

Diversity and Interaction: An Ecological Discourse Analysis of the Forewords in Hong Kong's *Policy Addresses* (2020–2023)

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Abstract

The study conducts an Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA) of the forewords of Policy Addresses (2020–2023) issued by the Chief Executives (CEs) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), aiming to investigate harmonious societal factors that facilitate the HKSAR's transition from “a governance phase” to “a prosperity period” (Shu, 2023, p. 68). Guided by the Ecosophy of “Diversity and Harmony; Interaction and Coexistence”, the research employs an integrated ecological thematic-based approach, focusing on evaluating two social-ecological parameters: Diversity and Interaction. Diversity is achieved via the semantic actualization of Participant Role Themes (PRTs), revealing bidirectional harmonious relationships between the central and regional governments, the government and its citizens, the administrative branch and the legislative institution, as well as citizens and the legislative organization. Interaction is accomplished through the visualization of PRTs and the examination of Thematic Progression (TP), confirming the coexistence of all social relations that contribute to HKSAR's advancement. Among these relations, this study finds that governmental guidance serves as a pivotal factor in promoting Hong Kong's social harmony, with its active role in coordinating all social factors to address crises and foster prosperity. This “appropriately proactive governance” philosophy differs from the Neoliberal-influenced approach of “positive non-interventionism”. Such shift reflects the government's efforts to adopt strategies tailored to Hong Kong's local conditions while deeply rooted in Chinese cultural values, suggesting a promising path for future development. Overall, this study enhances the applications of EDA for analyzing social-related discourses, proposing a harmony-oriented framework for interpreting socio-ecological transformations.

Keywords: Ecological discourse analysis, Policy addresses, Ecological thematic-based approach, Diversity and interaction, Hong Kong's social harmony

1. Introduction

Harmonious engagement among stakeholders is essential for administrative organizations to ensure internal stability and optimize social management processes, ultimately enhancing stakeholders' well-being (Osobajo et al., 2023). Social interaction plays an indispensable role in fostering harmonious relations, influencing "every conceivable institutional objective" (Freed & Ehrlich, 2010, p. 318) that can be recontextualized through discursive practices to (re)shape human society (Fairclough, 2003).

One such practice is the *Policy Address* (PA) issued by the Chief Executive (CE) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), defined as an institutional discourse that "expresses the government's voice and publicizes the tasks set for the region" (Lam, 2023, p. 9). The PA serves to strengthen interactions among stakeholders in Hong Kong society and promote the internalization of mainstream ideologies by the public (Wang & He, 2012). Delivered annually by the CE in October during the opening of the Legislative Council, the PA outlines the administration's focuses for the year ahead, with relevant departments mandated to implement its measures (Lam, 2023). First introduced in 1972 by "His Excellency the Governor" of British Hong Kong, the PA initially prioritized political advancement to strengthen British colonial identity and influence (Wang & Li, 2013), reflecting a subservient relationship between the colony and the suzerain. Following Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, the government shifted focus towards social and economic development under the "One country, Two systems" arrangement (ibid.).

This shift is evident in post-1997 PAs, characterized by textual structure and specific content. Textually, PAs consist of three basic elements: forewords, bodies, and closing remarks. Notably, the term "foreword" is used instead of "preface" or "introduction", clarifying "why readers should read the text" (see Cambridge Dictionary, Note 1). These forewords serve a persuasive function, bolstering governmental policy credibility while fostering public engagement. The bodies and closing remarks further emphasize adherence to central government leadership and the implementation of concrete social advancement measures, articulating a vision for the future. Specific content in PAs prioritizes extensive engagement of key stakeholders in "fostering societal harmony to advance development" (Ho & Chan, 2009, p. 38). This mission has been integrated into governmental actions in the PAs delivered by Donald Tsang (2005, 2010), Carrie Lam (2018, 2020), and John Lee (2022, 2023). With prevailing collective harmony, Hong Kong has navigated crises between 2020 and 2023, including the COVID-19 pandemic and internal housing issues (Mao et al., 2023), transitioning from "a governance phase" to "a prosperity period" (Shu, 2023, p. 68) and ensuring sustained stability.

As such, it is vital to investigate how Hong Kong's governmental policies promote development through social engagement. This study employs Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA) to analyze the forewords of CE's PAs from 2020 to 2023, exploring harmonious societal factors facilitating HKSAR's transition. Additionally, this research integrates the Ecosophy and Ecological Theme System (ETS) (He et al., 2018, 2020) with Register information and Thematic Progression (TP) to refine the framework, ultimately raising three

research questions: (1) What types of harmonious social relations are reflected in the forewords of PAs? (2) How do these relations coexist? (3) What ecological implications do these harmoniously coexisting relations convey?

2. Literature Review

PAs and other institutional discourses, such as manifestos, are produced by “animators” expressing the views of their political groups (Goffman, 1981, p. 144). These discourses represent the HKSAR’s institutional communication and serve the interests of governmental organizations and the social community (Ciprian & Gheorghe, 2016). Political ideologies, power relations, and identities are condensed and recontextualized in these forms of discourse to negotiate interactions with different social actors (van Leeuwen, 2008). Consequently, prior studies primarily employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to manifest opaque macro-level social practices through micro-level linguistic realizations (Wodak, 2001).

2.1 Micro-Level Textual Studies of HKSAR’s Institutional Discourses

Analyzing textual characteristics in institutional discourses offers a valuable approach to exploring identities, powers, and social practices in Hong Kong, employing methodologies from various linguistic subfields, particularly Pragmatics, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and Cognitive Linguistics (CL).

