

# Positive Discourse Analysis of the Queen's Christmas Speech from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory

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## Abstract

The history of Queen Elizabeth's Christmas Speech has been lasting for more than sixty years, and most of the contents are based on major events of the year, which cover the current reflections and yearning for a bright future, so as to guarantee the peaceful stability of the country and society, and enhance public self-identity. According to Martin's positive discourse analysis, this paper investigates the Queen's 2019 Christmas Speech through both qualitative and quantitative analyses. It is found that positive identification and vocabulary are often used for affirming annual achievements in this speech, while the emotional vocabulary is less used to ensure objectivity. Meanwhile, the positive vocabulary of this speech has achieved three communicative functions: expressing festival congratulations, bring the royal family and the people closer together, and maintaining national unity as well as social stability.

## Keywords

Queen's Christmas Speech; Positive discourse analysis; Evaluation theory; Positive vocabulary; Pragmatic strategy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Queen's Christmas Speech refers to the annual Christmas Speech recorded by Queen Elizabeth in the Green Drawing Room of Windsor Castle and broadcasted to the public at fifteen o'clock on Christmas Day through the media. This annual speech has been lasting for more than sixty years since 1952, and now it has become an important way for the royal family to transmit information to the society and get in touch with the British people. On every Christmas Day, sitting around the television or radio and listening to the Queen's annual Christmas Speech has become a festival tradition for most of the British families, which can be seen that the speech has been part of the Christmas celebration in the UK. The details of the Christmas Speech help to shape the good image of the royal family and national thinking. Meanwhile, the British people and the news media can also analyze the latest trend of the British royal family through analyzing the simple signals of this speech (such as the table layout and decoration). Therefore, the choice of vocabulary and expressions in the Christmas Speech is particularly important for the transmission of this information. It is not only distinct from the simple Royal Speeches but also a political way with purpose and appeal, which is worth studying for a better understanding of the political speeches.

At present, researches relating to the Queen's Christmas Speech in China, mainly focus on the perspective of systemic-functional grammar and the distinctions between Chinese and English speech-language styles. However, few studies have analyzed it through positive discourse analysis. Since positive discourse analysis has become a new trend of linguistics study in recent decades, there are a lot of potentials for us to explore and develop in studying various types of

materials. Based on the evaluation theory, this paper analyzes the 2019 Queen's Christmas Speech from the perspective of positive discourse analysis and explains the realization of the evaluation system through the overall statistics of evaluation vocabulary. The investigation of the Queen's Christmas Speech based on positive discourse analysis is not only conducive to the analysis of the pragmatic strategies used in the Queen's Speech but also helpful in the research and exploration of the field of this study in positive discourse analysis.

## **2. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **2.1. Positive Discourse Analysis**

The article "Discourse Analysis" published by Z. S. Harris in *Language* in 1952 is generally regarded as the starting point of contemporary discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is divided into two parts: critical discourse analysis and positive discourse analysis. British scholars Hodge, Fowler et al. firstly proposed critical discourse analysis in their book *Language and Control* published in 1979. Critical discourse analysis focuses on criticizing and exposing the relationship among discourse, right, and ideology, and attributing the conflicts and contradictions caused by society to rights, so as to trigger social system reform. However, critical discourse analysis (CDA) directly points to the source of the contradictions to the government, individuals, and various power institutions, so it is not conducive to social stability and development [1].

Positive discourse analysis comes into being on the basis of critical discourse analysis. It is not only a supplement to critical discourse analysis, but also helpful to its development. J. R. Martin, the professor of the University of Sydney, put forward this proposition for the first time at the Birmingham International Symposium on analysis, which opened up the academic research and exploration of positive discourse analysis. Martin believes that language analysis should not only focus on interpreting the "bad news" with inequality, but also observe the "good news" advocating peace and equality with a positive attitude [2]. Positive discourse analysis focuses on the use of positive language to deal with social conflicts and inequalities. The purpose of positive discourse analysis is to balance the relationship between the listener and the speaker, which is more conducive to social peace and stability. Although the development of positive discourse analysis is only a few decades, it has a supplementary and guiding significance for the further development of this field. Meanwhile, in terms of material selection, positive discourse analysis focuses more on the political, diplomatic, conference, consultation, speech, and other discourses, which has certain guiding significance for the current political stylistic analysis of various countries, so it needs to be further explored by the academic community.

