A Systematic Review of Appraisal Theoretical Research in Translation Studies Published Between 2017 and 2024[1]

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Abstract

This study analyzed 57 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters published between 2017 and mid-November 2024, indexed in BITRA and Google Scholar that applied Martin and White's Appraisal Theory (AT) in Translation Studies. Using a descriptive, exploratory method, the study examined the publications' annual and geographical distribution, specialized areas, language pairs, and focus on AT components. Findings showed that AT remains a popular framework in TS, especially for literary (16 studies) and news (6 studies) texts. Chinese-English was the most common language pair (15 studies) and geographically, China led with 17 publications, followed by Indonesia (9), Spain (8), and other countries. Among AT's subsystems, appreciation (42 instances) and judgement (41) were most frequently applied, followed by affect (37) and graduation (24), while engagement was least explored. The study noted the absence of research from traditionally influential TS countries, such as Australia, Canada, and the US. These findings underscore ongoing trends and gaps in AT application within TS, highlighting opportunities for future research.

Keywords: Affect, Appraisal theory, Appreciation, Domains, Engagement, Graduation, Judgment

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1. Introduction

The "social turn" in translation studies (TS) during the late 1990s shifted attention to the social dimensions of translation, emphasizing power dynamics, cultural contexts, and translators' agency (Angelelli, 2014). With Martin and White's (2005) development of Appraisal Theory (AT), scholars began exploring emotional and affective dimensions in translation. Munday (2010, 2012) advanced this integration, examining evaluative and emotive aspects of translation through AT, inspiring further research into these dimensions.

Building on Tajvidi and Arjani's (2017) systematic review of 27 studies applying AT in TS, this study reviews 57 research publications (2017–2024) to update and expand the understanding of AT's role in TS. It examines the chronological and geographical distribution of studies, the language pairs analyzed, the specialized areas of focus (e.g., literary, news, etc.), and the application of specific AT domains and sub-systems.

This research highlights AT's continued integration into TS, particularly in diverse genres like literary, legal, and news texts. It identifies emerging trends, including the predominance of certain language pairs and the focus on specific AT sub-systems like appreciation and judgement. Additionally, it underscores significant gaps, such as the limited representation of influential TS countries like Australia and the US in AT-focused studies.

The study aims to address five key questions regarding the application of AT in TS, including chronological patterns, geographical trends, language pair usage, specialized areas, and the adoption of AT domains and sub-systems. By identifying current trends and gaps, it proposes interdisciplinary and culturally diverse approaches to enhance future research, providing a roadmap for exploring evaluative language and interpersonal meaning in translation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Appraisal Theory in a Nutshell

Appraisal Theory (AT), developed by Martin and White (2005) within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), provides tools for analyzing how language expresses evaluation, emotion, and stance. Martin (2000) describes appraisal as "semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgements, and valuations" (p. 145), while White (2001) highlights its utility for systematic analysis of evaluation in texts across registers. AT focuses on interpersonal meanings, examining how language positions speakers, writers, and audiences relative to the content. It encompasses three primary domains: *attitude*, *engagement*, and *graduation*.

Attitude deals with feelings, judgments, and evaluations and includes three sub-systems:

- *Affect*: Positive or negative emotions (e.g., happiness or anxiety);
- *Judgment*: Ethical evaluations of behavior, divided into "social esteem" (normality, capacity, tenacity) and "social sanction" (veracity, propriety);
- *Appreciation*: Evaluations of objects or processes based on qualities like reaction, composition, and valuation.

Engagement explores how speakers or writers acknowledge and interact with other perspectives, distinguishing between "monoglossic" (single voice) and "heteroglossic" (multiple voices) statements, managing agreement or disagreement with audiences. *Graduation* addresses intensity or degree, categorized into "force" (strength of expression) and "focus" (precision of categorization).

Together, these domains offer a robust framework for analyzing subjective stances and interpersonal positioning in language. In TS, AT has been instrumental in examining how evaluative meanings transfer across languages and cultures. Its application across diverse text types and contexts highlights its versatility and analytical depth, making it a valuable tool for understanding translation dynamics.

