

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Critical Cognitive Interpretation of *The Time Machine* from the Perspective of Proximization Theory

Xiaoqin Rao<sup>1</sup> ✉ and Qian Yong<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate Student, College of Foreign Studies, Jinan University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, College of Foreign Studies, Jinan University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

**Corresponding Author:** Xiaoqin Rao, **E-mail:** 741650953@qq.com

---

**ABSTRACT**

As a product of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis, proximization theory is one of the emerging research directions in the field of linguistics. Most of the current research using this theory focuses on political conflict topics, and there are fewer studies using it for analysis of literary works. The present study examines *The Time Machine* from the perspective of proximization theory (PT) to unveil the legitimation strategies of science fiction qualitatively and quantitatively. The objectives are to enrich the explanation power of this theory and analyze how can it avail the expression and description of the implicit theme of science fiction. We apply CLAWS to annotate the whole novel, search and calculate the frequency of each lexico-grammatical item through AntConc 3.5.9, and then analyze the novella through proximization theory in spatial, temporal and axiological dimensions. Findings show that: spatially, the author subsumes the most salient Time Traveler to the camp of IDC, and with the first-person narrator and sense verbs, the whole picture of decay can make the readers horribly feel on the spot in person toward a dim human destiny; temporally, Wells prefers the past-present concept shift than the future-present. The former is to legitimize his critique of over-reliance on science and severe class exploitation, and the latter is to make predictions of a future society that may face decay. The use of contrasting construal makes the novel's plot more mysterious, stimulates the reader's interest, and paves the way for the revelation of the theme; axiologically, considering that England put science and industrial development on the pedestal at that time and that prevailing evolution theory puts people in a period of blind optimism, Wells cautions against the trap of utopia and the swamp of materialism with emphasis on negative ideologies and values of ODC. The analysis of literary works from the perspective of PT is conducive to the visualization of the implicit themes expressed in the novel, full of absurdity and exaggeration with data support, highlighting the author's humanistic concern and broadening the research object of proximization theory.

**KEYWORDS**

Proximization Theory, *The Time Machine*, Critical Cognitive Analysis, Discourse Analysis

**ARTICLE DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.4.9

---

### 1. Introduction

Herbert George Wells was a famous British novelist from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century and one of the world's pioneers of science fiction. His early work, *The Time Machine*, pioneered the science fiction genre. With *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Invisible Man* and *The War of the World*, he had the incredible foresight to anticipate the great events of human society several years in advance: the invention of chemical and atomic weapons, the time of the outbreak of world wars and the massacre in modern warfare, etc. (Pang, 2014: 74). His groundbreaking contributions and far-reaching influence on science fiction made him world-renowned. (Zhang, 2008; Pang, 2014). According to post-Darwin's idea of human evolution, human development results in evolution to progress, but in *The Time Machine*, we see a very different picture: through the eyes of a time traveler who can travel through time, the novel shows us the world of human beings over 800,000 years later. This future world does not meet people's expectations for the ideal state of human development technologically, economically, and culturally.

Most scholars have focused on the theme of “degradation”, anti-technology and the evils of class conflict from the perspective of literary narrative (Huang, 2008; Zhang, 2008; Zhu, 2012a, 2012b). There is still room for salient visualization of content and themes with data support from a linguistic perspective. Language is a carrier of culture, and it is necessary to investigate the functional cognitive mechanisms behind the discourse. Because science fiction is less restricted by time and space, its plot design is more flexible, varied and complex, and its themes are often scattered among surrealistic elements and hidden between the lines. Therefore, using a multidimensional perspective is more conducive to exploring the implicit themes of science fiction and revealing the author’s writing techniques and styles. Proximization Theory (PT) (Cap, 2008, 2010, 2013), combined with the fruits of cognitive linguistics, critical discourse analysis, corpus tools support to both qualitative and quantitative research, is one of the representative theories of the latest multidimensional research in critical cognitive linguistics, which has generated heated debate nowadays. The present study examines *The Time Machine* from the perspective of proximization theory(PT)to explore its applicability to unveil the legitimation strategies of science fiction qualitatively and quantitatively to visualize implicit themes in a countable and explicit way, aiming to answer the following questions: (1)What proximization strategies are adopted in *The Time Machine*? (2)What effect does the adoption of these strategies bring to the overall shaping of the novel?

## 2. Literature Review

As the first full-length work of fiction novella of Wells, with carefully written, revised and refined content, innovative and thrilling plot, fertile imagination, and far-sighted prophesy of the future world, *The Time Machine* which is widely acknowledged to be among his finest literary and imaginative achievements(Hammond, 1979:79) has occupied an important place in his literary writing and made him rise in prominence. Its publication which is a significant and successful breakthrough in his literary career, reputed him as “The Father of Science Fiction”, as are Jules Verne and Hugo Gernsback (Roberts,2002:48) and marked the beginning of the scientific romance as a literary mode or genre (Huang, 2008; Mclean, 2009). Critics and scholars have been continuously and repeatedly unanimous in recognizing its literary and social significance in the following aspects: the recurring theme throughout, integration and departure of established assumptions and theories, rhetorical devices, writing technique and contrastive analysis with other works.

