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## ATTITUDE RESOURCES IN A SELF-IMPROVEMENT BOOK'S INTRODUCTION CHAPTER

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**Abstract:** This study examines the use of Attitude resources in the introduction chapter of a self-improvement book named *Atomic Habits* through the framework of Appraisal Theory, employing both quantitative analysis of frequency and qualitative discourse interpretation. The analysis reveals that in the introduction chapter, Appreciation is the most frequent Attitude resource. Linguistics expressions of Valuation are predominantly positive, emphasizing both the book's significance and the author's achievements. Additionally, Quality and Composition resources underscore the book's practicality and intellectual foundations. Affect primarily conveys negative emotions related to insecurity and unhappiness, reinforcing the author's struggles in the early narrative. Judgement, particularly Tenacity and Capacity, highlights the author's perseverance and growing competence, shaping his credibility. The evaluative language in this chapter constructs a compelling narrative introduction: moving from adversity to achievements, while also reinforcing the book's authority and usefulness. Through this strategic use of Attitude resources, the introduction not only demonstrates the author's personal journey but also establishes his credibility and highlights the book's value, effectively engaging and persuading readers. This study reveals how self-improvement books strategically blend appraisal resources in narratives and academic writing to engage readers emotionally while establishing credibility, expanding the application of Appraisal Theory to this genre.

**Keywords:** Attitude resources, Appraisal theory, evaluative language, self-improvement book

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# NGUỒN LỰC THÁI ĐỘ TRONG CHƯƠNG GIỚI THIỆU CỦA MỘT CUỐN SÁCH KỸ NĂNG SỐNG

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này<sup>o</sup> phân tích việc sử dụng các nguồn lực thể hiện Thái độ trong chương giới thiệu của cuốn sách kỹ năng sống *Atomic Habits* dựa trên khuôn khổ Lý thuyết Đánh giá (Appraisal Theory), tập trung vào ba khía cạnh: Cảm xúc (Affect), Phán xét (Judgement) và Đánh giá sự vật hiện tượng (Appreciation). Kết hợp định lượng tần suất và phân tích diễn ngôn định tính, kết quả phân tích cho thấy trong chương giới thiệu, Đánh giá sự vật hiện tượng (Appreciation) là nguồn lực Thái độ được sử dụng nhiều nhất, trong đó Giá trị (Valuation) chủ yếu là những diễn đạt tích cực, nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của cuốn sách cũng như những thành tựu của tác giả. Ngoài ra, các nguồn lực thể hiện Chất lượng (Quality) và Cấu trúc (Composition) làm nổi bật tính thực tiễn và nền tảng tri thức của cuốn sách. Phạm trù Cảm xúc chủ yếu thể hiện những cảm xúc tiêu cực liên quan đến sự bất an (insecurity) và bất hạnh (unhappiness), nhằm nhấn mạnh những khó khăn ban đầu của tác giả. Phạm trù Phán xét, đặc biệt là Kiên trì (Tenacity) và Khả năng (Capacity) được sử dụng để làm nổi bật nghị lực và khả năng của tác giả, góp phần xây dựng uy tín của ông. Ngôn ngữ đánh giá trong chương này tạo nên một phần mở đầu hấp dẫn, chuyển từ câu chuyện về nghịch cảnh sang thành tựu, đồng thời củng cố tính thuyết phục và giá trị của cuốn sách. Thông qua chiến lược sử dụng các nguồn lực Thái độ này, chương giới thiệu không chỉ mô tả hành trình cá nhân của tác giả mà còn khẳng định uy tín, làm nổi bật giá trị của cuốn sách, giúp thu hút và thuyết phục người đọc một cách hiệu quả. Nghiên cứu này cho thấy sách kỹ năng sống kết hợp các nguồn lực thẩm định từ văn kể chuyện và văn bản học thuật để vừa tạo kết nối cảm xúc với người đọc, vừa khẳng định độ tin cậy, qua đó mở rộng phạm vi ứng dụng của Lý thuyết Đánh giá vào thể loại này.

*Từ khóa:* nguồn lực Thái độ, lý thuyết Đánh giá, ngôn ngữ đánh giá, sách kỹ năng sống

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, self-help books, also known as self-improvement books, have become a significant part of modern reading culture, attracting broad readership worldwide. Titles in this genre consistently rank among the bestsellers, with a record number of self-help books being sold in recent years as readers increasingly seek guidance for stress management, productivity, and personal growth (Walker, 2019). With the rising prominence of liberal education, self-help books are also frequently suggested among non-fiction reading lists for students at different ages. Such well-known pieces as *The 7 habits of highly effective people* (Stephen Covey) are included in recommended reading lists for secondary and high school students in private institutions such as Dewey Schools, Hanoi (The Dewey Schools website). At the University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, students can take elective courses aimed at improving soft skills beyond their major, such as

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*Emotional Intelligence & Social Communication* and *Life Design*. These courses use self-improvement books as reference materials, such as *Search Inside Yourself* (Chade-Meng Tan), *Peace Is Every Step* (Thich Nhat Hanh), *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Mitch Albom), and *The Power of Now* (Eckhart Tolle).

The popularity of self-help books is largely attributed to their focus on positive thinking and their direct, solution-oriented approach to personal development. These books often tell stories of dreams, limitations, and hope, reinforcing the belief that success lies within each individual. Such narratives strongly resonate with readers, particularly young audiences, by fostering a sense of relatability and emotional connection. These books play a crucial role in guiding, inspiring, and motivating young readers in their personal development (Woodstock, 2005; Dolby, 2005).

