

Junior High School English Teachers' Stancetaking on Social Media in the Mainland of China

Yanying Yao*

The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong 999077, China

**Corresponding author:* Yanying Yao, yanying@connect.hku.hk

Copyright: © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: The study employs discourse analysis as an analytical methodology, integrating stancetaking and positioning theories as theoretical frameworks, analyzing a post published by an in-service teacher and its related comments on RED, to explore the stancetaking of junior high school English teachers on social platforms in the mainland of China. This paper is expected to provide effective suggestions for enhancing the positive influence of front-line teachers on social media and facilitating the development of their teaching profession amidst the backdrop of educational informatization.

Keywords: Discourse; English teachers; Junior high school; Social media; Stance; Stancetaking

Online publication: February 10, 2025

1. Introduction

The term “stance focus” refers to the way an utterance emphasizes or highlights a particular stance in communication, shaping the overall meaning or intent ^[1]. In sociolinguistics, the term “stance” and its variant “stancetaking” have been used primarily to describe how people position themselves in conversation, frequently in terms of politeness, certainty, or emotion ^[2]. In recent decades, many scholars have conducted a lot of research on stance and stancetaking. Du Bois ^[3] claimed that taking a stance is a significant act we can accomplish with words. An action taken in public by a social actor that is accomplished dialogically through apparent communicative means, such as language, gesture, and other figurative forms. This action allows social actors to position and assess objects, and align with different subjects related to any salient aspects of the sociocultural field. The identities that speakers align or misalign with are revealed by their positionality about particular views and ideologies. This implies that stancetaking can offer insights into how communicative practices. In addition, positioning theory functions as a powerful tool to help understand the identity of individuals and groups in society. This theory holds that by using particular language, behaviors, and narrative modes in social interactions, people can create and preserve their positioning within the social system ^[4].

For those studying social media as a developing discourse genre, examining how intersubjective

orientation is achieved through discourse has been a successful avenue of inquiry ^[5]. Social media, a common term for online tools and websites that help users engage with others, represents the most dynamic dimension of postmodern culture. It offers people the stage to express thoughts through multiple mediums like text, images, and video, and could be used by people of all ages ^[6]. As a bridge of communication in the new era, social platforms are changing how people interact with others at an unprecedented speed. According to Biri ^[7], the expression of viewpoints on social media is a matter that shows one's thoughts to present positioning, it is also related to issues like an individual's identity and feeling of community. The field of education has also been gradually affected by this digital wave. Junior high school English teachers in the mainland of China, as part of the group of intellectuals who generally have an international vision and an inclusive mentality, inevitably integrate into the digital communication of social media by using such new platforms to carry out more diversified interactions with peers. Through interaction, their stancetaking could be reflected.

This study, using stancetaking and positioning theories as theoretical frameworks, aims to investigate the stancetaking of junior high school English teachers on social media in the mainland of China. By exploring the discourse of English teachers, we may gain insight into how they construct identity in the digital realm. In addition, analyzing discourse helps shed light on the interplay between a teacher's values and their online self-presentation, which is critical to understanding the dynamics of interactions between teachers in this information age.

In this paper, the analytical methodology and data collection will be first explained. Followed by showing the English translations of the post and several comments, the data will be discussed in detail. Finally, based on the key findings related to their stancetaking, some effective suggestions could be provided for society.

2. Methods and data collection

2.1. Material selection

Xiaohongshu (hereafter referred to as RED), originally founded in 2013, is the Chinese version of Pinterest or Instagram ^[8]. This social media platform, popular among young users in first-tier and second-tier cities in China, was chosen for the study since multi-dimensional data could be easily accessed and downloaded because of its publicly available comments and likes setting.

This study collected a post published by a junior high school English teacher with the nickname Pupu and its comments as data. The post has attracted wide discussion on RED, showing a certain degree of representation and resonance among teachers, and reflecting their common stancetaking. Additionally, to form a comprehensive dataset, the top 50 comments by likes were initially selected and subsequently refined based on response count, yielding 30 comments for analysis. Such two steps enable the collection of data that exhibit popular support and foster substantial engagement. Then, the authors of comments were privately messaged to verify their identities. They were categorized into three groups: junior high school English teachers, teachers not teaching junior high school English, and candidates aspiring to become junior high school English teachers.

