

Original Article

Exploring Engagement Resources in Chinese Military Discourse: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract - This study investigates the Engagement System, a subsystem of Martin and White's [1] Appraisal framework, within Sun Tzu's The Art of War, focusing on its linguistic strategies and rhetorical functions. By analyzing 9,000 words from the English translation of this seminal Chinese military text, the research explored how engagement resources contribute to its persuasive and didactic tone. A mixed-method research design revealed the predominant use of monoglossic resources, establishing authoritative statements and emphasizing clarity. Complementing this, selective heteroglossic resources, particularly contractive elements like disclaim and proclaim, served to reject flawed strategies and assert universal principles, reinforcing the text's instructive tone. Additionally, heteroglossic expansive resources occasionally acknowledge alternative perspectives, reflecting the text's adaptability to diverse contexts. This balance between definitive and flexible rhetoric supports the dual purpose of The Art of War: as a prescriptive guide for military strategy and a broadly applicable framework for decision-making in non-military fields. The study also identified recurring engagement patterns that align with Systemic Functional Linguistics principles, demonstrating how linguistic choices enhance the text's relevance and influence [2]. These findings advance our understanding of engagement resources in Chinese classical texts and offer a methodological contribution to the study of translated military discourse.

Keywords - Military discourse, Monoglossic and heteroglossic resources, Engagement system, The art of war.

1. Introduction

Military discourse is a critical lens for examining how nations construct and project power, shaping both domestic unity and international perceptions. In China, this discourse is deeply rooted in historical and cultural traditions, particularly those encapsulated in Sun Tzu's The Art of War. This seminal text, composed over 2,500 years ago, has transcended its era to influence military thought and communication for centuries, offering insights into strategy, leadership, and the nuanced management of power [3]. Beyond being a tactical manual, The Art of War serves as a philosophical and rhetorical foundation for Chinese military narratives, reflecting principles of adaptability, indirect engagement, and strategic deception. As Callahan [4] highlights, military discourse plays a central role in forming national identity and power projection on the global stage. This is particularly true in China, where The Art of War is not merely a historical artifact but an active component of modern strategic thought. Zhao [5] emphasizes the need for analytical frameworks to unravel the complexities of such military narratives, revealing how language operates as a tool of persuasion, identity construction, and power negotiation. This study employed Martin and White's [1] Engagement System, a subsystem of the Appraisal framework, to analyze the enduring

influence of The Art of War on Chinese military discourse. The Engagement System examines how texts engage with alternative perspectives, using linguistic resources to expand or contract dialogic space. By focusing on monoglossic (authoritative, closed) and heteroglossic (dialogic, open) resources, this framework enables a detailed understanding of how texts assert power, acknowledge complexity, and guide interpretation. The linguistic strategies in The Art of War align closely with the constructs of the Engagement System. As a foundational military text, Sun Tzu's work strategically combines monoglossic and heteroglossic elements to convey timeless principles while encouraging flexibility in application. Monoglossic resources are central to The Art of War's rhetorical strategy, presenting its principles as definitive truths. For example, statements like "all warfare is based on deception" and "the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting" [3] establish core principles as universal and unquestionable. Such language reinforces the text's authority and fosters confidence among its audience, mirroring contemporary Chinese military narratives, which similarly use authoritative claims to construct a sense of unity and strategic foresight [4].

Conversely, heteroglossic resources in The Art of War emphasize adaptability, encouraging alternative interpretations and situational flexibility. Statements like "he who knows when he can fight and when he will be victorious" or "let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt" invite leaders to adapt strategies to specific contexts, highlighting the dynamic and interpretive nature of Sun Tzu's teachings. Heteroglossic elements also reject incompatible strategies, as seen in the advice, "Do not engage an enemy whose banners are in perfect order," underscoring the importance of timing and preparation. These linguistic choices reflect The Art of War's nuanced approach to balancing assertiveness with flexibility, a hallmark of its historical philosophy and application in modern Chinese military communication [5].

Sun Tzu's rhetorical strategies are deeply rooted in Daoist philosophy, emphasising balance, harmony, and adaptability. This philosophical foundation aligns with the constructs of the Engagement System, where monoglossic assertions reflect universal truths, such as the inevitability of change and the value of preparation. In contrast, heteroglossic flexibility reflects the Daoist principle of fluidity in responding to shifting circumstances. Integrating these strategies, The Art of War combines absolute principles with contextual adaptability, creating a dynamic rhetorical approach relevant to contemporary military discourse.

