

A Study of Metadiscourse Features in English News Reports

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Abstract

This paper combines quantity analysis and quality analysis together and selects ten English reports about North Korea's nuclear test in 2016 to analyze the metadiscourse features. These reports are reported in 24 hours after the test happened. Hyland's classification method of metadiscourse is used in this paper to classify the metadiscourse of the ten reports. The study finally finds out that in the nuclear test reports, interactional metadiscourse is used for 223 times, which is more than interactive metadiscourse (N=166). This result shows the features of news reports. In these reports, the using of attitude markers and boosters shows the strong opposed attitude of different countries to the nuclear test, which makes a clear contrast to the attitude of North Korea.

Keywords: nuclear test, English report, metadiscourse

1. Introduction

In 6th January 2016, North Korea claims that it has successfully carried out its first hydrogen bomb test. This news draws the attention of the world. Some countries have announced their opinions to this test, in which there exist a lot of critical and doubted voices. The major medias also actively report the nuclear test and give some related comments. News reports can show the author's ideas as well as other speakers' opinions. Readers can also get different information from the news reports. News reports have gained extensive attention of many scholars. Different theories and methods are used to analyze the news reports discourse. Due to the features of metadiscourse, it is mentioned in these years to analyze the news reports.

This paper analyzes ten reports about North Korea's nuclear test which were published in 24 hours after the test had happened and observes the metadiscourse features of the ten reports to discuss these features and analyze the implied meanings.

Metadiscourse is first proposed by Harris in 1959. It shows the speaker's intention and purpose. The speaker uses metadiscourse to lead the listener and makes the listener can understand his intention better. Hyland (1998) concludes that metadiscourse is an important pragmatic concept that lets us know how the writer attempts to exert influence on perceptions of the reader about the text, and to make the reader understand their personalities and attitudes toward the text and the propositional information. A lot of scholars have analyzed metadiscourse from different aspects since it was proposed. Some other scholars also use metadiscourse to analyze classroom teaching and academic papers. These years, there are a lot of researches about the metadiscourse in China. Huang Qin and Xiong Yao compared the metadiscourse features of English and Chinese in English and Chinese news comments and news features from the news discourse. They found out that the reason that why the using of metadiscourse in Chinese and English is different may be the different ways of thinking in the two cultures. Zhou Qijun compared the differences of metadiscourse using in liberal art and science academic papers. He found out that the frequency of interaction metadiscourse in literal art academic papers is lower than science academic papers, but the types of metadiscourse in literal art academic papers are more variety. The abstracts of science academic papers manly stand out the authors' own ideas. Xin Zhiying and Huang Guowen analyzed the evaluation-assigning function of metadiscourse and found out that metadiscourse is an important approach to written discourse analysis. Scholars in other countries also pay attention to the metadiscourse research. Ken Hyland Classified

metadiscourse into interactive and interactional metadiscourse and studied the features metadiscourse in academic writing. Esmael Abdollahzadeh investigated the employment of interpersonal metadiscourse in applied linguistics articles written in English by Anglo-American and Iranian academic writers. Gillaerts & Van de Velde took a diachronic study on the interactional metadiscourse in research article abstracts.

This paper is based on Hyland's classification method of metadiscourse and analyses the using of metadiscourse in ten news reports about the North Korea's nuclear test to find out the metadiscourse features of the news reports about the North Korea's nuclear test in 2016.