2.2. Analytical methodology

To linguists, "discourse" refers to a component of language that is closely related to syntax, which is defined as the structure of language, the way words and phrases join into sentences ^[9]. Discourse analysis, which aims to investigate how language is organized and emphasizes linguistic structures that are more extensive than a single sentence such as a dialogue or a whole work, was applied as an analytical methodology to analyze the post and related comments ^[10]. According to Budd and Raber ^[11], the core of discourse analysis lies in the study of the

form and function of language use. In this study, analyzing language structures that go beyond a single sentence, such as the overall narrative style and the specific language features, helps show how social practice can reflect and shape ideologies and power dynamics^[12], revealing the stancetaking of junior high school English teachers in the mainland of China. This approach is useful for displaying the specifics that conventional qualitative or quantitative methods are unable to fully capture, thus providing a more thorough understanding.

3. Data analysis

3.1. Exemplify analysis

In this part, the translated full text of the post and some representative comments selected from the 30 comments are displayed and analyzed. The following is the post published by Pupu on RED.

(1) Pupu, February 24, 2022

Being a junior high school English teacher who also serves as a homeroom teacher lives like a puppy seeking comfort. I teach two classes, each with two days of English morning reading sessions. As the homeroom teacher, I'm also responsible for an additional morning reading session each week, as the school requires. So, that means I have morning reading sessions for five days in total. Every week, I have 14 regular lessons, one class meeting, a noon self-study session, and one after-school service period, I have to supervise two self-study sessions. I'm busy from morning till night, absolutely exhausted.

In this post, Pupu delicately describes her daily life as a junior high school homeroom teacher and English teacher, in a style close to spoken English. First of all, Pupu uses some specific figures to list her heavy work tasks, such as "morning reading sessions for five days," "14 regular lessons," "one class meeting," "a noon self-study session, and one after-school service period." By presenting these dense task arrangements in short sentences, Pupu expresses her depression. She also employs simile as a figure of speech, "lives like a puppy seeking comfort," to convey her profound feelings of overwhelming work, lack of respect, and both physical and mental exhaustion.

Subsequently, Pupu shows the audience a concrete case of what happened to her in current English teaching.

(2) Pupu, February 24, 2022

Yesterday, I gave a dictation and wrote the correct answers on the blackboard for students to correct, but I found that a bunch of them didn't even bother to correct their mistakes. They made a lot of mistakes in today's dictation again, and their handwriting was terrible.

In her description, she notes that "a bunch of them didn't even bother to correct their mistakes" after the dictation yesterday, and her response to today's dictation is that "a lot of mistakes" and "their handwriting was terrible." We can see that Pupu is strongly dissatisfied with the students' unserious and irresponsible attitude towards English learning. This disappointment can also be regarded as helplessness and concern about the current situation of education and the common problem of junior high school students' English learning attitude.

Finally, Pupu sums up her feelings in a straightforward way.

(3) Pupu, February 24, 2022

Well, there's a long way to go. What a sense of responsibility!

Here, she ends with the line "Well, there's a long way to go. What a sense of responsibility!" The use of modal words and a slight hint of impolite emotional venting reveal self-mockery at being unable to escape this heavy burden, yet her adherence to the cause of education and her sense of responsibility remains steadfast. This

complicated emotion is not only a helpless acceptance of the reality of the dilemma but also the persistence of her career choice.

Pupu employs short sentences, lists figures, utilizes rhetorical devices, and adopts a colloquial style of expression to present her multiple stances on the overwhelming work burden, poor students' learning attitudes, and complex emotions regarding responsibility. These stances are interwoven with each other, which constitute the understanding of junior high school English teachers on the current educational environment and their situation.

After publishing this post on Red, many users write comments as responses. In the comment section, we find many replies published by junior high school English teachers.

