

Appraisal Meanings of English Comment Adjuncts and their Motivations

Yating Li

Department of Foreign Languages, University of Science and Technology, 30

Xueyuan Road, Haidian District, 100083, Beijing

Corresponding author: Yating Li

Email address: 18236510610@163.com

[Abstract] As a lexicogrammatical device for speaker/author to express their attitudes to the whole or part of propositions, Comment Adjuncts in English have always been a hot topic in language research. Different theories have different definitions, division criteria and emphasis for Comment Adjuncts, but they have not formed an in-depth and systemic study on Comment Adjuncts. In addition, despite the long history of research, analyzing Comment Adjuncts based on Appraisal Theory is still a new attempt. Therefore, in combination with Subjectivity Theory, this article explores the appraisal meanings of Comment Adjuncts, namely the meanings of attitude, engagement and graduation, and their motivations, based on observations of authentic instances in COCA corpus. Through analysis, it is shown that Comment Adjuncts are rich in appraisal meanings, and the motivation for appraisal meanings is closely related to the speaker's subjectivity. This article hopes to provide a new perspective for the study on Comment Adjuncts and to attract the attention of teachers and students to Comment Adjuncts.

[Key words] Comment Adjuncts in English; Appraisal Theory; Appraisal Meanings; Motivations

1. Introduction

In verbal communication, the speaker generally expresses his or her attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the propositions/proposals that he or she is talking about. Comment Adjuncts in English, as a means to convey the speaker's attitudes, opinions and feelings about the whole proposition or parts of the proposition, are pervasive in both spoken and written discourses. Despite decades of research, previous researches need to be further expanded in depth. In addition, there still lacks a systematic study on Comment Adjuncts from the perspective of the Appraisal Theory.

APPRAISAL Theory is a new theoretical framework which deals with the appraisal resources in discourse and extends the SFL account of the interpersonal function by introducing three interacting systems --- attitude, engagement and graduation so as to expand the interpersonal meanings of the speaker's feelings,

attitude, viewpoint and so forth. The Appraisal Theory can be of assistance to explore the appraisal meanings of Comment Adjuncts, whereas it is not the case when delving into the reasons why appraisal meanings can be realized by Comment Adjuncts. Therefore, this article employs Martin's Appraisal Theory to analyze the appraisal meanings produced by Comment Adjuncts with the help of examples selected from COCA and to try to explore the motivations for these appraisal meanings in combination with subjectivity theory.

1.1 Aims of the Study and Research Questions

Based on previous studies, this article makes an attempt to first explore the appraisal meaning of Comment Adjuncts, including attitudinal meaning, engagement meaning and graduation meaning. Then it tries to seek the motivations for the appraisal meanings in Comment Adjuncts.

To fulfill these purposes, this article probes into the following four questions.

- (1) As an important device to convey the speaker's attitude, viewpoint or feelings, What are the attitudinal meanings of Comment Adjuncts in various communicative contexts?
- (2) what are the engagement meanings of Comment Adjuncts and in what ways are these functions embodied?
- (3) How the graduation meanings of Comment Adjuncts are addressed?
- (4) what are the motivations for the appraisal meanings realized by Comment Adjuncts?

1.2 Methods of the Study

Qualitative method is the main approach adopted in this article. Qualitative analysis is the analysis of the "quality" of the research object by means of induction, deduction, analysis, abstraction and generalization to process various materials, aiming at revealing the essence of things. In this article, Comment Adjuncts in the selected examples are analyzed in terms of three aspects of appraisal meanings.

1.3 Data Collection

In order to make the language analysis objective and reliable, examples used in this article all comes from COCA, Corpus of Contemporary American English. Data used in this article belongs to different textual discourse, including spoken texts, fiction, magazine, newspaper, academic texts etc. Then this article makes an in-depth observation and analysis on them, and explains the appraisal meanings they present based on the analysis.

2. Literature Review

As for the definition of Comment Adjuncts, there are many different explanations under different theories. This chapter first determines and sorts out different research views of Comment Adjuncts, including the study of Reference Grammar, Transformation-Generative Grammar, Pragmatics and (SFL) Systematic Functional Linguistics. Second, it examines specific studies on Comment Adjuncts and Appraisal Theory. Finally, this article puts forward the limitations of the previous studies and its understanding of Comment Adjuncts.