Given the significant influence of self-help books, their success cannot be attributed solely to the content itself. Instead, the way these books are written plays a crucial role in engaging readers and effectively delivering their messages. Therefore, it is essential to understand evaluative language in self-help books since it plays a crucial role in shaping reader engagement, building credibility, and reinforcing persuasive messages, ultimately influencing how readers interpret and apply the book's guidance in their personal lives. Within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the Appraisal theory was developed by Martin and White (2005), expanding on its interpersonal metafunction to provide a more detailed framework for analyzing evaluative language in discourse. This theory encompasses three main domains: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, each of which plays a critical role in understanding how language conveys evaluations. This study focuses on Attitude because Attitude markers are central to establishing an emotional connection, conveying the author's stance, and motivating readers from the outset, which is crucial for capturing interest and fostering trust in the book's guidance.

A crucial aspect of self-help books is their introduction chapter, which serves as the foundation for the book's persuasive impact. Research on discourse structures suggests that introductions play a key role in establishing an author's credibility, engaging the reader, and setting the tone for the book's argument (Swales, 1990). Particularly in self-improvement books, the introduction often outlines the problems the reader faces, provides an initial sense of encouragement, and persuades the reader to trust the author's guidance (Liang, 2015). By employing strategic linguistic choices, authors shape the reader's expectations and build an emotional connection that sustains engagement throughout the book.

This study examines the linguistic expressions of Attitude in the introduction chapter of a well-known self-help book called *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones* (Clear, 2018). It is a top-ranking *New York Times* best-seller, and it has been distributed globally with over 20 million copies sold, with translations available in more than 60 languages. By analyzing how the author builds motivation, credibility, and engagement through language in the introduction chapter, this research sheds light on the persuasive role of Attitude markers at the book's outset. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. *What Attitude resources does the writer employ in the introduction chapter of Atomic Habits?*
2. *How are these Attitude resources employed in the introduction chapter of Atomic Habits?*

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. Studies on the Application of Appraisal Theory in Discourse Analysis*

The Appraisal Framework has been widely applied across various discourse domains, most notably in literary narratives (Page, 2003; Thomson, 2008), academics and education (Hood, 2004; Hood, 2010; Xinghua & Thompson, 2009; Mur-Duenas, 2010; Nayernia & Ashouri, 2019), and media and news (Biro, 2008; Nguyen, 2016a; Ngu & Vo, 2021). While originally developed for English, the Appraisal Framework is also well-suited for analyzing other languages, including Vietnamese. Several studies have explored its applicability to Vietnamese discourse (Tran & Thomson, 2008; Nguyen, 2016b; Nguyen, 2021). In addition, it is not only useful for the discourse analysis of a single language but also valuable in contrastive discourse studies, such as English-Vietnamese comparisons (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Vo, 2020).

In the realm of personal and narrative discourse, appraisal resources play a crucial role in shaping storytelling and character representation. Page (2003) examined childbirth narratives and found that women's stories were more emotionally engaged and personalized than men's, as they employed more affect and appreciation resources. Additionally, men and women differed in how they used judgment to construct their self-representations. Similarly, Thomson (2008) explored Japanese folk tales and demonstrated that judgment was instrumental in shaping the moral and ethical portrayals of female characters. These findings suggest that evaluative language in narratives not only reflects individual experiences but also reinforces societal perceptions of identity and roles.

In education settings, research articles and argumentative essays are the subjects of investigation. Hood (2004) studied the introduction section of academic research articles, showing that both published authors and students used explicit attitude resources, with appreciation being the most common, reflecting their shared goal of positioning their research. She then examined evaluation in academic writing in general (2010), focusing on how researchers use appraisal to position their arguments and establish credibility. The study found that appreciation was the dominant attitude resource, as writers frequently evaluated research phenomena rather than expressing personal emotions or judgments. Also interested in students' writing, Xinghua and Thompson (2009) analyzed attitude in students' argumentative writing from a contrastive perspective, highlighting differences in how evaluative language is used to construct arguments. The findings revealed that students from different linguistic backgrounds varied in their use of judgment and affect, impacting the persuasiveness of their arguments. In an intercultural setting, Mur-Duenas (2010) analyzed research articles in business management and found that despite different cultural contexts, authors used similar attitude markers, suggesting shared disciplinary values. Similarly, when exploring book reviews in applied linguistics journals, Nayernia and Ashouri (2019) found that authors demonstrated a strong tendency to use appreciation resources. While the findings indicated evident traces of subjectivity in book reviews as an academic genre, they also highlighted the dynamic balance between subjectivity and objectivity in academic writing. A comparable pattern of evaluative language in research articles can be observed in the conclusions of Vietnamese linguistic research articles, where Graduation is the most dominant system, with a strong preference for upscaling evaluations, while Attitude is primarily expressed through Appreciation, and Engagement is less frequently used, reflecting a tendency to assert findings rather than engage alternative perspectives (Nguyen, 2021).

Regarding news and media discourse, Birot (2008) investigated news networks (*BBC*, *CNN*, *Al Jazeera*) and found variations in attitude markers, with appreciation being the most frequent and personal emotions the least common. Working with the same discourse type, Nguyen (2016a) employed Halliday's Mood system and the Attitude subsystem to elucidate interpersonal meanings in 40 editorials from *The New York Times*. Her analysis revealed that journalists often establish interaction with readers by expressing viewpoints, attitudes, and emotions both implicitly and explicitly. Only focusing on explicit Attitude and Graduation expressions, Ngu and Vo (2021) analyzed 65 sentences from *The Economist's* economic opinion article "The Business of Survival", using Positive Discourse Analysis and the Appraisal framework. Findings show that Judgment (particularly capacity) is the most frequent Attitude resource, while Graduation mainly functions to upscale intensification and quantification, offering insights for reading comprehension and academic writing. Turning to Vietnamese news discourse, Tran and Thomson (2008) investigated the use of "Reporter Voice" in Vietnamese hard news, analyzing how journalists employ evaluative language to present conflicts. Similarly, research on media coverage of President Obama's visit to Vietnam in 2016 found that news appraisers favored Affect and Appreciation over Judgment, while adopting a cautious stance through Expansion strategies and attribution to external sources (Nguyen, 2016b). These findings further demonstrate how Vietnamese journalists balance evaluative language with an objective stance, subtly shaping reader interpretation.