The enduring influence of The Art of War is evident in its integration into modern Chinese military communication. Monoglossic resources foster domestic unity and pride by emphasizing shared cultural heritage and historical authority, aligning the public with collective strategic goals [4]. Simultaneously, heteroglossic strategies project adaptability and strategic foresight, shaping global perceptions of China as assertive and responsive. These linguistic choices allow China to project strength while maintaining flexibility in international relations [5]. By applying Martin and White's [1] Engagement System, this study provides a nuanced analysis of how The Art of War continues to inform Chinese military discourse. The present study aimed to contribute to the field of Chinese military discourse by investigating the strategic use of monoglossic and heteroglossic linguistic resources in The Art of War, thereby underscoring the text's dual role as an authoritative guide and a flexible framework for strategic thinking. This linguistic dexterity reflects the philosophical roots of Sun Tzu's teachings and highlights their relevance in shaping contemporary narratives of power and identity. Through this lens, the study offers valuable insights into using engagement resources in classical texts like The Art of War.

2. Literature Review

Martin and White's [1] Engagement System provides a nuanced taxonomy for analyzing how speakers or writers position themselves with their audience and other voices within a text. This framework identifies key discursive moves that contract or expand the dialogic space. Despite its widespread application in linguistic studies, "the practical application of this framework in the assessment of Chinese military communication remains rare and

limited in scope" [6]. This gap underscores the need for a more detailed examination of how linguistic resources are deployed in influential texts like *The Art of War* and other Chinese military texts.

2.1. Historical Analyses of the Art of War

The historical significance of *The Art of War* has been extensively studied, with many scholars emphasizing its enduring relevance in military strategy and philosophy. Sawyer [7] described the text as a "foundational resource for understanding Chinese military philosophy and its influence on historical and contemporary military thought." While this study highlights the cultural and strategic importance of *The Art of War*, it lacks a focus on the text's linguistic strategies or the dialogic interplay explored in frameworks like the Engagement System.

Mote [8] analyzed the philosophical underpinnings of Sun Tzu's work, noting that its "strategic insights are as relevant today as they were in ancient times." However, Mote [8] concedes that a "full discussion of the language and its implications for military strategy lies beyond the scope of the study." Similarly, Ames [9] delved into Sun Tzu's strategies' philosophical and ethical dimensions, arguing that they are "deeply embedded in the cultural traditions of Confucianism and Taoism." Despite their insights, these studies do not offer a linguistic analysis that examines how Sun Tzu's rhetoric engages with his audience or entertains alternative perspectives.

Sehnal [10] provides a linguistic analysis of classical Chinese texts, focusing on the use of 'full' words in Laozi. While this study does not directly address *The Art of War*, it offers a methodological framework for analysing classical Chinese texts linguistically. It can be adapted to examine the dialogic patterns in Sun Tzu's work. This approach aligns with the need for a more detailed linguistic analysis of classical military texts.

2.2. Contemporary Military Discourse and Continuity

Several recent studies have drawn parallels between classical texts like *The Art of War* and modern Chinese military discourse. Rui [11] explored the rhetorical strategies in contemporary military texts, identifying a "continuity in strategic language that underscores the relevance of classical rhetoric in shaping modern narratives." However, Rui's [11] focus on contemporary discourse limits a deeper exploration of historical influences, leaving "limited room for analyzing how dialogic and rhetorical strategies have evolved." Rui [11] analyzed a range of military texts, including *The Art of War*, highlighting the frequent use of appraisal resources such as "proclaim" and "endorse" to "establish credibility and present information as authoritative." While Rui's [11] work effectively links classical and modern rhetoric, it stops short of applying a systematic engagement framework. Furthermore, Rui [11] argues that "the strategic use of dialogic resources in Chinese military texts has been overlooked in favor of broader rhetorical generalizations," underscoring the need for a more focused analysis of dialogic interactions.

In addition, Poh and Li [12] investigated the evaluative resources of stance and attitude in Chinese military reports. Li [6] applied Martin and White's [1] Engagement System to official military strategy documents, analyzing how these texts construct a national identity and geopolitical positioning. Their study highlighted the use of 'proclaim' and 'endorse' resources to project an image of China as a responsible and defensive military power. However, their analysis primarily focuses on modern political discourse and does not connect these findings to historical texts like *The Art of War*. This gap illustrates the importance of examining the Engagement System in Chinese classical texts.