2.1 Comment Adjuncts under Different Theories

According to Reference Grammar, Comment Adjuncts is regarded as adverbs of sentences. Quirk et al

(1985: 615) called it “Disjunct” and classified it into two categories: style disjunct and content disjunct. Biber et al (1999: 130-132) also gave a definition of Comment Adjuncts which express the speaker’s/author’s attitude towards informational structure or content and named it as stance adverbial.

In Transformation-Generative Grammar, Comment Adjuncts are often labeled as adverbs or adverbials. Its research focus is on the source of Comment Adjuncts, that is, how the surface structure of Comment Adjuncts is transformed from the deep structure.

Comment Adjuncts is also one of the hot topics in the field of pragmatics. Austin (1962) regarded Comment Adjuncts as adverbials of sentences with different meanings and classified them into illocutionary adverbials, attitude adverbials, evidence adverbials, and hearsay adverbials.

The study of Comment Adjuncts has also attracted the attention of Systemic Functional Linguists, such as Halliday, Thompson, Eggins, and Fawcett. Their researches mainly focuses on the definition, classification, and function of Comment Adjuncts. They divided Comment Adjuncts into three categories: Modal Adjunct, Conjunctive Adjunct and Circumstantial Adjunct.

2.2 Specific Studies on Comment Adjuncts

Specific studies on Comment Adjuncts mainly centers on the analysis level. At abroad, Phillip R. Morrow (1989) compares the difference of Comment Adjuncts in commercial news and academic texts. Conard and Biber (2000) conducted a comparative study on the frequency of Comment Adjuncts among three different text types, including conversation, academic discourse and news report.

At home, Yang Xinzhang (2006) analyzed the functions of Comment Adjuncts in academic text and it is concluded that when using Comment Adjuncts to express his/her personal opinions and judgments, the writer is prominently concerned with the factualness, naturalness, validity and obviousness of propositions. Chang (2008) made an analysis of the interpersonal meanings of Comment Adjuncts from the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar.

2.3 Specific Studies on Appraisal Theory

Studies on Appraisal Theory home and abroad can be combed as follows. First, many scholars focuses on the introduction and development of Appraisal Theory. Martin (2000) published the paper “Beyond Exchange: APPRAISAL Systems in English”, which marked the birth of Appraisal Theory. At home, Wang Zhenhua (2001) firstly introduced Appraisal Theory. Zhang Delu and Liu Shizhu (2006) made a comparison between Systemic Functional Linguistics and Appraisal Theory to show the differences between them.

Second, Appraisal Theory is widely applied by many scholars. Guo Li (2015) applied the theory to analyze 10 commencement addresses from the perspective of attitude, engagement and graduation systems respectively. Huang Fang (2019) made a study on speeches about death under Appraisal Theory to find the different attitudes towards death between China and foreign countries.

2.4 Summary

Through literature review, it is found that, Reference Grammar and Transformational-Generative Grammar focuses on the form of Comment Adjuncts, ignoring the semantic meaning of them. Moreover, although Pragmatics discusses the communicative function of Comment Adjuncts, the research is not

systematic and it lacks analysis of pragmatic motivations of these meanings. In addition, most of the previous researches on Comment Adjuncts focus on the grammatical analysis and differences in different text types. Therefore, it is necessary for us to re-explain the definition, classification and manifestation of Comment Adjuncts.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory is the expansion and supplement of the interpersonal function in Halliday's functional linguistics, which provides a theoretical framework and method for practical research. It is one of the three approaches to the interpersonal meanings along with mood and modality. "Appraisal is concerned with evaluation-the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned. Appraisals are interpersonal kinds of meanings, which realize variations in the tenor of social interactions enacted in a text." (Martin and Rose, 2003: 17) Appraisal system includes three subsystems-attitude, engagement and graduation.

3.2 Attitude System

Attitudes have to do with people's feelings, people's character and the value of things. Such evaluations can be more or less intense, that is they may be more or less amplified. And the attitude may be the writer's own or it may be attributed to some other source. As the center part of Appraisal system, attitude system itself is divided into three parts: affect, judgment and appreciation.

3.3 Engagement System

Engagement is the means of expressing attitude and stance of the speaker /writer. Engagement system has two small sub-categories, they are monogloss and heterogloss respectively. Monogloss implies that there are no other viewpoints and voice, meanwhile, heterogloss implies the alternative of dialogist is allowed or invoked.

3.4 Graduation System

Graduation system is concerned with the whole system of Appraisal Theory, and the graduation system is not limited to one defined system. Because attitude and engagement are related to graduation, the nature of meanings are different in scale. One of the characteristics of attitude is hierarchy, which means there are the positive and negative in attitude. Graduation also can be used in engagement system for the degree of the speaker/writer's intensity or the degree of their investment in the utterance. (Martin & White, 2005: 101).

