

Functional Linguistics Analysis of China Daily on Climate Change in Attitude towards 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26)

Yujie Hao

School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Beijing Normal University, Haidian District, Beijing, China

Abstract: *Climate change has always been an important issue requiring international attention. The 26th United Nations Conference of Parties on Climate Change was held on October 31st, 2021, in Glasgow, Britain. Mainstream media can reflect countries' attitudes towards climate change. This paper analyzes China Daily reports on the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) from functional linguistics, focusing on the change in attitude people have to COP26 and climate change. The study found that COP26 was regarded as an opportunity to handle the challenge of climate change. However, agreements are hard to reach because of conflicts of interest. Although countries eventually reached a compromise after COP26, active measures should be taken to improve climate change. This paper tries to discuss the attitude change based on Systematic Functional Grammar.*

Keywords: *Functional linguistics; climate change; COP26; China Daily*

1. Introduction

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 virus, COP26 initially scheduled for November 9th, 2020, was postponed to 2021. The Secretariat decided the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bonn, Germany, collaborating with Britain and its partner Italy. COP26 has concluded after two weeks of arduous negotiations in Glasgow, Britain, On November 13th, 2021. It adopted a resolution and reached a consensus on the implementation rules of the Paris Agreement. It is the first climate conference since the Implementation of the Paris Agreement and on the condition of multiple crises, such as COVID-19, climate change, and energy (Wang, Wu, Pan, & Han, 2022).

Climate change is a big environmental issue, and it is very urgent to solve its problems. Climate change is already affecting every inhabited region globally, with human influence contributing to many observed changes in weather and climate extremes (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2021). The rises in global temperatures represent significant changes in climates all over the planet that are already having major ramifications for life on earth (Sharma, 2011). Based on the Fifth Assessment Report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate change can widely affect natural systems, including the atmosphere, oceans, cryosphere, and sea level. It impacts human systems such as food security, water resources, human health, social and economic development (Shi, 2020).

2. Functional linguistics

Systematic Functional Linguistics is one of the comparatively influential linguistic schools, which aims to reveal that language is a means of social interaction (Hu, 2001). Labeling words cannot fully explain language according to its class. If we need to take account of functions and classes, then we also need to look beyond mere words (But, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2003). Based on Halliday, we represent the world through language by choosing words that represent people, things, or concepts, and words about what these participants are doing to, with, or for one another.

The resources of wording that express propositional content belong in a different part of the grammar. All the more specific functions can be assigned to one or other of the three broad functions, and hence we refer to these broad functions as metafunctions (Thompson, 2014). The ideational function conveys new information and communicates content unknown to the hearer; the interpersonal function embodies

all language used to express social and personal relations; the textual function refers to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken or written discourse into a coherent and unified text and make a living passage different from a random list of sentences (Hu, 2001). Moreover, the ideational function includes experiential metafunction and logical metafunction. The experiential metafunction is to describe various events of human activities and nature. It is mainly realized by transitivity system. This paper analyzes China Daily reports by using six process types of transitivity: material process, behavioral process, mental process, verbal process, relational process and existential process.

3. Data source, screening, and classification

This paper selects China Daily reports as corpus samples. In 1981, China Daily was a national paper published in English. It is an important window to show the country's external image, circulated in Hong Kong, the United States, Canada, and other countries and regions (Wang, 2017). Therefore, to some degree, China Daily can reflect the attitudes of China and other countries. 285 China Daily reports are searching under the keyword "COP26". After eliminating irrelevant reports and duplicates, 260 valid reports are obtained. In order to get a basic understanding of the attitudes, useful reports are analyzed in classification statistically. It is found that there are 131 reports on political issues, accounting for 50%, 51 reports on economic issues, accounting for 19%, and 78 reports on environmental issues, accounting for 31%.

4. Representation and attitude of China Daily on climate change

China Daily reports are analyzed on general features based on different stages. From the perspective of metafunctions in functional linguistics, it analyzes typical reports and some representative paragraphs and sentences which can reflect the themes clearly from each stage.

The changes of attitudes towards COP26 can be divided into three stages. The early-stage (from December 2019 to October 2021) has 151 reports. COP26 undertook heavy expectations ingrained in the European Union, Britain, and other countries. The medium stage (from November 1st, 2021 to November 13th, 2021) has 43 reports. Although there were conflicts during COP26, people worked hard to reach an agreement. The later stage (from November 14th, 2021 to January 2022) has 66 reports. Some countries and scholars were dissatisfied with the result and believed that active measures should be taken to improve climate change.

4.1. Early stage

On February 28th, 2021, China Daily reported on the release of a UN Framework Convention on Climate Change report and the statement of United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. The full text has a total of 478 words. It is accepted that climate change will worsen and worsen if all countries lack efforts. China took active measures and adjusted policies to make a change in economics and energies, contributing to the goal of combating climate change. This report showed both the severe challenge of climate change and the fierce determination of China to deal with extreme weather conditions. After identifying and analyzing all the clauses in this report, two representative clauses are discussed as follows:

(1) The planet is indeed on "red alert," as United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

The clause that the planet is indeed on "red alert" is a relational process. It identifies the particular circumstance of "the planet." In this clause, "red alert" is similar to a warning. It is shown that people live in a situation where all countries are prepared for extreme weather conditions and other dangers caused by climate change. What United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said has been a consensus, which proved the urgency of the climate change and illustrated the heavy expectations on COP26.