Zhu [9] identifies well-received Chinese rhetorical strategies in public speeches and reports by Chinese leaders, highlighting the influence of classical rhetoric on modern discourse. However, like other studies, it does not systematically apply the Engagement System to classical texts. By focusing on *The Art of War*, this study addresses these gaps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how linguistic resources shape military identity and strategy

2.3. Engagement System and Linguistic Analysis

To the best of our knowledge, there is a lack of studies that applied the Engagement System to Chinese classical texts like *The Art of War*. Li [6] applied the Engagement System to analyze the speeches of contemporary Chinese military leaders. They found that 'proclaim' and 'entertain' resources were strategically used to align with both classical traditions and modern political priorities. Similarly, Mariani [13] analysed speeches by Chinese military leaders, emphasizing the alignment of classical traditions with modern political priorities. While this study demonstrates the relevance of the Engagement System to military discourse, its findings are limited to speeches rather than foundational texts like *The Art of War*.

These studies collectively provide valuable insights into Chinese military texts' rhetorical and linguistic strategies, illustrating *The Art of War*'s enduring influence on classical and contemporary military thought. However, significant gaps remain, particularly in applying Martin and White's [1] Engagement System to military texts. While some studies examine rhetorical strategies or appraisal resources, they often fail to fully engage with these texts' nuanced interplay between authoritative and dialogic voices. By exploring the frequency and use of the Engagement System in *The Art of War*, this study sought to bridge these gaps, offering a deeper understanding of how linguistic resources shape military identity, strategy, and perceptions. This approach enriches our understanding of military discourse and lays the ground for future research in this evolving field.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The Engagement System developed by Martin and White [1] is an essential framework in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), emphasizing how speakers and writers explore their relationships with audiences via language. This system emphasizes the dialogic nature of communication, implying that discourse is not simply the transmission of information but rather involves the negotiation of meaning and positioning between the individuals communicating with one another. The Engagement System sheds light on the strategies utilized in persuasive communication across various contexts [1]. This is accomplished by analyzing how authors express their attitudes, acknowledge different points of view, and create a space for dialogue.

The focus of engagement is on the linguistic resources that are utilized for intersubjective positioning. This enables authors to express their voices while addressing alternative points of view. This facilitates the navigation of relationships characterized by alignment and misalignment. According to Poh and Li [12], utterances disregarding other voices are classified as monoglossic, whereas those that welcome alternative perspectives are heteroglossic. There are two main kinds of heteroglossic resources: dialogic expansion and dialogic contraction.

Dialogic expansion promotes the incorporation of diverse perspectives by establishing dialogic space and encompasses two primary resources: entertainment and attribute (See Figure 1). 'Entertain' denotes terms that suggest potentiality (e.g., perhaps, this may be, must), whereas 'attribute' pertains to the recognition of external sources, utilizing 'acknowledge' for direct attribution (e.g., the report stated that Halliday argues that) and 'distance' for referring to alternative perspectives through reporting verbs (e.g., Abdullah claimed to have shown that) [1].

Conversely, dialogic contraction limits the scope for alternatives by dismissing other positions through 'disclaim' resources, which can be categorized into two types: denial (no, did not, never) and countering (yet, although, but, amazing). 'Deny' refers to explicitly negating another's proposition, whereas 'counter' entails responding to an opposing viewpoint with a counterargument that employs conjunctions and connectives. In the category of proclaim, four types of resources are identified: concur, pronounce, endorse, and justify. 'Concur' signifies agreement with a perspective, either by affirmation or concession. Indeed, it is acknowledged. 'Pronounce' explicitly articulates the author's proposition, 'endorse' entails referencing external sources to substantiate a claim, and "justify" offers to reason for a proposition [1].

