

I-ROLE 2023**International Conference of Research on Language Education****ECOLOGICAL ORIENTATION AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF
THE DOCUMENTARY BEAUTY OF SHAANXI**

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Abstract

Against the backdrop that the construction of ecological civilization is vigorously promoted by the Chinese government, film and television programs provide a new carrier for the wide spread of ecological civilization construction. Through the description of the geographical environment, historical development and folk culture of Shaanxi Province of China, the documentary Beauty of Shaanxi exhibits the unique natural and cultural landscape of Shaanxi Province. Given this background, this study aims to explore the ecological orientation reflected in this documentary through action process, and to investigate the social functions it has realized. Under the guidance of the ecological discourse analytical framework constructed by He et al., this research adopted the approach of ecological discourse analysis and analyzed the action process of the commentaries to the documentary Beauty of Shaanxi. The results show that four subtypes of action process are involved in the documentary, among which doing process is used with the highest frequency, followed by creating process and behaving process, and happening process ranks last. Secondly, the analysis of action process shows a positive ecological orientation of the commentaries to the documentary Beauty of Shaanxi. Lastly, The use of action process enables the documentary to realize its two social functions—shaping the regional image of Shaanxi and promoting the construction of ecological civilization.

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1. Introduction

On February 10, 2021, the Fifth Session of the Thirteenth National People's Congress of Shaanxi Province approved 'The Fourteenth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of Shaanxi Province and the Outline of the Vision Goals for the Year 2035' (People's Government of Shaanxi Province, 2021), in which specific development goals are put forward in terms of economy, reform, culture, ecology, life and governance. Among them, the two goals of making significant progress in strengthening Shaanxi province by culture and continuous improvement of ecological environment play an important guiding role in the present research. Under the strategy of 'strengthening Shaanxi province by culture', Shaanxi filmmakers has launched a series of excellent films and television works that reflect historical events and highlight the theme of the times, which play a vital role in image building and ecological civilization construction of Shaanxi province.

Ecological civilization construction, an irresistible trend of the times, requires not merely the change of life style, but a shift in the public's mindset and language pattern as well. As regards the interplay between ecological civilization construction and ecolinguistics, Huang (2016, 2018) has repeatedly proposed that the latter contributes to a boost for the former. Ecolinguistics, a new interdisciplinary subject formed by the combination of ecology and linguistics, is defined as 'the study of the impact of language on the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms and the physical environment' (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014, p. 105). At the 6th National Symposium on Ecolinguistics held in 2021, the experts and scholars pointed out that ecolinguistics has become an important breakthrough point for the construction of ecological civilization at the linguistic level. In the process of ecological civilization construction, ecological orientations of discourses, which refers to 'eco-beneficial discourses, eco-destructive discourses and eco-ambivalent discourses' (He & Wei, 2018, p. 70), directly or indirectly have effect on the ecology of the whole society, and thereby affect the construction of ecological civilization.

2. Problem Statement

Haugen's (1970) speech marked the birth of ecolinguistics (Eliasson, 2015). And Halliday's (1990) speech signified it has become a branch of linguistics (Couto, 2014). Since the rise of ecolinguistics for over half a century, ecolinguists have made great achievements in the fields of environment (Chawla, 1991; Fill, 1993; Goatly, 2002; Mühlhäusler, 2003; Nash & Mühlhäusler, 2014; Penman, 1994; Schultz, 2001), tourism (Durán-Muñoz, 2019; Gössling, 2007; Kuhn, 2007; Milstein, 2008; Stamou & Paraskevopoulos, 2008), industrial agriculture (Glenn, 2004; Mitchell, 2013; Stibbe, 2012; Trampe, 2001) and politics (Bevitorri, 2015; Kuha, 2018). However, research focused on ecological discourse analysis of film and television works is rarely seen in the literature. And research on promoting the construction of ecological civilization in a region through the ecological discourse analysis of the media arts in that region remains a research gap in the field of ecolinguistics.

