

Investigating News Writers' Engagement in Reporting Gender-based Contents towards Female and LGBTQ Politicians of Thai Political Discourse in Press: An Appraisal Analysis

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the engagement of news writers in reporting gender-based content towards both female and LGBTQ politicians in the press in Thailand. The data were 39 clause complexes containing both female or LGBTQ politician as an actor and units of evaluation of gender and sexual orientations. They were collected from two online mainstream English-language newspapers: Bangkok Post and Khaosod. The period of data collection was May 2019 – December 2021. Engagement domain under Martin and White (2005)'s Appraisal Theory was employed as an analytical framework. The findings reveal that attribute under dialogic expansion domain was employed the most (32 times) in expressing performative evaluations towards female and LGBTQ politicians. This suggests that the writers were distancing from their responsibility for what they said. The findings also shed light on the writing strategies used for content creator.

Keywords: Appraisal Analysis; Appraisal Theory; Female and LGBTQ Politicians; News Writers' Engagement; Political Discourse

Introduction

"The media do not simply and transparently report events which are naturally newsworthy in themselves. News is the end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories." (Hall et al., 1978)

“Journalism is precisely such a powerful genre of communication..Journalism has social effect: through its power to shape issue agenda and public discourse, it can reinforce beliefs; it can shape people’s opinion..., or, if not shape your opinions on a particular matter, it can at very at least influence what you have opinions on; in sum, it can help shape social reality by shaping our view of social reality.” (Richardson, 2007)

From Hall et al. and Richardson’s statements, it can be said that a piece of news before broadcasting or publishing has to get through several steps and its power can influence people’s beliefs and ideas in the society. News writer can be also considered as an authoritative figure in promoting dominant culture of a particular society through linguistic choices. With this concern, the ways of how the media report the events are worth investigating since it has been believed that the linguistic choices used by the authors to create news stories can yield some ideologies embedded in a particular society especially the issues of gender stereotypes, gender inequality and gender discrimination.

According to Sriwimon (2015), political area has been widely used as a research site in gender studies since a political arena is normally recognized as male-dominated and political positions are reserved for men. For example, Sriwimon and Zilli (2017) investigated the discursive representations of the first Thai female Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in English-language newspapers in Thailand. In addition, Aungsuwan (2017) conducted a study using corpus-informed approach in investigating media attitude two opposing politicians during the 2013 –2014 political unrest in Thailand through news reports. Also, Kerrigan and Pramaggiore (2021) investigated how the gay Irish politician, Leo Varadkar, was reported in news articles during his term as Irish Prime Minister (2017–2020). From aforementioned studies, it can be seen that when politics becomes patriarchal, sexual minorities including female and LGBTQ politicians have been selected as the research participants to uncover their existence in patriarchal political discourse.

With this respect, to extend this line of research and to fill the gap in which there is no study exploring news writers’ engagement in presenting gender-based content towards both female and LGBTQ politicians in the press in Thailand by using engagement domain under Martin and White (2005)’s Appraisal Theory, this study aims at investigating news writers’ engagement in presenting gender-based content towards both female and LGBTQ politicians in the press in Thailand through appraisal analysis.

Objective and research question of the study

This study aims to investigate how news writers demonstrate the engagement in presenting gender-based content towards both female and LGBTQ politicians in the two mainstream English-language newspapers in Thailand. A research question is also presented as follow.

How did news writers demonstrate the engagement in presenting gender-based content towards both female and LGBTQ politicians in the two mainstream English-language newspapers in Thailand?

Literature review

Conceptualizing of media and its function and power

Media and its functions

The mass media provide the means of access to much information and represent a potentially powerful force in our society. This is due to the fact that the media can select what counts as news, who gets into the paper and onto television and radio and, most importantly for linguists, the way that stories about people and event get told and the frameworks in which people get to appear and talk (Thomas, Wareing, Singh, Peccei, Thornborrow & Jones, 2004). Any newspaper story goes through several stages before appearing on the page and many different people can be involved at each stage. Hence, rather than seeing the media as being things which control and, in some way, manipulate what we read and watch, we need to consider each medium as a complex institution (Thomas et al., 2004). This institution is characterized by a set of processes, practices, and conventions that people within it have developed within a particular social and cultural context. These practices have an effect both on what we perceive as news and on forms in which we expect to hear or read about it. People engage in daily interactions, thereby gaining experiences of themselves and a range of different realities, including linguistic reality (Coupland, 2007).