2. Theoretical frameworks

In 1959, Harris first put up with the concept of metadiscourse, but he did not give a clear definition to it. Subsequently, some scholars have studied on metadiscourse. Williams is the first person who uses "metadiscourse" and defines it as "writing about writing, whatever does not refer to the subject matter being addressed" (Williams, 1981). Vande Kopple thinks metadiscourse is "the linguistic material which do not add propositional material but which signals the presence of an author" (Vande Kopple, 1985). Hyland and Tse take metadiscourse as an approach which can organize language, express the author's view and refer to the reader's reaction. This view is accepted by many researchers now. Due to the different cognition of metadiscourse, there are several different classifications of metadiscourse, in which three classifications have a popular influence. Vande Kopple classifies metadiscourse into two types: textual metadiscourse and interpersonal metadiscourse. Crismore classifies textual metadiscourse into discourse markers and explanation markers according to polyfunctionality of metadiscourse and interpersonal metadiscourse is also classified in to five types. Hyland and Tse classify metadiscourse into interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse. Their classification is accepted by most scholars. This paper uses Hyland and Tse's classification. The following figure is the basic classification of metadiscourse by Hyland.

Table 1 Model of metadiscourse

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive resources	Help to guide reader through the text	
Transitions	Express semantic relation between main clauses	In addition/but/thus/and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	Finally/to conclude/my purpose is to
Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above/see Fig./in Section 2
Evidentials	Refer to source of information from other texts	According to X/(Y, 1990)/Z states
Code glosses	Help readers grasp meanings of ideational material	Namely/e.g./such as/in other words
Interactional resources	Involve the reader in the argument	
Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	Might/perhaps/possible/about
Boosters	Emphasise force or writer's certainty in proposition	In fact definitely/it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude proposition	Unfortunately/I to agree/surprisingly
Engagement markers	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	Consider/note that/you can see that
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I/we/my/our

(From Hyland, 2004, p.134)

Interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse shows the textual function and interpersonal function of metadiscourse. Metadiscourse is useful for the establishing of the relationship between readers and authors and it can also lead readers to understand the author's meaning.

3 Research methods

3.1 Collection of Data

The corpus analyzed in this study is mainly collected from BBC and China Daily news website. The author selects 5 news reports respectively from the two website. The release time of the 10 news reports is all in 24 hours after North Korea authority announced their nuclear test, which is from 6th to 7th January. This aims to analyze the first reaction of other countries to this test and analyze the metadiscourse features in these news reports.

3.2 Research questions

Through the analyze of metadiscourse features of news reports about North Korea's nuclear test, this paper aims to answer these questions: (1) What is the frequency of these news reports about North Korea's nuclear test? (2) What is the overall distribution of the two types of metadiscourse? Are there any differences of the distribution? (3) What can we infer from these features?

3.3 Research steps

This study combines quantity analysis and quality analysis together. The author analyzes the metadiscourse markers of ten news reports. The research steps are as follows: (1) Annotate all the metadiscourse of the ten news reports and annotate the interactive and interactional metadiscourse through UAM Corpus Tool 3.0. (2) Annotate the sub-classifications of interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse. (3) Calculate out the frequency and percentage of the two classifications and subclassifications. (4) Analyze the statistics and infer the features and meanings of the ten news reports according to the context and results.

4 Data analysis and discussion

4.1 Interactive metadiscourse features of the English reports about North Korea's nuclear test

Interactive metadiscourse reflects the textual function of metadiscourse. The author can use interactive metadiscourse to organize the discourse and guide the reader. Interactive metadiscourse is classified into transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers evidence markers and code glosses. In news reports, interactive metadiscourse can shows the author's writing flow clearly and makes the reports more coherent. Table 2 shows the distribution situation of interactive metadiscourse in the ten English nuclear test reports:

Table 2 Frequency of interactive metadiscourse in the ten reports

	Frequency	percentage
Transition markers	113	68.07%
Frame markers	9	5.42%
Endophoric markers	1	0.60%
Evidence markers	40	24.10%
Code glosses	3	1.81%
Total	166	100%

Table 2 shows the frequency of the five interactive metadiscourse classifications and the percentage of each classification from the total frequency of interactive metadiscourse. In the ten English reports, interactive metadiscourse appears 166 times.

We can see from table 2 that the frequency of transition markers is 113 times, and the percentage is 68.07%, which is the highest of the five classifications. However, the frequency of endophoric markers is only 1 times, and the percentage is 0.6%. The frequency of evidence markers is more than others, which is 40 times, 24.1% of the total.