In a contrastive perspective, studies have compared the use of evaluative language in English and Vietnamese news discourse. Nguyen and Nguyen (2020) analyzed two articles on the 2019 Amazon rainforest fires from *The New York Times* and *VnExpress*, revealing a dominant use of negativity to highlight the severity of the disaster and the inadequate response from authorities. Additionally, both articles employed quantification as an implicit means of expressing attitude to emphasize the devastation. Another study by Vo (2020) examined Appreciation and Judgment in English and Vietnamese news articles on social issues, finding that while both languages convey explicit and implicit evaluation, English texts tend to use a higher frequency of evaluative lexical units and sentence structures, leading to more detailed assessments of issues.

Overall, these studies demonstrate the diverse applications of the Appraisal framework across various discourse domains, highlighting how Attitude markers, whether through Affect, Judgment, or Appreciation, play a crucial role in shaping evaluation, persuasion, and identity construction in both academic and professional communication.

## **2.2. Theoretical Framework: Attitude System in Appraisal Theory**

Hunston (2011), along with other scholars such as Thompson and Alba-Juez (2014) and Martin and White (2005), asserts that almost everything in language carries some form of evaluation. This highlights the pervasive nature of evaluative meaning in communication, reinforcing the importance of studying how speakers and writers use linguistic resources to express attitudes, construct social identities, and position themselves in relation to their audience. Evaluative language, from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), refers to language used to express personal attitudes and emotions, assess the behavior of others, and evaluate objects or phenomena. It plays a crucial role in interpersonal communication.

Appraisal Theory, particularly the Appraisal Framework, was developed by Martin and White (2005) within the SFL tradition established by Halliday (2004). It operates at the discourse semantic level, emphasizing the evaluative meanings of language in interpersonal communication. This theoretical model systematically categorizes the linguistic choices and

semantic resources used by speakers/writers to convey evaluation.

According to Martin and White (2005), Appraisal theory consists of three main subsystems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation, each serving a distinct function in shaping interpersonal meaning:

Attitude is concerned with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behavior and evaluation of things. Engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse. Graduation attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred (p. 35).

The Attitude subsystem deals with the expression of feelings and evaluations. It is further divided into three categories: Affect, which conveys emotions and personal feelings; Judgment, which evaluates people's behaviors based on social norms; and Appreciation, which assesses objects, ideas, or events.

Although the Appraisal framework has been widely utilized as a powerful tool for analyzing and enhancing the expression of evaluative stance in texts across different modes, Martin and White (2005) emphasize that it should still be regarded as a work in progress with unresolved issues. They state that current categorizations of affect, judgment, and appreciation should be seen as hypotheses about the organization of relevant meanings, inviting further exploration and refinement (p. 46). Since its inception, the framework has undergone continuous development, with refinements and modifications informed by in-depth analyses of evaluative language in specific contexts. The framework and its subsequent developments will be further discussed as follows.

#### **a. Affect**

Affect is considered the core of the Attitude system, as it represents a fundamental means of expressing human emotions from birth. There can be positive and negative Affect, which reflects whether an emotion is associated with joy (positive) or sadness (negative). Emotions can be realized through different processes, including behavioral processes, mental processes and relational processes. Affect can be further classified into four primary groups, which are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1**

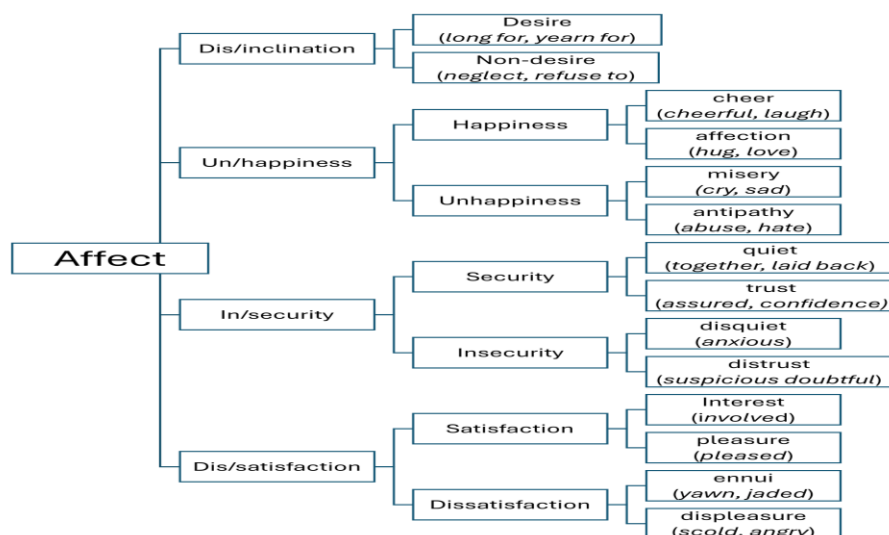
*Martin and White (2005)'s Affect Groups (p. 48-51)*

<b>Affect</b>	<b>Positive (+)</b>	<b>Negative (-)</b>
Dis/inclination	Desire	Fear
Un/happiness	Cheer, Affection	Misery, Antipathy
In/security	Confidence, Trust	Disquiet, Surprise
Dis/satisfaction	Interest, Pleasure	Ennui, Displeasure