(4) February 24, 2022

Some students are consistently scoreless in every dictation. Would their parents perhaps think about having their IQ assessed for them?

(5) February 25, 2022

Being a homeroom teacher is one thing, but having to deal with a bunch of leaders who can't even make up their minds and a pile of tasks every day. There's no light in my eyes. I'm only 26 years old. What did I do wrong in my past life to deserve such a heavy punishment in this one?

(6) February 25, 2022

Really, being a junior high school English teacher is a tough job. I have four morning reading sessions a week. We're in a boarding school, so we get up at six in the morning, and the evening self-study session goes until 21:10.

(7) February 25, 2022

You said it so truthfully.

(8) June 30, 2022

It feels like you're my colleague.

(9) August 16, 2022

This really resonates with my experiences.

(10) October 30, 2022

I thought it was written by me.

In (4), the teacher adopts a rhetorical question to enhance the tone, expressing her obvious anger with the student's repeated mistakes, and implicitly questioning the responsibility of parents. The absolute word "scoreless" is used to express the extreme dissatisfaction the teacher felt about the serious problem. The expression "having their IQ assessed" is an exaggeration, not really asking why parents do not conduct this action, but implying that the teacher argues that the student's basic knowledge of English is not firm enough. In (5), the user uses a longer composite sentence in which she describes the stress of her job, as well as the resulting fatigue. The phrase "can't make up their minds" describes the lack of clarity in leadership instructions, which reflects her confusion with the working requirement. The expression "no light in my eyes" which means the feeling of exhaustion, is a metaphorical saying. In this case, the teacher suggests that her enthusiasm for work is lost. Additionally, she also expresses her exhausted emotions by contrasting her youth with the heavy workload she is under. In (6), the teacher affirms Pupu's emotions, highlighting the hardships of junior high school English teachers by listing specific work hours and tasks, like "four morning reading sessions," "get up at six," and "the evening self-study session goes until 21:10," to describe the work intensity. In (7), (8), (9), and (10), the users use simple and clear sentence structures to convey a strong emotional color. The comments put

themselves in the position of having shared experiences or feelings with Pupu, suggesting a deep identification with her remarks.

These comments together reflect the confusion of junior high school English teachers with heavy work tasks. In terms of language expression, they all use relatively strong tones and rhetorical devices, such as exaggeration and contrast, to enhance the expression of emotions. They express fatigue in their discourse as well, suggesting the challenges and pressures faced by junior high school English teachers in the current educational environment. These commonalities prove their similarity in stancetaking and positioning, that is, the helplessness to the pressure of the current working environment and professional identity.

We also find some comments from teachers not teaching junior high school English.

(11) February 25, 2022

The Chinese teacher has it even worse. We extremely envy the English teacher greatly when it comes to grading homework.

(12) February 25, 2022

Junior high school Chinese teachers have numerous morning reading sessions. Every day, the first class is always our session. We need to get up early every day!

(13) February 25, 2022

If you were to teach Chinese, you would be even more overwhelmed. Besides everything you need to do now, you would also have to take on other tasks, such as designing drama performances, grading hand-copied newspaper competitions, and so on.

(14) March 21, 2022

Try being a high school English teacher, and you'll find your current job happier.

