GRADUATION MARKERS IN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE DISCOURSE: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Newspapers is one of the main global sources of conveying information. Therefore, reported information needs to be neutral, authentic and objective. Newspapers are prone to class division and different social groups prevalent in a society. Accordingly, conveyed news reflect the positions, standpoints and ideologies of the news reporters. Sports news are no exception to it. In the lieu of native and non-native settings, sports news writers express their opinions, value positions and standpoints while reporting sports events. The present study has used appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005) as its theoretical and conceptual framework which identifies and explores the methods and ways through which sports news writers underpin their evaluation and construct their ideological positions in a text. A huge bulk of research is available using appraisal theory in academic and non-academic genres but use of appraisal theory in identifying the difference in the use of appraisal markers with reference to the native and non-native settings is very less which creates a gap. The current study intends to fill the gap by exploring the difference in the frequency of use of graduation markers in native and non-native sports news discourse. The, current research analyzes the sports news discourse of 1-million words each for native and non-native sports news compiled from (Pakistani) non-native and (Britain) native online English newspapers. Mixed method research design is used for sequential explanatory analysis of the data. The findings have revealed the differences in intensified and softening attitudes of native and non-native sports news writers. Generally, native sports news writers have used more graduation markers in their news as compared to non-native sports news writers. Moreover, findings offer the variation in the communication of ideas and opinions by native and non-native sports news writers when up-scaling or down-scaling the attitudes which may assist the readers to develop critical thinking abilities.

Key Words: Graduation markers; evaluative language; sports-news discourse; native, non-native

1. Introduction

Hunston and Thompson (2000) proclaim that "evaluation is the expression of the speaker or the writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about!" (p. 5). Evaluation deals with what, why, when and how the speakers and writers evaluate, people, places and things by making certain syntactic and

lexical choices. There are significant reasons which indicate the importance of studying the evaluative language. It exposes "an attitude towards something is important in socially significant speech acts such as persuasion and argumentation" (Hunston, 2011, p.23). Use of evaluative language signifies the strategies of adopting ideological positions and stance taking acts. Whereas, evaluation refers to the subjective attitude of a speaker or writer towards a place, person or entity placed within a societal value-system (Hunston, 2011).

Recently, appraisal theory has been used to manifest evaluation in different contexts. It identifies, explains, describes and explains the linguistic use of evaluative language in the constructions of stance, ideologies and interpersonal relations. The present study has adopted the appraisal framework, particularly the system of *Graduation* as theoretical and analytical framework. It is associated with the range of lexical choices for each subtype of graduation which suits the analysis of sports news discourse.

Therefore, the current study identifies the frequency of graduation resources in native and non-native sports news discourse and intends to unearth the role these graduation markers play in the construction of stance, ideology and standpoint of native and non-native sports news writers. Furthermore, the study intends to discover the quantitative extent of graduation markers along with their qualitative interpretation. With reference to the native (Britain) and non-native (Pakistani) settings, no major work regarding the use of graduation markers in sports news could be found. Therefore, the present study intends to fill the obvious gap for the flow of knowledge in future.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

To identify and explain the use of graduation resources in native and non-native sports news discourse, the appraisal system by Martin and White (2005) has been adopted as conceptual theoretical framework in the current study. Following figure presents an overview of the appraisal system:

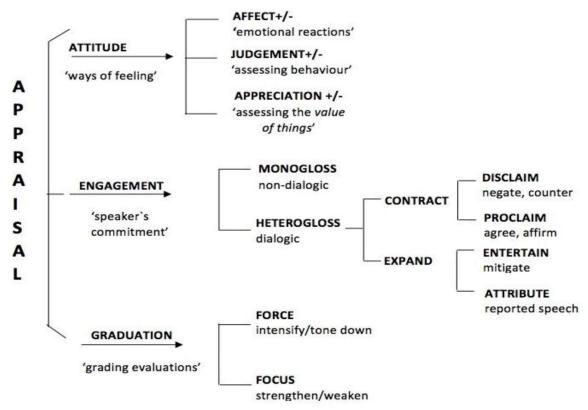


Figure 1: Appraisal system by Martin & White (2005, p. 46)