However, there were issues with the theorization of this subsystem regarding the negative polarity assignment of Affect-Insecurity: Surprise, since it is fair to associate surprise with both positive and negative feelings. To address this issue, Surprise is suggested to be removed from the system Insecurity, giving place to Distrust – an opposite subcategory to Trust (Bednarek, 2008; Ngo & Unsworth, 2015). The subtype Non-desire is also proposed as opposition to Desire, replacing Fear while Fear is merged with Disquiet under the category of Insecurity (Bednarek, 2008; Ngo & Unsworth, 2015). The revised Affect subcategories and their instantiations are demonstrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Modified Affect System (Adapted From Martin & White, 2005; Bednarek, 2008; Ngo & Unsworth, 2015)*

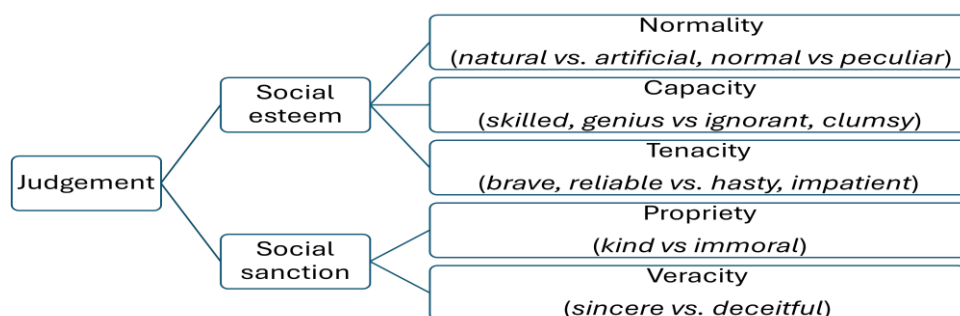


## b. Judgment

Judgement refers to the evaluation of people and their behaviors based on social norms, ethical standards, and personal attributes. This subsystem assesses human conduct in terms of morality, personality, and competence, often relying on societal expectations and regulations. According to Martin & White (2005, p. 53), Judgment is categorized into two main types: Social Esteem and Social Sanction. Social Esteem concerns personal attributes that affect an individual's reputation but are not subject to formal rules or laws. It consists of three aspects: (1) Normality: evaluating how usual or exceptional someone is; (2) Capacity: assessing a person's ability, and (3) Tenacity: measuring perseverance and determination. Capacity can be divided into mental capacity (intellectual skills, expertise), material capacity (physical strength, technological ability), and social capacity (interpersonal and leadership skills) (Ngo & Unsworth, 2015). Social Sanction evaluates people based on ethical standards that are either conventionally accepted or legally enforced. It includes two key dimensions (4) Veracity: assessing truthfulness and trustworthiness and (5) Propriety: evaluating moral conduct and adherence to social norms. The Judgement system and their lexical instantiations are displayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Judgement System (Martin & White, 2005)*

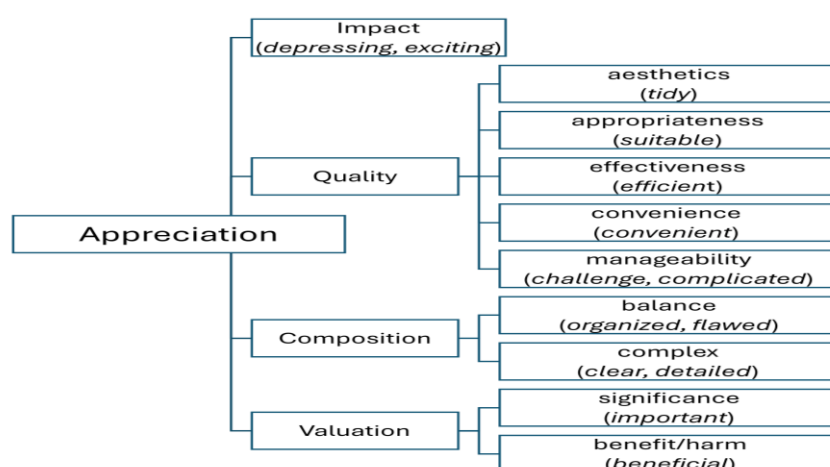


### c. Appreciation

Appreciation concerns the evaluation of objects, events, and phenomena rather than people. It focuses on assessing the quality, impact, and value of things in different contexts. Similar to Affect and Judgment, Appreciation can be positive or negative and may be expressed explicitly or implicitly. However, it is more complex and context-dependent, as the evaluation of objects often varies based on perspective and circumstances. Martin & White (2005, p. 56) classify Appreciation into three subtypes: (1) Reaction: emotional responses to an object or event, assessing its impact and appeal, divided into two aspects: Impact and Quality; (2) Composition: the structure and complexity of an object, considering balance, organization, and arrangement based on personal, cultural, or social standards; and (3) Valuation: the significance, usefulness, creativity, reliability, and relevance of an object or event. This system undergoes some re-categorization and further developments by Humphrey (2008), and Ngo and Unsworth (2015) as shown in Figure 3. With this categorization, ‘quality’ is no longer a subtype of Reaction, but it stands alongside other Appreciation subtypes. Also, a new subcategory called ‘manageability’ is introduced, classified as a separate category under Quality. It refers to a measure of how easily something can be handled, while textual complexity remains under Composition alongside ‘balance’.