In (11), the user uses a comparative structure, comparing the work of a Chinese teacher with that of an English teacher. The expression “even worse” expresses the relative difficulty of the Chinese teacher’s job, and “extremely envy” strongly shows this teacher’s envy for the relatively easy work of junior high school English teachers when it comes to homework grading, indirectly highlighting the relative advantages of English teachers. In (12), the junior high school Chinese teacher’s comment directly describes the reality in two declarative sentences. The word “numerous” accurately and vividly highlights the heavy workload of Chinese teachers. The second sentence further embodies the influence of this phenomenon on the daily work of Chinese teachers. The use of the expressions “every day” and “always” has a certain emphasis and exaggeration effect, which not only expresses the frequency and regularity of the morning reading class arrangement, but also implies the profound impact of this arrangement on the daily life of Chinese teachers. Although the comment does not express her evaluation of the workload of junior high school English teachers, by objectively describing the facts, she indirectly implies that the degree of hard work of junior high school Chinese teachers is even worse than that of junior high school English teachers. In (13), the user employs an adverbial clause of condition to directly point out the outcome of a hypothetical situation. She suggests that being a Chinese teacher would be even more devastating. Her stancetaking is further reinforced by the introduction of the word “besides” as an additional workload. The word “overwhelmed” implies that the extra tasks are tiring. In addition, the user uses exemplification, such as “designing drama performances” and “grading hand-copied newspaper competitions,” to make her positioning more vivid. By giving examples of tasks that do not need to be completed by junior high school English teachers, she expresses criticism or dissatisfaction with the additional work burden that teaching Chinese may bring. In (14), the user takes a hypothetical tone to guide the contrast by presenting a different situation (becoming a high school English teacher). By using the word “try,”

the teacher proposes a higher challenge (to experience the daily life of a high school English teacher) to imply the relative happiness of the current junior high school English teacher. This user's discourse is full of a tone of ridicule, indirectly evaluating the relatively easy work environment of junior high school English teachers.

Although the specific expressions might be different, the discourse of the two comments revolves around the two core points of contrast and envy, forming a similar stancetaking and positioning. The group shows agreement with some aspects of the relatively relaxed working style of junior high school English teachers.

Pupu's post also influences some candidates aspiring to become junior high school English teachers. As they read through the shared experience by Pupu, they contemplate their future life.

(15) February 25, 2022

Should I still take the teacher recruitment exam to become a teacher?

(16) February 25, 2022

I'm going to be a junior high school English teacher in the second half of the year, and I'm really scared.

(17) November 30, 2022

Can I have a rest at weekends?

(18) June 8, 2023

So, should I go to a key junior high school or an ordinary junior high school to be a teacher?

In (15), the user uses the question to express her hesitation about being a teacher, expressing her inner entanglement. Her discourse reveals a confused mood due to the worry about facing the pressure of a teaching career or the uncertainty of personal career planning. In (16), the user uses a compound sentence. By connecting two separate but closely related parts with "and," the first half of the sentence states an impending fact, and the second half directly expresses the speaker's inner feelings. The expression "really scared" means that she is insecure about what she is about to do. Without dissembling or avoidance, the comment reflects her concern and uncertainty about the new role. In (17), the words "rest" and "weekend" reflect the speaker's concern about teachers' working hours. The speaker asks the question mildly and politely, implying her expectation of reasonable breaks in future work. In (18), the user chooses to use a question to show her weighing and consideration of two different options, which not only reflects the prudence of her decision, but also reveals her expectations and worries about the future career environment. "Key" is in sharp contrast to "ordinary," suggesting quality educational resources and the possibility of higher career development, which can mean a more mundane but perhaps more relaxed working environment. The choice of these two adjectives accurately captures her perception of the career prospects offered by different types of schools. Her tone speaks of a desire for advice and guidance, but also of uncertainty and anxiety about her future career path.

These comments reflect candidates' complex feelings and concerns about the profession through similar stancetaking. Their discourses also imply the general recognition of the occupational pressure of junior high school English teachers.

3.2. Key findings

Based on these representative comments, the features of the stancetaking of junior high school English teachers could be summarized as follows.

The stancetaking of such teachers on social platforms is affected by personal experience and the working environment. For instance, in (11), the source of envy and satisfaction expressed by the high school English teacher is probably related to her personal experience in high school English teaching. The social interaction of comparing her working pressure with the interpretation of Pupu's posts prompted her to make such a comment.

She believes that if junior high school English teachers experience the pressure of high school English teachers, they will reconstruct identities. It also reflects that junior high school English teachers' positioning on social platforms may be affected by their experience and environment. This influence could shift the stancetaking and opinions they express on social platforms.