Pragmatics-oriented research has examined discursive strategies such as *genre shifts*, *presupposition*, *deixis*, and *lexical reiteration*. For example, Flowerdew (2004) critically analyzed discourses from Tung Chee-hwa, the first Chief Executive (CE) of the HKSAR, finding that his fundamental topics remained similar to those of his predecessor, Chris Patten. However, an “emphatic nature” was evident through presuppositional triggers, utilizing simple present and present perfect tense to construct universal truths reinforced by verbs like “guaranteed” and “maintained” which emphasized Hong Kong’s Chinese values. Deixis, particularly “we” referred either to Hong Kong citizens or the Chinese population, while lexical reiteration justified governmental actions through terms such as “economy”, “democracy”, and “the rule of law”. Wang and He (2012) highlighted the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of “we”, noting that while it often included both the Hong Kong government and citizens, references to the central government rose post-1997. Additionally, Wai and Yap (2018) found that inclusive “we” was more prevalent than exclusive “we” in CE manifestos, showcasing its effectiveness in aligning with audiences for electoral success. Presuppositions, as highlighted by Wang and Shen (2016), revealed discursively constructed oppositions between the “ingroup” and “outgroup” (Van Dijk, 1995) within the same 22 political announcements (PAs).

SFL-based approaches often utilize the *Appraisal System* (Martin et al., 2005). Ho and Crosthwaite (2018) analyzed political stances in CE candidates’ manifestos in 2017, revealing a higher frequency of *Attitude* over *Engagement* and *Graduation*. Lam’s strategic use of *Attitude* and *Graduation* enhanced her governmental image, contrasting with her competitors who focused on *Engagement*, underscoring the significance of emotional evaluations in electoral success.

In CL, scholars employ the *Conceptual Metaphor* framework to analyze governmental policies via mental schemata. Ahrens and Jiang (2020) used a corpus-based approach to examine the *Source Domain* (SD) of BUILDING in PAs from 1997 to 2024, integrating methodologies with WordNet and the Suggested Upper Merged Ontology (SUMO). Ahrens and Zeng (2022) categorized metaphorical expressions related to EDUCATION in institutional reports, revealing that while both CEs and Hong Kong Colonial Governors frequently invoked SDs like BUSINESS and SYSTEM, CEs exhibited more metaphORIZATION, emphasizing EDUCATION's role in shaping HKSAR initiatives post-1997.

2.2 Macro-Level Social Practices of HKSAR's Institutional Discourses

Language, or discourse, as a social practice is foundational to CDA (Fairclough, 2003). Research reveals linguistic features in institutional discourses illuminating broader social practices at the macro level, which are embedded in the sociopolitical and historical context (Flowerdew, 2004). These practices can be categorized into three facets: (1) ideological factors influenced by traditional Chinese values and the free market (Flowerdew, 2004); (2) Hong Kong's identity and self-representations (Wang & He, 2012); and (3) governmental powers related to policy implementation aimed at enhancing responsibility and credibility (Ho & Crosthwaite, 2018).

In terms of ideology, Chiu and Wong (2005) noted that the government promotes traditional Confucian values to foster loyalty and responsibility among Hong Kong's youth, countering Neoliberal individualism that can generate regionalism (Veg, 2017). Thus, aligning with central government values became crucial after the 1997 reunification. Examining Hong Kong's identity is essential for understanding social transformations before and after 1997. Wang and He (2012) discussed postcolonial identity within the "One country, Two systems" framework, transitioning from "local Hong Konger" to "Chinese Hong Konger" (Fung, 2004, p. 402).

Moreover, scholars have highlighted the paradoxical blend of traditional culture and governmental policies in Hong Kong's Chinese identity (Tang et al., 2022). The government employs a "positive non-interventionism" approach (Schenk, 2008, p. 67) facilitating market forces' role in public affairs while showing increased intervention in education and scientific innovation (Huque, 1999). Wong and Au-Yeung (2017) analyzed youth narratives in PAs from 2012 to 2017, underscoring the government's proactive engagement with youth challenges amid economic integration with China. Changes in science and technology policy mentioned in PAs (Xu, 2018) illustrate enhanced support for high-end technologies aimed at sustaining Hong Kong's international competitiveness.

In summary, previous studies of Hong Kong's institutional discourses primarily employed a CDA paradigm to reveal social practices reflected in specific linguistic features. This approach uncovers ideological social values, identity representations, and governmental powers related to social advancement. However, it is equally important to analyze the harmonious coexistence of key social factors (e.g., government and citizens) that facilitate Hong Kong's transition from governance to prosperity (Shu, 2023). Employing an EDA approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of social interactions often

overlooked in CDA research, fostering an ecological mindset among society members (Huang, 2016, 2018).

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1 EDA Approach: Theoretical Construction and Practical Application

Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA), rooted in the “Hallidayan approach” to ecolinguistics (Halliday, 1990), arises from the “ecological turn” in discourse studies (Stibbe, 2015; Huang, 2016a; He & Wei, 2018; Couto, 2018). EDA reexamines how human language reflects and (re)shapes relationships among diverse living beings and their environments (Huang, 2016b; He et al., 2022). Following Hallidayan SFL, it conceptualizes language stratification and employs context-dependent ideologies alongside lexico-grammars. In China, macro-level guiding ideologies have adapted to contemporary contexts, promoting harmonious engagement in both natural and social ecosystems (Zhou & Huang, 2017).

Chinese scholars have demonstrated the dynamic harmony among ecological factors using various frameworks, including Huang et al.’s Harmonious Discourse Analysis (HDA) (Huang, 2018) and He et al.’s ecological functional grammar (He & Zhang, 2017; Zhang & He, 2018; He & Ma, 2020). HDA combines SFL analysis with a “people-oriented” focus on public well-being and universal social principles (Huang, 2016; Huang, 2017). Meanwhile, ecological functional grammar establishes a framework promoting “*Diversity and Harmony; Interaction and Co-existence*” as its Ecosophy (He & Wei, 2018).

EDA’s theoretical foundations support its diverse applications, which include analyzing not only environmental texts but also discourses on “inter-societal and interpersonal harmony” (Ma & He, 2023, p. 208). While EDA has been utilized in social discourses—such as CSR reports (Xia & Xu, 2020) and official speeches (Ma & He, 2023)—its application in institutional texts like political announcements remains limited. This necessitates a call for more flexible approaches to evaluate ecological properties from a social-ecological perspective.