Scholars have reached a consensus on its repeated theme of decay and explanation resulting from the backfire of technological advancement and intensified conflict between classes. Hammond (1979:81)commented that: “the whole story can be regarded as an extended allegory on the theme of the exploitation of man by man.” As for the repelling state of the two species, wallowing in arcadian leisure dependent upon the mechanical labor of brutal Morlocks (Haynes1980:71) and diminishing need for struggle through rendering strength which is seen as redundant in a fine“paradise world” and hindrance to civilized man (Mclean,2009; Liu, 2010) would explain the tough and doomed fate faced by parasite-prone Eloi, which insinuates the fact that the sense of inevitability of technological advance may spoil public consciousness indulgent in an amoral, machine-derived ethic Mclean(2009). The devour of Morlocks to Eloi represents the product of the over-exploitation of the bourgeois class to the working class (Pearson,2007; Zhang, 2008; Mclean, 2009; Chen, 2015; Roberts, 2019). Besides, the future society Wells described is riddled with signs of corrosion and decay. The unusual emphasis on decline unravels his implicit pessimism against the facile optimism of the Victorian age(Hammond1979, 1988; Mclean, 2009). Other evidence of decay is represented by degradation of humanity, degeneration of body completeness and health, the decadence of spirit, vanish of emotion and intelligence, civilization in decline (Huang, 2008; Zhu, 2012b), and decay of authority and dominance of “the sun never falls”(Zhu, 2012a.) Furthermore, the theory of Entropyin physics serves as a valid explanation of the state of decay(Zhang, 2008; Pang, 2014), which is similar to the notion that the moon waxes only to wane, and water surges only to overflow in Chinese.

The themes mentioned above are manifested through the integration and departure of established assumptions and rhetorical devices of symbolism and metaphor. The source of Time Traveler’s speculations about the future world is his mentor, T.H.Huxley’s *Romanes Lecture* and evolutionary approach to life and history (Hammond,1979; Haynes,1980 ; Mclean, 2009; Li, 2011), the creation between Eloi and Morlocks is related to the evolutionary theory ( Dou, 2008 ; Wan, 2010) Ray Lankester’s *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (Mclean, 2009), class conflict from Marxist and the environment of the future world are relevant to Utopian assumptions about society (Hammond, 1979; Zhang, 2008 ; Mclean, 2009 ; Zhu, 2012b). However, Wells is not really a loyal follower of all these theories. *The Time Machine* is not only an opponent of the idea of Utopian social paradise but also an assault on the notion that evolution and technological advancement must eventually lead to progress. (Hammond, 1979; Haynes,1980; Pearson,2007; Dou, 2008; Zhang, 2008; Mclean, 2009; Ní Fhlainn,2015). In addition, scholars have examined the negative connotation of decay of the symbol and image of the word “white”, the sphinx, and the sunset, and metaphorical references of social caste and class conflict shown by two human descendants: Eloi and Morlocks(Hammond, 1979; Mclean, 2009; Li, 2011; Zhu, 2012a, Ní Fhlainn, 2015, Chen, 2015; Roberts, 2019).

Others concentrate on analyzing the writing techniques and making contrastive analyses with other works. Fertile imagination toward the future world not limited to that time period and textual tricksiness of the true working mechanism in the future world in play intriguing people’s curiosity serve as a lure to constantly grab reader’s attention and interest throughout the reading(Hammond, 1988; Pang, 2014). Just as Hammond (1988:82-83) pervasively summarized: “There is a deliberate mocking of

the interpretative process as if the narrator is offering solutions to the riddle of the sphinx only to discard them one by one.” The Time Traveller’s own various interpretations of the riddle also reveal Well’s own understanding of the prevailing attitudes, beliefs and assumptions of his age. Besides, the first person point of view can also bring the reader and the author closer (Du, 2005). Regarding the contrastive analysis of it, a comparison between *The Time Machine* and *The Strange Case Of Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde* (Wan, 2010), an adventurous novel like *King Solomon’s Mines* and *The Heart of Darkness* (Youngs, 2014; Zhu, 2016), and among different Chinese translation versions (Cai, 2006; Xia, 2013) can be seen in the novella.