To sum up, the media plays a variety of important roles in the construction of our everyday world. It reports current events around the world, provides a framework for interpretation, mobilizes citizen in various matters, produces and reproduces dominant culture and entertain its audiences (Llanos & Nina, 2011). In addition, the media is said to have authoritative power as Matheson (2005) posits:

“Media professionals in general are able to write or speak in authoritative ways about the world, making claims to know what other people feel or what is really happening which few others

could get away with. They do so to the extent that they draw on the authoritative discourses of journalism and other media practices.”

Supported by Fairclough (1992) who said that the media has an authoritative power as it “structures knowledge and social practices” in societies (p.3). The media, especially news media, has been found to be a formidable element of reinforcing ideologies in everyday life.

News discourse: The hidden power

News demonstrates ‘news values’, that is, what reported is what is considered to be the most indicative aspect of a society. The news is typically an event or topic that is valued by news producers as ‘newsworthiness’. News production takes a complex process before turning a newsworthy event into a piece of news. The process involves a systemic sorting and selecting that is affected by internal factors such as editorial policies and news values, or external factors (Hall et al., 1978). Journalists use linguistic resources to construe news values, and there are assorted linguistics devices that can establish newsworthiness (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). Therefore, news discourse can be considered as ‘one-sidedness’ (Fairclough, 2015). Another thing to be noted, news discourse is designed for mass audiences, and there is no way that producers can even know who the audience is. Hence, they must produce with some interpreters in mind, what they do is address an ideal subject (Fairclough, 2015) and actual viewers or listeners or readers have to negotiate a relationship with the idea subject. That means the news writers or reporters are projected as a figure of authority, someone who knows the facts and someone who has the right to tell. With this opportunity, authoritativeness of language is manipulated with authoritativeness of those who work in the news industry and then delivered to the audiences who are projected as receptive, waiting to be told and wanting to know (Fairclough, 1995).

We can say that, in news discourse, producers exercise power over consumers, have sole producing rights and can therefore determine what is included and excluded, how events are represented, and even the subject positions of their audiences. The tendency to represent people, situations and events in regular and predictably similar ways results in the linguistic choices that are used in these representations becoming established in our culture as the most usual, prevailing ways of thinking or writing about types of people and events. These prevailing choices in representations are called ‘commonsense’ or ‘dominant discourse’ (Thomas et al., 2004). This is similar to Luke (1974) who defines ‘power as domination’ as power that can be exercised over others by preventing them identifying or recognizing their own interests. In other words, power can be exercised over others by cultivating what Marx and Engels (1967) referred to as false consciousness, or by

exercising what Gramsci (1971) referred to as cultural hegemony. Then, this commonsense or dominant discourse can be considered as ‘ideology’ in which van Dijk (1998, p.8) provides a definition that the basis of the social representation shared by members of a group.

Since linguistic resources have been used to portray news values which then dubbed as the authoritativeness of language (Fairclough, 1995), tension between the objectives of providing information and entertaining has been emerged in contemporary media including news. Colloquial vocabulary (fancy, mate, bloke, blooming) and idiom (fed up to the back teeth) have been frequently used in the media in order to mitigate the impact of the violence and intentionally cause an entertaining outcome (Fairclough, 1995). This shift towards entertainment across the media is often attributed to commercial pressure in the competitive marketplace of the media industries which can be seen as part of a ‘marketization’ of the media (Fairclough, 1995; Talbot, 2007).