2.2. Previous AT Studies in TS

The use of AT in TS has significantly enhanced the analysis of evaluative language across linguistic and cultural boundaries. First applied in TS by Arjani (2011) in his Master's thesis at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran, he analyzed a hundred Persian-to-English abstract pairs, identifying shifts in attitudinal markers and graduation resources. This early work predates Munday's (2012) foundational study, which applied AT to political speech translations and demonstrated its ability to uncover subtle shifts in interpersonal meaning.

Since then, research has expanded to explore AT in greater depth. For example, Koskinen (2020) examined the role of *affect* in TS, offering a comprehensive view of its application. The present study builds on these foundations and reviews 57 recent studies from 2017 to 2024, identified through BITRA and Google Scholar databases.

The first major systematic review of AT in TS was conducted by Tajvidi and Arjani (2017). Their analysis categorized prior studies by their use of AT's subsystems and highlighted its versatility in literary, news, and audiovisual translations. They identified trends such as increased attention to translator decision-making and the engagement subsystem, while noting a lack of research in specialized fields like legal and scientific translation. Methodological limitations, such as an overreliance on case studies, were also highlighted. Building on their pivotal review, the present research extends the analysis from where they left off.

3. Methodology

This study reviews 57 peer-reviewed journal articles and research-based book chapters published between 2017 and November 2024 that applied Martin and White's (2005) AT theory in TS. Publications were selected based on two criteria: (1) explicit inclusion of AT in their theoretical frameworks and (2) application of AT to

analyze translated texts. Moreover, works that only mentioned AT, analyzed non-translated texts, or consisted of conference papers, online content, or unpublished theses were excluded from this study. Using a descriptive, exploratory approach, the review analyzed publications based on: (1) year-by-year distribution, (2) geographical distribution (using the corresponding author's affiliation as the basis), (3) specialized subject areas of the source and target texts, (4) language pairs analyzed, and (5) focus on AT components (attitude, engagement, or graduation).

Data collection utilized two databases. At first stage, BITRA was queried with the phrase "Appraisal Theory." The database provides specialized TS coverage but the results obtained demonstrated it lacked geographical diversity. The results from this database were mainly from Spain and Latin American countries, with no studies from Indonesia, Malysia, and several European countries. To address this gap, Google Scholar, as a database with much wider geographical scope, was used to supplement the query. As Google Scholar indexes research from all scholarly areas, this time the term '"Appraisal Theory" AND "Translation Studies,"' was used to delimit the results within TS area. Then, the results were filtered for the 2017–2024 period. In Google Scholar, the first 100 results (first ten pages) were extracted for further manual reviews. Ultimately, from all the instances indexed and extracted from BITRA and Google Scholar, a final total of 57 publications—52 journal articles and 5 book chapters—were selected. The 57 studies were written primarily in English but also in Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, and German. However, non-English works were translated into English using Google Translate. While comprehensive, this study's scope remains limited to its search methodology and focus, and other relevant publications may exist outside its purview.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section analyzes 57 publications on AT's application in TS (2017–2024), comprising 52 journal articles (91%) and 5 book chapters (9%). The prevalence of

journal articles underscores AT's strong integration into peer-reviewed TS research. While book-length works on evaluative language in translation exist (e.g., Munday, 2012; Koskinen, 2020), they fall outside this study's scope. Table 1 and Figure 1 below summarize the chronological distribution of publications:

Table 1. *Chronological Distribution of AT-focused Publications*

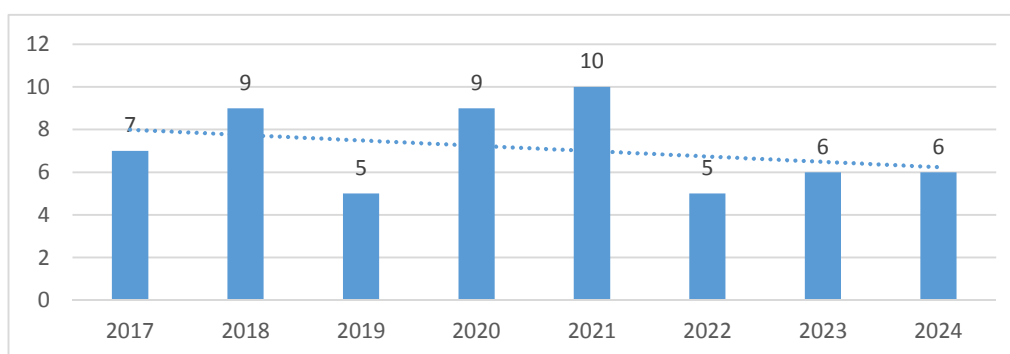| Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Count & Percentage	7 (12%)	9 (16%)	5 (9%)	9 (16%)	10 (18%)	5 (9%)	6 (10%)	6 (10%)

Figure 1. *Chronological Trend of AT-focused Publications*

The peak years are 2021 (10 studies), followed by 2018 and 2020 (9 each), while 2019 and 2022 have the fewest outputs (5 each). No consistent upward or downward trend is apparent, though a slight decline emerges in the trend line. Despite this, an average of 7.12 publications per year reflects sustained interest in this emerging area. The 2024 data, covering publications up to mid-November, suggests continued engagement. Variations in specific years, such as 2019 and 2022, may reflect delays in review or publication processes, though further investigation would be required to confirm these factors.

4.1. Geographical Distribution of Publications

From 2017 to 2024, AT applications in TS demonstrate global contributions, with most studies originating from China, Indonesia, and Spain, followed by Brazil,

Qatar, the UK, Iran, and Malaysia. Seven additional countries have also contributed a single study each, totaling 15 different countries. Asia dominates with 67% (38 studies), led by East Asia, particularly China and Indonesia, while Europe accounts for 26% (15 studies). Latin America, represented solely by Brazil, contributes 6% (4 studies).
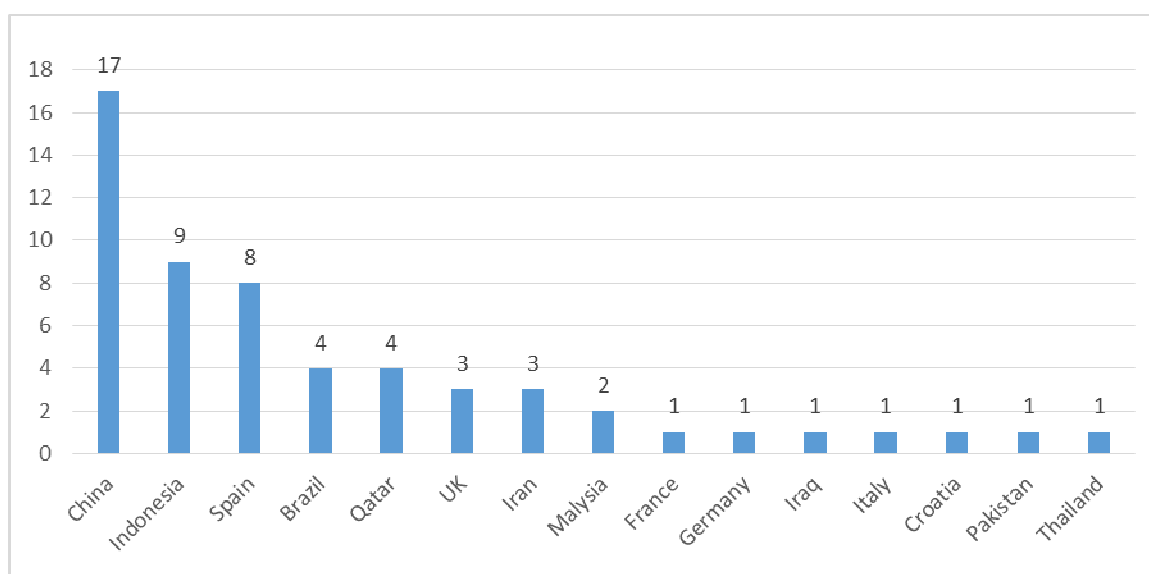

Figure 2. *Geographical Distribution of AT-focused Publications*

As illustrated in Figure 2, China leads with 30% of publications, reflecting strong academic engagement with AT in TS. Indonesia (16%) and Spain (14%) follow, underscoring significant contributions. Brazil and Qatar each contribute 4 studies, while Iran and the UK (3 studies each) and Malaysia (2 studies) also show moderate engagement. Countries like Croatia, France, Germany, and Pakistan each contributes one study, indicating emerging interest or limited research activity.