**Figure 3**

*Modified Appreciation System (Adapted From Martin & White, 2005; Humphrey, 2008; Ngo & Unsworth, 2015)*



## 3. Research Design and Methodology

### 3.1. The Book *Atomic Habits* and Its Author James Clear

James Clear is a writer, speaker, and productivity expert specializing in habits and decision-making. His work focuses on translating complex scientific research into practical strategies for personal and professional growth. Clear’s insights have been featured in major publications such as *Time*, *Forbes*, and *The New York Times*, and his expertise has made him a sought-after speaker for Fortune 500 companies and top organizations.

Building on his research and writing, Clear published *Atomic Habits* in 2018, a book that has since gained widespread recognition in the self-help and personal development genres. The book explores the science behind habit formation, drawing from psychology, neuroscience, and behavioral economics to present an actionable framework for lasting change.



The book has been praised for its clarity and practicality, earning recommendations from experts and readers alike. It has achieved bestseller status on multiple prestigious lists, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *Publisher's Weekly* (Amazon.com). The *New York Post* highlights its emphasis on small, consistent improvements leading to transformative results (Giardina, 2025). On *Goodreads* - one of the biggest forums for book readers, *Atomic Habits* has received the Goodreads Choice Award and holds an impressive 4.34-star rating based on over one million reviews, reflecting its widespread acclaim and lasting impact on readers (Goodreads.com). These endorsements, alongside its millions of copies sold worldwide, underscore both the book's credibility and its impact on readers.

### **3.2. Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for this study was collected from the Introduction chapter of *Atomic Habits*, which consists of 3,065 words (Appendix A). The e-book version of the book was accessed, and the Introduction was extracted and saved as a Word document for analysis. The text was then carefully reviewed to gain a thorough understanding of its main content before identifying and analyzing evaluative language within the chapter. Following this, based on the framework of Appraisal Theory and its development, linguistic expressions of Attitude, including Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation were identified. Relevant words, phrases, clauses, and sentences were underlined, then systematically categorized into subtypes within the framework. Each expression was further classified in terms of polarity (positive or negative) and explicitness (inscribed or invoked), providing a more nuanced understanding of how Attitude is conveyed in the text. A detailed classification of Attitude expressions, including their types, subtypes, polarity, and explicitness, is provided in Appendix B.

To ensure systematic quantification, each identified Attitude expression was coded then saved in Excel for counting purposes. This allowed for statistical representation of the frequency and distribution of Attitude resources across the text. After this, a qualitative analysis was conducted to interpret how these Attitude expressions functioned, focusing on the discourse functions of Attitude expressions, examining how they contribute to the author's interpersonal positioning, persuasive strategies, and narrative voice.

In short, the study combined numerical data with in-depth discourse interpretation to reveal the use of evaluative resources embedded in the author's language.

## **4. Results and Findings**

The analysis of Attitude markers in the Introduction chapter of *Atomic Habits* highlights a clear distribution across the three subcategories: Appreciation, Affect, and Judgment. Among the 137 instances of Attitude markers identified, Appreciation is the most dominant, accounting for 91 occurrences (66.4%). This suggests that the chapter primarily focuses on evaluating qualities, attributes, and the value of key concepts introduced. Affect, which represents emotional expressions, appears 32 times (23.4%), indicating a moderate level of emotional engagement to connect with readers. Judgment, on the other hand, is the least frequent, with only 14 instances (10.2%), showing that direct assessments of people's behaviors or moral qualities play a relatively minor role.

### **4.1. Linguistic Expressions of Affect**

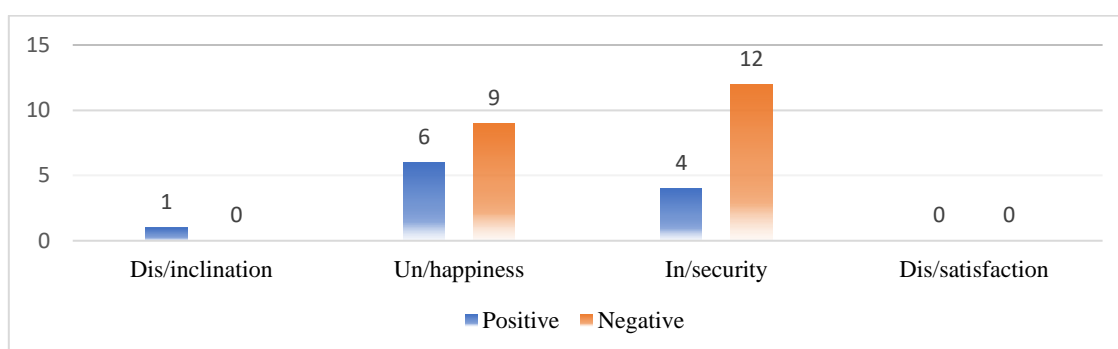
The introduction chapter of *Atomic Habits* begins with the author's personal story of a severe high school injury that resulted in multiple skull fractures and a long, difficult recovery. This narrative sets the emotional tone for the book, illustrating a period of immense struggle,

uncertainty, and self-doubt. The affective language used in this chapter reflects these emotions, with a strong emphasis on insecurity and unhappiness.

The emotional distribution is visualized in Figure 4, which illustrates the polarity of different Affect groups in the chapter.

**Figure 4**

*The Distribution of Polarity Among Different Affect Groups*



As the chart indicates, negative expressions of In/security (12 occurrences) and Un/happiness (9 occurrences) are particularly prevalent. In contrast, the presence of positive expressions within these categories is notably lower (4 and 6 occurrences, respectively), reinforcing the chapter's focus on struggle rather than resolution. Additionally, expressions related to Dis/inclination and Dis/satisfaction are almost entirely absent, suggesting that the chapter does not directly engage with themes of motivation or explicit dissatisfaction but instead immerses the reader in the psychological weight of adversity.