In conclusion, most of the studies focus on qualitative analysis ranging from the theme of decay and exploitation as a result of backfire of technological advancement and intensified conflict between classes, assault on established and prevailing assumptions and complacent optimism of future advancement, fine and imaginative arrangement of plots, rhetorical devices, writing technique to contrastive analysis with other works. And there is still a gap in quantitative analysis with the assistance of corpus tools and data support. Given the explicit conflict status between the decadent Eloi and brutish Morlocks, the threat posed by the latter to the former and the fantastic plot with little restriction of time, space and conventionality in the novella, the study of it seems to appropriately invite a cross-disciplinary consideration like Proximization Theory (PT) consisting of Spatial-Temporal - Axiological dimensions proposed by Cap (2006, 2008, 2010, 2013) with conflict and threat as its key elements. PT has been widely used in political discourse analysis, which is not “the only field offering data to illustrate the mechanism of proximization” (Cap, 2013:3). So far, Only two studies related to literary analysis have been found: *The Other Two* (Cao & Wu, 2020) and the remonstrance in *Zhen Guan Zheng Yao* (Li, 2020), with the genre of science fiction untouched. This paper aims to study *The Time Machine* from the perspective of PT to offer both quantitative support and qualitative account of the implicit theme in it and explore PT’s explanation power in science fiction.

**3. Research Design**

Cap (2013: 3) proposes that: “ proximization is a discursive strategy of presenting physically and temporally distant events and states of affairs (including “distant”, i.e. adversarial, ideological mind-sets) as directly, increasingly and negatively consequential to the speaker and her addressee” to legitimize the actions and policies adopted by them to neutralize the growing negative impact from “foreign”, “alien”, “antagonistic”, entities. This paper studies the novella of *The Time Machine* as the research target, with a total of 33446 words, in the following three dimensions: spatial proximization, temporal proximization, and axiological proximization to analyze the implicit cognitive mechanism and theme behind it. The detailed research methods and processes are as follows: firstly, the text will be grammatically tagged with the assistance of CLAWS, an online free grammar tagger, which can help to distinguish words with multiple parts of speech, convenient for later data collection and calculation. Based on the different key terms in STA (Spatial-Temporal - Axiological Model, STA Model) formulated by Cap ( 2013: 105-121) and the complementary annotation form formulated by Zhang & Zhang (2020: 74) to make up for the shortcomings of original SAT model to encode and manually annotate the lexico-grammatical items in the discourse. Secondly, the corpus tool AntConc 3.5.9 is used to retrieve the frequency and distribution of each labeling category, and according to the actual statistical data, the distribution table of the lexico-grammatical items of the proximization strategies is drawn respectively. In order to be included in the framework as representative members of the particular categories, the items have had to make a frequency threshold. The threshold has been set at 0.1% (Cap, 2013: 108). In addition, in order to further refine the statistical data, this paper group the synonym or semantic anaphora and metaphor as one umbrella term to calculate the proportion, which is represented by the slash lines “/”, such as *Morlocks/creature/animal/figure/thing/wells/beast/being/rat/crowd/people*; Furthermore, other similar terms which can be unified under one general term will aggregate their distributions together according to the context they appear, such as *western civilization* including *Sphinx, Oriental elements such as Chinese porcelain*. The inflected forms of a word are counted as one lemma, such as *company* contains both *company* and *companies*.

**4. Proximization Strategies in The Time Machine**

**4.1 Spatial Proximization in The Time Machine**

Spatial proximization is a forced construal of the Discourse Space (DS) peripheral entities encroaching physically upon the DS central entities located in the deictic center of the Space (Cap, 2013:74). That is to say; the peripheral entities referred to as ODCs (“outside-the-deictic-center”) who share negative values geographically, geopolitically and ideologically pose imminent, inevitable and increasing threats to the central entities called IDCs (“inside-the-deictic-center”) who share positive values beckoning an immediate pre-emptive action from IDC camp, through which the current urgent scenario envisaged by the speaker can be endorsed and solicit addressee’s legitimization of speaker’s actions in the fastest way are acceptable and available.

Category	Key terms	Frequency(%)
	Time Traveler/pronoun	29.91
	Weena/pronoun	5.47

Noun phrases (NPs) construed as elements of the deictic center of the DS (IDCs)	Eloi/people/creature/thing/figure/feet/crowd/pro noun	3.91
	western civilization	3.67
	natural environment	3.46
Noun phrases (NPs) construed as elements outside the deictic center of the DS (ODCs)	Morlocks/creature/animal/figure/thing/ well/beast/being/rat/crowd /people/pronoun	5.8
	technological advancement	5.36
	eastern civilization	1.26
Verb phrases (VPs) of motion and directionality construed as markers of movement of ODCs towards the deictic center	see/look/notice,heard,feel,find,occur/appear	13.09
	come, go	2.54
Verb phrases (VPs) of action construed as markers of impact of ODCs upon IDC	stop/drop/diminish/fade, leave/vanish/disappear/die	2.95
	break/wear/destroy/fail	0.8
Noun phrases (NPs) denoting abstract concepts construed as anticipations of impact of ODCs upon IDCs	horror/fear/terror,danger,end loneliness/alienation	4.57
		1.38
Noun phrases (NPs) denoting abstract concepts construed as effects of impact of ODCs upon IDCs	decay	12.02
<b>Total</b>		<b>96.19</b>