To summarize, Appraisal Theory is the evaluation of people's character or things according to a certain evaluation standard, thereby achieving a certain appraisal significance and thus being an effective way to explain the appraisal meanings of Comment Adjuncts.

4. Analysis of Appraisal Meanings in Comment Adjuncts

This chapter describes the appraisal meanings in Comment Adjuncts and in what ways they are embodied. The analysis is made from three aspects: attitudinal meaning, engagement meaning and

graduation meaning.

4.1 Attitudinal meaning in Comment Adjuncts

The attitudinal meaning of Comment Adjuncts refers to the speaker's evaluation of the content of the proposition using Comment Adjuncts, which is a direct reflection of the speaker's subjective tendency. It is from three aspects---affect, judgment and appreciation that the attitudinal meaning of Comment Adjuncts will be discussed.

Martin (2003) considers affect to be psychological responses to writing, text, processes, and phenomena. The process is divided into un/happiness, in/security, dis/satisfaction. Comment Adjuncts, like luckily, happily, fortunately, to one's delight, sadly, to one's dismay express sense of un/happiness. Comment Adjuncts, like assuredly, definitely, terrifyingly, horribly are used to convey sense of in/security. Those, like preferably, impressively, ideally, disappointingly, what's worse indicate sense of dis/satisfaction.

- (1) Luckily, she said, the city of Fond Du Lac stepped in and passed a proclamation to cover insurance for the families of any city workers killed on duty.
- (2) Definitely, there would be disappointment that I didn't win this because I so much wanted to win this for Bear Nation.
- (3) Disappointedly, she drops the towel and heads out of the bathroom.

In (1) , Comment Adjunct "luckily" is used to express the speaker's happiness about the pass of a proclamation. "Definitely" in (2) shows that the speaker firmly believes that he will be disappointed about his failure, which reflects the sense of security. In (3), "disappointedly" conveys a sense of dissatisfaction of the language user.

Judgment meaning in Comment Adjuncts refers to the speaker's judgment on the proposition expressed by the commented sentence by the use of Comment Adjuncts, including the speaker praises or condemns the behavior. The judgment subsystem is divided into two categories which are social esteem and social sanction.

Comment Adjuncts, like properly, appropriately, to one's surprise, oddly, bizarrely, curiously, ironically, reasonably, imprudently, bravely are used to express meaning of social esteem. Those, like frankly, truthfully, flatly, lawfully, mistakenly, rightly present meaning of social sanction.

- (4) Intelligently, Channel 4 has put the 12 part series into four videos that will serve as a substitute to anyone who missed the programmes.
- (5) To tell you the truth, before I went to prison I used to meet people who had been to prison and I didn't want to talk to them because I thought they were funny.

In (4), "intelligently" reflects the speaker's positive judgment on the action of Channel 4. Comment Adjunct in (5) uses "to tell you the truth" to emphasize the truthfulness of the discourse information to make

it convincing, thereby the sense of judgment is expressed.

The appreciation meaning of Comment Adjunct refers to the evaluation of the content in terms of reaction, composition and value by the use of Comment Adjuncts. Comment Adjuncts, like interestingly, noticeably, magically, predictably, annoyingly are used to express meaning of reaction. Those, like precisely, briefly, broadly, roughly reflect meaning of composition. Those, like significantly, profoundly, importantly, crucially, commonly embody the meaning of value.

(6) Annoyingly, youngsters were playing games in the lifts, and we had to resort to the stairs.

(7) More precisely, lots of people have ideas, but they do not all agree.

(8) Very commonly, people see static landscapes, moving faces or a sequence of pictures or geometric shapes.

Sentence (6) is about an introduction to the equipment and price of a cruise. The speaker uses Comment Adjunct “annoyingly” to express his complaint about the cruise. In (7), the adoption of Comment Adjunct more precisely” is to summarize the previous information appearing in the text, trying to make the information easier to be understood. “Very commonly” in (8) is used to show that the following phenomenon is common. The three sentences above reflects appraisal meanings of reaction, composition and valuation respectively.