Regionally, East Asia accounts for 51% of the studies, while Central and West Europe contribute 26%. Brazil remains the only Latin American contributor. The high output from China may reflect a large scholarly community or focused institutional interest in AT within TS. This geographical diversity highlights both dominant regions and underexplored areas, presenting opportunities for future research to expand the field's regional scope.

4.2. Specialized Areas of Focus

The analyzed research cover 16 specialized topics in TS, with literary texts (16 studies) and news texts (9 studies) dominating the dataset. Political, advertising, and audiovisual texts follow, each analyzed in five studies. Other areas include business texts (3 studies), legal and pedagogical texts (2 studies each), and diverse topics like public notices, religious texts, and medical texts, each represented by a single study.
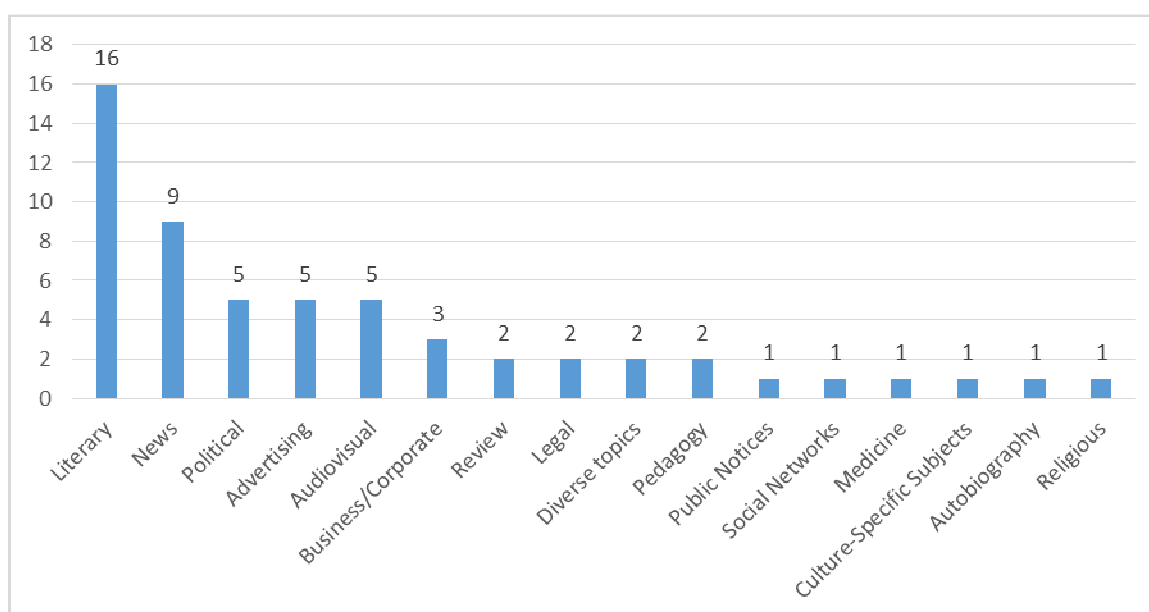

Figure 3. *Specialized Areas Covered by the ATU-focused Publications*

As illustrated in Figure 3, literary texts (analyzed in 16 studies) and news texts (analyzed in 9 studies) dominate the dataset, indicating that these genres are particularly well-suited for examining evaluative language. This may stem from the centrality of emotion, tone, and stance in these genres. Political, advertising, and audiovisual texts (each analyzed in 5 studies) also hold a significant presence, likely due to their reliance on evaluative language for persuasive purposes, aligning them closely with the objectives of AT analysis. Political and advertising texts, in particular, are often crafted to shape or influence audience opinions, which explains their prominence in AT-focused research.