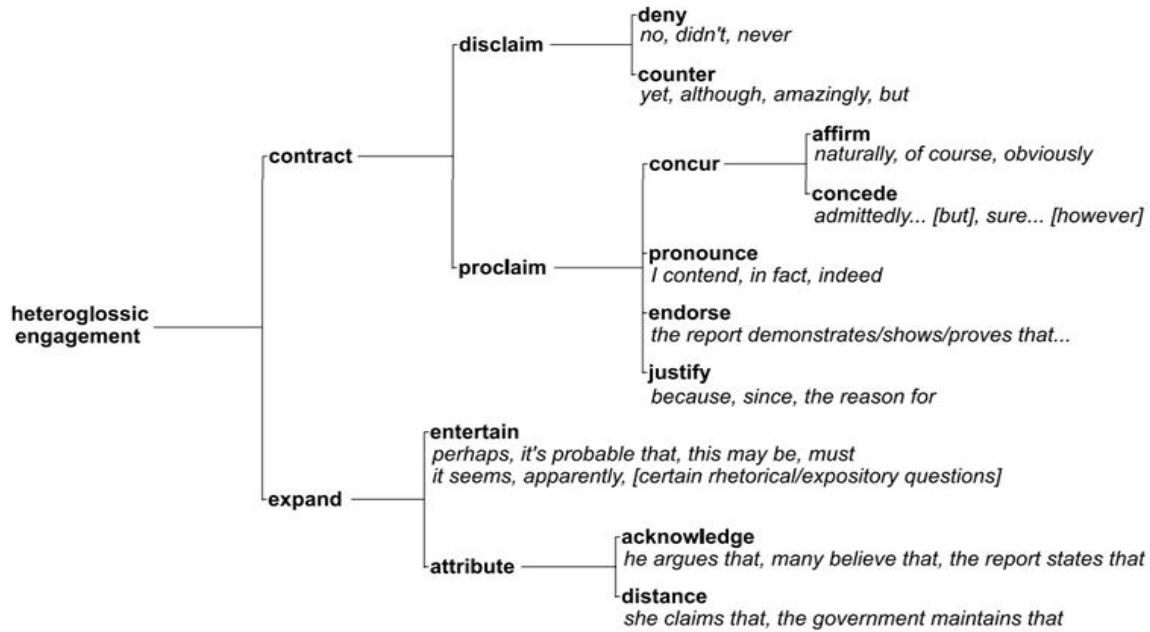


Fig. 1 System network for heteroglossic engagement within the engagement system (Martin & White, 2005, p. 134)

* Features are in bold, and example realizations are in italics.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The mixed-methods approach is essential for analyzing Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* through Martin and White's [1] Engagement System as it provides a comprehensive and balanced analysis by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of the context in which engagement resources are employed, such as dialogistic tools like 'entertain' (e.g., *may or perhaps*), to frame strategic possibilities. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, provide systematic and replicable insights into the frequency and distribution of engagement strategies (e.g., heteroglossic resources like *disclaim* and *entertain*), offering objectivity and supporting generalizability in linguistic patterns. Together, these methods enhance validity and reliability by complementing qualitative interpretations with statistical evidence, addressing multiple layers of analysis, and bridging exploratory and explanatory insights. This mixed-methods design aligns with the complexity of the research, enabling a nuanced understanding of how Sun Tzu's text employs engagement strategies to influence its readers [1].

3.2. Data Collection

The researcher investigated the engagement resources in the English translation of the Chinese military book, *The Art of War*, encompassing 9,099 words. The text was initially converted from PDF to a text format. Afterwards, elements such as footnotes, images, and any unclear numbers (e.g., page numbers at the top) were removed, leaving a clean text.

3.2.1. About the Book

The Art of War is an ancient Chinese military treatise that significantly influenced strategic thought in warfare and numerous life domains. Authored by Sun Tzu, it is regarded as an important work on strategy and tactics. The book highlights the significance of comprehending the adversary, self-awareness, and the capacity to adjust to evolving situations. It underscores the importance of strategy, subterfuge, and intelligence application in securing triumph [3]. Sun Tzu examines the necessity of adaptability, the significance of time, and the application of diverse

strategies contingent upon circumstances. The book underscores the importance of leadership and the necessity of encouraging and inspiring one's subordinates [3].

The Art of War is a perennial masterwork that remains pertinent and impactful in contemporary Society. It provides significant insights and tactics for success across multiple fields [3].

3.2.2. *About the Author*

Sun Tzu, also known as Sun Wu, was a distinguished military strategist and tactician in ancient China. He was born during the Spring and Autumn Period, an era marked by relentless conflict and political instability. Although the precise location of his birth remains unclear, the impact of Sun Tzu's ideas on military strategy is widely recognized.

Sun Tzu is best known for his influential work, 'The Art of War,' a fundamental work that has significantly impacted military strategies and tactics. This ancient Chinese military treatise demonstrates Sun Tzu's deep understanding of conflicts, strategies, and tactics. Sun Tzu's writings present innovative military concepts, emphasizing the significance of self-awareness and understanding the adversary, the strategic use of surprise and deception, and the notion that warfare encompasses both military might and economic and logistical considerations.

Sun Tzu's military career thrived under the reign of King He-Lu of Wu, where he played a vital role as a strategist. His exceptional understanding of military matters and astute strategies were crucial in achieving victories for the Wu army. Sun Tzu's strategies highlighted the significance of intelligence, manoeuvrability, and flexibility in combat and the necessity of adjusting to evolving situations.

In addition to his military accomplishments, Sun Tzu's impact reaches beyond warfare. His teachings have echoed through the ages, influencing military strategies across the globe. 'The Art of War' has been translated into various languages and is essential reading in military academies and strategic research institutions worldwide. Moreover, its principles have been applied across diverse domains, such as business and management, showcasing the enduring significance of Sun Tzu's insights.