4.2 Analysis of Engagement Meaning in Comment Adjuncts

As an indispensable means to construct discourse, the engagement meaning of Comment Adjuncts varies from type to type. Some Comment Adjuncts help the speaker to speak more objectively with the use of projection so that the speaker’s point of view can be easily recognized; some allow conciliation between different voices through concessions. The engagement meaning of Comment Adjuncts will be discussed from two aspects: monogloss and heterogloss. Comment Adjuncts, like in my view, to my mind, are used to express engagement meaning of monogloss. Those like possibly, perhaps, maybe, likely present the engagement the meaning of heterogloss.

(9) There is one further practical objection, in my view, has real substance.

(10) Perhaps this reflects no more than the elevation of masculinity that permeates the canteen culture of the station, but the view that nothing busy happens in the unit.

“In my view” in (9) directly points out the source of information. That is the speaker’s own view, attitude and evaluation. In other words, the engagement meaning of the Comment Adjuncts is to emphasize that it is the speaker himself who makes contribution to the content of discourse. In (10), the Comment Adjuncts “perhaps” is a reflection of engagement meaning. The language user employs the adjuncts to potential voice to express the information is not asserted by him but someone else. In this instance, he can take less responsibility and meanwhile make the information more convincing.

4.3 Analysis of Graduation meaning in Comment Adjuncts

Graduation meaning of Comment Adjuncts will be discussed from two aspects. The graduation of attitudinal meaning in Comment Adjuncts is reflected by the mediation of force, that is, the strengthening or weakening of attitude. Comment Adjuncts are usually modified by very, quite, really much, less, least and so on to express graduation meaning of force.

Graduation is also illustrated in the engagement meaning of Comment Adjuncts. In other words, the degree of engagement meaning in Comment Adjuncts can be mediated by words like just possibly, very possibly, certainly etc.

(11) I had decided that, much to my regret, it would not be possible to plan a DIY funeral for myself as it was not a job I would bequeath to friends, and my nearest close relations who might have co-operated were overseas.

(12) High wages at some undefined earlier date had very possibly induces many Cornishmen to abandon husbandry for tinning.

In (11), “much to my regret” is modified by “much” to mediate the attitude meaning, thereby the degree of attitudinal meaning of Comment Adjunct is strengthened. In (12), the engagement meaning “possibly” is modified by “very”, which not only shows the involvement of other information, but also the language user’s identification of such involvement.

4.4 Summary

In a nutshell, it is shown that Comment Adjuncts carry three types of attitudinal meaning: affect, judgment and appreciation, involving positive and negative evaluation. In addition, the three subsystems of the attitudinal meaning are related to each other and they can be transformed and converted into each other. Have a good knowledge of the multiple meanings Comment Adjuncts is of great importance to understand the change of the speaker/author’s attitude and thus better understanding the conversation/texts.

When Comment Adjuncts are be used to explain the perspective or source of attitude or information, it is obviously related to the engagement meaning. On the one hand, it can reflect the speaker’s allowance of other different opinions, thereby expanding the dialogue space of divergent opinions; on the other hand, it shows that the speaker is expressing his own views, positions and attitudes directly or indirectly, rejecting the different perspectives, positions, and attitude. Grasping the engagement meaning of Comment Adjuncts is helpful to be aware of the different perspective and viewpoints in a proposition and thus catch the meaning in an accurate way.

Graduation is a fundamental feature of appraisal meanings. Whether it is affect, judgment or appreciation, it involves different degrees of appraisal meanings. We can use modifiers to strengthen or weaken the attitudinal meaning of Comment Adjuncts. With the help of graduation meaning of Comment Adjuncts, speakers can use reinforcement words to increase or reduce the intervention level of the speaker’s dialogue, and thus it deserves people’s attention in the process of language decoding.

5. Analysis of Motivations for Appraisal Meanings in Comment Adjuncts

Based on above analysis, it is shown that Comment Adjuncts carry with rich appraisal meanings, but the reasons for the appraisal meanings in Comment Adjuncts still needs to be explored. In this section, an attempt is made to analyze the effects of language user's subjectivity on the appraisal meanings.

5.1 An Overview of Subjectivity Theory

In the last century, subjectivity theory is proposed by Breal. It is developed from philosophy and applied in many fields, such as psychology and ethics. Whether Pragmatics, Psycholinguistics, Cognitive Linguistics or SFL, they all take the subjectivity into consideration. For instance, the subjectivity theory is a very popular theory to analyze the translation strategies used by the translator.

Language is a tool for communication used by human beings, thereby language use is definitely related to the subjectivity of its user. Therefore, the motivations for appraisal meanings in Comment Adjuncts can be analyzed based on subjectivity theory from the following aspects: the speaker, the speaker's concern about the hearer and about the context.