Table1 : Key terms of Spatial Proximization in *The Time Machine*

According to table 1, there are 5 types of IDC camps within spatial proximization strategies. Among them, "Time Traveler" accounted for the highest proportion. "Weena", a typical representative of Eloi, and the Eloi themselves are recognized as members of the IDC. In addition, "western civilization" and "natural environment", as victims of human social changes in Wells's writings, are also within the scope of IDC. "Morlocks" are at the central of the ODC camp because of the direct damage done to the core members of the IDC. What's more, the ODC camp also includes "technological advancement" and "Eastern civilization". VP of motion represents direction and process, and VP of action represents consequences and impacts (Zhang Yanmin, Zhang Hui, 2020). In *The Time Machine*, VP of motion has the highest proportion and is intended to conceptualize what the future world will look like and the negative impact ODC will have on IDC members through the verbs of the senses used to describe Time Traveler's feeling. The detailed results can be seen in the table1 above.

[1] And then, down in the remote blackness of the gallery, I **heard** a peculiar pattering, and

The same odd noises I **had heard** down the well.

[2] I turned with my heart in my mouth and **saw** a queer little ape-like figure, its head held down in a peculiar manner, running across the sunlit space behind me.

[3] I **saw** no evidence of any contagious diseases during all my stay.

[4] I **saw** mankind housed in splendid shelters, gloriously clothed, and as yet, I had **found** them engaged in no toil.

Examples [1] and [2] show the scene of seeing Morlocks from the auditory and visual aspects. Through the first-person narration, the readers can immerse themselves deeply in the plot of the novel, as if it is the readers themselves who is facing the terrifying and frightening underground dwellers —Morlocks. Examples [3] and [4] present what a paradise-like society will look like in the future through the eyes of the narrator "I". But what unfolded before "my eyes" was not the full picture: the more perfect the environment is in front of me, the more shocked and disappointed it would be to know the truth of social decay in the future.

**4.2 Temporal Proximization in The Time Machine**

Temporal proximization is, in a general sense, a forced construal of “now”, the speaker’s present, as the central point and event frame on the time “axis”(Cap,2013:85). The centrality of “now” refers to the momentousness of the present. Two conceptual shifts, the past-to-present shift and the future-to-present shift, count in persuading immediate actions in the temporal dimension.

Category	Key terms	Frequency(%)
Discourse forms involving contrastive use of the simple past and the present perfect construing threatening future extending infinitely from a past instant	did+have done	6.3
Verb phrases (VPs) involving modal auxiliaries construing conditions for ODC impact as existing continually between the now and the infinite future	could	2.75
	will	1.08
	would	1.76
Discourse forms involving parallel contrastive construals of oppositional and privileged futures extending from the now	(at) first..but, ...however/but	1.43
Total		13.32

Table 2 : Key terms of temporal proximization in *The Time Machine*

The two shifts endorse the speaker’s “now” as, retrospectively, the moment to “take stock” of the past to develop a sound rationale for action and, prospectively, the moment to start or decide on starting the action, to preempt the near future ODC action.

(Cap,2013:86)

Simply speaking, the speaker presents the negative disaster in the past and the potential threat and trouble in the future, which may happen again or with the possibility to happen at present to preempt in advance. The table of the core lexical items of the temporal proximization in *The Time Machine* in this paper is shown in Table 2 below. Given that science fiction is less restricted by Time and Space, and the whole story is recounted by the Time Traveler, this paper incorporates the past perfect tense into Category 1 for calculation. The data shows that Wells often tends to use the concept shift of from the past-present to highlight the influence of the oppressive and distorted values that exist in contemporary society on the future world. Based on the time and space perspective of the Time Traveler and the frequent use of modal auxiliaries to show that the damage of ODC to IDC will extend from the “now” of 802700 years to the further future, highlighting the long-term negative impact. What is more worthy of explanation is that Wells uses contrasting construals multiple times to advance the development of its plot step by step, eliciting the true state of the future world, enhancing the mystery of the novel, and making readers full of interest and curiosity about the novel. The examples and results are shown in Table 2 in detail:

[5]It **seemed** to me that I **had happened** upon humanity upon the wane. The ruddy sunset set me thinking of the sunset of mankind.

[6] This, I must remind you, **was** my speculation at the time. Later, I **was** to appreciate how far it **fell short of the reality**.

[7] **Possibly** the checks they **had devised** for the increase of population **had succeeded** too well, and their numbers **had** rather **diminished** than kept stationary. That **would** account for the abandoned ruins. Very simple was my explanation, and plausible enough as most wrong theories are!

[8] **But**, gradually, the truth **dawned** on me: that Man had not remained one species, but **had** differentiated into two distinct animals.