Over the years, a series of ecological control measures have been persistently promoted in Shaanxi province, which has enabled the color green not only the typical of Shaanxi, but also a symbol of its image. As the portrayal of Shaanxi folk customs, the documentary *Beauty of Shaanxi* exhibits the

profound history and cultural heritage of this province, exhibits a brand-new image of the humanistic spirit of Shaanxi in the new era, highlights the great achievements of Shaanxi's ecological progress, and provides valuable experience for China's construction of ecological civilization. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to conduct an ecological discourse analysis of the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi* and explore its positive impact on Shaanxi's image building and ecological civilization construction. Extensive research in this field will also inject new vitality into the further development of the emerging discipline of ecolinguistics.

In probing into future directions of ecolinguistics, Fill and Penz (2018) and Penz and Fill (2022) point out more than once that an additional section would be the investigation of films and TV shows. In view of the research gap of movie and television shows from an ecolinguistic angle and the urgency of ecological civilization construction, this study, therefore, selects the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi* as the research object and conducts an ecological discourse analysis of its commentary under the framework established by He et al. (2021), to explore the ecological orientation reflected by action process, and to investigate the social functions the documentary has achieved through the commentaries with positive ecological orientation.

3. Research Questions

This study aims to find the answers to the following two questions: i) What kind of ecological orientation is reflected by action process of the commentary to the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi*? ii) How does the documentary film achieve its social functions through eco-beneficial discourses?

4. Purpose of the Study

Consistent with the research questions, two objectives were outlined to guide the current study: i) To explore the ecological orientation of the discourses in the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi* in terms of action process; ii) To investigate the social functions the documentary film has achieved through eco-beneficial discourses.

5. Research Methods

This research employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly, the commentary of the documentary *Beauty of Shaanxi* is transcribed, with a total of 6261 words. Secondly, label the action process of the transcription. Then, make a quantification statistics for action process in the corpus. Finally, under the guidance of the transitivity system from an ecolinguistic perspective constructed by He et al. (2021), this study conducts an ecological discourse analysis in terms of action process based on the statistical data, and expounds on the social functions the documentary has realized from the perspective of ecolinguistics.

5.1. Data collection procedure

This study employs a qualitative approach to identify the ecological orientation of the commentaries to the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi*. The data collection procedure is based on three key stages: Stage 1 - Collecting data; Stage 2- Processing data; and Stage 3 - Displaying data.

In the first stage, the researcher collects the data from the documentary available at Youku, the Chinese equivalent of YouTube. With an altogether ten episodes, 10 minutes each, the documentary boasts a large amount of data to be screened for analysis. In the second stage, the researcher transcribes in full the commentary to the documentary, and labels the action process of the transcription and conducts an ecological discourse analysis under the guidance of the analytical framework constructed by He et al. (2021). In the third stage, the researcher displays the data by means of text, exploring the social functions the documentary film has achieved through positive ecological orientation. Figure 1 shows the three key stages in this research procedure.

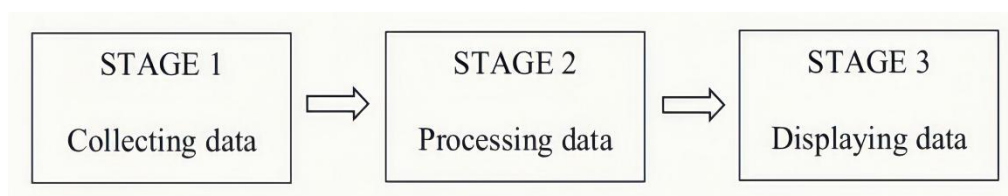


Figure 1. Research procedure

5.2. Data analysis

This study employed the transitivity system from an ecolinguistic perspective constructed by He et al. (2021), to explore the ecological orientation of the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi* reflected by action process. Transitivity concerns the type of process (Pro) represented by a clause, and the participant role (PR) and circumstantial role (CR) in this process. He et al. (2021) divides transitivity process into action process, mental process and relational process. Based on the framework of ecological discourse analysis constructed by He et al. (2021), this research, taking the documentary *Beauty of Shaanxi* as the research object, explores the ecological orientation reflected by action process, and discusses the social functions of the documentary has achieved through positive ecological orientation.