Table 2 shows that the frequency of transition markers is the highest, while the frequency of endophoric markers and code glosses are low. Transition markers play a great role in the establishment of discourse. They can make the discourse more fluency and are useful for the author to lead readers to express the author's information and purpose. For example:

(1) Technically yes, *but not yet* the means to deliver it via a missile.

(2) The nuclear test, if confirmed, *not only* challenges the UN Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, *it also* violates a string of UN resolutions already in place against Pyongyang.

In example 1 and 2, *but not yet*, *not only*, *also* are all transition markers. The using of these words makes the discourse more coherent and also emphasizes the author's key point properly. In example 1, what the author wants to point out is "the means to deliver it via a missile". And example 2 also points out that the influence of nuclear test is not only one. Because the ten reports mainly aim to show the information and some comments about the nuclear test, endophoric markers appear a little. To ensure the objective authenticity of news reports, the relevant sides which are mentioned in the reports are all used concrete term rather than endophoric markers. However, the evidence markers appear many times, which also shows the authenticity, and make all the ideas have their provenances. For example:

(3) *According to the statement*, DPRK top leader Kim Jong Un ordered the H-bomb test on Dec 15, 2015, and1 signed the final written order on Sunday.

Thus it can be seen that the interactive metadiscourse features of the English reports about North Korea's nuclear test in 2016 are as follows: the frequency of transition markers is the highest and evidence markers take the second place, which shows the fluency and objective of news. But endophoric markers appear a little, which shows the topic and stress points of these reports are all highlighted.

4.2 Interactional metadiscourse features of the English reports about North Korea's nuclear test

Interactional metadiscourse makes the author get involved into the discourse and expresses the author's ideas and attitude through metadiscourse. Interactional metadiscourse contains hedges, boosters,

attitude markers, self mention and engagement markers. In news reports, interactional metadiscourse can increase readers' reading interest and show the author's idea, which is useful for readers resonate with the author and makes readers have a better understanding to the news events.

Table 3 Frequency of interactional metadiscourse in the ten reports

	Frequency	percentage
Hedges	36	16.14%
Boosters	70	31.39%
Attitude markers	109	48.88%
Self mention	1	0.45%
Engagement markers	7	3.14%
Total	223	100%

Table 3 shows the frequency of occurrence of the five interactional metadiscourse classifications and the percentage of each classification from the total frequency of interactive metadiscourse. In the ten English reports, interactional metadiscourse appears 238 times.

We can see from table 3 that the frequency of attitude markers is 109 times, and the percentage is 48.88%, which is the highest of the five classifications. There are also many boosters, which appears 70 times, 31.39% of the total. Self mention and engagement markers appear a little, which is only 1 times and 7 times, 0.45 and 3.14% of the total.

The much using of attitude markers is to show the attitudes of those countries and North Korea to this event. Meanwhile, it also shows the feature of news reports. For example,

(4) Although both represent *roughly* the same level of threat, a uranium bomb would signify a *huge* technological achievement because¹ the process of distilling natural uranium ore to the stuff suitable for bombs is profoundly *difficult*.

(5) The *unexpected* announcement of the first hydrogen bomb test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) will not only deal a huge blow to the *unpredictable* Korean Peninsula denuclearization process and *unnecessarily* intensify the tensions in Northeast Asia,

In example 4 three attitude markers: *roughly*, *huge*, *difficult* show that the author takes a doubted attitude to this nuclear test. He thinks that the manufacturing process of hydrogen bomb is very complicated and it is impossible for North Korea to take a nuclear test according to its scientific level now. Therefore, he suspects the authenticity of the nuclear test. Attitude markers show this point well. In example 5, the author use three attitude markers, *unexpected*, *unpredictable* and *unnecessarily*, *continuously* to show his astonishment. And these attitude markers show that he takes a dim view to the effect of this nuclear test. Attitude markers can make readers understand the author's thought and show the author's idea clearly.