[9]Then I **thought** of the Great Fear that was between the two species, and **for the first time**, with a sudden shiver, **came** the clear knowledge of what the meat I **had seen** might be. Yet it was too horrible!

In example [5]-[9], the author keeps playing word games with readers, from speculating that human beings are on the wane, knowing that the former idea is wrong and the new truth is that human beings have divided into two species to the truth that

Morlocks is preying on the Eloi and treat them like cattle, etc. The previous inference is overthrown over and over again, and then the narrator will state a new point of view. This whole process can make people cannot help wondering, what is the final truth of the future world? These overturned arguments are foreshadowing in order to make the final facts seem all the more cruel and unacceptable.

### 4.3 Axiological Proximization in *The Time Machine*

As a natural device to maintain the legitimization stance:

Axiological proximization is a forced construal of a gathering ideological conflict between the "home values" of the DS central entities, IDCs, and the "alien", antagonistic values of the ODCs, which occupy the conceptual periphery of the DS. The IDC-ODC conflict either will or (at least) may lead to a physical clash, that is, the materialization of the ODC ideological threat within the IDC space.

(Cap,2013:94)

The table of the core lexical items of the axiological proximization in *The Time Machine* in this paper is shown in Table 3 below.

category	Key terms	Frequency
Noun phrases (NPs) construed as IDC positive values or value sets (ideologies)	lighting, freedom, color, humanity, curiosity	2.42
Noun phrases (NPs) construed as ODC negative values or value sets (ideologies)	indulgence in technology	11.54
	complacency on optimism of involution	8.34
	utopian perfect world	4.28
	darkness/blackness/black/dark/dimness	2.6
total		20.84

Table 3 : Key terms of axiological proximization in *The Time Machine*

The proportion of positive values and ideologies is small, while the proportion of negative values and ideologies is relatively large. The author intends to highlight the high frequency of negative values to warn people that if they are over-addicted to technology reliance, too optimistic about the future society, and over-indulge in an utopian society, the negative effect in the future world described in the book bears a high probability of happening. In addition, because Morlocks are nocturnal animals, which causes serious injury and panic to Eloi and Time Travelers, the words "darkness/blackness/black/dark/dimness" also serve as a fringe member of negative values.

[10] '**Where is my Time Machine?**' I began, **bawling like an angry child, laying hands** upon them and **shaking them up** together. It must have been very **queer** to them. Some laughed; most of them looked sorely **frightened**.

[11] Very **inhuman**, you may think, to want to go killing one's, own descendants !

[12] The **too-perfect security** of the Upperworlders had led them to **a slow movement of degeneration**, to **a general dwindling in size, strength, and intelligence**.

[13] And during these few revolutions all the activity, **all the traditions, the complex organizations, the nations, languages, literatures, aspirations, even the mere memory of Man as I knew him, had been swept out of existence**.

[15] Then I tried to **preserve myself from the horror** that was coming upon me by regarding it as a rigorous **punishment of human selfishness**.

Examples [10] and [11] are about the adverse effects of over-reliance on technology physically and mentally. When the time traveler finds out that his time machine has been stolen, his mood fluctuates greatly, and he not only becomes easily angry but also becomes emotionally unstable. In the end, he even thinks of killing his own descendants. And he himself found the idea surprising and terrifying. In addition, examples [12] to [15] are related to pseudo-utopian societies. The “well-nurtured” greenhouse flower, Eloi, lives a wonderful life on the ground in a paradise-like palace, but that’s just not the whole story. They are petite, lazy, and not good at labor. So their life still needs to be maintained by the underground Morlocks with machines, so we can say that Eloi is still exploiting Morlocks. But not like the age that Time Traveler live, the exploitation now comes at a high and painful price: physical degradation and prey to others. This is what Wells sees a utopian society really looks like, and so it is also a favorable counter-attack to the doctrine of a utopian good society: settlement for the steady status and indulgence in enjoyment can lead to fatal trouble.

**5. Discussion**

Through text analysis, we are inspired by the discourse space theory of Chilton (2004:58) and the SAT model of Cap (2017:18) to form a visualized model of proximization strategies, shown in figure 1 below, to analyze more clearly how Wells conveys his views and stance through various proximization strategies in the novella. This model includes the fictional world and the physical world. The former refers to the world constructed by the author with its own unique characters, scenes and central events, which is the external representation of the fictional world; the latter refers to the reflection of specific phenomena in the real world reflected by characters, scenes and plots in the novel. Sometimes, the inter-relationship and social status among characters may be beastly opposite in those two worlds to promote kindness and beauty or unveil the misery and brutality in the world of experience, which is the underlying representation of the values in the novel world. The Spatial District (SD), Temporal District (TD) and Axiological District (AD) represent the pragmatic effect of spatial, temporal and axiological approximation strategies used in discourse space respectively.

