



Research on Theory and Method of Image Studies in News Reports based on Argumentation

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the limitations of the existing image studies based on news reports in terms of the theory and methodology, explains the types and meanings of topos analysis and Toulmin's argumentation model. By clarifying the relationship between image construction in media and topoi as well as argumentation models, this paper develops a method for image studies in news reports based on argumentation and gives examples to illustrate the application of this method.

Keyword: Image studies in news reports; Topoi; Toulmin's argumentation model

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1 Introduction

The book "Behind the Demonization of China" published by Liu Kang and Li Xiguang (1996) studied the image of China in western media and put forward the view that the western media has "demonized" the national image of China, which has triggered a great response and research boom. Scholars have devoted themselves to the study of China's image in foreign media and have obtained relatively abundant academic achievements.

From the perspective of theoretical basis, a small number of studies apply agenda setting theory, frame theory and critical discourse analysis to investigate

the influence of agenda setting in media reports and news frames, power and ideology in discourse on audience perception. But most of the researches did not mention the theoretical basis.

In terms of research methods, most researches use text analysis. Some of the researches use content analysis to provide more support for the research through quantitative analysis of the number of reports, vocabulary and themes. Some of the researches focus on the themes or frames reported by the media, the discourse characteristics and discourse strategies such as appraisal rhyme, semantic rhyme, vocabulary, metaphor, etc., to provide more clues for the researches. Existing research methods in the image studies based on discourse are inseparable from text analysis. In the light of the commendatory and derogatory nature of themes, vocabulary, metaphors, etc., lots of researches divide image orientation into three outcomes: negative, neutral, and positive.

However, theories and methods applied in the existing researches still have the following limitations. Agenda setting, news frames, ideologically influenced vocabulary, metaphors, etc. cannot fully reflect the image of a specific object in media reports, namely the audience's understanding and evaluation of the object. Furthermore, the existing studies have not clarified the connection between agenda setting, news frames, ideology and the construction of the image. The existing research methods based on topics, frames, vocabulary, metaphors, etc. provide certain clues and evidence for image studies of

media reports in terms of content, approach and attitude, but they cannot provide specific paths for analysis of the image built by media reports. Existing research methods which rely on the commendatory and derogatory judgments of topics, vocabulary and metaphors to make judgments of image orientation are to some extent subjective.

According to the limitations of the above-mentioned theories and methods, this paper adopts the method of argumentation analysis to improve it.

2 Theory construction of image studies in news reports based on argumentation

2.1 Topos analysis

Wengeler (2003), the main founder of topos analysis in the discourse studies, used topos analysis to investigate the discourse of economic crisis and the discourse of immigration in newspaper articles, so as to explore the thinking patterns and knowledge systems hidden in the discourse. The topoi in the researches usually take the following form:

“because something endangers health or damages benefits or pollutes the environment, etc., it should be

opposed. Because something benefits health or brings benefits or protects the environment, etc., it should be supported”.

The topoi in the topos analysis are consequence-oriented arguments, which are basically named after the results or consequences and refer to the arguments in daily life argument.

2.2 Toulmin’s argumentation model

There are diversified forms of argumentation models based on different purposes in our daily life. Toulmin, the pioneer of informal logic, has summarized some types of the argumentation models in daily life. According to Toulmin, the argumentation consists of the claim (or conclusion) supported by data and the reasoning that relies on warrant. The warrant can be supported by other statements (backing). Arguments include not only the support of the arguments, but also the refutation of them (rebuttal), which makes the conclusion of the argument limited (qualifier) (Wu, Zhou and Tang, 2009: 183). Toulmin's argumentation model and its typical example of “Harry is a British subject” are shown in Figure 1(Figure 1).