The system of appraisal is a multidimensional system. It has three subsystems or dimensions i.e. attitude, engagement and graduation. These subsystems are further divided into types and subtypes. The present study deals with the subsystem of graduation. Graduation is concerned with the sharpening (up-scaling) and softening (down-scaling) of the attitudes and evaluations of people, places, events and things etc. This subsystem is graded into "two axes of scalability": Focus and Force (Martin & White, 2005: p. 137). Force deals with the extent, quantity or amount. It has been further divided into three subtypes: (1) intensity, it deals with the evaluation of qualities. (2) quantity, it is concerned with the evaluation of quantity or amount of entities (3) enhancement, which deals with the evaluation of processes. According to Martin and White (2005), Focus deals with the "phenomena scaled by reference to the degree to which they match some supposed core or exemplary instance of a semantic category" (p. 137). Focus is also concerned with the sharpening and softening of the evaluation entities and evokes positive and negative meanings in evaluated entities.

1.1.1. Lexical Realization of Graduation Resources

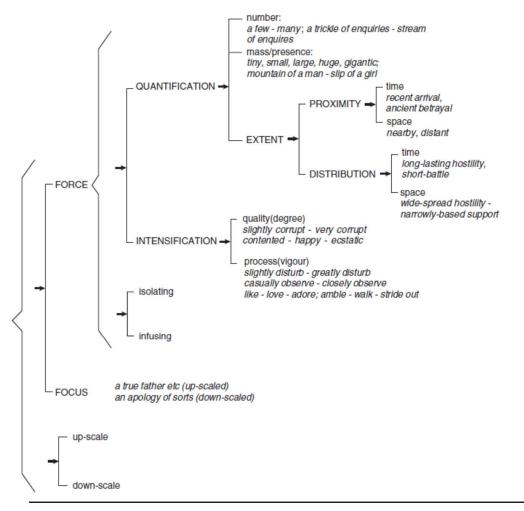


Figure2: An overview of Graduation sources (Martin and White, 2005, p. 154)

2. Literature Review

Recently, there has been a great deal of transformation, change, globalization and commercialization of different types of sports and sports events in addition to their rigorous coverage and ever-increasing popularity on local and global levels through various kinds of media (Callies &Levin, 2019). In spite of such popularity and coverage, research on the use of language in sports discourse has not received any attention. To date, only few studies (see e.g. Caldwell, 2020; Taborek et al., 2012; Burkhardt & Schlobinski, 2009; Lavric & Flere., 2008; Settekorn, 1997; Adelman & Becker, 2013) are found to be focusing on sports. Moreover, sports news reflect the stance of sports news writers' about cultural, social and ideological perceptions. Sports news not only indicate the view point of the news writers but also of the readers in relation to their social and ethnic backgrounds.

Appraisal theory explores, conducts and explains the ways language is used to assess and evaluate, to construct textual persona, to adopt certain stance and to indicate interpersonal relationship and positions (Martin & White, 2005). In other words, as an approach to study linguistics, appraisal theory helps in finding and identifying the opinions of others about an entity or object and studies the ways in which language has been used for the assessment and evolution of things, people and places.

According to White (2001), "graduation is concerned with values which act to provide grading or scaling, either in terms of the preciseness or sharpness of focus with which an item exemplifies as value relationship. These two dimensions are variously labeled 'force' (variable scaling of intensity) and 'focus' (sharpening or blurring of category boundaries)". The current study has aimed to identify the variation in the use of graduation markers by the native and non-native sports news writers while evaluating attitudes of sports men and sports events.

Graduation deals with such use of language that strengthens or weakens and sharpens or soothes the force of an utterance encoded in any text (Martin & White, 2005). Graduation has two major types: force and focus. Force strengthens or weakens the assessment of an utterance whereas focus sharpens or soothes the quality of whatever is encoded in any utterance. Force has two subtypes: intensification and quantification. It includes the assessment of any utterance based on its intensity (Martin & White, 2004). Intensity of quality (extremely, slightly), process (slightly, greatly) and of likelihood of something showing (possibility, obligation) is assessed. Lexical markers of intensification are used to refer to the scale of processes and quality. Whereas, lexical markers of quantification are used to give precise number (many, a few) and mass of certain entities pertaining to their weight and size (large, small, distant, nearby). In short, force is used to intensify or downgrade the utterances and attitude of a writer or speaker. Force has three subtypes:

- Intensification: it deals with qualities.
- Enhancement: it deals with processes.
- Quantification: it deals with the quantity and amount of entities.