5.2 The Speaker's Subjectivity

First and foremost, the speaker's own perspective, emotion and way to know the world cannot be ignored. Comment Adjunct is an appraisal device employed by the language users to show their different perspectives in viewing the world. For instance, often, Comment Adjuncts like "honestly" and "truthfully" present a subjective perspective with the speaker involved, while "generally" and "to be precise" reflects a much more objective and macroscopic perspective. Besides, Comment Adjuncts are attached to people's personal feelings in the process of meaning construction.

The way that people know and understand the world is another motivation for appraisal meanings. Comment Adjunct is a reflection of people's understanding of the world, and it is usually related to modal category, naming epistemic modality.

Second, appraisal meanings in Comment Adjuncts are motivated by the speaker's concern about the hearer. It is similar to cooperation and politeness principle in Pragmatics. For instance, Comment Adjunct "as might be expected" presents the speaker's attention to the hearer's reaction in the process of information exchange.

Third, it is evident that context has great influence on language speaker and thus influences his language choice. SFL identifies three key dimensions of the context as having significant and predictable impacts on language use, including mode, tenor and field. As an appraisal device to express evaluation on the proposition, the use of Comment Adjuncts definitely are mediated by tenor of discourse. Considering the different situation, language user will select different Comment Adjuncts and put them in different places which are suitable for communication and thus the appraisal meanings are presented.

Having discussed the motivations for appraisal meanings of Comment Adjuncts, it is clear that the use of Comment Adjuncts is an reflection of people's subjectivity, which are actually encodings of "the speaker's imprint" in the language. In other words, the appraisal meanings of Comment Adjuncts are motivated by the speaker's subjectivity.

6. Conclusion

This chapter first summarizes the major findings of the article and then it introduces the contribution that the article makes and limitations existed in the study. At last it gives suggestions for further study.

6.1 Major Findings

The first one is that Comment Adjuncts are rich in meanings and its three appraisal meanings are clearly presented through analysis. In terms of attitudinal meaning, Comment Adjuncts take on the meanings of affect, judgment and appreciation. These three categories are interrelated and interchangeable. Furthermore, with the help of engagement meaning of Comment Adjuncts, the speaker's attitude can be adjusted, the validity of utterance verified and the potential interaction in discourse revealed. Besides, the semantics of graduation extends across the whole Appraisal Systems and it can be reflected through attitudinal and engagement meaning of Comment Adjuncts. It is a general property of values in the process of construing greater or lesser degrees of positivity or negativity.

The second finding is that appraisal meanings of Comment Adjuncts are motivated by the speaker's subjectivity. The speaker's/author's subjective degree can be viewed as a continuum from low to high values.

6.2 Contributions of the Research

Applying Appraisal Theory to the study on Comment Adjuncts provides a new theoretical perspective to researches on Comment Adjuncts, and it also enriches the application field of Appraisal Theory. The exploration of subjectivity analysis is of assistance for future studies on the motivation for people's language selection. And it may be of practical value to verbal communicative exchanges and English teaching. Suitable use of Comment Adjuncts is an important means to improve the efficiency of speech acts and promote smooth and efficient communication. The research results of Comment Adjuncts can help students improve their ability to interpret and appreciate texts, deepen their understanding of the author's intentions, and develop their reading strategies.

6.3 Limitations of the Research

However, limitations also exist in the present research because of limited time and ability. Firstly, the classification of Comment Adjuncts is not clear and the article fails to give a definition for Comment Adjuncts. Secondly, examples enumerated in this article are not sufficient and comprehensive. Thirdly, only one corpus (COCA) serving as the data source weaken the reliability of the research findings. Fourthly, the methods adopted in this study are mainly descriptive and explanatory, lacking statistic data supported.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Study

In view of the limitations of this article, two aspects of studies on Comment Adjuncts merit further discussion. On the one hand, the research field needs to be further expanded. We can conduct a comparative study of English and Chinese Comment Adjuncts using bilingual parallel corpus, or between different texts and genres. On the other hand, research methods also need to be broadened. The study of the meaning of Comment Adjuncts is a comprehensive and multidisciplinary research topic and it is necessary to combine the disciplines such as psycholinguistics, neuropsychology, and computational linguistics. Taking an typical example, the use of ERP in Psycholinguistics can clearly present the brain wave data of language users when

they select Comment Adjuncts. Therefore, analyzing the data can better reveal their motivation and mental state in the process of language selection and discourse construction, making the research much more objective, reliable and convincing.

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