3.2 ETS, Ecosophy, and Its Parameters

In SFL, the Theme-Rheme structure is regarded as essential to the textual metafunction of language (Thompson, 2014). Halliday (1994) defines the Theme as “the point of departure for the message”, represented by an initial experiential element, which can be a *participant role*, *process*, or *circumstance* (Halliday, 1994; Eggins, 2004). The Rheme, located in the remainder of the clause, conveys new information (Eggins, 2004). In ecological functional grammar, He and Ma (2020) assert that an “obligatory” element (i.e., participant and process) must be included within the Theme of each clause to reveal ecological relationships through actual “doers” or “actions” (Cheng, 2022). Thus, the ecological Theme is defined as encompassing “what participant or process it is about, optionally involving circumstances” (see Table 1, Ma & He, 2023, p. 209). Participant Role Themes (PRTs) can be categorized into two basic types: animate (living) and non-animate (lifeless) (He & Ma, 2020; Cheng, 2022). As illustrated in Figure 1, animate PRTs include human and non-human types, further divided into individual (PRT_{ind} & PRT_{indnho}) and group types (PRT_{grp} & PRT_{grpnho}).

Non-animate PRTs relate to social concerns (PRT_{soc}) and physical phenomena (PRT_{phy}).

Table 1. Different thematic choices in SFL and EDA

Original clauses
An open and diversified metropolis where old and new styles meet, Hong Kong is also an appealing city embracing both Chinese and Western cultures. (PA 2023)
Theme in SFL: An open and diversified metropolis where old and new styles meet (Theme = Circumstance)
Theme in EDA: An open and diversified metropolis where old and new styles meet, Hong Kong (Theme = Circumstance + Participant Role Theme)

Similar to CDA, the practice of EDA is linked to the analyst's value orientation (Huang, 2018). Chinese national character is shaped by traditional philosophies such as Confucianism and Daoism (Wei & Meng, 2022) and contemporary concepts like "human community with a shared future" (Xi, 2018, p. 5). He et al. (2020) propose an Ecosophy of "*Diversity and Harmony; Interaction and Co-existence*" (He & Wei, 2018) to guide ecological thematic-based EDA. This framework facilitates the assessment of ecological orientations in social discourses through two parameters: Diversity and Interaction (He & Wei, 2018; He et al., 2021). A higher level of these parameters in PRTs indicates a stronger ecological property that conveys an eco-beneficial orientation (Cheng, 2022). Conversely, if a PRT relies solely on one element (e.g., reiteration of "I"), its ecological property weakens (He & Ma, 2020), as shown in Figure 2.

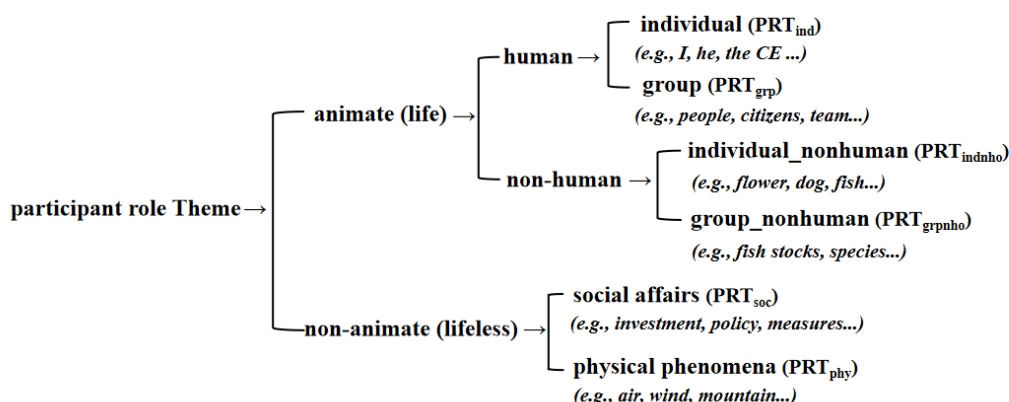


Figure 1. Specific types of participant role themes in EDA (He & Ma, 2020)

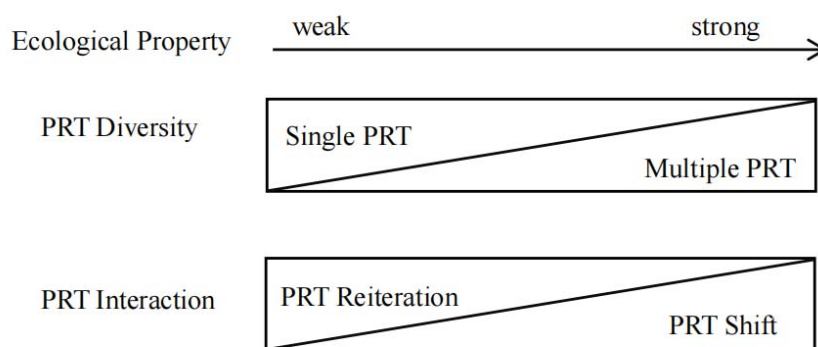


Figure 2. Criteria of PRT-related ecological properties and orientations (He & Ma, 2020; Chen, 2022)

3.3 Combining Register Information and TP with Original Framework: An Integrated Approach

As articulated above (§3.1), He et al. have established a comprehensive framework for analyzing social-related discourses. The two parameters indicate that repetitive use of the same PRTs, such as “I-talk” or “we-talk”, may not align with the Ecosophy, potentially implying an eco-destructive orientation in discourses. However, it is essential to note that the HKSAR has achieved social harmony and advanced development, which contradicts the findings of the original model. This contradiction challenges the feasibility of the thematic-based EDA approach.

Consequently, this study argues for necessary refinements in applying EDA to tackle the “issue of reiteration”. Firstly, it is crucial to embed the Ecosophy within cultural context (Genre) while also incorporating Register information (Field, Tenor, and Mode) in the situational context. This approach reflects the notion of “variation according to use” (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 41) that influences thematic choices in governmental documents. Furthermore, in addition to various ecological Themes, TP should be considered due to its capacity to illustrate both the flow of information (Eggins, 2004) and how Theme-Rheme structures integrate into the linguistic event (Thompson, 2014). This expands the Interaction analysis beyond thematic choices alone.