Focus is assessed prototypically and refers to those attitudes and utterances which can not be scaled but redefined. According to Martin and White (2005), in focus "phenomena are scaled by reference to the degree to which they match some supposed core or exemplary instance of a semantic category" (p. 137). Focus sharpens or softens i.e. up-scale or down scale the entities in addition to adding flavors to the otherwise less intense entities (sort of, kind of, true). Martin and White (2005) proclaim that sharpening in focus deals with positivity and softening deals with negativity in entities.

2.1 Research Questions

- 1. What is the distribution of subcomponents of graduation i.e. force and focus in native and non-native sports news discourse?
- 2. How does the quantitative and qualitative use of graduation markers differ in the language of native and non-native sports news discourse?

3. Research Methodology

The mixed methods (MM) technique has been used to collect, identify, describe and interpret the variable use of graduation resources in native and non-native sports news discourse. It is the third methodological movement (Venkish, Brown & Bala, 2013, p.22) and includes quantitative as well as qualitative methods of analysis. These methods of analysis have strengths but these are not without weaknesses. For the profound understanding (Creswell, 2014), the current study has utilized the strengths and avoided the weaknesses of these methods. Following the strategies of the mixed methods approach, the present study has identified the frequency of use of graduation markers in native and non-native sports news discourse. Quantitative investigation identifies the extent of variation in the use of graduation markers and their subtypes

in both discourses. Qualitative investigation identifies and interprets the evaluative function performed by graduation markers in sports news discourses of both sides. The collection and analysis of the data has been done by following the sequential explanatory design (QUAN-QUAL) which acknowledges the successive use of quantitative and qualitative strategies (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Qualitative analysis of the data is based on quantitative analysis of the data.

3.1. Corpus Compilation

In the current study, a corpus of 1-million words each for native and non-native sports news discourse has been used. For compiling the corpora, sports news of three months i.e. 1st January to 31st March have been collected from the sports sections of native and non-native online English daily newspapers. For the compilation of the native corpus, sports news from the Britain English daily newspaper i.e. *The Independent* have been taken. For the non-native corpus, sports news from three Pakistani English daily newspapers i.e. *The News, The Nation*, and *Dawn* have been taken. English is spoken as 1st language in Britain and 2nd language in Pakistan.

3.2. Data Analysis Tool

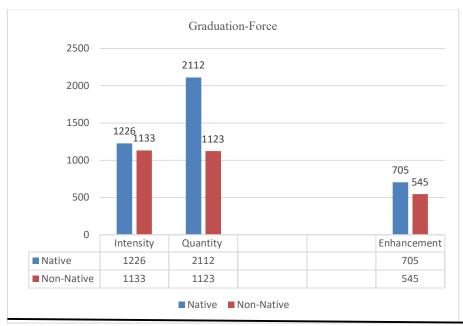
The variation in the frequency of use of the graduation markers in both native and nonnative sports news discourse is quantified with the help of software Antconc 3.2.1 developed by Anthony in 2004. With the help of this software, the frequencies of the searched lexical items (node words) are identified and displayed from both discourses.

4. Results and Discussion

The frequency of use of the lexical items belonging to the subtypes of graduation are displayed in graphs. The graphs have displayed the variation in the use of evaluative graduation markers in both discourses. Quantitative display of the frequency leads to the qualitative interpretation according to the guidelines of the appraisal system by Martin and White (2005). Graduation is concerned with the "grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred." (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35). It deals with the intensification or weakening of the evaluation done by the writers. Graduation is a subsystem of appraisal system and has two types which have various subtypes. The frequency of use and distribution of lexical terms of these subtypes is presented in graphs in following lines:

4.1. Graduation (Force)

It is a type of graduation (subsystem of appraisal system) and measures the range of intensity of an evaluation or assessment done by the writer or speaker. It describes the degree or quantity of an expression that could be more intense or less intense. It has been further divided into three subtypes.