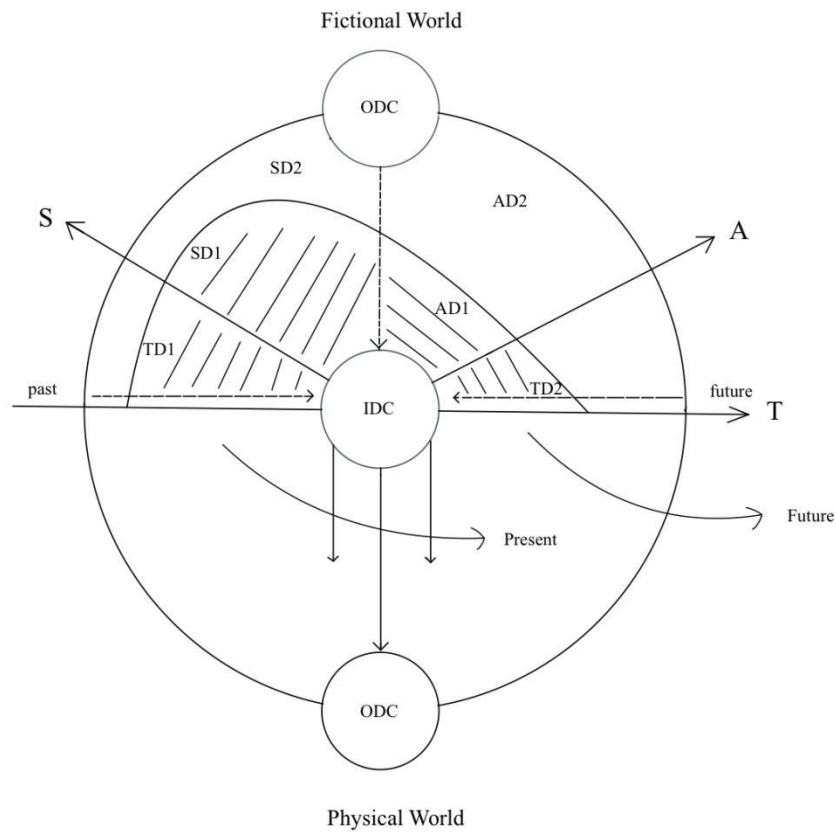


Figure 1: Visualized Model of Proximization Strategies

First of all, the spatial proximization strategies adopted by *The Time Machine* is to more intuitively show the humanities and social dilemmas of the future society through the first-person tone from “Time Traveler” with sense verbs of motion. In the fiction world, IDC represents the group that are beneficiaries or the objects of threat, and the person who started the story — “Time Traveler”,

is in the central position, followed by “Weena”, “Eloi”, “western civilization” and “the natural environment” at the periphery. SD1 shows the pragmatic effect brought by the adoption of VPs (see/look/notice, hear, feel, find, etc.), which intuitively manifest the time traveler’s experience in the future world from the aspects of vision, and hearing and touching. What he has seen and heard makes it easier for people to show empathy for his suffering caused by ODC, including Morlocks, eastern civilization and technological advancement, etc., convincing them that the “horror/fear/terror and decay” he feels in the future world are real and about to happen around them in the physical world. SD2 indicates that the author further concretizes threats such as the decay and degradation of the future world by using VPs (stop/drop/diminish/fade, etc.) to deepen the credibility.

Temporally, Cap (2013) argues that people first tend to use the future-present conceptual shift to legitimize the speaker’s actions and then follow the past-present. In *The Time Machine*, however, Wells prefers the concept of past-present than future-present. It is worth noting that because *The Time Machine* is science fiction, time and space are placed far behind the present time. Therefore, the “past” in the fiction world represents the “present” in the physical world, while the “present” in the fiction world represents the “future” in the physical world. This makes people face up to the fact with a high possibility that all the disastrous senses that the world will be destroyed in the future are closely related to what people are doing now. In addition, the author sets the background of the story in the future, which has two advantages: first, it may impress people that what will happen in the future maybe only exist in the imagination, so it brings less pressure or imposition to audiences (Xiang Mingyou, 2002), which is beneficial to convey Well’s own point of view in a roundabout way with more acceptance; secondly, the future time go a long way toward creating a feeling that danger will happen anytime and anywhere, making the fear persists with consistence. The past-present conceptual shift (TD1) uses the past tense combined with the perfect tense, which is intended to convey the fact that over-reliance and dependence on science and serious class exploitation have already occurred, are immutable, and are likely to continue. The conceptual shift of the future-present is intended to foreshadow a possible decline in humanity, social development, and natural diversity. The multiple uses of contrasting construals make the plot of the novel trilling and mysterious. On the one hand, it can stimulate people’s enthusiasm and interest in reading, and on the other hand, it lays the groundwork for revealing the theme of decay in the future of mankind. TD2 represents the use of future-present concept shift, which is to remind people that disaster scenarios will occur in the long run in the future, lengthening the negative feelings brought by the fear of decay of the future world.