By integrating Register analysis and TP, this study adapts the original thematic-based EDA framework to an integrated approach (see Figure 3) for revealing harmonious coexisting relationships in forewords. The initial step involves analyzing both the cultural context encompassing Ecosophy and the situational context, confirming Register information to “limit the choice” (Hyland, 2004, p. 2359) of social-related discourse. This rationale can justify some texts that, while repetitive in Themes, remain eco-beneficial. Next, the linguistic realization of contextual ecological properties should be assessed through specific options of function-based lexico-grammars, such as EDA and TP, to evaluate whether the discourse adheres to the Ecosophy parameters. Discourse ecological orientations can then be

categorized into three classifications: eco-beneficial, eco-destructive, and eco-ambivalent (He & Ma, 2020).

The final step is to uncover the social-ecological factors that either foster or undermine social harmony and the additional impacts arising from the discourse. Overall, this revised approach establishes a comprehensive path across different language strata, with a particular focus on the Register information found in PAs preceding thematic analysis.

As illustrated in Table 2, the Field in these PAs reflects the fundamental stance of the HKSAR, reinforcing its connection with the central government and demonstrating the government's commitment to promoting prosperity and stability by enhancing social engagement and addressing prevailing issues. The Tenor primarily centers on the HKSAR government and Hongkongers, where the government seeks to exert authority over the citizens. This group includes not only current residents but also those born and raised in Hong Kong (Fong & Murphy, 2006), adding layers of complexity to social governance. The Mode of these discourses manifests in various formats, including online full-texts, published materials, and informative leaflets. Most content is delivered through declarative clauses, presenting established facts. Given that these three register-based determinants focus on human participants and intricate social issues, they provide significant semiotic potential, suggesting that thematic choices will largely revolve around human PRTs (e.g., personal pronouns) and social-related PRTs (e.g., specific actions). This underscores that social harmony predominantly hinges on these types of PRTs, justifying their repeated yet harmonious presence in the forewords.

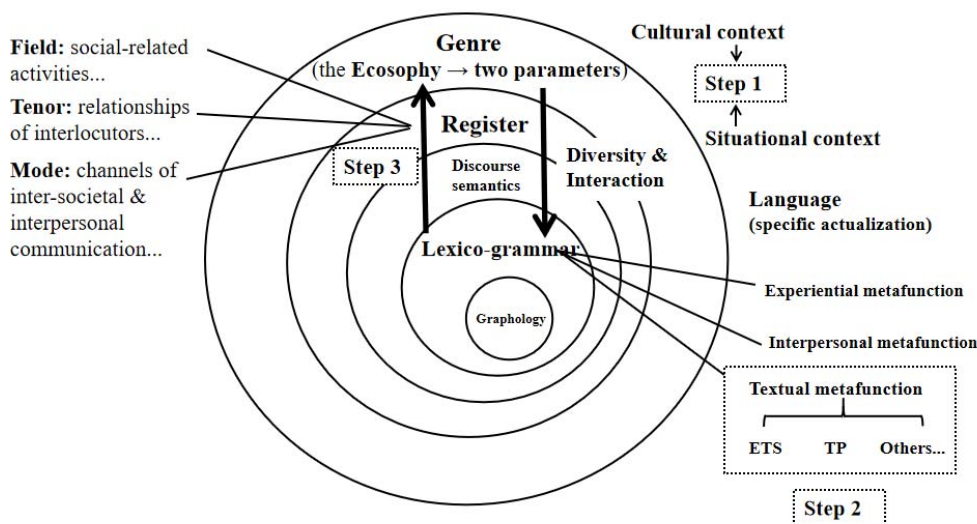


Figure 3. An integrated framework

Table 2. Register information of PAs in HKSAR

Year	Field (topics)	Tenor (CEs to citizens)	Mode (medium)
2020	<i>Striving Ahead with Renewed Perseverance</i>	Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor	Published both onsite and online with various forms
2021	<i>Building a Bright Future Together</i>	Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor	
2022	<i>Charting a Brighter Tomorrow for Hong Kong</i>	Lee Ka Chiu	
2023	<i>Vibrant Economy for a Caring Community</i>	Lee Ka Chiu	

4. Research Design

4.1 Data Collection and Processing

The data for this study were collected from the forewords of Hong Kong's PAs from 2020 to 2023, reflecting the transitional phase from governance to prosperity, published by CEs Carrie Lam (2020–2021) and John Lee (2022–2023). The official English versions were sourced from the HKSAR government's policy address websites (Note 2) and converted to plain text with the aid of ABBYY Aligner (online version), yielding 99 clauses and 2,388 tokens. Despite their brevity, these forewords carry significant implications for Hong Kong's social harmony by encapsulating essential government concepts.

4.2 Analytical Tools for Two Parameters

The integrated thematic-based EDA approach will investigate Theme-related strategies according to the Ecosophy's two parameters. The Diversity is analyzed using the UAM Corpus Tool (O'Donnell, 2008) for manual coding of linguistic features, generalizing various ecological Themes into semantic tags. Following Ma and He's annotation method (2023), omitted PRTs are indicated in parentheses, while non-obligatory themes are underlined to illustrate the complete thematic structure (see Table 3). For the Interaction analysis, Themes and their positions are encoded into point coordinates (x, y) and visualized using the ggplot2 package in RStudio (Wickham, 2010), focusing primarily on PRTs.

Table 3. Method of annotating the Themes

Method of annotation	Example
Complete thematic structure	<u>Naturally</u> , they [PRT _{grp}] will expect the HKSAR Government to do more and to do better. We [PRT _{grp}] have formulated strategies to tackle the issues of inter-generational poverty, district environmental hygiene, land and housing supply, etc., and (we) [PRT _{grp}] have attained the targeted outcome.
Omitted Themes	

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 The Overall Frequencies of Different PRTs

In the PA forewords, both animate (living) PRTs (e.g., I, we, all LegCo Members) and non-animate (lifeless) PRTs (e.g., PA, Hong Kong, efforts) are used. Table 4 indicates that human PRTs (50.51%, 50 clauses) and PRTs related to social affairs (49.49%, 49 clauses) appear in roughly equal numbers, reflecting the Register information discussed in §4.1. Within human PRTs, individual-type (28 clauses) and group-type (22 clauses) also show balance. This data will facilitate thematic-based analyses through Diversity and Interaction to further examine social-related harmonious relationships and their coexistence.