Sun Tzu is a prominent figure in military strategy and tactics. His concepts and theories still offer substantial guidance and practical relevance in today's context.

3.2.3. *About the Translator*

The book 'The Art of War' was translated by Cleary [14]. He is an academic and translator with a deep passion for Asian cultures and their philosophical traditions. He has dedicated his entire life to exploring and distributing Asian philosophies, focusing on Taoism and Buddhism. His translations have enabled Western readers to explore the intricate and profound realm of Asian thought, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures.

His translation of "The Art of War," known in its original Chinese as 'Sunzi Bingfa,' demonstrates a profound understanding of the ancient language and its strategic concepts.

Numerous individuals commend Cleary's [14] rendition for its precision, clarity, and fidelity to the source material. He successfully distilled the core concepts of Sun Tzu's teachings, rendering them accessible to contemporary audiences. His work has preserved the original book's core concepts while ensuring they are accessible and applicable to contemporary readers, helping strengthen the connection between ancient and contemporary concepts.

3.3. Analytical Procedures

The study focused on analyzing the frequency of the engagement resources employed in the Chinese military text *The Art of War*. The final data version was uploaded into MAXQDA, an open-source software designed for mixed-methods research. MAXQDA offers both qualitative and quantitative analysis capabilities, providing an intuitive interface for coding and categorizing textual data, as the Engagement System scheme was manually uploaded into the software. It also supports data visualisation, making interpreting qualitative themes and quantitative patterns easier. MAXQDA's overview and summary tables were particularly valuable in aggregating the analysis results, facilitating the exploration of Engagement System frequencies across the text.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Mono-Glossic and Hetero-Glossic Resources

As mentioned earlier, the framework of the Engagement System provides a methodical analysis of the frequency utilized in the Chinese military text known as *The Art of War*. Table 1 illustrates the frequency of monoglossic and heteroglossic propositions in the data collected for the current study.

Table 1. Monoglossic vs. Heteroglossic resources in the art of war

Data Set	Monoglossic			Heteroglossic		
	No.	%	Frequency (/100)	No.	%	Frequency (/100)
	878	55.75	98	697	44.25	71

Note: Normalized frequency per 100 words

The military text (the *Art of War*) used monoglossic more than the heteroglossic one. However, the text employed more monoglossic elements (55.75 %, 98 per 100 words) than heteroglossic (44.25 %, 71 per 100 words).

Monoglossic statements in *The Art of War* assert a single, unchallenged perspective, emphasizing universality, certainty, and authority. These statements present Sun Tzu's principles as absolute truths, leaving little room for alternative viewpoints or discussion. They are designed to frame the ideas within the text as fundamental laws that are universally applicable in military strategy.

Example: "To know your enemy and know yourself is to fight a hundred battles without disaster." (Knowledge and Strategy)

This is a classic example of a monoglossic statement, which presents a definitive truth framed in a way that leaves no room for doubt. The use of 'is to' indicates a clear, unambiguous relationship between knowledge of self and enemy and victory in battle. The reader is not invited to question or interpret this principle—it is presented as a universal law of military strategy.

On the other hand, heteroglossic statements represent variability and the possibility of multiple perspectives. These resources introduce flexibility, acknowledging that there may be different ways to interpret a situation and strategies based on context.

Example: "If opponents show no change or movement, wait for them."

This is a more flexible, context-dependent statement. It does not present an absolute rule but offers a strategy based on specific conditions (i.e. when the opponent is passive). The word 'wait' introduces a strategy that depends on the situation, inviting readers to adapt accordingly.

Thus, monoglossic and heteroglossic resources serve distinct functions in *The Art of War*, reflecting Sun Tzu's dual emphasis on certainty and adaptability. These resources highlight the balance between unwavering principles

and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, underscoring the complexity and timeless relevance of Sun Tzu's strategic insights. The contractive resources (91.54%, 8 per 100 words) significantly outnumber expansive resources (8.46%, 8 per 100 words) (Table 2).

Table 2. Contractive Vs Expansive resources in the art of war text

Data Set	NO.	%	Frequency (/100)
Contract	638	91.54	8
Disclaim	477	68.44	53
Deny	203	29.12	30
Counter	274	39.32	23
Proclaim	161	23.10	18
Concur	84	12.05	9
Pronounce	6	0.86	2
Endorse	3	0.43	1
Justify	68	9.76	8
Expand	59	8.46	8
Entertain	50	7.17	6
Attribute	9	1.29	2
Acknowledge	5	0.72	1
Distance	4	0.57	1

The result of more dialogic contractions (contractive resources) than dialogic expansions indicates Sun Tzu's focus in *The Art of War* is on decisive action, clarity, and certainty in military strategy, with less room for uncertainty, reflection, or engagement in extended discussions.

