality (2 and 8), modality (6 and 7), and attribution (9 – 13). In this literature it is often the case that such formulations are by reference to notions of speaker/writer certainty, knowledge or commitment to the "truth value" of the proposition. For example, writing about what he terms "evidentiality," Chafe (1986, p. 262) states: "What gives coherence to the set under consideration is that everything dealt with under this broad interpretation of evidentiality involves attitudes to knowledge."

In dealing with these meanings, White (2000, 2003) and Martin and White (2005) are influenced by Bakhtinian/Voloshinovian notions of dialogism, as exemplified in the following citation.

> [each verbal communication] inevitably orients itself with respect to previous performances in the same sphere … Thus the … verbal performance engages, as it were, in ideological colloquy of a large scale: it responds to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support, and so on. (Voloshinov, 1995, p. 139)

Accordingly they hold that such meanings are best understood, not in truth functional terms (i.e., as not necessarily concerned with authorial certainty or commitment to truth value) but rather as providing for different possibilities by which the authorial voice positions itself vis-à-vis the diversity of other voices and alternative viewpoints that always apply in any communicative event. Thus for example, so-called epistemic modals (for example, *may*, *might*, *must*, *possibly*, *probably*) are not treated as necessarily communicating degrees of authorial certainty or assessments of reliability but, rather, as functioning to ground the proposition in the speaker/writer's contingent subjectivity and therefore "opening up dialogic space" for alternative voices and viewpoints.

More generally, in line with the Bakhtinian/Voloshinovian notion of dialogism, the appraisal framework interprets all such meanings as orienting the speaker/writer either to what has been said previously on the same subject (or is presented as likely to have been said) or to what is likely to be said in response to the current proposition. Thus, for example, a formulation such as "the facts of the matter are that …" (Instance 4 above) can be interpreted in dialogistic terms as a "pronouncement" by which the speaker/writer fends off alternative viewpoints by indicating a heightened

personal investment in the proposition. Such formulations accordingly, are classified as "dialogistically contractive" in that, even while the speaker/writer engages with possible alternative positions by confronting them, he/she nevertheless suppresses those alternatives. Such "contractive" formulations stand in contrast to formulations involving attribution, evidentials, or modals that are dialogistically "expansive" in that they make available space for alternative positions by grounding the proposition in an individual, contingent subjectivity (either that of the speaker/writer or the quoted source.)

One key consequence of this perspective is that all utterances are seen as involving stance-taking on the part of the speaker/writer and hence as involving some form of dialogistic engagement. Thus even bare, categorical assertions (that is, formulations such as Instance 1 above) should be understood as "stanced" in the sense that they present the current proposition as not in conflict or tension with any alternative position, as so dialogistically unproblematic in the current communicative context that no acknowledgment of, or engagement with, dialogistic alternatives is required. This is, of course, of itself a "stance."

Conclusion

The classifications and subclassifications of evaluative meaning developed in the appraisal literature are formulated so as to provide a map of the "valeur" relations operating in the domains of attitudinal and dialogistic meaning-making, a map of how the different meaning-making options relate to each other and what is at stake when one, rather than another, is employed in an utterance. The appraisal framework accordingly makes possible nuanced explanations of the particular evaluative workings of individual texts and, similarly, nuanced accounts of how texts are similar or different according to their particular evaluative arrangements. Thus it offers the possibility of new insights into how texts enact individual and collective identities, into the evaluative dispositions of particular registers and genres, into how speakers/writers may manage relations of solidarity and power, and into the workings of texts which function to persuade and influence public opinion.

SEE ALSO: Critical Discourse Analysis; Emotion and Affect; Evaluative Language; Heteroglossia; Metadiscourse; Modality; Stance-Taking; Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Further reading

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