Table 4. Frequencies of different PRTs in PAs

Types of Themes		Freq.	%
Animate PRTs	PRT _{ind} : Human PRTs	28	
	PRT _{grp}	22	50.51
	Non-human PRTs	0	0
Non-animate PRTs	PRTs-social affairs	49	49.49
	PRTs-physical factors	0	0
Total		99	100

5.2 Diversity: Social-Related Harmonious Relationships and Their Actualization

As mentioned above (§3.2), the eco-beneficial orientation with harmonious relationships hinges on Diversity of thematic choices in social ecological discourses (He & Ma, 2020; Chen, 2022). The conformity of this ecological parameter can be manifested via various linguistic actualization of PRTs in Hong Kong's PAs, which will be analyzed as follows.

5.2.1 Diversity and Social Harmony in Human PRTs

According to specific meanings conveyed by individual PRTs and group PRTs, all human PRTs are further classified into distinct semantic categories (see Table 5).

Table 5 indicates that most individual PRTs reference the “Chief Executive”, represented by the first-person pronoun “I”, which denotes the speaker’s authority in issuing the PA. This thematic choice serves dual purposes: it expresses gratitude on behalf of the CE to the people and conveys a firm commitment to lead the HKSAR toward prosperity. This approach fosters rapport between the governmental leader and citizens while emphasizing the link between governmental actions and social development. Examples are shown as follows:

Example (1)

Here, I [PRT_{ind}] express my gratitude to our people and all sectors of the community for offering me a wealth of suggestions over the past three months, and to my team for their concerted support. (PA, 2022, by Lee Ka Chiu)

Example (2)

Since I [PRT_{ind}] took office, I [PRT_{ind}] have led the Government to embrace a result-oriented culture, building an administration with the focus on actions and delivery of results, as well as strengthening our co-operation and team spirit. (PA, 2023, by Lee Ka Chiu)

Example (1) and (2) demonstrate the use of “I” Theme by the CE. In Example (1), it functions as the Communicator of the clause, showing the grateful attitude towards all people who make proposals for the development of HKSAR. It implies that the Hong Kong government values public input, reflecting its people-centered approach. And in Example (2), both “I” Themes serve as Actors of the ranking clauses, motivating officials to actively engage in ensuring the effectiveness of governmental actions. This showcases the strong sense of responsibility exhibited by the Hong Kong government in promoting social development. Despite concerns regarding a lack of objectivity associated with “I” as a Theme, messages conveyed through this PRT still have beneficial impacts on Hong Kong’s social ecosystem.

In addition to the frequent use of “I” Theme, individual PRTs related to the leader of Central People’s Government are also employed, exemplifying Hong Kong’s adherence to the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party and manifesting a harmonious relationship within the framework of “one country, two system” policy. For example:

Example (3)

In his keynote address delivered at the meeting celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Hong Kong’s Return to the Motherland and the Inaugural Ceremony of the Fifth-term Government of the HKSAR held on 1 July 2017, President Xi Jinping [PRT_{ind}] pointed out that the implementation of “One Country, Two Systems” entailed an evolving process. (PA, 2020, by Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor)

In Example (3), “President Xi” is employed by the PA as the PRT, accompanied by “in his keynote address...” serving as the Circumstantial Theme. This emphasizes that national reunification is the prerequisite for Hong Kong’s long-term development. By incorporating President Xi’s perspective into Hong Kong’s PAs, it demonstrates tight and harmonious connection between central and local authorities.

Additionally, the PRTs used for describing human groups can be categorized into 3 semantic tags: the “Chief Executives & the teams”, “Legco participant”, and “all parts of society”. Results in Table 5 show that the first semantic type outnumbers the combination of others, indicating that PAs highlight governmental endeavors aimed at enhancing citizens’ livelihood. This finding aligns with the harmonious relationship between government and public as reflected by the “I” Theme shown above, projecting a reliable image of the Hong Kong government. Below are examples chosen from PAs:

Example (4)

We [PRT_{grp}] have strived to improve people’s livelihood by significantly increasing our recurrent spending on healthcare and social welfare...over the past four years. (PA, 2021, by

Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor)

Example (5)

We [PRT_{grp}] will make our best endeavour, all for better serving our people and better developing Hong Kong. (PA, 2022, by Lee Ka Chiu)

In Example (4) and Example (5), the group PRT “we” refers to Hong Kong government, represented by CEs and their teams. Example (4) shows an “already achieved” state of governmental efforts made by the PRT “we”; while Example (5) manifests a “not-yet realized” but promising future created by the endeavour of “we” Theme. Both the messages convey the credibility of the government, indicating beneficial ecological orientation.

Besides, PAs also take into account group PRTs referring to other stakeholders during the policy-making process, including members of the Legislative Council and other citizens. It indicates that governmental policies demonstrate collective wisdom by coordinating the interests of all parties involved, showcasing a harmonious relationship between relevant organizations/stakeholders and social development. For example:

Example (6)

And all LegCo Members [PRT_{grp}] can solemnly perform their constitutional function to receive the policy address of the Chief Executive. (PA, 2021, by Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor)

Example (7)

You [PRT_{grp}] all care about Hong Kong, support the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). (PA, 2020, by Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor)

In Example (6), “all LegCo Members” are taken as the PRT, who have the obligation to perform their duties and the right to supervise the implementation of PAs. This embodies the spirit of democracy and rule of law in Hong Kong society. In Example (7), the second-person pronoun “you” serve as the PRT to refer to LegCo Members and all citizens, offering a point of departure that encourages everyone’s participation in promoting the prosperity of Hong Kong SAR. Therefore, both of these examples demonstrate Hong Kong’s internal social harmony.