Example: "The skillful leader does not raise an army twice, nor recruit the same men twice. The skillful general avoids conflict until necessary" (Strategic Advantage).

This passage presents a sharp contrast between a leader who is strategic and one who is wasteful. The clear opposition between raising an army twice and avoiding unnecessary conflict helps the reader understand the strategic advantage of being measured and not overextending resources. It eliminates any ambiguity in how to approach military campaigns.

Expansive resources, by contrast, open possibilities for alternative actions or interpretations. They introduce ambiguity or additional possibilities, allowing for a more fluid and adaptable approach.

Example: "If he sends reinforcements everywhere, he will everywhere be weak."

This statement presents a situation where a particular action (sending reinforcements everywhere) weakens the overall position. However, it is not an absolute rule; it opens the door for further reflection on the strategy. The reader is invited to consider different contexts where this advice might be applicable or reconsidered.

In conclusion, the dominance of contractive resources (91.54%) over expansive resources (8.46%) in *The Art of War* underscores Sun Tzu's focus on clarity and decisiveness in strategy. Contractive resources define effective tactics clearly, promoting swift decisions, while expansive resources offer secondary flexibility. This balance emphasizes the need for both clear direction and strategic adaptability.

The disclaims resources (68.44%, 53 per 100 words) are used more frequently than proclaim resources (23.10%, 18 per 100 words) in *The Art of War* (Table 2), while both have a higher frequency than other sub-categories of the Engagement System. Disclaim resources (e.g., denials and counter-expectations) are used to reject incorrect assumptions, refute alternative ideas, or highlight exceptions to general rules, as in “Foreknowledge cannot be gotten from ghosts and spirits, cannot be had by analogy, cannot be found out by calculation.” (On the Use of Spies). This disclaim resource (denial) rejects superstition and speculative methods favouring actionable intelligence. Sun Tzu’s use of disclaiming here ensures that the reader understands the limitations of certain approaches, reinforcing the importance of relying on tangible evidence.

The lower but significant frequency of proclaim resources (e.g., affirmations, pronouncements, and concurrences) asserts certainty and authority, emphasizing the truth and reliability of the writer’s statements. While less frequent than disclaim resources, their higher-than-average presence indicates that Sun Tzu also uses proclaim resources to reinforce his credibility and establish his authority as a master strategist, as in “All warfare is based on deception.” (Laying Plans). This proclaimed resource (pronouncement) establishes deception as an absolute foundation of military success, emphasizing its universal application.

This finding suggests that negating incorrect ideas is a more prominent strategy in *The Art of War* than simply affirming truths. Sun Tzu uses disclaim resources to clarify his ideas by rejecting ineffective or incorrect strategies, ensuring the reader understands what not to do as much as what to do. The proclamation comprises four sub-categories: concur, pronounce, endorse, and justify (Table 2). The most frequently used proclaim resource was concurring (84 instances, 9 per 100 words), indicating that Sun Tzu frequently employs language that affirms ideas as obvious truths or natural conclusions that the audience is expected to agree with. This statement implies that the audience should naturally agree with achieving victory without unnecessary conflict. Sun Tzu’s use of concurring here invites the reader to align with his reasoning and see it as inherently logical.

Justify resources (e.g., providing reasons or explanations) is the second most common sub-category of proclaim (68 instances, 8 per 100 words), suggesting that Sun Tzu takes care to explain and rationalize his strategies when necessary to ensure the audience understands their logic, as in “The skillful fighter puts himself into a position which makes defeat impossible and does not miss the moment for defeating the enemy” (Energy).

Here, Sun Tzu justifies the importance of positioning and timing by explaining how these factors prevent defeat and ensure success. Using “justify” resources builds confidence in the reader that these principles are based on practical reasoning. The minimal Use of “Pronounce” resources (e.g., authoritative declarations) accounts for only 0.86% of the text, suggesting that Sun Tzu rarely relies on overt declarations of authority to establish credibility.

Example: “All warfare is based on deception.” (Laying Plans).

This is a rare pronouncement where Sun Tzu asserts deception as an irrefutable foundation of warfare. Its declarative nature underscores its importance as a core principle. The minimal use of ‘Endorse’ (e.g., citing external authorities or aligning with other views) (0.43%) indicates that Sun Tzu occasionally references external examples of successful strategies to illustrate his points (e.g., historical battles). However, these are integrated into his reasoning rather than being cited as sources of authority.