Appraisal Theory

The appraisal theory (AT), emerged from Martin and White and their colleagues in the 1990s, provides analyses of those meanings by which texts convey positive or negative assessments, by which the intensity or directness of such attitudinal utterances is strengthened or weakened and by which speakers/writers engage dialogistically with prior speakers or with potential respondents to the current proposition (White, 2015). In other word, what AT basically explores is how speakers and writers generally pass judgments on people, other writers/speakers and their utterances, material objects, happenings and states of affairs and thereby form alliances with those who share these views and distance themselves from those who don’t. Martin and White (2005) explain that AT is based on the notion of stance: “appraisal is probably most closely related to the concept of stance”, which depends on the idea that “whenever speakers (or writers) say anything, they encode their point of view towards it”. Hence, readers should not only pay attention to literal meaning but also focus more on deeper meaning of the discourse. Evaluative resources are used to negotiated social relations with other by telling listeners and readers their feelings and viewpoints towards other people and things (Liu, 2010). Such resources are first involved someone’s attitude towards events, other people’s action, and surrounding objects. Secondly, they are concerned with the source of attitude, which may not be the speaker himself, but narrated by others. Lastly, they relate to the degree of intensity of attitude, which are high, medium, or low. These three aspects are named attitude, engagement, and graduation respectively.

Attitude is “concerned with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behaviors and evaluation of things” (Martin & White, 2005). More specifically, the appraisal

framework divides attitudinal meanings into three subtypes: (1) positive/negative assessments of emotional states and responses (labeled “affect”), (2) positive/negative assessments of human behaviors and characters referred to morality/ethics and other social norms (labeled “judgment”), (3) assessments of objects, texts, artifacts, and processes in terms of how they assigned values socially (labeled “appreciation”). Hence, attitudes towards people, situations or objects can be either positive or negative and gradable. In other words, their intensity can be adjusted on scale, and, while attitude can be expressed in a word or groups of words, those expressions require to be viewed in the context of the discourse.

Engagement refers to the linguistic resources by which speakers or writers adopt a stance towards the value positions being referred by the text and with respect to those they address, which are divided into two main approaches: monogloss and heterogloss. Monogloss is considered when the author’s thoughts, opinions, or attitude is stated in which does not accept other voices in public. On the other hand, heterogloss refers to when the author makes use of others’ voices to express his or her own views indirectly, showing that there may be exist other opinions.

Graduation involves in the attitude system as well as in the engagement system in order to demonstrate the levels of evaluation meaning. The overall aspects are shown in Figure 1.

Since the aim of this study is to investigate how news writers demonstrate the engagement in presenting gender-based content towards both female and LGBTQ politicians in the press, only engagement domain of appraisal theory is employed. See examples in Table 2.