Table 5. Linguistic actualization of human PRTs (individual & group)

Human PRTs					
Individual PRTs			Group PRTs		
Semantic tags	Examples	Freq.	Semantic tags	Examples	Freq.
Chief Executive	I	26	Chief Executive & the teams	(we; my team)	17
President Xi	(President Xi; he)	3	Legco participant	(some participant; all the member in Legislative Council)	3
			All parts of society	(they; you)	2

5.2.2 Diversity and Social Harmony in PRTs related to Social Factors

The diversity of PRTs related to social factors in the PAs warrants discussion. Based on their ecological meanings, PRTs can be categorized into seven groups in Table 6: “the Policy Addresses”, “Hong Kong”, “Measures of the Hong Kong SAR government”, “the complexity of situations”, “emotional expressions”, “objectives of development”, and “the world”. Due to the higher frequency of the first three groups, the analysis will focus on how these PRTs contribute to social-ecological harmony.

Themes that fall within talking about PAs themselves occur the most frequently in all the social PRT types. They are used to introduce fundamental concepts in PAs, facilitating citizens’ comprehension of governmental policies to promote social harmony. Here are two examples:

Example (8)

This Policy Address [PRT_{soc}] comprises measures consolidating work introduced over the past year - areas in which we need to delve deeper and wider - as well as new fields and directions we should pursue. (PA, 2023, by Lee Ka Chiu)

Example (9)

It [PRT_{soc}] is a Policy Address for each and every one of us. (PA, 2023, by Lee Ka Chiu)

In Example (8), the PRT “This Policy Address” functions as the Carrier, containing the overall characteristics of the PA. The Rheme further explains them by summarizing past achievements and illuminating the plans of future. In Example (9), the PRT “it” also refers to the PA, serving as the Token that includes every citizen in HKSAR, meaning that governmental policies are not designed for a select few but rather for the benefit of all. These messages convey an eco-beneficial idea of development that prioritizes people’s welfare, thereby demonstrating a harmonious relationship between government initiatives and citizens’ livelihoods.

The frequency of Themes referring to “Hong Kong” ranks second among all the social PRTs. This means that the Chief Executive aims to arouse people’s love and pride for this vibrant city, making the PAs enjoy popular support through conveying these eco-beneficial messages. For example:

Example (10)

Blessed with the strong support of our country and the close connection to the world, Hong Kong [PRT_{soc}] is the only world-class city that can capitalize on both the China advantage and the international advantage. (PA, 2023, by Lee Ka Chiu)

Example (11)

The Pearl of the Orient [PRT_{soc}] will shine brighter than ever. (PA, 2022, by Lee Ka Chiu)

In Example (10), the Circumstantial Theme indicates the primary factors contributing to Hong Kong’s remarkable achievement from both domestic and international perspectives. In

Example (11), “the Pearl of the Orient”, a nickname of Hong Kong, is employed as the PRT, highlighting the city’s captivating qualities and strategic location. The Rheme suggests that these advantages will be consolidated via government policies. Accordingly, both examples underscore the harmonious relationship between Hong Kong’s inhabitants and the societal advancement, which is a goal attainable through governmental efforts.

Social PRTs related to measures implemented by the Hong Kong government are also frequently used in PAs, aiming at addressing issues that impede the enhancement of citizens’ well-being. For instance, given the persistent concern over housing problems within Hong Kong society (Wang, 2018), proactive governmental actions have been undertaken to tackle these challenges and promote social stability. Below is a specific example of it:

Example (12)

As for land supply, a **multi-pronged approach** [PRT_{soc}] has been adopted to press ahead with the related work at full steam. (PA, 2021, by Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor)

In Example (12), the Circumstantial Theme introduces the topic of “land supply” for discussion in this clause, and the marked PRT “a multi-pronged approach” foregrounds various actions taken by the government to deal with this social problem, which not only have a beneficial impact on Hong Kong society, but also strengthen the connection between governmental actions and social development.

Table 6. Linguistic actualization of social PRTs

PRTs-social factors		
Semantic tags	Actualization	Freq.
The Policy Addresses	(the Policy Address; this; it...)	14
Hong Kong	(Hong Kong; the Pearl of the Orient)	12
Measures of the Hong Kong SAR government	(measures implemented over the past year; the implementation of “one country, two systems”; these efforts; multi-pronged approaches; these...)	10
The complexity of situations	(the pandemic; the same occasion; the worries and anxieties of people...)	5
Emotional expressions	(the greatest encouragement; my appreciation; this)	3
Objectives of development	(the primary objective; new areas and development directions...)	3
The world	(the world)	2

5.3 Interaction: Shifts of PRTs in the Forewords

In addition to the Diversity noted in the PAs’ forewords, it is essential to analyze the coexistence of harmonious ecological PRTs. Figure 4 visualizes the overall distribution of PRT types using ggplot2 (§4.2) to explore shifts in thematic choices. The x-axis represents the year of issuance, while the y-axis indicates the clausal position within each PA. A legend

on the right displays three colors corresponding to the PRT types. The majority of clustered nodes demonstrate the interactive occurrence of various PRT types in each PA, aligning with the Ecosophy's second parameter. However, some PAs exhibit reiteration of a single PRT type, with similarly colored nodes clustered. This observation allows for categorization into “the interactive case” and “the case of reiteration”. It is necessary to elucidate (1) how the former reflects PRT-related social harmony and (2) whether the latter undermines the overall eco-beneficial orientation in PAs. Theme Progression (TP) patterns will also be examined to enhance the assessment of Interaction.

