Stylistic Features on Agriculture Reports of VOA Learning English

Jing Li*
Foreign Language College, Dalian Neusoft University of Information, Dalian, Liaoning Province, China
*Corresponding author e-mail: lijing@neusoft.edu.cn

Abstract. This paper, based on modern stylistic theories, aims at studying the stylistic features of agriculture reports abstracted from the official website-https://www.chinavoa.com/ OVA learning English. With combination of the quantitative and qualitative analytical research methodologies, the levels of lexicon and syntax or the texts are studied respectively. The analysis presents words which are relevant to agriculture and different numbers with the units of measurement are frequently presented in the reports. While on the grammatical level, present tense and active voice are two typical usages. Moreover, passive voice, perfect aspect, and modality are also distributed. In the application of modality, the words with the meaning of permission, possibility, ability is frequently adopted. The results of this study pave the way to English learners and agriculture researchers’ writing reports.

Keywords: Agriculture Report, Stylistics, VOA Learning English

1. Introduction
Agriculture is the first industry, a basic industry to support the construction and development of the national economy. Therefore, various research concerning agriculture has been conducting across the world, among which English perspective studies are worth noting, covering the words of agriculture or farming, literature and agriculture reports, etc.

The Voice of America (VOA) provides news, information and cultural programs through the Internet, mobile phones and social media [8]. Special English, one of its columns, plays a key role in learning English with the contents of Technology Report, Science in the News, Agriculture Report, Economics Report and so on [10]. Dynamic information of agriculture expressed in English, no doubt, acts as an effective way for English learners. Besides, those who spend much time researching agriculture can benefit from VOA learning English.

The primary purpose of this paper, taking agriculture reports from https://www.chinavoa.com/ as examples, is to analyze the stylistic features of agriculture reports from lexical and syntactic perspectives.

2. Theories

2.1 Aspect
Aspect is a term which is related to time distinctions and it emerges in verb phrases. Whereas
aspect connects with the finished or uncompleted events or states by using verbs. The perfect aspect indicates events or states occurring during a specific period [1].

2.2 Modality
The meanings of permission, possibility, ability, obligation, necessity and prediction are expressed by modal auxiliary verbs, which include can, may, should, will, etc [2].

3. Research Target and Research Methodology

3.1 Research Target
In this paper, the research targets are 15 agriculture reports are adopted from the website https://www.chinavoa.com/, consisting of planting the tea, converting forests, fishing and so on.

3.2 Research Methodology
Stylistics are usually classified into four levels containing pronunciation, lexicon, phrase and grammar [5]. This thesis is based on the theories of tokens, tense, aspect, voice and modality with the quantitative methodology demonstrating the statistics of tokens, figures of clauses, tenses, voices, and the usage of modality, etc. and the integration of qualitative research to study the lexicon, syntax and texts of agriculture reports.

4. Research Results and Discussion

4.1 Lexical Level
The words related to the agriculture are commonly occupied in the reports such as irrigation, food processing, crops, farming, bean and so on. The concrete vocabulary usage is shown as follow.

| Planting | roses, chrysanthemums, fruit, vegetable, purple tea |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Forestry | forests, bark, pine needles, cottonseed, oak leaves |
| Animal husbandry | animals, cow, a cow-head factory |
| Fishery | fish, tuna, salmon, fish farms |
| Sideline industry | tea bushes, milking |

A typical feature of agriculture reports is the usage of numbers, among which the year and percentage are frequently adopted and statistics are listed in each report. In the abstracted 15 reports, percent of numbers are used for 30 times. For instance, might and maybe followed by 30 percent of our entire farm income is employed to express the possibility [9]. And it makes listeners clarify the detailed occupation of agri-tourism revenue.

Another common usage, the year are cited for 34 times such as 1970, 2010, etc. As is found in the lines, numbers are modified by might, maybe and more than instead of the exact ones which accord with characteristics of reports—providing the timely and accurate information. 60 percent is estimated by local tourism and it is not calculated when the report is issued. Besides, the use of numbers is often followed by units of measurement. In one clause, the application of the vague language more than 57-thousand hectares is to embody the objective and rigorous expression.

4.2 Syntactic Level
On syntactic level, tense, aspect, voice and modality are analyzed in this paper. It is found in corpus findings that more present tenses are adopted than past tense [7]. While for modality data, verb phrases with modals comprise 10-15% of all finite verb phrases in all registers.
Distributions of tense, aspect, voice, and modality are as follow.