In/security is the most dominant subcategory, with negative expressions significantly outnumbering positive ones. The chapter frequently conveys feelings of vulnerability, lack of control, and uncertainty, as the author describes his physical and mental struggles following the accident. Linguistic resources for insecurity can be either inscribed (Example 1 and 2) or invoked (Example 3).

(1) **Shocked and confused**, I was unaware of how seriously I had been injured.

(2) My parents slept **restlessly** on a hospital mattress-one moment they would **collapse from fatigue**, the next they would be **wide awake** with **worry**.

(3) The following months were hard. It felt like **everything in my life was on pause**.

In examples (1) and (2), insecurity is inscribed through explicit lexical choices: adjectives (“shocked and confused”, “wide awake”), adverb (“restlessly”), verb phrase (“collapse from fatigue”), noun (“worry”). These expressions directly encode the author's disoriented reaction to the accident, highlighting his lack of awareness and control (1) or vividly portray his parents' distress (2), reinforcing a broader atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

In (3), insecurity is invoked rather than explicitly stated. The phrase “everything in my life was on pause” does not directly express fear or anxiety, but it subtly conveys a sense of disruption and helplessness. By describing time as being “on pause”, the passage suggests stagnation and uncertainty, allowing readers to infer the underlying emotional turmoil without it being explicitly articulated. This indirect approach deepens the affective impact by engaging the reader's interpretation of the narrator's struggles.

Similarly, the Un/happiness category also leans toward negativity, capturing moments of frustration, disappointment, and helplessness. However, the presence of a few positive Affect

markers suggests that amidst the hardship, there were glimmers of hope and small victories. Some examples of this category are presented below.

(4) While my mother rode with me in the helicopter, my father went home to check on my brother and sister and break the news to them. He **choked back tears** as he explained to my sister that he would miss her eighth-grade graduation ceremony that night.

(5) I earned a spot on the baseball team and, although I was at the bottom of the roster as a freshman, I was **thrilled**.

In (4), unhappiness is invoked through the situation rather than explicitly stated. The phrase “choked back tears” subtly conveys emotional distress without directly labeling it as sadness or disappointment. It further reinforces a sense of regret and sorrow, making the reader infer the emotional weight of the moment. In contrast, (5) represents a rare instance of inscribed positive Affect. The verb “thrilled” directly encodes happiness, leaving little ambiguity about the narrator’s emotions. Despite the modest achievement of merely securing a spot on the team, this explicit expression of joy highlights the significance of small personal victories within an otherwise difficult period. The contrast between these two examples illustrates the fluctuating emotional landscape within the introduction chapter, where adversity and hardship are occasionally punctuated by moments of optimism. These moments subtly introduce the idea that positive change is possible, even in the face of significant obstacles.

#### 4.2. Linguistic Expressions of Judgement

The introduction chapter of *Atomic Habits* contains 14 linguistic expressions of Judgement, distributed as 5 instances of Capacity and 9 of Tenacity. This quantitative breakdown objectively highlights an emphasis on the author’s personal ability and persistence, with minimal reference to broader social norms.

Tenacity is the most frequently invoked judgment, appearing 9 times throughout the chapter. This category centers on the author's portrayal of his determination and persistence. The text includes inscribed resources—specific lexical choices such as “determined,” “managed to,” and “I still believed”—that firmly establish his resolve. Additionally, invoked resources (as in examples 6, 7) further emphasize this point:

(6) While my peers stayed up late and played video games, I built good sleep habits and went to bed early each night.

(7) Maybe there are people who can achieve incredible success overnight. I don't know any of them, and I'm certainly not one of them.

In example (6), he contrasts his disciplined routine with that of his peers, not only highlighting his commitment to personal growth but also implicitly criticizing the lack of discipline in others. Example (7) further reinforces his tenacious self-view by dismissing the myth of overnight success, which underlines his belief in sustained effort over fleeting achievements.

Regarding Capacity, five expressions in the chapter collectively illustrate the author's measured self-assessment of his abilities, as exemplified by the following instances:

(8) I had **never considered myself a master** of the topic, but rather someone who was experimenting alongside my readers.

(9) I **was increasingly asked** to speak at top companies about...

The evaluative language demonstrates two independent facets of Capacity. In example (8), the phrase “never considered myself a master” serves as an evaluative marker that downplays expertise, positioning the author as an experimenter alongside his readers. In

contrast, in (9), the use of “increasingly asked” highlights growing external recognition, thereby affirming his professional competence.

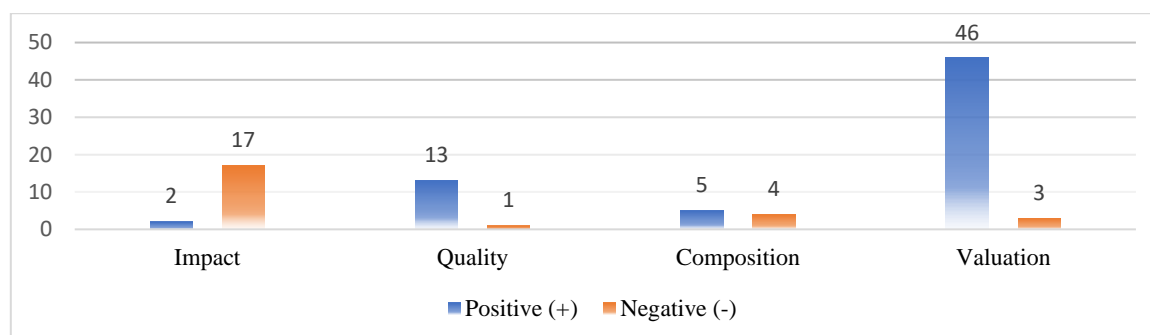
Through these linguistic choices, the author not only conveys a sense of humility and capability (Capacity) but also underscores the critical importance of persistence and self-discipline (Tenacity). The sparse use of Propriety indicates a deliberate focus on internal measures of success, aligning with the book’s broader theme of personal development through incremental, disciplined actions.