Under the guidance of the ecological discourse analytical framework constructed by He et al. (2021), this study made statistical analysis on action process of the documentary *Beauty of Shaanxi* and obtained the following data (see Table 1):

Table 1. Quantity and proportion of action process types

Action process	Quantity	Proportion
Happening process	9	3.95%
Doing process	188	82.46%
Creating process	17	7.45%
Behaving process	14	6.14%
Subtotal	228	100%

According to Table 1, action process of *Beauty of Shaanxi* appears 228 times. Doing process appears most frequently, followed by creating process and behaving process, and happening process ranks last. The highest frequency of doing process, which is 188 times, accounting for 82.46%, shows that *Beauty of Shaanxi* is not a vague and general description of social and cultural environment in Shaanxi, but a specific display of Shaanxi's beauty through a large number of doing processes that represent direct action events in nature and society and thereby have an impact on the real world.

6. Findings

This section presents the findings on the basis of the analysis of the characteristics of action process of the commentary to the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi*. The objective is to explore the ecological orientation reflected by action process of the commentary to the documentary film and to investigate social functions the documentary film has achieved.

6.1. Ecological orientation reflected by action process

Within the framework of ecological discourse analysis constructed by He et al. (2021), the term 'action process', which concerns both the physical realm of experience and the realm of social interaction, is adopted from Cardiff Grammar (Fawcett, 2008). He et al. (2021) divide action process into happening process, doing process, creating process and behaving process. Within the ecological discourse analytical framework, this study analyzes action process of the commentary to *Beauty of Shaanxi*, and explores the ecological orientation reflected in the text.

6.1.1. Happening process

Happening process refers to the experiential activities occurring directly in nature or society (He et al., 2021). In this subtype of action process, no PR or only one PR is involved. The PR, which is, in most cases, Affected (Af), and in few cases, Agent (Ag), is generally used to represent a natural or social phenomenon.

Example 1: *Peacefully, the 3000-li Hanjiang River (Af) flows (Pro) day and night (CR) through the verdant mountains to provide visitors with a matchless water view.*

In Example 1, 'flow' in the underlined clause is a natural happening process, and 'Hanjiang River' is the Affected. As the cradle of Chinese civilization, Hanjiang River conveys the voice of the era of ecological construction, mixed with musical rhyme of coexistence between humans and nature. The description of the beautiful scenery of Hanjiang River in this clause presents the limpidity and beauty of Hanjiang River and the sweetness that it nourishes everything. Hence it is an eco-beneficial discourse.

6.1.2. Doing process

Doing process represents the events of direct action in nature and society (He et al., 2021). This type of process expects one to three PRs. In the case of one PR, it is generally the Agent (Ag); in the case of two PRs, one Ag and the other the Affected (Af); and in the case of three PRs, one Ag and two Afs, in

which the two Afs are compound participant role. The following is the analysis of an example of this type:

Example 2: *These green plants (Ag), therefore, have not only stopped (Pro) the southward expansion of the Maowusu Desert (Af), but also changed (Pro) our general impression of the loess plateau (Af).*

Example 2 shows the outstanding achievements of Maowusu Desert control. According to the documentary film, Maowusu Desert has finally changed from a desert to an oasis through unremitting efforts of generations of people to combat desertification. In this example, the Agent ‘*these green plants*’ is the initiator of the Processes ‘*stopped*’ and ‘*changed*’, which respectively correspond to the two Affected ‘*the southward expansion of the Maowusu Desert*’ and ‘*our general impression of the loess plateau*’. This clause vividly describes the amelioration of the Maowusu Desert after decades of ecological management, as well as a new pattern of harmonious coexistence between man and nature realized through man’s struggle. Therefore, this clause delivers an eco-beneficial process.