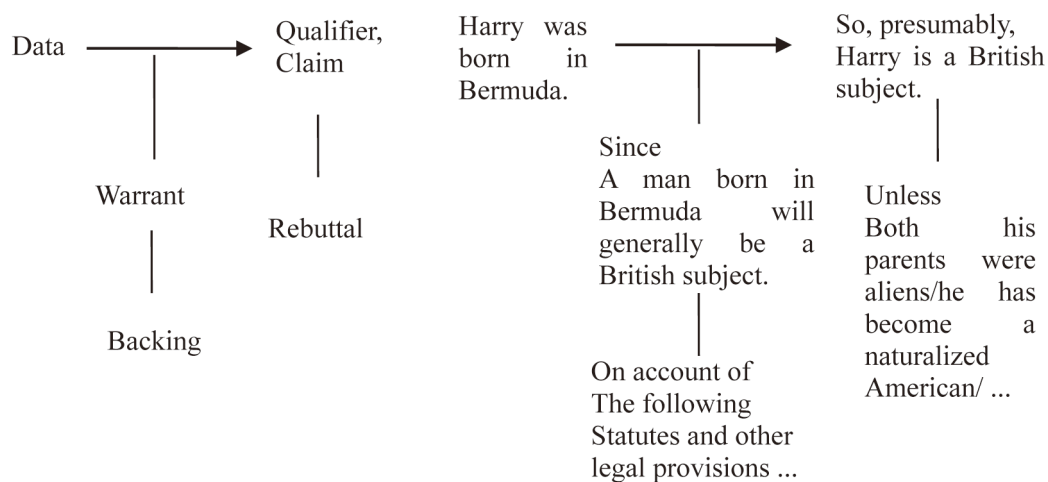


Figure 1. Toulmin’s argumentation model and its example of “Harry is a British subject”

If we compare the structure of the topos in topos analysis with the structure of Toulmin’s argumentation model in Figure 1, it is not difficult to find that the topos is only a simplified form of Toulmin's argumentation model.

2.3 The relationship between image in news reports and topos

Philip Kotler defines image as “people’s beliefs,

ideas and impressions about an object”, and the image is people’s subjective perception of the object it represents (Qin, 2017: 20f.). National image is “a country’s internal public and external public’s understanding and evaluation of the country’s political, economic, social, cultural, geographical and other aspects” (Sun, 2009). Based on the above definition of the “image” and the “national image”, it

can be seen that the image is the subject's cognition and evaluation of the object.

As shown in Figure 1, data, warrant, rebuttal and claim in the argumentation model indicate the speaker's views and inclination towards objective things, that is, the result or the consequence of a certain thing (such as policy, measure, behavior, etc.), and the judgment and tendency to produce this result. Therefore, each element of the argumentation model reflects the recognition and evaluation of the object. The various argument elements of the argumentation model have different meanings. They form the overall meaning of the text through logical relationships. The images and tendencies obtained through the analysis of the argumentation model can demonstrate the original meaning of the text. Therefore, the image in the news reports and its tendency can be better analyzed through the argumentation model.

3 Method of image study in news reports based on topoi and argumentation model

The topoi in the discourse, that is, a specific policy, measure or behavior will lead to certain consequences (harmful to health/healthy, etc.), reflecting the views of the speaker. And the standpoints reflect the inclination of the speaker. The consequences on the one hand form an image of a certain policy, measure or behavior. And the opposition or support on the other hand reflects the tendency (positive or negative) of the image. For the discourse of a certain topic, the topoi which are used frequently reflect the overall image of a certain policy, measure or behavior of a social group.

Take the topoi of hygiene and health in the study of image of German refugees (Tang, 2019: 62) as an example: "Because a certain refugee group is not

conducive to German environmental sanitation and the health of the German people, measures to limit the number of this group should be implemented". The arguer believes that because foreigners entering the country illegally did not undergo health checks in the receiving country, the number of hepatitis patients and tuberculosis patients in the receiving country increased. In order to strengthen the persuasiveness of the argument, the arguer used Hanover's tuberculosis patient data as an example to further strengthen the argument that refugees are not good for the health of the local people. In this way, the arguer creates a negative image of the refugees that they are unhealthy and endanger the health of local people.