The counter resource is more frequently employed in the text (39.32%) than in the text (29.12%). The result explains that the author focuses on Correcting and redirecting misconceptions. Sun Tzu frequently uses counter-resources to correct false assumptions or challenge conventional expectations, replacing them with strategic insights. The higher frequency of counters reflects the text’s focus on providing new ways of thinking about warfare, encouraging readers to move beyond simplistic or traditional ideas, as in “If the enemy is secure at all

points, be prepared for him. If he is in superior strength, evade him.” (Tactical Dispositions). This is a counter because it contrasts two scenarios and offers specific alternatives to conventional aggression. By engaging with the audience through alternatives, Sun Tzu ensures his strategies are flexible and context-aware.

The lower frequency of ‘Deny’ indicates the limited role of pure rejection and suggests that Sun Tzu does not focus solely on negating false ideas. Instead of simply rejecting incorrect notions, he often takes the next step to replace them with alternatives using counters, as in “Foreknowledge cannot be gotten from ghosts and spirits, cannot be had by analogy, cannot be found out by calculation.” (On the Use of Spies). This is a ‘deny’ resource because it explicitly rejects superstition and speculative methods. While effective in ruling out incorrect approaches, denies like this do not actively engage with the reader’s perspective beyond negation.

Entertain resources (7.17%, 6 per 100 words) were significantly more prevalent than Attribute resources (1.29 %, 2 per 100 words) (Table 2). It reveals a deliberate rhetorical strategy by Sun Tzu under the Engagement System. This result highlights Sun Tzu's focus on engaging the audience with possibilities and hypothetical scenarios while minimizing reliance on external attributions or other voices.

Example: “If he sends reinforcements everywhere, he will everywhere be weak.” (Energy). This entertaining resource introduces a potential outcome contingent on a specific action (sending reinforcements everywhere). Using such language, Sun Tzu invites readers to consider this possibility and draw conclusions about the importance of concentration in military strategy. The minimal use of attribute resources suggests Sun Tzu positions himself as the primary authority, rarely relying on external voices or sources to support his strategies.

Acknowledge and Distance resources are used almost equally in The Art of War, highlighting a particular balance in Sun Tzu's rhetorical strategy (Table 2). Acknowledge engages readers with external ideas, showing respect for traditional wisdom and common practices, as in “There are five dangerous faults which may affect a general: Recklessness, which leads to destruction; cowardice, which leads to capture; a hasty temper, which insults can provoke; a delicacy of honor which is sensitive to shame; over-solicitude for his men, which exposes him to worry and trouble.” (Weaknesses and Strengths)

This statement references common flaws that generals may possess, implicitly acknowledging that these are widely recognized characteristics. By doing so, Sun Tzu engages with external ideas, allowing his audience to relate to known concepts while building on them. The results of this study indicate distinct linguistic patterns regarding the use of engagement resources in The Art of War. There is a notable prevalence of monoglossic resources compared to heteroglossic ones, reflecting Sun Tzu’s emphasis on clarity and authority. These patterns align with the text’s persuasive and instructional goals. SFL theorists, such as Martin and Rose [15], argue that texts within a similar genre often share linguistic tendencies. In this case, The Art of War’s focus on military strategy promotes monoglossic statements to assert absolute truths, while heteroglossic elements support the adaptability required in complex, real-world scenarios. Furthermore, the analysis reveals a significant reliance on disclaiming resources, particularly denials and counters, to dismiss misconceptions and emphasize corrective strategies. This preference underscores the text’s educational function, providing clear guidance by rejecting flawed ideas. Similarly, using proclaim resources, such as justifications and pronouncements, reinforces Sun Tzu's principles' credibility and universal application. This linguistic distribution demonstrates that The Art of War uses engagement resources strategically to balance authority, precision, and flexibility, making it timelessly effective in both military and broader applications.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The analysis of The Art of War using the Engagement System reveals a highly structured use of evaluative language, balancing certainty with adaptability. Sun Tzu strategically employs monoglossic resources to assert

clear, authoritative principles, while heteroglossic resources introduce flexibility, accommodating alternative perspectives. This dynamic interplay between authoritative certainty and flexible interpretation underscores the text's relevance and authority across different contexts, aligning with Martin and White's [1] dialogic contraction and expansion framework. Gee [16] further explains how discourse constructs authority through linguistic strategies while leaving room for alternative viewpoints, supporting the engagement patterns observed in *The Art of War*. The predominance of monoglossic resources (55.75%) in *The Art of War* reflects its nature as a prescriptive military guide, presenting universal principles with strong certainty. These clear directives ensure that the text provides unambiguous guidance on military strategy. Meanwhile, the substantial presence of heteroglossic resources (44.25%) introduces the necessary space for adaptability, allowing Sun Tzu's strategies to remain relevant across various situations. This balance of certainty and flexibility is essential for effective leadership, which requires firm decisions and responsiveness to changing circumstances [17].