6.1.3. Creating process

Creating process represents the process of things or events going from nothing to something, generally involving one or two PRs—Created (Cre) and Agent (Ag) (He et al., 2021).

Example 3: *It (Ag) produces (Pro) with the sandy water (CR) a symphony (Cre), singing praise of the yellow blood, toiling and boiling in the blood vessels of a people with yellow skin.*

In combination with the context, the Agent in Example 3 is ‘*it*’, referring to our mother river, the Yellow River, which is an eco-beneficial Participant Role. The Circumstantial Role ‘*with the sandy water*’ complements the characteristics of the Yellow River. The Created produced by the Process ‘*produce*’ is ‘*a symphony*’, which represents prosperous glory the Yellow River is leading us to, as well as the firm determination of the Chinese people promoting the Yellow River culture and guarding the mother river. Thus, this clause clearly represents eco-beneficial information.

6.1.4. Behaving process

Behaving process refers to the unconscious physiological behavior of animate objects such as human beings, generally involving only one PR, Behaver (Behr), the one that conducts the process (He et al., 2021).

Example 4: *This coalmine sleeping under the earth for millions of centuries (Behr) woke up (Pro) to change Shaanxi’s position in the general energy resource structure of China (CR).*

In Example 4, the Behaver is ‘*this coalmine*’, referring to the Jurassic Coalfield in Northern Shaanxi. Combined with the background, the discovery of the coalfield is a milestone achievement in the history of geological exploration since the founding of new China, which has laid the foundation for the westward movement of China’s coal industry. The exploitation of the Jurassic coalfield has improved the living conditions of the local people and promoted the great transformation of the economic and social outlook of Northern Shaanxi. ‘*Woke up*’ is the behaving process, with the employment of which, the film personifies the coalfield, endowing it with strong subjective initiative, narrowing the relationship between

people and the coalfield, and thus reflecting a non-anthropocentric perspective. Therefore, this clause transfers eco-beneficial information.

6.2. Social functions of the documentary

Our study is inspired by Fill and Penz's (2018) and Penz and Fill's (2022) proposition that television programs and films will have to be investigated as new dimensions into ecolinguistics. We also draw upon Huang's (2016, 2018) standpoint that ecolinguistics can be a guide in the construction of ecological civilization. Within the ecological discourse analytical framework constructed by He et al. (2021), this research analyzes action process of the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi*. It is found that the documentary has achieved two social functions through the application of action process—shaping the regional image of Shaanxi and promoting the construction of ecological civilization.

6.2.1. Shaping Shaanxi's regional image

Through bright pictures, beautiful music and concise language, the documentary *Beauty of Shaanxi* showcases from all angles Shaanxi's natural landscape, folk culture and modern vitality with ten different themes. 'The Central Mountain Range of China' recounts the deep attachment of Chinese people to Qinling, the Father Mountain of the Chinese nation; 'The Water of Rivers and Streams' depicts Hanjiang River—a true-life painting rolling 3,000 li; 'Land of Geographic Miracles' shows the Loess Plateau with ecological improvement and Guanzhong Plain with the reputation of 'Granary on Earth'; 'The Green Homeland' has uncovered the secret and magic weapon for turning the land of northern Shaanxi from yellow to green; 'Xi'an—Starting Point of the Silk Road' reviews the past of Xi'an as the starting point of the ancient Silk Road and looks forward to the future of Xi'an as the focus of the new Silk Road; 'Land of history' narrates the abundant memory of Chinese history; 'Land of Transportation Miracle' presents the soundly-developed traffic system of Shaanxi; 'Land of Antiquity and Charm' portrays the quiet, peaceful and vibrant ancient town; 'Land of Everlasting Happiness' exhibits Shaanxi's culture and people's livelihood; 'Treasury of Energy Resources' relates the guiding principle for the future development of Shaanxi—to develop green resources and to build an eco-friendly homeland.