(6) The test has "proved the technological specifications of the newly developed H-bomb were *accurate and scientifically* verified the power of smaller H-bomb," said the statement.

The example 6 uses two attitude markers to show that North Korea pay much attention to the nuclear test and affirm this test. North Korea's words show its state to the authenticity of this event and the affirmation of its technology.

In a word, North Korea's affirmation and delighted attitude to this test and other countries' opposed and doubted attitude are both showed in interactional metadiscourse and the two make a vivid comparison, which is helpful for readers to have their own idea and attitude.

4.3 The meanings which showed by the metadiscourse features of the English reports about the North Korea's nuclear test

According to the statistics in 4.1 and 4.2, we can see the features of the two classification of metadiscourse. The contrast of interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse is shown in table 3:

Table 4 The contrast of the distribution of interactive and interactional metadiscourse

	Interactive metadiscourse	Interactional metadiscourse	Total
Frequency	166	223	389
Percentage	42.67%	57.33%	100%

Table 4 shows the frequency of occurrence and percentage of the interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse. The percentage of interactive and interactional metadiscourse from the total metadiscourse is 42% and 58%.

We can see from table 4 that the frequency of interactional metadiscourse which is 238 times is more than interactive metadiscourse. The main function of news reports is to spread information, publish the publish opinion and guide the audiences. The news reports about this nuclear test in 24 hours show public's attention to this event. The statistics shows that besides using the interactive metadiscourse to make the reports more fluency and authentic the ten reports also use interactional metadiscourse especially attitude markers and boosters to express the author, North Korea and other countries' attitude and comments. From the attitude markers we can see that North Korea use these words like "successful, scientific" when mentions the nuclear test. Their attitude is completely positive and they think this test is helpful for North Korea's development. But the reports about other countries' statements all use the doubted and opposed words like "unexpected, doubt, condemned". Besides, the using of boosters also stands out the author's attitude. For example,

(7) We *strongly* urge North Korea to abide by her pledges and stop taking any action that might make the situation worse."

(8) "This act is *profoundly* destabilizing for regional security and *seriously* undermines international non-proliferation efforts. I condemn it *unequivocally*."

In example 7 and example 8, the boosters like "strongly, seriously" all help the author to express his ideas and show the stressed meaning. Countries all have a clear attitude to this event, and they all state their opposed attitude to this test at the first time and criticized North Korea's behavior.

Through the analysis about the metadiscourse features of the nuclear test reports, we can know that the first reaction of countries is strongly against and countries also worry about it influences. North Korea has not given any response to other countries comments except for its praise for this nuclear test.

5. Conclusions

Through the analysis of metadiscourse of ten reports about North Korea's nuclear test, the study finds out the frequency of interactional metadiscourse is 223 times, which makes 57.33% of the total frequency of metadiscourse. In interactive metadiscourse, transition markers occupy the highest proportion, 68.07%, which shows the discourse features of news reports. In interactional metadiscourse, attitude markers occupy the highest proportion, 48.88%.

Through the analysis about the statistics, the study finds out that the metadiscourse features of the English news reports about North Korea's nuclear test in 24 hours are the follows: Interactional metadiscourse appear more times than interactive metadiscourse. The frequency of attitude markers and boosters are the highest in interactional metadiscourse, which shows that countries all state their attitude and comment about this event at the first time. Therefore, we can know more about this event through the using of metadiscourse. Besides, we can see from North Korea and other countries' different using of attitude markers and boosters that they have different response to this event. The metadiscourse help readers to have a more deeply understanding of the news reports about this event.

The study in this paper is just limited to metadiscourse research, and the markers about metadiscourse are also somewhat subjective, so the analysis may have some deficiency. The future research can use some other theories to analyze the discourse. Comparative analysis is also feasible.

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