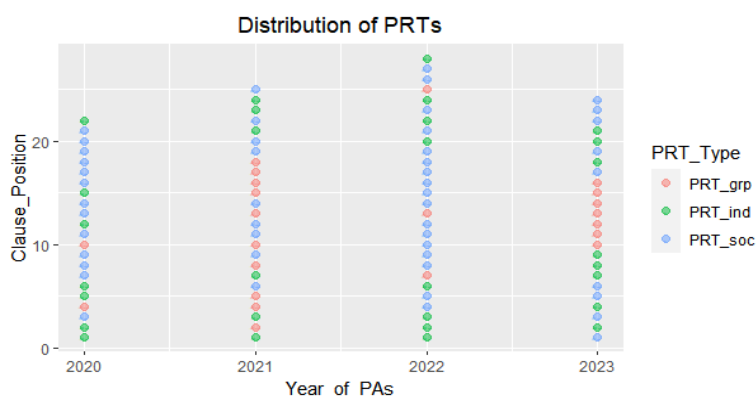


Figure 4. The overall distribution of PRT types in the forewords

5.3.1 Social Harmony in “the Interactive Case”

According to the Ecosophy, “the interactive case” demonstrates a strong and beneficial ecological orientation that facilitates the coexistence of various harmonious relationships. Furthermore, this interaction of PRTs is not arbitrary, but follows specific TP patterns in order to achieve cohesion and coherence in PAs. The following example serves as a representative illustration:

Example (13)

This year, the greatest encouragement [PRT_{soc}] was brought to us by President Xi Jinping’s visit to Hong Kong to attend the meeting celebrating the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong’s return to the Motherland... **President Xi** [PRT_{ind}] put forward “four musts” and “four proposals” and (he) [PRT_{ind}] said that “Hong Kong will prosper only when its young people thrive”. **This** [PRT_{soc}] has reinforced the confidence of all sectors of the community in our future development. **I** [PRT_{ind}] am grateful to President Xi for his important speech which now serves as my governance blueprint. (PA, 2022, by Lee Ka Chiu)

Figure 5 illustrates the complete TP path in Example (13), where “the greatest encouragement” serves as the initial PRT in these clauses. The R1 introduces a new topic, “President Xi”, aligning with the PRT of the second clause. This connection exemplifies a Continuous type of TP (Zhu, 1995). Furthermore, R1 functions as the PRT for both the

second and third clauses, establishing a Thematic consistent type (Huang, 1988). A Continuous TP is also evident between the third and fourth clauses, with the social PRT “this” referring back to Xi’s statement in R3. The individual PRT reappears in the last clause, revealing the alternative features of these PRTs. Overall, PRTs in these clauses reflect a strong eco-beneficial orientation, reinforcing social harmony as indicated by the Diversity analysis.

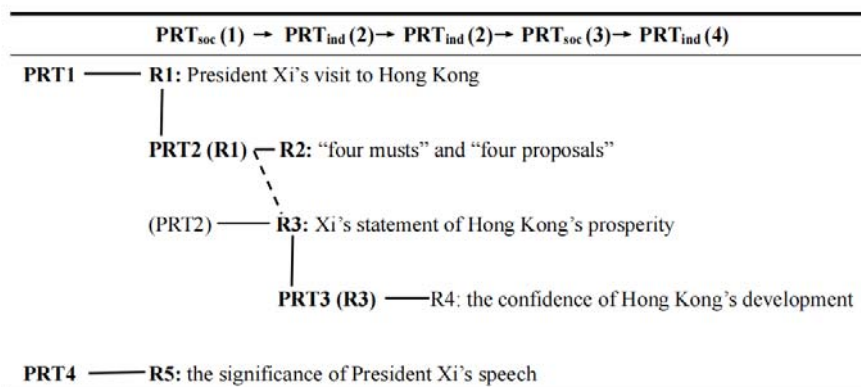


Figure 5. The complete path of TP in Example (13)

5.3.2 Social Harmony in “the Case of Reiteration”

To investigate whether the repetitive use of the same PRT undermines ecological orientation in PAs, the study also combines TP pattern analysis with the Interaction. One of the typical instances is as follows:

Example (14)

Over the past year, we [PRT_{soc}] have led Hong Kong out of the pandemic, with society returning to full normalcy. **We [PRT_{soc}]** have enhanced governance on various fronts, strengthening co-ordination and improving the civil service management system. **We [PRT_{soc}]** have formulated strategies to tackle the issues of inter-generational poverty, district environmental hygiene, land and housing supply, etc.; and we [PRT_{soc}] have attained the targeted outcomes. **We [PRT_{soc}]** have rendered support and help to the elderly and the disadvantaged, established Care Teams, enhanced the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme and strengthened public hospital services. **We [PRT_{soc}]** have devised an improved district governance system... **We [PRT_{soc}]** have enhanced the talent admission schemes and have been creating strong impetus for growth... (PA, 2023, by Lee Ka Chiu)

In Example (14), coherence is achieved through a **Thematic consistent type** of TP (see Figure 6), characterized by the repetitive use of the pronoun “we” to refer to the Hong Kong government. This TP pattern underscores the government's role in ensuring citizens’ livelihoods (R1, R3, R5) and enhancing its own efficiency and quality (R2, R4, R6, R7). In light of the pandemic’s challenges, the government aims to restore citizens’ confidence by

highlighting pre-existing efforts to present a trustworthy image. This reiteration of PRTs fosters a harmonious relationship between the government and Hong Kong citizens, reflecting a beneficial ecological orientation that supports overall social harmony.

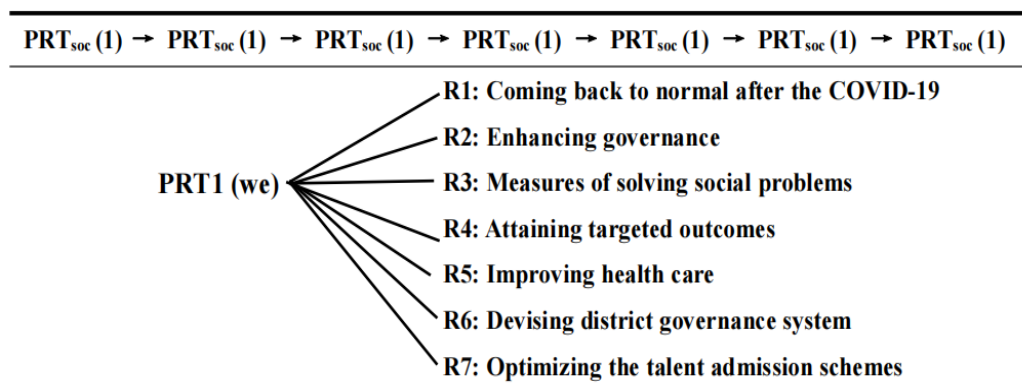


Figure 6. The complete path of TP in Example (14)

6. Research Findings

As noted by Machin and van Leeuwen (2005), the involvement of social actors in discourse can be represented as dynamic, active forces within events or activities. This representation can be anticipated from the semiotic potential of Register information (§3.3), which indicates that PAs function as top-down institutional communication, utilizing Field, Tenor, and Mode to elucidate the selection of human and social PRTs that promote an eco-beneficial orientation rather than undermine it.