Compared with the topoi in the above-mentioned example, the argumentation model has more fundamental elements. The argument elements such as data, warrant, and rebuttal may reflect the speaker's views on different things, and are no longer limited to a certain policy, measure or behavior in the argument. Therefore, the argumentation model will demonstrate the speaker's view and judgement of more things. The rebuttal in the argumentation model reflects the speaker's dialectical thinking, that is, his understanding of the opposite of the conclusion. The existence of the rebuttal reduces the degree of opposition or support tendency of the conclusion and the degree of discourse's tendency toward the image of things. For the discourse of a certain topic, the argumentation model which appears frequently reflects the overall image of the social group on certain things.

On the basis of Toulmin's argumentation model, Zhang (2020: 75) extended the argumentation model to a secondary argumentation model which can illustrate the argumentation in the discourse properly (Figure 2).

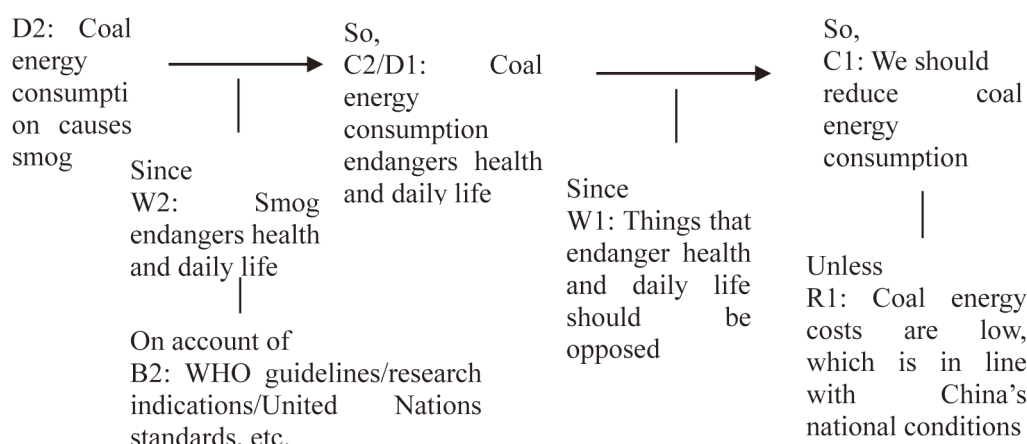


Figure 2. Argumentation model in the news article "Beijing is gasping for air"

In this argumentation model, in terms of the data in the second argumentation (D2: Coal energy consumption causes smog), the speakers have built a negative image of China that consumes large coal and has severe smog. According to the warrant in the second argumentation (W2: Smog endangers health and daily life), the speakers have provided a negative image of China where smog has endangered people's health.

In summary, topos analysis and Toulmin's argumentation model are both good research methods for analyzing the image constructed by media reports. Among them, topos analysis is relatively simple and is suitable for a certain policy, measure or behavior. Toulmin's argumentation model can reflect the image of more things and is suitable for a wider range of research objects.

4 Conclusion

Argumentation is the process of proposing conclusions and providing evidence and reasons. The argumentation model includes claims or conclusions, data and warrants as well as the other elements of argumentation. The argumentation model can fully indicate the speaker's cognition, viewpoint and tendency of things. It is consistent with the image in news reports that reflects the speaker's understanding and evaluation of things. The conclusions, data and warrants in the argumentation model have clear meanings and a strict logical relationship with each other, which can provide specific methods

and paths for the image study in news reports. The argumentation model reflects the original intent of the text, and the image obtained by the analysis of the argumentation model can avoid deviation from the actual results.

Consequently, theories and methods of image studies in news reports based on argumentation can better analyze the image and effectively improve the limitations of the existing studies in terms of theory and method.

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