Further analysis of the text reveals a significant use of contractive resources (91.54%), which helps distinguish between successful and ineffective tactics. These resources support decisive action, guiding readers toward optimal choices in critical moments. Though sparse at 8.46%, Expansive resources offer opportunities for reflection and alternative strategies, focusing on the importance of situational awareness alongside decisive action. The frequent use of disclaiming resources (68.44%), particularly counter-resources, illustrates Sun Tzu's strategy of discrediting ineffective ideas and reinforcing successful tactics. This clarifies what to do and emphasizes what should be avoided. Proclaim resources (23.10%) reinforce the text's authoritative voice, asserting key principles such as deception and strategic surprise. The careful use of disclaiming and proclaiming resources ensures that *The Art of War* provides clear guidance while challenging outdated strategies.

The minimal presence of attribute (1.29%) and entertainment (7.17%) resources further highlights Sun Tzu's pragmatic approach. The text focuses on practical, actionable advice relevant to any leader or strategist by reducing reliance on external validation and speculative alternatives. This study holds significant implications for scholarly research and practical applications in leadership and strategy. The balance between monoglossic certainty and heteroglossic flexibility in *The Art of War* offers valuable insights for modern decision-makers in business, politics, and military strategy. The text demonstrates how decisive action and adaptability coexist, providing a model for leaders navigating dynamic and complex environments. Leaders can improve their strategic decision-making by drawing on monoglossic resources to assert clear goals and heteroglossic resources to adapt tactics. Sawyer [7] notes that the strategic flexibility inherent in *The Art of War* is not limited to military contexts but extends to various leadership disciplines, reinforcing the text's cross-contextual applicability.

The study also emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and problem-solving, evidenced by the frequent use of disclaiming resources to challenge ineffective strategies. *The Art of War* offers valuable insights for modern business, politics, and military strategy decision-makers. The text demonstrates how decisive action and adaptability coexist, providing a model for leaders navigating dynamic and complex environments. Leaders can improve their strategic decision-making by drawing on monoglossic resources to assert clear goals and heteroglossic resources to adapt tactics. Sawyer [7] notes that the strategic flexibility inherent in *The Art of War* is not limited to military contexts but extends to various leadership disciplines, reinforcing the text's cross-contextual applicability.

The study also emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and problem-solving, evidenced by the frequent use of disclaiming resources to challenge ineffective strategies. *The Art of War* encourages questioning conventional wisdom and exploring alternative strategies, fostering innovation and strategic thinking. Its focus on flexible thinking remains relevant in today's rapidly changing world, where leaders must reassess strategies in response to new challenges and information.

From an SFL perspective, the study enhances our understanding of how dialogic contraction and expansion are used to engage readers. By balancing authority with alternative perspectives, the text exemplifies how linguistic resources can shape audience engagement and enhance rhetorical effectiveness. This approach aligns with Hyland's [17] focus on stance and engagement, demonstrating how language choices influence decision-making and communication. Gee [16] provides further insight into how engagement through discourse strategies enhances the interaction between the text and its readers, helping to establish authority while remaining open to new interpretations.

The use of heteroglossic resources in *The Art of War* contributes to its timeless relevance. Sun Tzu's work remains adaptable to various fields, from military strategy to leadership and management, because it engages with multiple interpretations while preserving a core set of principles. This adaptability ensures that *The Art of War* resonates as an essential text for strategic thinking and leadership across cultures and disciplines.

In conclusion, the engagement resources in *The Art of War* reflect Sun Tzu's expertise in guiding, instructing, and persuading leaders. Through the strategic use of monoglossic, heteroglossic, contrastive, and expansive resources, the text remains a powerful manual for effective decision-making. This analysis offers valuable insights into the linguistic strategies contributing to the text's enduring impact, reinforcing its relevance in military and broader strategic contexts. Future research could investigate the use of engagement resources in modern military discourse to compare the findings with those in the present study.

Authors' Contributions

The first author planned and carried out the study. The first author analysed the data, while the second author revised the annotations and the literature review section. The results, discussion, and conclusion sections were written by the first author and revised by the second author. The second author proofreads the paper to ensure it adheres to the journal's style.

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