Business texts (analyzed in three studies) appear less frequently in the dataset, possibly reflecting the limited scope for evaluative language in formal business correspondence and related documents. Legal and pedagogical texts, each explored in two studies, are also less represented. The lower focus on legal texts might be attributed to the expectation of minimal evaluative language in such texts due to their sensitive and formal nature. Pedagogy, a field where evaluative language could offer significant insights, was expected to receive more attention. Nonetheless, the underrepresentation of topics like law, religion, public notices, medicine, and other genres signals opportunities for future research into AT applications in TS.

4.3. Language Pairs

Among the 57 studies reviewed, 53 examine AT in source and target texts across 15 unique language pairs, demonstrating AT's cross-linguistic versatility. The most frequently studied pair is Chinese-English (15 studies), likely reflecting China's global influence and the demand for English translations of Chinese texts. English-Spanish ranks second (7 studies), followed by English-Chinese and English-Indonesian (5 studies each), highlighting the importance of cross-cultural exchanges involving English, East Asia, and Spanish-speaking communities.

Other notable pairs included Indonesian-English (4 studies), English-Brazilian Portuguese, and Arabic-English (3 studies each). Less frequently analyzed pairs, such as English-Persian (2 studies) and French-Arabic or German-Croatian (1 study each), indicate emerging interest in specific cultural or geopolitical contexts.
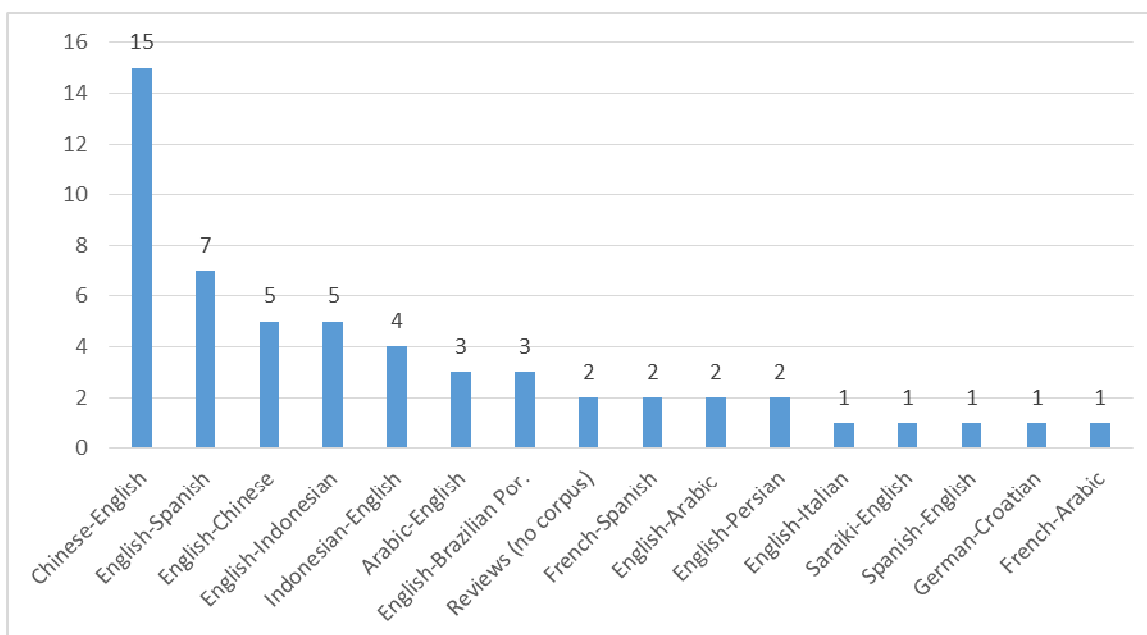
Figure 4. *Distribution of Language Pairs Studied in AT-focused Publications*

English was the source or target language in 92% of the studies, underscoring its role as a global lingua franca and revealing an Anglocentric bias in TS research. While European languages like Spanish, French, and German featured prominently, the findings suggest a need for greater linguistic diversity to fully capture evaluative language use across varied cultural and linguistic contexts.