### **2.2. Evaluation Theory**

Evaluation theory, proposed by Australian scholars Martin and White in the 1990s, is the theoretical support of positive discourse analysis, which aims to help readers understand the writer's intention, position, and viewpoint. It is a part of systemic functional grammar and was proposed by Australian scholars Martin and White in the 1990s. According to Martin, evaluation is about assessment that is attitude negotiation, emotional intensity, and various ways of indicating the value and associating with readers [3]. The evaluation theory includes three subsystems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, and its core is the Attitude system. Martin focuses on the lexical level of the evaluation system and distinguishes the three subsystems of the Attitude system from different dimensions, namely, Judgement, Affect, and Appreciation [4]. Among them, the Appreciation includes three subsystems: reaction, composition, and value, which refers to the value evaluation of things; the judgment includes social evaluation and social restraint, in which social norms include behavior norms, ability, and perseverance, while social

constraints include authenticity, reliability, and legitimacy. Generally speaking, the Judgment system judges people's behavior and character; the Affect system mainly refers to the expression of human feelings. At present, the academic circles often analyze political diplomacy, public speech, and historical discourse from the perspective of evaluation theory, which shows the importance of the academic circles on its proposition. The evaluation system of the 2019 Queen's Christmas Speech mostly reflects views and attitudes through positive vocabulary and expressions. Therefore, this paper will mainly analyze and explore the evaluation system of the selected data in specific contexts from the perspectives of words, sentences, and pragmatics.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter mainly applies qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to explore the frequency of evaluation vocabulary and the communicative effect achieved by the Queen's Christmas Speech in 2019. In this paper, qualitative analysis refers to the analysis and identification of positive and negative words in the attitude subsystem of the evaluation system, and quantitative analysis refers to the use of relevant word frequency statistical software for statistical analysis to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the data.

#### 3.1. Overall Statistics of Evaluation Vocabulary

Referring to the positive and negative vocabulary in the attitude subsystem of the evaluation system, this paper analyzes the 2019 Queen's Christmas Speech (687 words in total), and summarizes the use of positive and negative vocabulary in the attitude system, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Statistics of the 2019 Queen's Christmas Speech's Evaluation Vocabulary

	Appreciation	Judgment	Affect	Total (unit)
<b>Positive word</b>	70	10	4	84
<b>Negative word</b>	27	3	1	31
<b>Total (unit)</b>	97	13	5	115

From Table 1, it can be seen that there are 115 evaluation words in this speech. According to the standard of division mentioned before, there are 84 positive words, accounting for 73.04% of the total evaluation words, and 31 negative words, accounting for 26.96% of the total evaluation words. The proportion of words expressing Appreciation, Judgment, and Affect accounted for 84.35%, 11.30%, and 4.35% of the total evaluation vocabulary respectively, while the number of positive words in the three attitude subsystems are 70, 10, and 4, accounting for 72.16%, 76.92%, and 80%, respectively.

Therefore, it can be seen that in this speech, the use of positive words is significantly more than that of negative words, and the number of words expressing the value evaluation (the Appreciation system) of things in attitude resources is the most, while the Affect words are obviously the least. The reason for the small proportion of emotional words is that, although the Queen's Christmas Speech is mainly for celebrating festivals, it still belongs to the political speech in terms of category, which means the speaker will design "to express views and comment on national internal affairs, foreign relations, major events at home and abroad and practical problems". In this case, objective comments are needed. At the same time, the queen also deliberately avoids emotional expression when designing this Christmas Speech, and focuses on the objective facts and reality, so there are more appreciation and judgment words in this speech. The extensive use of positive words shows the Queen's vision for the future

development of the country and her strong appeal for unity as well as kindness among the people.

Through positive discourse analysis, it is found that the use of positive words is significantly more than that of negative words in the 2019 Queen's Christmas Speech. Then, what kind of effect can be achieved by using positive words in the speech? In the following discussion, the author will summarize the communicative purpose of this speech through the positive information conveyed at the sentence level.