(2) The current policies were found not to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

The clause is a material process. It is noted that the UN secretary-general is the actor, and the activation process is to find. "The current policies" refer to the updated action plans submitted by 75 nations ahead of November's COP26 climate summit. It is reflected the importance of COP26. The policies countries already submitted were not satisfied with severe climate conditions, which makes

COP26 become a valuable opportunity to discuss more actions on dealing with climate change.

Therefore, this report is showed that COP26 undertook heavy expectations that were ingrained in countries at the early stage. In the face of dangerous climate conditions, countries need to find new and appropriate solutions to avoid climate change getting worse and worse.

4.2. Medium stage

On November 11th, 2021, China Daily reported on China-United States' interaction in climate cooperation on COP26. The full text has a total of 454 words, and it illustrated that China and the US States were trapped in a stalemate. Although climate cooperation became a common goal, there were important questions about responsibility and ability. This report reflected China's goodwill in climate cooperation. Meanwhile, it was an active step to the Paris Agreement's requirements that China and the US States reached an agreement on cooperation to accelerate climate actions and tackle global warming. After identifying and analyzing all the clauses in this report, three representative clauses are discussed as follows:

(1) There has been a protracted, though fruitless, blame game going on between Beijing and Washington.

It is noted that the clause is an existential process. The existence is "a protracted, though fruitless, blame game." The circumstances are "between Beijing and Washington." This clause reflected the conflicts between China and US. More efforts should turn to the discussion about common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. It is a necessary question for countries to answer in the face of global improvements and respective benefits.

(2) The newly reached agreement on climate cooperation will certainly inspire constructive interactions between the two sides.

The clause is a material process. It is obtained that the actor is "the newly reached agreement on climate cooperation." The action process is "will certainly inspire." The goal is "constructive interactions between the two sides." The word "constructive" reflects the effect of the agreement between China and the US states. It is shown that people give high expectations on the agreement, which needs more agreements to solve the climate problems.

Therefore this report reflected that there were conflicts during COP26. However, people still take active actions on reaching agreements at the medium stage. Both growing consensus and practical actions are indispensable.

4.3. Later stage

On November 14th, 2021, China Daily reported on the Glasgow Climate Pact adopted at COP26. The full text has a total of 459 words. It gave high expectations on the Glasgow Climate Pact, inspiring global action on dealing with climate change and solving problems of extreme weather conditions. However, it expressed worries about the duty of developed countries as well. This report discussed the final result of COP26 and the prospect of global action. After identifying and analyzing all the clauses in this report, three representative clauses are discussed as follows:

(1) The financial and technological support they provide to their developing counterparts is not charity.

The clause is a relational process. It identifies "the financial and technological support," which shows the responsibilities developed countries should take. The clause says that worries about developed countries' practical actions are not empty words. It illustrates the key to facing climate change after COP26. Developed countries should contribute to the common goal.

(2) The Glasgow Climate Pact is adopted at COP 26 on Saturday, which will hopefully prove a milestone for the global response to climate change.

The clause is a material process. It is identified that the actor is "the Glasgow Climate Pact." The action process is "will hopefully prove to be." The goal is "a milestone for the global response to climate change." The milestone means an essential stage in dealing with climate change, which proves the influence of COP26. The final result has the positive part that people are satisfied. It is obtained that COP26 can guide countries to help the climate conditions get better in the future.

Therefore, this report illustrated both the prospect and the worries about COP26. From what has been

discussed, active measures should be taken to improve climate change.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of functional linguistics, this paper analyzed 260 reports on the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference by China Daily, from December 2019 to January 2022. The research found that attitudes towards COP26 can be divided into three stages. Although there were conflicts on climate cooperation and COP26, COP26 still undertook heavy expectations. When climate change has been a great danger for all countries, common but differentiated responsibilities must be maintained. In order to improve climate cooperation, all countries should make efforts and take positive practical actions.

References

- [1] Butt, D., Fahey, R., Feez, S., Spinks, S., & Yallop, C. (2003). *Using functional grammar: An explorer's guide*. National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research Macquarie University.
- [2] Hu, Z.L. (2001). *Linguistics: A course book*. Peking University Press.
- [3] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2021). *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Full_Report.pdf
- [4] Sharma, A. (2012). Global climate change: What has science education got to do with it?. *Science & Education*, 21(1), 33-53.
- [5] Shi, C.X. (2020). *Quanqiu qihou bianhua zhili de xiningshi yu lianheguo de xinshiming [New situation of global governance of climate change and new mission of the United Nations]*. *Huobei shehui kexue*, (05), 48-57.
- [6] Thompson, G. (2013). *Introducing Functional Grammar*. Routledge.
- [7] Wang, B., Wu, L., Pan, X. S., & Han, X. (2022). *Gelasige fenghui de chengguo he yiyi [The outcome and significance of the Glasgow Summit]*. *Shengtai jingji* (01), 1-4.
- [8] Wang, H. (2017). *Zhongguo ribao de duiwai chuanbo celue yanjiu [A research on the external communication strategy of China Daily]*. *Xinwen zhanxian*, (20), 109-110.