Graph-1.1: Distribution of frequency of use of subtypes of graduation-force in native and non-native discourse

Graph 1 presents the variation in the use and distribution of lexical items of subtypes of force (type of graduation) across native and non-native sports news discourse. It displays that the use of lexical items showing force in all subtypes is higher in native discourse as compared to non-native discourse. It also indicates that within the native sports news discourse the use of evaluative items of subtype of quantity is highest as compared to the lexical items showing intensity and enhancement. In non-native sports news discourse, the use of linguistic expressions showing intensity of evaluation is highest while the linguistics items of the subtypes quantity and enhancements are used in lesser extents as compared to intensity. Graph 1 also reveals the big difference in the frequency of use of lexical items showing quantity as compared to intensity and enhancement in native discourse whereas in non-native sports news discourse the difference between the frequency of use of lexical items showing quantity and intensity is not big. Overall, it is depicted that the native sports news writers have used more evaluative markers showing force in their news as compared to non-native sports news writers.

4.1.1. Force (Intensity)

In the subtype intensity, the evaluative items are used to indicate the least and most intense attitudes and behaviors of the speakers and the writers.

Examples

- Spurs' chances of finishing third have been <u>greatly</u> increased by the slip-ups of their London rivals Arsenal and Chelsea and they will want to consolidate that advantage here. (N, The Independent.Jan.txt.2019).
- Discarded Pakistan opener Ahmed Shehzad made a quiet return to competitive cricket when he was out for just 16 as Faisalabad <u>somewhat</u> struggled to 256-7 in reply to Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK)'s first-innings score of 311-8 at the Iqbal Stadium in Faisalabad. (NN, Dawn.Jan.txt.2019).

Explanation

In example 1, the native sports news writer has used the lexical item *greatly* as an adverb. It indicates the electrifying excitement of the native sports news writer over the increased chances of the victory of Spurs. Co-text reveals the *intensity* of the happiness of the native news writer over the mistakes committed by the opponent team. *Greatly* as an evaluative item indicates the forceful intensification of the assessment of the native sports news writer. In example 2, the non-native sports news writer has used the evaluative item *somewhat* as an adverb. It indicates the less intense evaluation of the situation by the non-native sports news writer and the force of assessment has been wakened. Co-text has revealed the struggle of team Faisalabad while chasing the score set by team Azad Jammu Kashmir. The use of the adverb *somewhat* might persuade the reader to consider that the performance of team Faisalabad is weaker as compared to the opponent team.

4.1.2. Force (Quantity)

In this subtype of force, the extent, quantity and amount of the forceful judgement and evaluation is done by the speakers and writers.

Examples

- Since that famous night in Paris, when first-team players were patched up to play and teenagers Mason Greenwood and Tahith Chong were thrown into the fray, <u>a few</u> of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's players have returned to fitness. (N, The Independent.Feb.txt.2019).
- After conceding a 57-run lead, PIA piled up a <u>huge</u> total of 319 without loss with Shezar Mohammad (142*) and Agha Sabir (169*) completing centuries in each innings of the match. (NN, The News. April.txt.2019).

Explanation

In example 1, the native news writer has used the lexical item *a few* as an adjective. According to the co-text, the evaluative item *a few* reveals the lesser quantity of the fit players. It has diminished the force of evaluation by affirming the small quantity of the players who got fitness after the fight with other players. According to Ho and Suen (2017), in order to change the intensity of an assessment or evaluation and "to change the amount, the writer can resort to imprecise reckonings of number, mass or presence, and extent in time or space" (p, 8). Thus, the use of the adjective *a few* has modified the evaluation by decreasing its intensity. In example 2, the non-native sports news writer has used the evaluative item *huge* as an adjective. It refers to the enormous quantity of the score put forth by the team PIA. It signposts the greater intensity of evaluation by the non-native sports news writer. In the co-text, the non-native sports news writer has exposed the magnificent performance of the player of the team PIA by scoring unbeatable centuries. *Huge* as an evaluative item refers to the massive quantity of the runs scored by the team.

4.1.3. Force (Enhancement)

This subtype deals with the implementation of the attitude and behavior as an aspect of the manner by the speakers and the writers. Attitude and behavior as a process are evoked in this subtype.