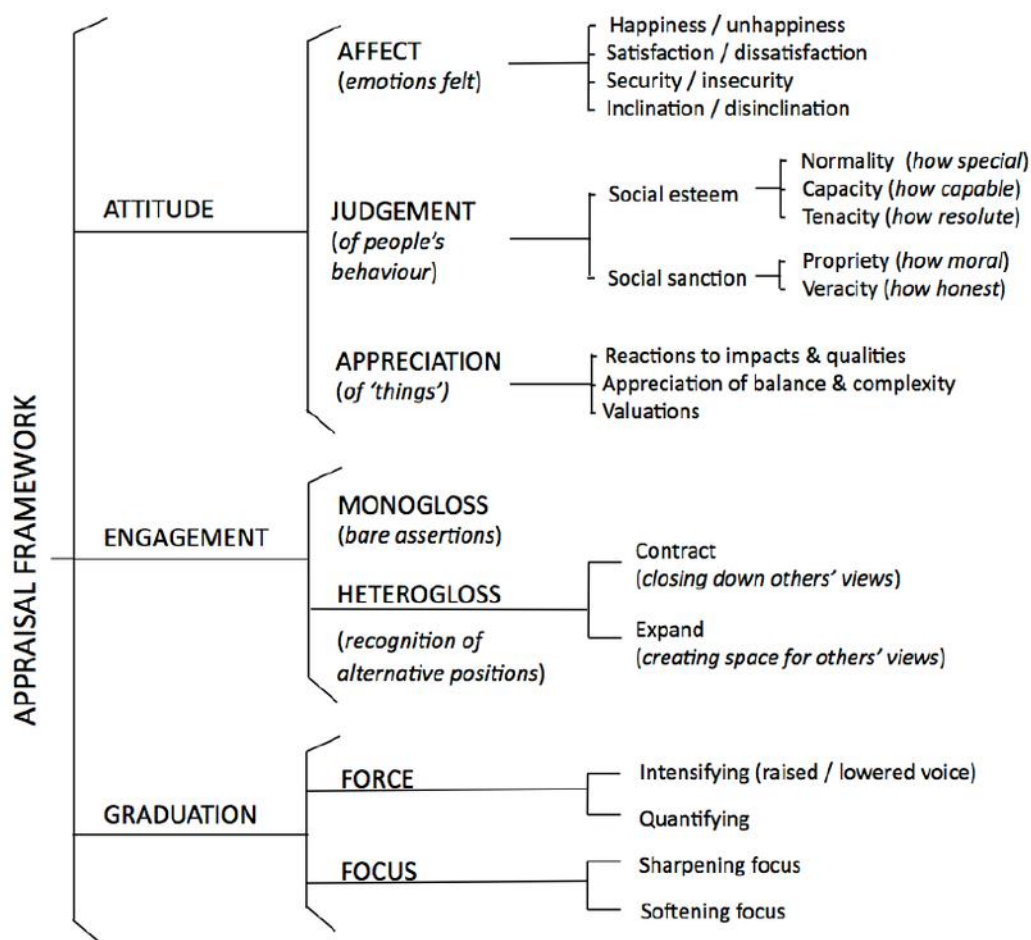


Fig 1 Appraisal Theory (Adapted from Martin and White, 2015)

Table 1 The monogloss and the heterogloss (Adapted from Martin & White, 2005)

| Monogloss (no recognition of dialogistic alternatives) | Heterogloss (recognition of dialogistic alternatives) |
|--|--|
| The exchange rate has dramatically dropped. | <u>Everyone knows</u> the exchange rate has dramatically dropped. |
| | <u>The Minister of Finance has stated that</u> the exchange rate has dramatically dropped. |
| | <u>There is the argument thought that</u> the exchange rate has dramatically dropped. |
| | <u>There can be no denying</u> the exchange rate has dramatically dropped. |

Research methodology

Data

The data of this study were 39 clause complexes extracted from 45 news articles (160 clause complexes and containing units of evaluation of gender and sexual orientations).

Data collection

The data were collected from two mainstream English–language newspapers, Bangkok Post and Khaosod, on their websites. The timeframe of data collection was May 2019 – December 2021. The reason that this timeframe was chosen because on May 9, 2019, the official results of 2019 election were announced and then marked the beginning of new government. The selected politicians have actively acted upon their appointed role. This two–year–and–seven–month period of time is considered enough to demonstrate a dynamic picture of politicians’ performances presented in the press.

Only news articles in which their headlines contain name or referential name of either female or LGBTQ politicians were included. It was found that there were 45 news articles (160 clause complexes) in which their headline follows the criteria. However, to investigate gender–based content presented by news writers, clause complexes containing both female or LGBTQ politician as an actor and units of evaluation of gender and sexual orientations were then explored.

With this concern, the criterion of sexual determinants as shown in Table 2 were set. It revealed that there were 39 out of 160 clause complexes containing units of evaluation of gender and sexual orientations. The selected 39 clause complexes were then counted for further appraisal analysis.

Table 2 Sexual determinants

| | Male | Female | Other |
|---------------|--|--------|-------|
| 1. Sex | A person’s biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia (American Psychological Association, 2012; American Psychological Association, 2015; Kittiteerasack & Matthews, 2017). | | |