4.4. Use of AT Components in Identified Research

The 57 reviewed studies exhibit diverse applications of AT components, demonstrating the framework's adaptability in TS. The analysis identified five distinct patterns:

A. No Use of Core Components: Two studies bypass AT's main components, focusing instead on niche aspects like Martin and White's (2005) "three reading positions" or custom models inspired by AT principles.

B. General Use of the Attitude Domain: Three studies apply "attitude" broadly, often integrating it with other theories or AT components such as "engagement" or "graduation."

C. Focus on a Single Subsystem: Several studies concentrate on specific subsystems, such as "graduation" (e.g., intensity of language), "judgment" (behavioral evaluation), "affect" (emotional language), or "engagement" (authorial positioning).

D. Comprehensive Use of All Components: Ten studies employ all AT components—affect, judgment, appreciation, graduation, and engagement—offering holistic analyses of evaluative language in translation.

E. Selective Use of 2–4 Components: The majority (33 studies) adopted a selective approach, balancing focus with versatility by combining specific components tailored to their research aims.

These patterns underscore the adaptability of AT in TS, ranging from highly focused studies to comprehensive analyses, thereby enriching the academic discourse on evaluative language in TS.

Table 2. *Frequency of Usage of AT Components Across AT-focused Publications*

Attitude			Graduation	Engagement
Affect	Judgment	Appreciation		
37	42	42	25	17

As illustrated in Table 2, *judgment* and *appreciation* emerge as the most frequently utilized components, followed by *affect* and *graduation*, while *engagement* is the least employed due to its complexity. The cumulative frequency of attitude and its sub-systems (121 instances) underscores the centrality of evaluative language in understanding translation, particularly in subjective genres like literature, news, and political discourse.

The relatively limited use of *engagement* suggests challenges in its application or a narrower perceived relevance, yet it presents an opportunity for future exploration. *Engagement*'s insights into intersubjective positioning and dialogic interactions could enrich translation studies, offering valuable perspectives on text dynamics.

Overall, the findings highlight AT's flexibility in addressing varied analytical needs, with researchers tailoring their use of AT components to their specific

objectives. The diversity of approaches emphasizes both the theory's established utility and the potential for further innovation in applying its less-explored elements like *engagement*.

5. Conclusion

The review of 57 studies from 2017 to 2024 highlights the growing interest in applying Appraisal Theory (AT) within Translation Studies (TS). AT has proven valuable for analyzing evaluative language across genres and cultures, with literary translation dominating research, followed by news, advertising, and audiovisual translation. Underrepresented among the studies are genres like social networks, medicine, and culture-specific texts. Geographically, China, Indonesia, and Spain led the contributions, with notable engagement from Brazil, Qatar, the UK, and Iran. However, despite AT's Australian origins, no studies from Australian or African researchers were identified, signaling potential areas for growth. Other countries with significant impact and history in translation theory and research and host universities with active translation departments, including Finland, Germany, Austria, Turkey, Canada, India, Egypt, and Russia, are not represented in the dataset at all. It might be attributed to their reluctance to contribute to the topic or their failure to be indexed in the BITRA and Google Scholar databases.

The most studied language pairs were Chinese-English, English-Spanish, and English-Chinese. Collaborative patterns also vary across the studies: Brazil and China have contributions from multiple universities, while Qatar and the UK were represented by single researchers: In these countries, influential figures like Jeremy Munday and Ashraf Fattah have shaped the field with their foundational works.

Despite these advances, gaps remain. Non-English-centered studies, such as Arabic-Persian, Spanish-Portuguese, and French-Arabic translations in Francophone cultures, are underexplored. The integration of AT with other linguistic theories, seen in 33% of the studies, signals the potential for more multidimensional frameworks. In

conclusion, it can be stated that, according to the *57* studies identified and investigated in this study, AT-focused research is continuing within TS, and there is still ample space for studies in TS to investigate AT and evaluative language in other, less explored language pairs, countries, specialized areas, and AT subsystems.

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