#### 4.3. Linguistic Expressions of Appreciation

In the introduction chapter of *Atomic Habits*, the author’s evaluative stance extends beyond personal emotions to encompass various aspects of Appreciation. As visualized in Figure 5, Valuation overwhelmingly dominates the Appreciation resources in this chapter, with 46 positive instances, far exceeding all other categories. This strong emphasis on Valuation suggests a focus on the significance and worth of key ideas, reinforcing the book’s central message about the transformative power of habits. In contrast, Impact is the only category where negative expressions (17) outnumber positive ones (2), reflecting the immediate hardships caused by the author’s injury. Quality and Composition are present to a lesser extent, both exhibiting a slight positive inclination.

**Figure 5**

*The Distribution of Polarity Among Different Appreciation Groups*



Regarding Impact, negative expressions dominate, particularly in descriptions of the author’s physical suffering and medical crisis. Linguistic expressions of Impact can be either inscribed (example 10) or invoked (example 11 and 12).

(10) By this time, the **swelling** in my brain had become so **severe** that I was having **repeated post-traumatic seizures**.

(11) My eyeball **bulged out of the socket**, held **precariously** in place by my eyelid and the optic nerve attaching my eye to my brain.

(12) Shortly after arriving, my body began **shutting down**.

In example (10), the negative evaluation of Impact is explicitly inscribed through the phrase “swelling... so severe” and the mention of “repeated post-traumatic seizures.” These details present the severity of the injury in a direct and unambiguous manner, reinforcing the immediate, devastating effects on the author’s health. Example (11) invokes negative Impact through the use of “precariously,” which conveys instability and danger. The word itself suggests a fragile, unstable state, and in the broader context of the sentence, it heightens the sense of physical vulnerability. The description of the eyeball being “held precariously in place” creates a vivid, unsettling image that implicitly evaluates the extent of the damage without directly stating

it. Similarly, example (12) employs an invoked negative evaluation through metaphor. The phrase “my body began shutting down” frames the body as a failing machine, suggesting a complete breakdown rather than simply a deterioration in health. This metaphor intensifies the sense of crisis, implicitly reinforcing the gravity of the author’s condition. Together, these examples illustrate how negative Impact is both inscribed and invoked, effectively conveying the life-threatening nature of the author’s injury and its immediate consequences.

In addition to Impact, negative expressions of Composition further emphasize the severity of the author’s injuries through descriptions of physical distortion. Phrases such as “distorted U-shape”, “bulged out of the socket”, and “a bulging left eye” explicitly evaluate the unnatural and unsettling appearance of his injuries. These descriptions inscribe negative Composition by highlighting the extent of physical damage. Alongside negative Impact, this evaluative language immerses the reader in the immediate consequences of the accident, reinforcing their severity through concrete physical descriptions.

In contrast to the negative expressions of Composition, positive instances focus on the complexity and sophistication of the author’s work, particularly regarding his book and business.

(13) At the start of 2017, I launched the Habits Academy, which became the **premier** training platform for organizations and individuals interested in building better habits in life and work.

(14) The fields I draw on-**biology, neuroscience, philosophy, psychology, and more**-have been around for many years.

In example (13), positive Composition is explicitly inscribed through the phrase “premier training platform”, which evaluates the Habits Academy as a highly developed and refined system for habit formation. This directly attributes sophistication and quality to the author’s work. Similarly, example (14) invokes positive Composition by emphasizing the breadth of disciplines - “biology, neuroscience, philosophy, psychology, and more” - that inform the book’s content. While no direct evaluative term is used, the reference to multiple well-established fields suggests depth and intellectual rigor, implicitly positioning the book as a thoughtfully constructed and comprehensive resource. These positive expressions of Composition highlight the structured and refined nature of the author’s works. By emphasizing both the sophistication of his training platform and the diverse academic foundations of his work, this evaluative language helps establish the author’s credibility and positions his book as a well-researched and authoritative resource.

Positive expressions of Quality in the introduction chapter primarily highlight the book’s practicality, clarity, and effectiveness. The author emphasizes that the methods presented are not only well-structured but also easy to implement, reinforcing the book’s value as a useful and applicable guide. Phrases such as “small but consistent habits”, “simple writing habit”, and “step-by-step plan” explicitly evaluate the book’s approach as manageable and systematic. Similarly, descriptions like “easy to understand and apply” and “highly actionable” further underscore its accessibility and practicality. Additionally, references to “four-step models of habits” and “step-by-step system” highlight its structured and methodical nature, positioning the book as a clear and effective tool for behavior change. Through these positive Quality expressions, the author reinforces the book’s reliability and usability, framing it as a well-designed resource that offers concrete, actionable strategies for readers.

The most frequent type of Appreciation in the introduction chapter is positive valuation, which serves to highlight both the author’s achievements and the enduring value of the book. This evaluative language helps establish credibility by demonstrating the author’s personal

success (as in examples 15 and 16) and positioning the book as a meaningful and lasting resource (as in examples 17, 18, and 19).

(15) By the time I graduated, I **was listed** in the school record books in eight different categories. That same year, I **was awarded** the university's **highest academic honor, the President's Medal**.

(16) In 2016, my articles began to appear regularly in **major publications** like *Time*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Forbes*. Incredibly, **my writing was read by over eight million people** that year.

(17) What I offer you is **a synthesis of the best ideas smart people** figured out a long time ago as well as **the most compelling discoveries** scientists have made recently.