The stancetaking of junior high school English teachers on social platforms is a multifaceted phenomenon. Various social groups may provide different interpretations based on their unique working modes and cognition. Junior high school English teachers can easily understand Pupu's feelings due to similar workload and worries, while others, even teachers who teach other subjects or levels may not empathize with Pupu and even the whole group because of cognitive biases.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Summary

Based on the discussion and analysis, we can understand the stancetaking of junior high school English teachers as well as the existing problems they face. The role of junior high school English teachers is not only to impart linguistic knowledge, but also to serve as mentors, and even psychologists for their students. However, we can see that the heavy work pressure takes a toll on their mental and emotional well-being. Many previous experiments have also proved this judgment. Therefore, preventing and assisting with initiatives to lessen teacher stress and exhaustion would directly contribute to a healthy teaching profession^[13]. In recognition of this, the education department has a crucial role to play in supporting the mental health of front-line teachers. One effective measure would be to set up a mental health support system that provides psychological counseling services tailored to the needs of this group. It could offer a safe and confidential space for them to express concerns, seek advice, and receive professional guidance on how to better cope with the stresses and challenges of their profession. In addition to mental health support, schools could take proactive steps to properly relieve their pressure, like reallocating some of their non-teaching responsibilities. Administrators might consider handing over the work of homeroom teachers to some competent teachers of other subjects who have less teaching pressure. This reallocation of duties could help ensure that junior high school English teachers are not overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities, and can instead focus their limited energy on teaching English. By implementing these measures, we may create a more supportive and nurturing environment for junior high school English teachers, enabling them to provide the best possible education for their students.

4.2. Limitations and future studies

This study focused on the stancetaking of junior high school English teachers in the mainland of China. However, it is undeniable that the sample size is relatively limited. Future studies are expected to expand the scope and depth of data collection to enrich the findings. Additionally, diversified research methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, could also be applied to help deeply understand the feelings of this group as well as their positioning. Through these studies, we may provide effective suggestions to help promote the career satisfaction of junior high school English teachers and facilitate the development of their teaching profession.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Kiesling SF, Pavalanathan U, Fitzpatrick J, et al., 2018, Interactional Stancetaking in Online Forums. *Computational Linguistics*. Association for Computational Linguistics, 44(4): 683–718. https://doi.org/10.1162/coli_a_00334
- [2] Kiesling SF, 2022, Stance and Stancetaking. *Annual Review of Linguistics*, 8(1): 409–426. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-031120-121256>
- [3] Du Bois JW, 2007, The Stance Triangle, in *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction*, John Benjamins, Netherlands.
- [4] Harre R, Slocum N, 2003, Disputes as Complex Social Events: On the Uses of Positioning Theory. *Common knowledge*, 9(1): 100–118.
- [5] Kang MA, Chen KH, 2014, Stancetaking and the Hong Kong Girl in a Shifting Heterosexual Marketplace. *Discourse & Society*, 25(2): 205–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513515587>
- [6] Elkatmis M, 2024, Examination of Social Media Usage Habits of Generation Z. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15: 1370823. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1370823>
- [7] Biri Y, 2024, Stancetaking in Interest-Based Online Communities: A Corpus Pragmatic Comparative Analysis. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 125(1): 256–265. <https://doi.org/10.51814/nm.142198>
- [8] Wu Q, Gu L, Zhang M, et al., 2024, Understanding Dual Effects of Social Network Services on Digital Well-Being and Sustainability: A Case Study of Xiaohongshu (RED). *Sustainability*, 16(15): 6709. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16156709>
- [9] Gee J.P, 2014, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method (Fourth Edition)*, Routledge, London.
- [10] Stubbs M, 1991, *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.
- [11] Budd JM, Raber D, 1996, *Discourse Analysis: Method and Application in the Study of Information*. *Information Processing & Management*, 32(2): 217–226.
- [12] Ehrlich S, Meyerhoff M, Holmes J, 2014, *The Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken.
- [13] Ramberg J, Brolin Laftman S, Akerstedt T, et al., 2020, Teacher Stress and Students' School Well-Being: The Case of Upper Secondary Schools in Stockholm. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 64(6): 816–830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2019.1623308>

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.