Axiologically, instead of making AD1(positive values ideologies) salient, Wells puts emphasis on AD2 (negative values and ideologies. It seems that he is clearly not a moderate promoter but a serious reformer. Britain in the 19th century was in the Victorian period, the heyday of the British Industrial Revolution, economic and cultural development. There is the confidence that scientific progress will bring economical and political prosperity. And the idea of the evolution of animals of Darwin that “The struggle for life and the survival of the fittest”, and its adaptation by Spencer to every department of Nature prevail in the whole western world, which can explain people’s blind confidence in the bright future of mankind a little. Therefore, in such a social context, it is undoubted that convincing people to stay calm and humble is not an easy task. Therefore, he focuses on the prominence of negative values and ideologies to present a terrifying picture of future human destiny in which human beings are killing each other, degenerating human nature, and deteriorating the social environment, rather than laying emphasis on the depiction of IDC’s positive values and ideologies. He warned people not to be so complacent, to recognize the two sides of this technology-led society, and to avoid falling into the glamorous but painful pseudo-utopian trap where “the evil and degrading effects of a technology devoid of morality” Hayens (1980: 71).

When people finish reading the novel, they will be surprised to find that there is a contradiction between the novel world constructed by Wells and the physical world. Regarding the “eastern civilization” (ODC) in the text, including “sphinxes”, “porcelain”, “China”, etc., Zhu (2012a), from the perspective of colonial expansion, believes that Wells’s description of it in the novel is to warn Britain to avoid being left behind by less-privileged oriental culture. However, this paper believes that the introduction of oriental cultural imagery here is not in a derogatory sense. Wells created a mirror world in this novel: in the fictional world, Morlocks brutally preyed on Eloi, and eastern civilization invaded western civilization, etc. In the physical world, these phenomena are contrary to the fact. It is Eloi (representative of the rich or the upper class) who exploits Morlocks (representative of the poor or the working class). And it is the western world that has been invading the eastern world without cease, especially to China, and bringing back the trumpet of war into the *South Kensington*. Furthermore, the *Sphinx*, a typical symbol of Egypt and also the embodiment of Eastern civilization, appears repeatedly in the novella. So it was not the Eastern civilization that eroded Western civilization, but the unjust aggression of Western countries itself backfired, making culture in the west less pure. In addition, in common practice, society in the future should have been a wonderland, but the “loneliness” of being unable to communicate effectively with other people, the “fear” of incapacity of returning to his own age with the loss of the time machine, and the “danger” of fighting against Morlocks occupy most of the time of traveler’s life. This can undoubtedly remind people that “loneliness”, “fear”, and “danger” may be just around the corner if we continue to act in such a decadent way.



## 6. Conclusion

Although *The Time Machine* was created in the Victorian era at the end of the 19th century, its theme is still universal. Times keep moving forward, but the essence of human life has not changed, and that's why it is still applicable to contemporary civilized society (Zhu, 2012b). As a classic scientific fiction, it merits attention from the prospective of multi-dimensional analysis. This paper pores through the novella from the angle of proximization theory which is a fine combination of critical discourse analysis, cognitive linguistic, corpus linguistics and pragmatics. It is conducive to digging out the functional cognitive mechanism of it and explicitize the veiled theme with qualitative and quantitative support in the following three dimensions. Spatially, the author constructs the most salient term of Time Traveler as one of the core members of IDC, and with the first-person narrator and sense verbs, the whole picture of decay in favor of traveler's point of view can make the readers horribly felt on the spot in person toward a dim human destiny. Besides, Wells has also created a world of the mirror in his fantasy where the roles of Morlocks, perpetrator, and the Eloi, victim, totally shift while in the story and the reality. Eastern cultural imagery is not derogatory but reminds people that long-term class oppression and colonial rule will make the ruling class suffer the consequences. Temporally, unlike Cap's (2013) proposal, the frequency of past-present conceptual shift is much higher than the future-present. Wells uses the former to legitimize his criticism of over-reliance on science and severe class exploitation and uses the latter to make predictions that the future society may face degeneration. The construal of contrast is used multiple times to make the plot of the novel more mysterious, intrigue the interest of readers, and pave the way for the unveiling of the theme. Axiologically, considering that the UK is at the peak of advocating science and industrial development and that Darwinism and social Darwinism's theory of human evolution has put people in a blindly optimistic era, Wells focuses on portraying negative ideologies and values and can more effectively warn People to watch out for utopian traps and material swamps, and stay rational at all times. Some have questioned whether Wells is a socialist or not because of his frequent depictions of a socialist utopian world. There is probably no proper and perfect answer to this question, but we believe that in the era of the Industrial Revolution and colonial expansion, he just wants to admonish his fellow people, the country and even the whole world that aggression and addiction to technology will not avail the world peace and development, just from the perspective of an ordinary person.