Through the analysis of two parameters (§5.2 & §5.3), this study reveals the impact of harmonious coexistence among human and organization-based social relations via ETS and TP (see Figure 7), creating a comprehensive panorama of social harmony. Within Hong Kong society, major social actors represented by human PRTs establish bidirectional harmonious relationships, symbolizing the enactment and implementation of PAs. These relationships underscore the government's prioritization of citizens' needs under the Legislative Council's oversight, while citizens internalize PAs and provide valuable suggestions for optimizing governmental policies. This collaborative process enhances social development and contributes to a promising future for Hong Kong through social-related PRTs. Moreover, Hong Kong's social harmony is integrated into China's broader harmony, evidenced by HKSAR's commitment to the "One country, Two systems" policy and CPC Central Committee leadership. Thus, Hong Kong's development is embedded within China's dynamic social ecosystem.

Additionally, the study finds that the Hong Kong government plays a key role in these bidirectional relationships, aligning with prior CDA-based research (§2.2), which indicates a

shift from “positive non-interventionism”—characterized by limited governmental intervention in laissez-faire capitalism (Yan, 2008)—to “appropriately proactive governance” (Leung, 2012, p. 5). This shift signifies an increasing role of the HKSAR government in promoting regional economic recovery, reshaping economic advantages, and addressing the shortcomings of a free-market system (Sun, 2017). This trend aids in deconstructing the binary opposition between governmental policies and the free development of regions, markets, and individuals as framed by Neoliberalism (Mudge, 2008). Consequently, the Hong Kong government can exert active influence in coordinating social factors to address significant crises, facilitating a transition from governance to prosperity (Shu, 2023). Such efforts enhance Hong Kong’s connection with the central government and activate the dynamics of other social actors in HKSAR, achieving a higher level of social harmony characterized by diverse participants and interactive engagement.

Furthermore, these analyses deepen the understanding of Hong Kong’s social governance through the lens of Ecosophy: “*Diversity and Harmony; Interaction and Co-existence*”. The harmonious coexistence of diverse participants cannot occur spontaneously; it requires proactive leadership from influential actors to empower others. This governance philosophy is shaped by the Confucian concept of “*Action*” (yǒu wéi, 有为), emphasizing the necessity of effective guidance by rulers for societal advancement (Chiu & Wong, 2005). Therefore, achieving sustainable development within a harmonious society necessitates that the HKSAR government actively explore approaches that align with both their own needs and the broader Chinese cultural context.

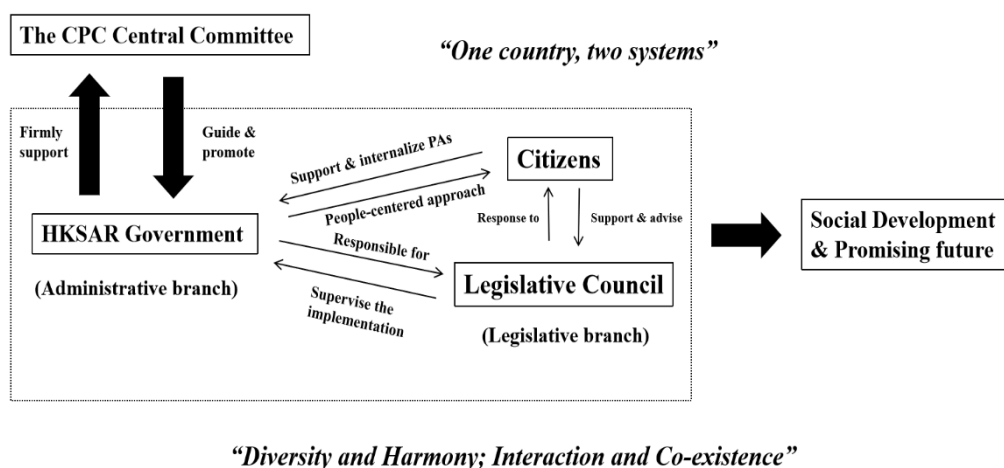


Figure 7. Social harmony reflected by the PAs of HKSAR

7. Conclusion

This study utilizes an EDA to explore the harmonious coexistence of social-ecological factors in the forewords of PAs, aiming to facilitate economic recovery and higher-level

development in HKSAR. It seeks to elucidate the underlying reasons and ecological implications for Hong Kong's sustained growth. Through a modified integrated framework, the study justifies specific PRT options via Register analysis, examining their diverse actualization, semantic representation, and interaction through visualization and TP patterns to validate eco-beneficial PRT choices. Theoretically, it incorporates additional social-ecological factors to augment EDA research, providing a comprehensive insight into the overall social dynamics. Practically, it enriches EDA applications in analyzing social-related discourses, offering a new perspective for interpreting events within social ecosystems.

Findings reveal diverse bidirectional harmonious relationships among central and regional governments, government and citizens, the administrative branch and legislative institution, as well as citizens and legislative organizations. These social actors collectively contribute to Hong Kong's social development and promising future, indicating effective governmental guidance in mobilizing HKSAR actors and challenging the stereotype of non-interventionism. From a social-ecological perspective, the Hong Kong government shows a tendency to refine its governance philosophy, aligning with regional conditions and Chinese-oriented Ecosophy, such as Confucianism, rather than adhering strictly to Western Neoliberalism.

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Notes

Note 1.
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-chinese-simplified/foreword?q=forewords#google_vignette

Note 2. The official website of PAs is available for download as follows:

<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2020/eng/>

<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2021/eng/policy.html>

<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2022/en/policy.html>

<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2023/en/policy.html>

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