| | Male | Female | Other |
|---|---|--|-------|
| 2. Gender Expression | The presentation of an individual, including physical appearance, clothing choice and accessories, and behaviors that express aspects of gender identity or role (American Psychological Association, 2012; American Psychological Association, 2015). | | |
| 3. Sexual Orientation | The sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted. Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one's own sex (gay men or lesbians), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuals), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuals) (American Psychological Association, 2012; American Psychological Association, 2015; Kittiteerasack & Matthews, 2017; Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolff, 1985; Shively & DeCecco, 1977). | | |
| 4. Gender Stereotypes | | | |
| 4.1 Descriptive Gender Stereotypes <i>Perceptions about how men and women actually are based on proper characteristics (Heilman, 2001, 2012)</i> | Men are expected to be competent, assertive, dominant, independent, critical (Hill & Flom, 2007; Heilman, 2012; Ilemus, Moya, Lupiáñez & Bukowski, 2014), aggressiveness, and ambition (Kandido–Jakšić, 1995). | Women are expected to be caring, considerate, obedient, emotionally sensitive, and passive (Bakan, 1966; Heilman, 2012). | N/A |
| 4.2 Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes <i>Perceptions about how men and women should or should not behave based on norms shared by group members (Heilman, 2001, 2012)</i> | Men are expected to be breadwinner, and portray taking risks, tasked-oriented leadership and physical strength (Heilman, 2001; Heilman & Park–Stamm, 2007; Kandido–Jakšić, 1995). | Women are expected to satisfy others' needs and to take care of the house and all members of the family (Heilman, 2001; Heilman & Park–Stamm, 2007; Kandido–Jakšić, 1995). | N/A |

| | Male | Female | Other |
|---|--|--|-------|
| 4.3 Occupational Gender Stereotypes <i>Expectations and beliefs on the professional roles towards men and female (Ginevra & Nota, 2017)</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Realistic jobs (e.g. lorry driver), investigative jobs (e.g. chemist) and enterprising jobs (e.g. building contractor) (Ji, Lapan & Tate, 2004) – Emerging jobs (e.g. computer engineer and webmaster) (Miller & Hayward, 2006) – Airline pilot, webmaster, diagnostic radiographer, civil engineer, materials scientist, financial advisor, molecular geneticist, systems analyst, forensic scientist, architect, software engineer, therapeutic radiographer, biotechnologist, computer engineer, dentist (Ginevra & Nota, 2017) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social jobs (e.g. teacher), artistic jobs (e.g. dancer), and enterprising jobs (e.g. public relations expert) (Ji, Lapan & Tate, 2004) – More traditional jobs (e.g. secretary and nurse) (Miller & Hayward, 2006) – Nurse, mathematics teacher, secretary, occupational therapist, health and fitness instructor and hairdresser (Ginevra & Nota, 2017) | N/A |
| 5. Language Use | | | |
| 5.1 Communication Style | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More self-disclosing and express more support and acceptance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overt expressions of aggression and anger (Kinney, Smith & | N/A |

| | Male | Female | Other |
|---|--|--|-------|
| | (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Duck & Wright, 1998) – Not deliver nonverbal feedback to same sex interlocutors (Crawford, 1994) | Donzella, 2001; Timmer, Fischer & Manstead, 1998) – Respond positively nonverbal feedback to same sex groups (Hall & Vecchia, 1990) – The expression “you know” has often been described as a female hedging device and interpreted as a marker of both insecurity and powerlessness (Coates, 1986; Freed & Greenwood, 1996; Lakoff, 1975). – Women use tag questions as a hedging device (Lakoff, 1975). – Women asked many more questions than men (Fishman, 1980) | |
| 5.2 Differences in pronunciation | Women’s pronunciation is better than men’s. Shuy (1969) made a study in this field, and he found that 62.2% of men pronounced “-ing” in a wrong way, but only 28.9% of women didn’t pronounce right. | | N/A |
| 5.3 Differences in Intonation | N/A | – Women often like to speak in a high-pitch voice because of physiological reason, | N/A |

| | Male | Female | Other |
|--|------|--|-------|
| | | <p>but scientists point out that this also associates with women's "timidity" and "emotional instability" (Xia, 2013).</p> <p>– Lakoff (1975) says that women usually answer a question with rising intonation pattern rather than falling intonation.</p> | |

Data analysis

The study employed the content analysis in order to identify the news writers' engagement in presenting gender-based content towards female and LGBTQ politicians. 39 clause complexes were analyzed by using Martin and White (2005)'s appraisal theory as an analytical framework. Only engagement domain was employed.

Data validation

To validate the study's results, the researchers' interpretations were sent to two raters. They were required to demonstrate the level of agreement between the researchers' findings and the raters' interpretations.