### 3.2. The Communicative Purpose of Positive Vocabulary

Just as Martin once said: "Verbal interaction is the basic reality of language [5]." According to the statistics of the evaluation vocabulary above, it can be seen that the positive words are often used in this speech for objective evaluation of things, such as 'giant', 'great', 'protecting', etc. The use of these basic positive words can not only attract the attention of the audience and impress people but also help to share the same feeling with the people, summarize the past and look forward to the future. On the contrary, if too many negative words are added to the speech, the purpose of celebrating the festival will not be achieved, and the listeners will feel depressed and boring, and the intention of the Christmas Speech will not be realized. Based on the characteristics of vocabulary selection in positive discourse analysis, the author believes that the use of positive words in Christmas Speech mainly achieves the following three communicative purposes: to express best wishes for the festival, to close the distance between the royal family and the public, and to maintain national unity and social stability. In the following discussion, the author will make a detailed analysis according to the specific examples in the 2019 Queen's Christmas Speech.

#### 3.2.1. Expressing Best Wishes for the Festival

Christmas has its origins in Christianity. On December 25 of the Gregorian calendar, it was originally to celebrate the birth of Jesus and then gradually evolved into a festival representing the coming of a new year in many western countries. Therefore, Christmas is of great importance in the eyes of westerners. In 1952, the queen began to give a Christmas speech for the first time. On the one hand, the purpose was to convey the message and summarize the achievements and important events of the previous year. On the other hand, the queen celebrated the arrival of the new year and wished the people to continue their efforts in the new year.

These are examples of the wishing intention in the speech.

Example 1: As Christmas dawned, church congregations around the world joined in the singing. It came upon the midnight clear. Like many timeless carols, it speaks not just of the coming of Jesus Christ into a divided world, many years ago, but also of the relevance, even today, of the angel's message of peace and goodwill.

Example 2: And so, I wish you all a very happy Christmas.

In example 1, the Queen conveys a happy and auspicious festival atmosphere by describing the scene in which people sing carols together. The extensive use of positive words such as 'carol', 'angel', 'peace' and 'goodwill' not only create an image of people's happiness when getting together in the church but also expresses the queen's good wishes of the British people to celebrate the new year. In this example, the queen chooses to use 'church' as the subject instead of the first or second person. The main purpose of the queen is to make the people feel the warm atmosphere in the church, encourage citizens to be as happy as the people in the church, and celebrate the arrival of the new year. The use of verbs such as 'joined' and 'singing' describes the great pleasure that people show at festivals. Besides, at the end of each year's speech, the queen always uses 'happy' Christmas at the end of the speech, instead of 'merry'. That is because the word 'merry' emphasizes the carnival joy, which has a potential meaning of stirring the

hearts of the people when it is paired with Christmas; while 'happy' expresses a more general and vivid emotional state. Such basic positive words can win people's attention and make people feel the festive atmosphere and good wishes.

In a word, the happy and auspicious festival atmosphere and good wishes in the speech are conducive to desalinating the political color, making it easier for the public to accept suggestions, to achieve the deep intention of the royal family to convey information to the society. Therefore, the primary purpose that Queen chooses positive words in her speech is to celebrate the festival and create a warm and auspicious Christmas atmosphere for the audience.

### 3.2.2. Closing the Distance Between the Royal Family and the Public

The second reason why Christmas speeches often use positive words is to close the distance between the royal family and the public. The queen is the head of state. As a symbol of the country, the queen represents authority, leadership, and influence. Generally speaking, ordinary people are full of reverie for royal life. Although in reality, the royal family obeys the principle of non-intervention, it is still a part of the British political system. Also, the royal family's expenditure depends on a large amount of taxes allocated by the government every year. If the royal family fails to be supported by the British people, it will make some working-class people feel that the royal family's existence is just a white elephant. In this way, it will lay a hidden danger for the domestic class conflict. Therefore, the annual Christmas speech is the best opportunity for the royal family to close to the public. Every year, the media and people of all classes can analyze the content of the speech, the Queen's manner, room layout, and even the photos on the table to understand the latest developments of royal family members. The queen can close the distance between the royal family and the British people through the blessing and things of royal life so that the public can know that the royal family is always concerned about the people's lives, to narrow the gap between the royal power and the people.

These are examples of intimacy in the speech.