Examples

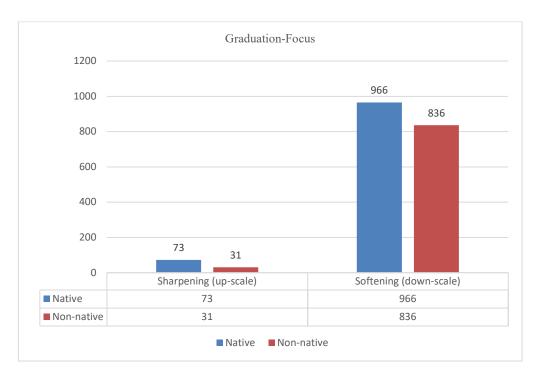
- The Irishman, who won't play on the tour <u>until</u> February due to injury, is a four-time winner of the Ryder Cup as a player and was well-liked by the current crop in France. (N, The Independent.Feb.txt.2019).
- 2. So it seems the wind of change promised by the new government like other departments also failed to blow in the corridors of the PCB headquarter as well and its bureaucracy is <u>up to</u> the old tactics yet again. (NN, The Nation. Feb.txt.2019).

Explanation

In example 1, the evaluative item *until* has been used by the native sports news writer as a conjunction. It expresses the *enhancement* of the evaluation by the sports news writer. According to the co-text, the player who was injured cannot play in the upcoming games. *Until* as an *enhancement* item has put a boundary and revealed the progress in the process of the player's future games. *Until* as an evaluative item exposed the condition posed by the sports news writer about the future of the players. In example 2, the non-native sports news writer has used the preposition *up to* in order to reveal the conditioned process of the change in the PCB as promised by the government. According to the co-text, the old tactics were supposed to be used to get the promised benefits from the government. Thus, the prepositional phrase *up to* has enhanced the process of evaluation by showing the accustomed method of progress and change in PCB.

4.2. Graduation (Focus)

Focus deals with the softening or sharpening of the expressions or judgements which cannot be scaled otherwise. It infers that "grading according to prototypicality and the preciseness by which category boundaries are drawn" (Martin, 2005, p.137). It evaluates the non-gradable resources showing various attitudes wither to sharpen (up-scale) or soften (down-scale) them.



Graph-1.2: Distribution of frequency of use of subtypes of graduation-focus in native and non-native discourse

Graph 2 presents the variation and distribution of lexical items of subtypes of focus (a type of graduation) in native and non-native sports news discourse. It shows that frequency of use of evaluative items of subtypes of focus is greater in native sports news discourse as compared to non-native discourse. Graph 2 also reveals the higher use of softening term which are used for down scaling the expressions in both native and non-native discourse. Evaluative items used to sharpen the judgement and evaluation are used in very less extent. Overall, native sports news writers have used more graduation-focus lexical items in their news fabrication process.

4.2.1. Focus-Sharpening (Up-scale)

The evaluation and judgment of the speakers and writers are strengthened and up-scaled by using the lexical items of this category.

Examples

- 1. In Sunday's game alone, Fernandinho had a 75% pass success rate, won three aerial duals and completed two dribbles. He is a <u>very</u> consistent player who likes to turn up in the big games and it's vital that he shows up tonight. (N, The Independent.Feb.txt.2019).
- 2. Japan and Qatar will next play competitively as guest nations at the Copa America, a tacit admission that other Asian countries do not offer strong enough opposition to <u>truly</u> test a team with ambitions to compete at the highest level. (NN, Daily Times. Feb.txt.2019).

Explanation

In example 1, the adverbial evaluative item *very* has been used by the native sports news writer to express the worth and achievements of the player. According to the co-text, the player has already won different titles with higher pass success rate. The native news writer has opined that such a worthy and consistent player should show up in the recent game for the success of the team. The adverb *very* has sharpened the evaluation of the sports news writer and has up-scaled his analysis. In example 2, the adverb *truly* has been used by the non-native sports news writer for the construction of a strong judgement about the worth of the up-coming competition. The co-text has demonstrated the strong and up-scaled viewpoint of the non-native sports news writer by explaining the rare opportunity for the teams of Qatar and Japan to play in America. The sports news writer has graded his assessment and exposed the strong opinion about the worth of the opportunity by the use of the adverb *truly* as Debacker (2015) has acknowledged that "adding words such as 'genuine' or 'real' assess how prototypical a phenomenon is; e.g. a true leader" (p.21).