Findings and discussion

After appraisal analysis, the overall findings of how news writers demonstrate their engagement in presenting gender-based content towards female and LGBTQ politicians were presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Summary of engagement domain imposed to female and LGBTQ politicians

| Appraising domains | Appraising types | Sub-appraising types | Female politician | LGBTQ politician |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | | | Appraising time | Appraising time |
| Engagement | Monogloss | – | 7 | |
| | Heterogloss | Expand: <i>Attribute</i> | 29 | 3 |

Demonstrated in Table 3, it can be observed that attribute under dialogic expansion domain was employed the most (32 times) in expressing performative evaluations towards female and LGBTQ politicians. This formation is shown through the use of directly or indirectly reported speech and thought by using communicative process verb, mental process verbs such as suspect and believe, or adverbial adjuncts such as according to and in X's view (Martin & White, 2005). Notably, sexual-based negative evaluations were mostly reported through directly reported speech and all cases were expressed through the attribute's subcategory called distance as exemplified below.

"The venue is not a place to organize a fashion show. They should have some common sense and humility," user Virat Srianan wrote in the same news thread. "If they want to put on Thai dress, they can do so when there's a cultural fair." (Khaosod, 2019)

From the statement mentioned above, the statement "user Virat Srianan wrote" was used to show direct quotation, implying that the writer is distancing himself or herself from the term being quoted. Caldas-Coulthard (2002) and Trask (2019) suggest that this type of formulation indicates the writer's disapproval and detachment from responsibility for what is being reported. This, at the same time, provide a reader the space for dialogic alternatives.

Following the *attribute* under dialogic expansion domain, monogloss or the statement with no recognition of dialogistic alternatives was used for 7 times. News writers present their own thoughts or opinions which does not accept other voices in public. Also, only female politicians were negatively assessed through monogloss as shown below.

Parina, who represents Ratchaburi province, is infamous for her scathing verbal attacks on members of the opposition and the pro-democracy camp. (Khaosod, 2021)

The news writer, in the statement above, confidently expresses his or her thought toward Parina as a person delivering scathing verbal attacks on members of the opposition and the pro-democracy camp. It can be observed that monogloss was used to show non-personal opinions. What is expressed through monogloss derived from facts or circumstances widely recognized in the news events. For example, Since Parina attacked her opponents with rude words for many times and people recognized what she did. The fact about her behaviors have been pervasively agreed.

Therefore, the news authors are sure to report about her unpleasant behavior. However, the words used in describing her characteristics were neutral, or not too much personal. The words “infamous” and “scathing” were employed instead of “bad” or “rude” to lower negative impact that may cause to those mentioned in the news report and the writer himself or herself.

It can be seen that even though politics are widely recognized and dubbed as a male-dominated arena, the news writers strategically employ language that distance themselves from what they reported about negative images of both female and LGBTQ politicians through attribute under dialogic expansion domain. The directly reported speech was used to report the negative evaluations toward female and LGBTQ politicians. This also suggests that the negative evaluations toward female and LGBTQ politicians are subjective since the writers provide alternative voices space for negotiation. The writers were not certain or did not agree with those who passed the negative evaluations on those politicians. However, apart from the approach the writers employed in narrating the news reports, both female and LGBTQ politicians were still negatively assessed based on their sexual properties, that are really unfair for them.

Conclusion

In reporting gender-based contents towards both female and LGBTQ politicians in the press in Thailand, heterogloss or using others’ voices to indirectly show the evaluators’ thoughts, opinions, or attitude was found the most comparing to monogloss or explicit demonstration evaluators’ thoughts, opinions, or attitude without other voices. Attribute under heterogloss was frequently employed to report evaluative statements. This formation is shown through the use of directly or indirectly reported speech and thought by using communicative process verb, mental process verbs such as suspect and believe, or adverbial adjuncts such as according to and in X’s view (Martin & White, 2005). This suggests that the writer is distancing himself or herself from the term being quoted and showing disapproval and detachment from responsibility for what is being reported.

Following the attribute under dialogic expansion domain, monogloss was used to illustrate news writers’ own thoughts or opinions which do not accept other voices in public. Pareena Kraikupt was such a case reported through this formation. However, it can be observed that fact or information that is widely accepted was portrayed in the evaluative statements instead of writer’s personal opinions or thought.

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