From the perspective of ecological discourse analysis, the four subtypes of action process that the commentaries to this documentary involve—happening process, doing process, creating process and behaving process—all reflect a positive ecological orientation. In other words, through an ecological discourse analysis in terms of action process, the commentaries to *Beauty of Shaanxi* are all eco-beneficial discourses. This film presents to the audience Shaanxi province, where history and modernity complement each other, tradition and fashion blend perfectly, and economy and ecology develop harmoniously. It departs radically from the poverty and backwardness of the Loess Plateau that has been painted for us by stereotypes, showing the charm of Shaanxi and highlighting its new image.

With high credibility and market penetration (Gartner, 1994), documentary films hold much more potential for shaping the image of a certain region than fictional stories. The positive ecological orientation reflected in this documentary is conducive to the creation of a positive image of Shaanxi province. In this respect, we concur with Hao's (2014) study that the film language can be codified to shape the images of a city as a tourist destination, Min and Sangkyun's (2015) findings that

documentaries can change viewers' perceptions of a region, as well as Ilie-Prica's (2015) emphasis of the importance of documentary films in the construction of country branding.

6.2.2. Promoting the construction of ecological civilization

As mentioned above, through the analysis of action process, the commentaries to *Beauty of Shaanxi* are all eco-beneficial discourses, reflecting the positive ecological orientation. Under the background of China's vigorous promotion of ecological civilization construction, film and television works play a vital role in value guidance with their novel and unique artistic charm. Among them, the documentaries of human geography focusing on the great rivers and mountains of the motherland have greatly enhanced the cohesion and pride of Chinese people, making it possible to carry forward mainstream values through audio-visual arts, providing a new carrier for the widespread dissemination of ecological civilization construction and a new path for presenting ecological civilization construction.

The description of Shaanxi's ecological environment protection and construction in this documentary, be it Shaanxi's ecological improvement, change of Maowusu Desert's original view, or the gradual formation of green lifestyle, all demonstrates the great achievements of Shaanxi's construction of ecological civilization, and thus providing valuable experience for the promotion of China's ecological progress.

Ecolinguistics 'enables humanities to contribute to building a more ecological civilization (Stibbe, 2021). In this sense, the present study echoes Zuo's (2019) finding that the ecological meaning of texts can be interpreted to highlight the construction of ecological civilization, as well as Chen and Stibbe's (2022) viewpoint that Chinese ecolinguists can take 'ecological civilization' as a national policy of China to analyze discourses.

7. Conclusion

This study responds to the call for an investigation into films and TV programs in an ecolinguistic dimension (Fill & Penz, 2018; Penz & Fill, 2022). In this study, we set out to investigate what kind of ecological orientation is reflected by action process of the commentary to the documentary film *Beauty of Shaanxi* and how the commentary to the documentary film achieves its social functions through positive ecological orientation. Under the guidance of the ecological discourse analytical framework constructed by He et al. (2021), this study makes an analysis of action process of the discourses in the documentary from an ecological perspective, and comes to the following conclusions: First, the commentary to the documentary *Beauty of Shaanxi* involves four subtypes of action processes—happening process, doing process, creating process and behaving process, among which doing process is the most frequently used, followed by creating process and behaving process, and happening process ranks last. The use of action process describes the positive interactions between human and nature, human and social economy, as well as human and ecological environment. Second, through the analysis of action process, the commentaries to the documentary *Beauty of Shaanxi* are all ecological beneficial discourses, which reflect a positive ecological orientation. Research on the ways eco-beneficial discourses are expressed and the promotion of their use in the whole society contributes to the wide spread of the ecological civilization values and

the benign development of the ecosystem. Third, the positive ecological orientation enables the documentary *Beauty of Shaanxi* to realize its two major social functions — shaping the regional image of Shaanxi and promoting the construction of ecological civilization. By analyzing action processes of the commentaries to the documentary and determining their ecological orientation, the ecological awareness of the public and media workers will be increased, and their ecological behaviors will be improved, so as to accelerate the new process of ecological civilization construction.

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