The limitations of this research are that there are not enough research objects and discourse data, and it has not been demonstrated in combination with many classic science fiction novels to support our analysis. Therefore, the corpus itself is not large enough, and the representativeness of the research results needs further improvement. What's more, this study only focuses on science fiction, so the question of whether approximation theory can also be used in other types of fiction analysis remains unknown. Therefore, further study can combine multiple classic science fiction as a corpus to illustrate the adaptability of the proximization theory to science fiction analysis and summarize more representative common discursal strategies adopted in this novel. Second, scholars can also try to apply this theory with other concepts to analyze other types of novel genre to pore through the explanation power of proximization theory convincingly.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Disclosure statement:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Cap, P. (2006). *Legitimization in political discourse: A cross-disciplinary perspective on the modern US war rhetoric*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Press.
- [2] Cap, P. (2008). Towards the proximization model of the analysis of legitimization in political discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40 (1), 17-41.
- [3] Cap, P. (2010). Axiological aspects of proximization. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 42 (2), 392-407.
- [4] Cap, P. (2013). *Proximization: The pragmatics of symbolic distance crossing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- [5] Cap, P. (2017). *The language of fear: Communicating threat in public discourse*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [6] Chilton, P. (2004). *Analyzing political discourse: Theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- [7] Hammond, J., R. (1979). *An H. G. Wells companion*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press.
- [8] Hammond, J., R. (1988). *H. G. Wells and the modern novel*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- [9] Haynes, R., D. (1980). *H. G. Wells: Discovery of the future: The influence of science on his thought*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press.
- [10] Mclean, S. (2009). *The early fiction of H. G. Wells*. England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [11] Ní Fhlainn, S. (2015). 'There's Something Very Familiar About All This': Time Machines, Cultural Tangents, and Mastering Time in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and the Back to the Future trilogy. *Adaptation*, 9 (2), 164-184.
- [12] Pearson, R. (2007). Primitive modernity: H. G. Wells and the prehistoric man of the 1890s. *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 37 (1), 58-74.
- [13] Roberts, A. C. (2002). *Science fiction*. New York: Routledge.
- [14] Roberts, A. C. (2019). *H. G. Wells: A literary life*. England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [15] Youngs, T. (2014). *The beastly journeys: Travel and transformation at the fin de siècle*. Cambridge: Liverpool university Press.
- [16] 蔡立胜. (2006). 小说翻译创造性研究. (硕士学位论文). 华东师范大学.
- [17] 曹曼、吴虹. (2020). 趋近化视域下《另两个》的话语研究. *乐山师范学院学报*. (01), 43-48.
- [18] 陈才. (2015). 威尔斯《时间机器》的双重叙事. *外国文学*. (02), 87-94+159.
- [19] 杜飞. (2005). 声音的诗学:《时间机器》的叙述视角和叙述效果评析. *外语研究*. (05), 71-73.

- [20] 豆瑞杰. (2008). 从社会达尔文主义看赫伯特·乔治·威尔斯的《时间机器》(硕士学位论文). 河北师范大学.
- [21] 黄鹤飞. (2008). 《时间机器》中的反技术理性思想. 南京财经大学学报. (05), 99-101+105.
- [22] 黎婵. (2011). 《时间机器》: 认知陌生化与科幻新颖. 世界文学评论. (02), 81-84.
- [23] 李妙. (2020). 《贞观政要》中书谏的趋近化研究(硕士学位论文). 湖南科技大学.
- [24] 朱光立. (2012a). 《时间机器》之退化主题研究. 金华职业技术学院学报. (02), 76-79.
- [25] 朱光立. (2012b). 《时间机器》: 一部大英帝国的没落史. 商丘职业技术学院学报. (01), 69-70.
- [26] 朱光立. (2016). 《时间机器》中的帝国主义思想. 甘肃广播电视大学学报(05), 30-32.
- [27] 刘熊. (2010). 永不妥协: 《时间机器》的伦理警示. 世界文学评论. (02), 92-95.
- [28] 庞好农. (2014). 时间机器、社会“熵”增与多维时空——评威尔斯《时间机器》之科幻遐想. 山东外语教学. (06), 74-79.
- [29] 万琦. (2010). 《时间机器》和《化身博士》对比赏析. 青年文学家. (05), 57.
- [30] 夏然. (2013). 图里翻译规范理论视角下《时间机器》三个中译本研究. (硕士学位论文). 四川外国语大学.
- [31] 向明友. (2007). 试论英语虚拟语气的语法化. 外语学刊. (06), 84-89.
- [32] 张艳敏、张辉. (2020). 突发公共卫生事件话语的批评认知语言学分析——2018“疫苗事件”中外媒体报道的个案研究. 解放军外国语学院学报. 43(6), 73-81+158.
- [33] 张莹. (2008). 解读《时间机器》的批判现实主义的道德精神. 外国语言文学. (04), 277-282.