**Table 2.** Syntactic Features of Agriculture Reports

| Report | Clause | Present tense | Past tense | Aspect | Passive voice | Modality |
|--------|--------|---------------|------------|--------|---------------|----------|
| 1      | 38     | 27            | 2          | 3      | 1             | 10       |
| 2      | 29     | 19            | 1          | 5      | 2             | 11       |
| 3      | 29     | 25            | 2          | 4      | 4             | 15       |
| 4      | 35     | 31            | 3          | 5      | 3             | 12       |
| 5      | 41     | 29            | 4          | 6      | 2             | 10       |
| 6      | 36     | 29            | 1          | 7      | 6             | 10       |
| 7      | 28     | 35            | 2          | 4      | 5             | 9        |
| 8      | 34     | 23            | 3          | 6      | 7             | 8        |
| 9      | 43     | 30            | 16         | 8      | 3             | 9        |
| 10     | 35     | 24            | 5          | 3      | 3             | 11       |
| 11     | 37     | 25            | 5          | 3      | 0             | 7        |
| 12     | 33     | 19            | 8          | 3      | 0             | 11       |
| 13     | 34     | 26            | 2          | 1      | 2             | 12       |
| 14     | 37     | 31            | 1          | 2      | 2             | 8        |
| 15     | 43     | 34            | 2          | 3      | 2             | 9        |
| Mean   | 35     | 27            | 4          | 4      | 3             | 10       |

**4.2.1 Tense**

As is seen in the table, there is no distinct clause number difference among the extracted agriculture reports and the average figure of clauses is 35. Present tense is distributed more frequently (with the average frequency 27) than past tense (with the average frequency 4) in agriculture reports. Specifically, the simple or unmarked present tense account for 77%, illustrating that the state many be temporary or persist for a longer time, and present habitual behavior. Occasionally, the marking of the present tense refers to future time. An example is:

*We expect to keep that growth rate going in the next couple of decades.*

**Figure 1.** Example of present tense

**4.2.2 Voice**

While active voice is with the larger occupation than passive voice. By this means, it is easy for listeners to understand the contents [6]. Another factor is that the actions or states of people are in charge or have impacts on growth of agriculture to a great extent. Moreover, it is found that the perfect passive is the only complex combination that is moderately common and other combinations of aspects and voice are generally rare [3]. Nevertheless, passive voice only takes up 3 times on average in reports.

**4.2.3 Aspect**

Meanwhile, passive voice and aspect are used. The statistics from corpus indicate that perfect aspect in British English news is much more common than in American news [4]. According to VOA learning English, the average usage of aspects occupies 11%, and the majority of perfect and progressive aspect verb phrases are in the present tense in news reportage. Furthermore, the verb been with 23 times is the most common present perfect form in agriculture reports. The case is:

*Climate change has severely hurt the area in the past 10 years.*

**Figure 2.** Example of aspect

**4.2.4 Modality**
With regard to modality, markers of permission, possibility and ability can, could and may are with the highest frequency. Among the reports, the vocabulary of modality is adopted for 154 times and the detailed data is listed in the following table.

**Table 3. Syntactic Features of Agriculture Reports**

| Modality            | Marker | Figure | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------|--------|------------|
| permission          | can    | 65     | 43%        |
| possibility         | could  | 7      | 5%         |
| ability             | may    | 15     | 9%         |
| obligation          | must   | 5      | 3%         |
| necessity           | should | 9      | 6%         |
|                     | have to| 3      | 2%         |
|                     | need to| 5      | 3%         |
| volition            | will   | 35     | 23%        |
| prediction          | would  | 7      | 5%         |
|                     | be going to | 2   | 1%         |

The modal can, with the meaning of permission, possibility and ability ranks the first place with 43% of all the modals, indicating that in agriculture reports, some consequences can be predicted. Next, obligation and necessity must, should, have to and need to are presented with the least rate and the figures are 3%, 6%, 2% and 3% respectively. The modal will with the meaning of prediction appears more commonly than be going to. To some extent, will is also a way to illustrate volition. The data demonstrates that situations of five industries of agriculture—planting, fishery, forestry, animal husbandry, sideline industry and fishery are not necessary but flexible.

5. Conclusion

Through the lexical analysis above, it is proved that the typical stylistic features of agriculture reports are the applications of words connected with agriculture and vague numbers. Besides, on the syntactic level, present tense, active voice and modality with the meanings of permission, possibility and ability are with higher frequency. Mastery of stylistic characteristics paves the way for learners’ acquisition and researchers’ grasping dynamic agriculture information. Whereas, the limitation of this paper is that the textual analysis is undone in this paper, leaving the room for future researchers.

References

[1] Biber, D. Variation across Speech and Writing [M]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
[2] Douglas Biber, Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2011, pp.460-506
[3] Zhou Shijie, Statistics in Language Reseraches, Dalian, 2008
[4] Aphra Behn’s Dramatic Canon: Stylistics, Stylochronometry, and Non-Traditional Authorship Attribution [J], 227, 2020
[5] Book review: Alison Gibbons and Sara Whiteley, Contemporary Stylistics: Language, Cognition, Interpretation, 2020
[6] Dong Danni, A Stylistic Study on the English Newspaper Disaster News [J], Jincheng Institute of Technology, 2011(4) pp.54-57
[7] He Shanshan, A Stylistics Analysis of Foregrounding in Hills Like White Elephants[J], Overseas English, 2020, pp. 225-227
[8] Zhang Meifang, Using Corpus for Investigating the Style of a Literary Translator-Introducing and commenting on Baker’s new research method [J],
Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages, 2002(5) pp.54-57

[9] Information on https://www.chinavoa.com/

[10] Information on https://www.51voa.com/VOA_Special_English/