(18) But this book is about what doesn't change. It's about the **fundamentals** of human behavior. The **lasting principles you can rely on year after year**. The ideas you can build a business around, build a family around, build a life around.

(19) As long as human behavior is involved, this book will be your guide.

In examples (15) and (16), the author's achievements are positively evaluated. The phrase "listed in the school record books in eight different categories" and the mention of the "President's Medal" explicitly inscribe his academic and athletic success. Meanwhile, the reference to "major publications like *Time*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Forbes*" and the fact that his writing reached "over eight million people" invoke a sense of professional recognition and influence.

Examples (17), (18), and (19) shift the focus to the book's value. The description of the book as "a synthesis of the best ideas smart people figured out" in (17) inscribes its intellectual credibility, while (18) emphasizes its long-term relevance with phrases such as "fundamentals of human behavior" and "lasting principles you can rely on." Finally, (19) positions the book as a trusted resource by stating that "this book will be your guide."

Through these positive Appreciation resources, the introduction reinforces both the author's authority and the book's significance, enhancing its perceived credibility and relevance for readers.

## 5. Discussion

The introduction chapter of *Atomic Habits* employs a range of Attitude resources to shape the reader's perception of the author's journey, credibility, and the book's value. Affect primarily manifests through negative expressions of In/security and Un/happiness, reinforcing the emotional weight of the author's personal struggles. The scarcity of positive Affect suggests that the chapter focuses more on hardship and perseverance rather than immediate resolution or motivation. Judgement, on the other hand, is predominantly realized through Tenacity, with frequent references to the author's determination and persistence. This is complemented by instances of Capacity, where the author first downplays his expertise before acknowledging his growing competence through external recognition. These Judgement resources contribute to the self-made, resilient image of the author, aligning with the book's overarching theme of gradual self-improvement. Finally, Appreciation is the most prominent Attitude category, particularly Valuation, which overwhelmingly skews positive. The book and the author's accomplishments are framed as highly valuable, credible, and enduring. Additionally, Quality evaluations highlight the book's practicality and effectiveness, while Composition emphasizes both the structured nature of the content and the intellectual foundations behind it. Overall, the introduction strategically blends Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation to establish a compelling discourse that reinforces the book's authority and persuasiveness, effectively positioning

*Atomic Habits* as a trustworthy and actionable guide for personal transformation.

These findings align with previous research on discourse structures, which highlights the pivotal role of introductions in shaping an author's credibility, engaging readers, and setting the stage for the book's argument (Swales, 1990). Particularly in self-improvement literature, the introduction serves as a critical space where the author not only defines the reader's problem but also establishes trust and motivation for change (Liang, 2015). The strategic use of Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation in *Atomic Habits* reflects this pattern, demonstrating how emotional appeal, personal credibility, and book valuation work together to reinforce key themes of persistence and transformation.

It can also be suggested from the findings that self-improvement literature, particularly the introduction section, blends elements of narrative storytelling and academic argumentation. Prior research on evaluative language in narratives highlights the role of appraisal resources in shaping self-representation and moral positioning (Page, 2003; Thomson, 2008). Similar to how personal and folk narratives employ Judgment and Affect to construct identity and reinforce societal values, the introduction of *Atomic Habits* leverages these resources to emotionally connect with readers and simultaneously frame the author's credibility. While the very first part of the chapter employs Affect to create an emotional connection with readers through personal storytelling, the subsequent sections shift towards a prominent usage of Appreciation resources to establish credibility and reinforce the book's value. A similar pattern can be observed in academic writing, where Appreciation is the most frequently used to express authors' stance while remaining their objectivity (Hood, 2010; Xinghua & Thompson, 2009; Mur-Duenas, 2010; Nayernia & Ashouri, 2019). This dynamic use of appraisal resources reflects the dual function of self-improvement books: engaging readers on a personal level while also positioning the text as a trustworthy guide for transformation.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of Attitude markers in the introduction chapter of a self-improvement book under the Appraisal Theory by Martin and White (2005) has revealed a strategic deployment of Attitude resources. The initial emphasis on struggle (Affect) sets the foundation for the author's perseverance and self-discipline (Judgement), which then leads to a strong assertion of credibility and book value (Appreciation). This layered use of Attitude resources not only reinforces the author's credibility and the book's value but also aligns with the genre's dual function of engaging readers emotionally while establishing authoritative guidance for self-improvement.

Through the lens of Appraisal Theory, both the introduction's function and the genre characteristics of self-improvement books become clearer. A distinct pattern emerges, revealing how self-improvement books strategically draw on appraisal resources from both narrative and academic writing to fulfill their communicative purpose. This approach allows them to engage readers emotionally while simultaneously establishing credibility and instructional value.

By examining the Attitude resources in the introduction chapter of *Atomic Habits*, this study expands the application of Appraisal Theory beyond literary, academic and media discourse into the realm of self-improvement books, illustrating how evaluative language operates in persuasive non-fiction. It also contributes to the broader field of functional linguistics by highlighting how appraisal resources function in shaping credibility, engagement, and thematic cohesion in self-improvement discourse. Additionally, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how self-improvement books leverage linguistic strategies to engage readers and enhance persuasive impact. It can offer practical implications for educators and

content creators seeking to enhance writing by leveraging Attitude resources strategically.

One limitation of this study is its focus on a single self-improvement book, which may not fully capture the diversity of appraisal strategies across the genre. Future research could expand by analyzing a broader range of self-improvement books to identify the general appraisal patterns or exploring how Appraisal resources can be effectively integrated into writing instruction. Also, studies across different genres of non-fiction can also be implemented to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how evaluative language reinforces authorial credibility and reader engagement.

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## Appendices

