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EXPLORING THE AXIOLOGICAL LEXICON IN CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS: CROSS-LANGUAGE PERSPECTIVES ON EVALUATIVE MEANING

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Abstract

This article presents a multi-dimensional synthesis of five seminal strands in the study of values in language—axiolinguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics (Appraisal), pragmatics (Politeness & Speech Acts), Critical Discourse Analysis, and cognitive-cultural metaphor theory—and shows how their integration can enrich contrastive-linguistic research and foreign-language teaching. Through a systematic literature review of canonical works (Arutyunova et al., 2007; Halliday, 1978; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fairclough, 1989; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Wierzbicka, 1991, etc.), we identify the key evaluative constructs, analytical units, and pedagogical implications in each framework. We then propose a unified model that (1) catalogs evaluative vocabulary across languages, (2) applies Appraisal diagnostics to annotate Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation, (3) incorporates pragmatic face-management strategies, (4) employs critical-discourse techniques to uncover ideological biases, and (5) leverages conceptual-metaphor and semantic-prime insights for intercultural awareness. This integrative approach not only offers a richer contrastive-linguistic typology but also suggests targeted pedagogical interventions to mitigate negative transfer (interference) and enhance positive transfer (facilitation) in second-language acquisition. We conclude by outlining directions for empirical validation and curriculum design.

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Keywords: Axiolinguistics; Systemic Functional Linguistics; Appraisal Theory; Politeness Theory; Critical Discourse Analysis; Conceptual Metaphor; Contrastive Pedagogy; Interference; Facilitation.

Introduction

The study of how language encodes, communicates, and shapes human values has matured into a multidisciplinary field, drawing on insights from semantics, discourse analysis, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics. Early work in linguistic axiology (or axiomatic linguistics) established that languages are not neutral vehicles but repositories of a community's moral and cultural priorities. Arutyunova and colleagues, for instance, developed frameworks for identifying evaluative lexemes, phraseology, and metaphors—showing how concepts such as goodness, justice, and happiness are variously lexicalized across cultures (Arutyunova et al., 2007).

Building on this, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) introduced the interpersonal metafunction, positing that language resources allow speakers to express attitudes and negotiate social relationships (Halliday, 1978). Martin and White's Appraisal theory refines this by categorizing evaluative language into three systems—Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation—mapping how emotion, moral evaluation, and aesthetic assessment are linguistically realized (Martin & White, 2005).

Meanwhile, pragmatic approaches have highlighted the role of context in conveying values. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory foregrounds "face" as a core value, illustrating how strategies like honorifics and indirectness signal respect or solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speech Act Theory further demonstrates that utterances such as apologies or commendations inherently perform value judgments (Searle, 1969).

In parallel, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) scholars argue that even ostensibly neutral institutional language embeds ideological values and power relations. Fairclough (1989) and van Dijk (1993) reveal how media and political texts label actors ("freedom fighters" vs. "terrorists"), shaping public opinion through subtle evaluative choices. Finally, cognitive and cultural linguistics emphasize the interplay between language structures and worldviews: Sapir (1921) and Whorf

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(1956) contended that linguistic categories influence perception, while Lakoff and Johnson's work on conceptual metaphors uncovers how values like morality and freedom are framed through metaphorical schemas (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 2002). Anna Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguage identifies culture-specific "key words" (e.g., Japanese amae, Russian toska) that encapsulate foundational values (Wierzbicka, 1991, 1992).

Despite this rich theoretical foundation, there remains a need for a synthesized model that integrates these perspectives to guide both linguistic theory and applied fields such as foreign-language pedagogy. This study conducts a systematic literature review and meta-synthesis to articulate such an integrative framework.

Methods

A comprehensive literature search was conducted, targeting seminal monographs and peer-reviewed articles across five domains: linguistic axiology, SFL/Appraisal, pragmatics/politeness, CDA, and cognitive-cultural linguistics. Sources were selected based on (1) historical significance, (2) citation frequency, and (3) theoretical distinctiveness. Archives consulted included the AIC2007 proceedings for axiological frameworks, Cambridge and University of Chicago Press catalogs for foundational texts, and the Natural Semantic Metalanguage repository for cultural-keywords research.

After assembling an initial corpus of thirty works, we applied qualitative discourse-analytic techniques (Wodak, 1996) to extract key categories, mechanisms, and methodological approaches. Data abstraction involved coding each source for (a) primary evaluative constructs, (b) analytical units (e.g., lexemes, speech acts, metaphors), and (c) proposed pedagogical implications. These codes were then synthesized into five principal strands, each representing a thematic cluster of axiological inquiry.

Results

1. Linguistic Axiology (Axiolinguistics)

Arutyunova et al. (2007) pioneered the systematic mapping of evaluative lexis, demonstrating that value terms form semantic fields which can be compared across languages. Their framework identifies both universal value concepts (e.g.,

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good, bad) and culture-specific idioms and proverbs, offering tools for cross-linguistic contrast.

2. Systemic Functional Linguistics & Appraisal

Halliday's SFL situates evaluation within the interpersonal metafunction, while Martin and White (2005) elaborate the Appraisal system into Affect (emotion), Judgement (moral evaluation of persons), and Appreciation (aesthetic evaluation of phenomena). This tripartite model provides a granular taxonomy for coding evaluative expressions in corpora and classroom materials.

3. Pragmatics & Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) show that face-saving and face-enhancing strategies are governed by cultural norms, indexing values like deference or solidarity. Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969) complements this by classifying acts—praising, blaming, thanking—as performative expressions of value, underscoring the context-dependency of evaluative meaning.

4. Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough (1989) and van Dijk (1993) reveal how institutional and media discourses embed ideological values. Their methodologies—such as critical text analysis and discourse semantics—uncover hidden assumptions about authority, consumerism, or social justice, illustrating how lexicogrammatical choices sustain power structures.

5. Cognitive & Cultural Linguistics

Sapir (1921) and Whorf (1956) laid the groundwork for the idea that linguistic categories shape thought and value perception. Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor theory (1980) links abstract values to embodied schemas (e.g., Nation as Family). Wierzbicka's NSM (1991; 1992) identifies universal semantic primes and language-specific key words that crystallize core cultural values.

Discussion

The five strands collectively map a continuum from micro-level lexical semantics to macro-level discursive ideologies and cognitive schemas. An integrative framework would:

1. Catalogue evaluative vocabulary (Axiolinguistics) to build contrastive lexicons.

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2. Apply Appraisal diagnostics (SFL) to annotate text for Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation.
3. Incorporate pragmatic strategies (Politeness/Speech Acts) to teach contextual value negotiation.
4. Engage critical discourse techniques to develop learners' critical awareness of power-laden language.
5. Leverage cognitive-cultural insights (Metaphor & NSM) to foster deep intercultural understanding.

Applied to foreign-language teaching, this model suggests that axiological awareness—explicit instruction in value-laden language—can mitigate negative transfer (interference) and harness positive transfer (facilitation) by sensitizing learners to both universal and culture-specific evaluative patterns.

Conclusion

Synthesizing axiological linguistics, SFL/Appraisal, pragmatics, CDA, and cognitive-cultural theory yields a robust, multi-layered framework for understanding and teaching how language encodes values. Embedding this integrative model in contrastive pedagogy holds promise for more culturally responsive, critically aware, and effective foreign-language instruction.

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