4.2.2. Focus-Softening (Down-scale)

The lexical items used in this subtype lessen and down-scale the involvement of the speaker and the writer while constructing meanings and making value positions.

Examples

- 1. Defeat at Millwall in last weekend;s FA Cup tie is hardly the <u>sort of</u> result acceptable to the long-suffering Blue half of Merseyside and the boos that greeted the half-time whistle and a 2-1 deficit summed up the growing air of disquiet in the Goodison ranks. (N, The Independent.Jan.txt.2019).
- 2. City's goals on Wednesday were their 113th and 114th of the season in all competitions, and a glance at their forthcoming matches in the Premier League suggests that Guardiola's men could have a <u>slightly</u> easier run than Liverpool. (NN, The Nation. Feb.txt.2019).

Explanation

In example 2, the use of adverb *sort of* by the native sports news writer has softened and down-scaled the meaning he has constructed. The gravity of the situation has been diminished by the use of the adverb *sort of*. The co-text interprets the severity of the event that belongs to the loss of the game by Blues in FA cup. The emotional value of the evaluation by the native sports news writer has been weakened by the use of the adverb *sort of*. It reveals the less importance of the event which may not be considered a significant game because of the use of this adverb by the news writer. In example 2, the non-native sports news writer has used the adverbial evaluative item *slightly* to express his mild evaluation. The co-text indicates that the non-native sports news writer has down-scaled his assessment and softened his expressions. By using the adverb *slightly*, the non-native sports news writer has shared his softer opinion about the up-coming competitions for the players of Guardiola as compared to the players of the Liverpool. It implies the positive evaluation of the situation by the non-native sports news writer.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study was inclined to identify the variations in the use of graduation markers by native and non-native sports news writers to unearth the use of evaluative function of graduation markers. Therefore, the present study has analyzed the variable use of graduation markers in the native and non-native sports news discourse. The study has intended to evaluate the use of graduation markers i.e. force and focus in native and non-native setting with respect to the sports news discourse. For the said purpose, a corpus of 1-million words each for native and non-native sports news discourses has been compiled. Significant differences in the use of graduation markers by native and non-native sports news writers was identified by the quantitative analysis.

The use of graduation markers by native sports news writers is more than non-native sports news writers. The excessive use of graduation markers in native sports news discourse are in accordance with Jalilifar & Hemmati (2013) and Yang (2016). Native sports news writers were recorded to use more resources of quantification and intensification in order to quantify and intensify phenomenon, characters, moral, behaviors or performances of their sports men. In other words, native sports news writers have communicated their ideas, opinions and behaviors more intensely as compared to non-native sports news writers.

The current study has also identified the variations in the use of graduation markers in native and non-native sports news discourse within their respective discourses. The native sports news writers have made use of more graduation markers (force, focus) which recommends that native sports news writers inclined to intensify and quantify the performances, attitudes and characters of their players more than non-native sports news writers. Variations in the use of graduational markers in native and non-native sports news discourse identifies the ideologies of the news writers as Fowler (1991) opines that the evaluative differences mirror the ideological differences. Therefore, such variable use of evaluative markers represent the variable, stance, opinions and viewpoints of native and non-native sports news writers as the use of graduation markers is quite common in newspapers (Fan, 2020). Therefore, graduation (subsystem of appraisal theory) plays an important role in the construction of discourses. It naturalizes the position and attitudes of both the news writers and readers at the same time (ibid). The current study also supports Bednarek (2006) in identifying that "evaluations in newspapers can be used

to express emotive values in order to attract a certain implied readership (p. 203).

The study also entails some pedagogical implications. It indicates that the cultural backgrounds and variations effect the opinions and evaluative behaviors of students and writers while evaluating, people, places and events. However, the study has utilized a smaller corpus, and the findings cannot be generalized on broader level. Nevertheless, the use of evaluative graduational markers in sports news can serve as a reference material for designing courses and developing teaching and learning materials for students and teachers when evaluating non-academic courses. This research may help the sports news readers to identify their linguistic aptitude and cultural associations. In addition, it may also assist them to understand the effects of cultural and ideological differences on the evaluation of people, places and events.

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