Example 3: As those historic pictures were beamed back to Earth, millions of us sat transfixed to our television screens, as we watched Neil Armstrong taking a small step for man and a giant leap for mankind - and, indeed, for womankind. It's a reminder for us all that giant leaps often start with small steps.

Example 4: I well remember the look of concern on my father's face. He knew the secret D-Day plans but could of course share that burden with no one.

In the speech, the queen started with the Apollo landing on the moon. In describing the process that the photos were transmitted back to the earth, the queen used 'beam' as a predicate verb to describe the pictures being transmitted back to the earth like a beam of light, giving people warmth and hope. Moreover, the queen chooses 'us' as the subject for holistic treatment, which deliberately weakens the distance between the royal family and the public. The queen reviewed the exciting time 50 years ago with all the people, which gives people a more cordial feeling. The queen also used positive words such as 'historic' and 'giant' to express the positive affirmation of the 50th anniversary of Apollo's landing on the moon, and also announced to the public that this is our effort so that the British people can enhance their sense of self-identity and take pride in the progress of the country. Then, the contrast between 'small' and 'giant' can encourage the people to walk through fire by our patience and efforts, even though the difficulties and dangers lay ahead. In example 4, the use of verbs such as 'well', 'concern', and 'share' reflects the royal family's concern for the people, thus enhancing their credibility and closing the distance between the royal family and the British people. It can be seen that the queen wants to arouse the common people's resonance through story narration, to reduce her posture and shorten the audience's distance. Besides, the first person of 'I' was used in many places in the speech, and 'I' told the story to the people without reservation, which shows that

the concept of class is deliberately blurred, which reflects the kindness, and makes people feel a sense of intimacy.

### 3.2.3. Expressing Best Wishes for the Festival

As we all know, political leaders often give speeches to clarify their attitudes to society and express their suggestions in the form of appeals. Therefore, the given speech on Christmas day can well convey the royal family's vision and their calling for national and social stability. Although this Christmas speech is still a kind of royal speech, which contains political meaning, it is a symbol of the state and authority, with a certain political significance. However, along with the theme of the Christmas celebration, this kind of political meaning will be subtly diluted, so that the people can get a sense of self-identity in a happy atmosphere. Therefore, it is easier for people to listen to suggestions. By arousing the resonance of the audience's attitude on a certain political or social issue, the audience's behavior and attitude can be influenced, so as to realize the communicative intention. At the same time, calling for national unity and social stability is also an essential theme of the Queen's Christmas speech over the years. Therefore, how to utilize positive vocabulary to achieve this appeal is worth further exploration. These are examples of the appealing intention in the speech.

Example 5: By being willing to put past differences behind us and move forward together, we honor the freedom and democracy once won for us at so great a cost.

Example 6: It's a timely reminder of what positive things can be achieved when people set aside past differences and come together in the spirit of friendship and reconciliation. And, as we all look forward to the start of a new decade, it's worth remembering that it is often the small steps, not the giant leaps, that bring about the most lasting change.

After reading all the text of the speech, it can be seen that the contents of the Queen's Christmas speeches are mainly based on the major events of this year in their country, so as to express the expectations of the queen as a leader to unite all the people. At the same time, it will be easier for people to accept others' blessings and suggestions on such a special occasion, which is playing an appealing role in maintaining national unity and social stability. The use of these positive vocabulary helps emphasize the importance of resolving differences and embracing peace. Although the UK will face many difficulties in exiting from the EU in 2019, the queen stressed that all of the people should be positive and enterprising, and make progress step by step. The utilization of positive words such as 'forward', 'together' and 'positive' constantly reminds people of the importance of national unity, emphasizing that only a small step beyond faith and hope can overcome long-term differences and deep-rooted differences, and bring about harmony and understanding.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The result shows that although the 2019 Queen's Christmas Speech is simple in words, it is concisely understandable and can fully cover the Queen's appealing and expectations for social peace, harmony, and unity. Numerous positive vocabulary of identification and judgment is used in this speech, which can be more conducive to expressing the speakers' festival celebration to the public, narrowing the distance between the royal family and the British people, and maintaining the social stability of the country. At the same time, through the application of Martin's positive discourse analysis, the language characteristics of the 2019 Queen's Christmas Speech can be concisely explored, which is helpful for figuring out the best way of skillfully using positive vocabulary in political speeches, so as to achieve better political purposes.

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