

# *A Discourse Analysis of News Reports from China Daily*

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**Abstract:** Based on the framework of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this paper employs Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar to analyze 10 News Reports from China Daily in terms of three perspectives: text, discursive practice and social practice. On the level of text, it uses lexis frequencies and transitivity to analyze the linguistic features. And on the level of discursive practice, it shows the news production process by exploring news sources. And finally on the level of social practice, it puts news discourse in the social and cultural context in seeks to explain the text and discourse representation. Whereby, it uncovers the different ideological meanings.

## **I. Introduction**

Critical discourse analysis, an interdisciplinary method, has attracted more and more attention and has been widely used to humanities and social sciences. It aims to reveal the relationship between language, power, and ideology by analyzing text, discourse production process and the socio-cultural context. And the news media, a medium for the public to obtain information, plays an important role in delivering facts, influencing and guiding the receivers. It can be said that the news media is a powerful carrier to export and reflect the ideology and an important means to shape the image. Therefore, the critical discourse analysis of news reports has always been a focus of discourse analysis both home and abroad [1,2]. Since the end of 2019, the disease outbreak has undoubtedly become the focus around the globe. From the initial high infectivity and high mortality rate, to the contraction after vaccination, the decline of the mortality rate, to the post-epidemic era, people's hearts have been affected all the time. There is also more and more academic research on the news reports, mainly focusing on the perspective of communication, public health event response, and linguistics. The perspective of linguistics is mainly on Corpus-Based discourse analysis and comparative analysis of Chinese and foreign media. There are relatively few studies on domestic media. Thus, this study selects 10 related news reports from China Daily, and adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional theory as the framework to analyze the three aspects of text, discursive practice and social practice, aiming to explore the linguistic features, discourse construction process and their relationship with politics, society and culture.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

CDA is the product and extension of critical linguistics. And more importantly, it is a breakthrough of critical linguistics. The term "critical linguistics" was put forward by Fowler in his

book *Language and Control* in 1979. Then ten years later, another scholar Norman Fairclough formally raises the term “critical discourse analysis (CDA)” in his book *Language and power*. He thinks discourse is a kind of social practice (Fairclough, 1992a: 5). So he tried to explain the control, prejudice, resistance and power these relations rooted in the social structure by analyzing discourse. He thinks language is co-related with social practice and regards the linguistic analysis as the tool to analyze social relations and practice. His famous three-dimensional model includes three levels: text, discursive practice and social practice. The first level focuses on describing the language features of the text ranging from vocabulary, grammar to semantics etc. To some extent, it belongs to micro-level description. The second discursive practice pays attention to the process of discourse production, communication and consumption. It is the bridge of text and social practice. So we call it interpretation. The last or the ultimate level is social practice, which aims to explain the social context to which the text and discursive practice belong. This context may include political, economic and cultural environment [3-5].

The first dimension description is mainly achieved by Halliday’s Systemic-functional Grammar. It provided theoretical foundations and analytic methods for critical discourse analysis. Early in his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday pointed that the purpose of his functional grammar’s establishment is to supply a theoretical frame for discourse analysis and this framework can be used in any discourse analysis including spoken or written discourse. Till to now, this has become the most significant instrument for critical discourse analysis.

As far as Halliday’s concerned, language is the system of system network. That is to say, the system network is made up of several systems. And for each system, people have more than two options or meaning potential. When a person wants to form a sentence, he must choose one item from the options the system provides and then choose another item from other systems by turns. Usually, these choices are simultaneous. After these choices, these items chosen shape the sentence, or the language system. But the choice process is also dominated by the language’s social meaning functions. He also convinces that language has different functions and linguistic features reflect its function [6]. That is, what language becomes depends on its functions in social context (Fairclough, 1992a: 25)

Language, as people’s communicative tool, undertakes various functions. Halliday divided language’s meta-function into three functions. They are ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Ideational function means the representation of people’s diversified experiences in reality by using language. Put it simply, it refers to how people, using language, represent the events happening in objective world and subjective world and related persons, objects, time and places etc. This function is mainly realized by transitivity, which has been adopted and become an important tool for critical discourse analysis. Transitivity aims to explore how people express the world around them via different processes on the level of clause. As for the process, Halliday divided it into six process types: material process, verbal process, mental process, relational process, existential process and behavioral process.

### **3. Critical Analysis and Findings**

This section employs Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to analyze 10 news reports from *China Daily* from three levels of text, discursive practice and social practice.

#### **3.1. Text Analysis**

In this section, lexis frequencies and transitivity will be discussed with the help of UAM Corpus Tool 6, a system functional linguistics tool.

### 3.1.1. Lexis Frequencies Analysis

High-frequency words refer to the words that appear more frequently in the text, which can usually reflect the focus. This indicator can identify the basic features of language and convey a specific discourse meaning. Add 10 news reports to UAM Corpus, then we can use the lexis frequencies to generate the following list, excluding function words and proper names.

Table 1: Lexis frequencies

|         |               |         |           |            |          |               |             |         |
|---------|---------------|---------|-----------|------------|----------|---------------|-------------|---------|
| Nouns   | country       | measure | control   | prevention | people   | health        | economy     | vaccine |
| Verbs   | say           | take    | work      | develop    | combat   | announce      | provide     |         |
| Adj/Adv | international | medical | financial | scientific | globally | significantly | effectively |         |

Nouns generally serve as subjects and objects in the sentence. From table 1, we can see high-frequency words country and people appear in the subject position for many times, indicating that the media are highlighting country and people as the main force. According to the accompanying verbs, the country is responsible for the policy coordination and promotion at the macro level, while the people are responsible for the specific fight against the epidemic, showing the different roles in the fight. The high-frequency terms measure, control, prevention and health, have repeatedly appeared in the object position, underlining the powerful measures taken by the country in order to ensure people's health. At the same time, we can conclude that the policy focus lies on control and prevention. In the mid-to-late stable stages, economy and vaccine have repeatedly appeared in the object position, which also suggests the country's emphasis on economic recovery and vaccine development. Verbs serve as predicates in the sentence, which can best express the action of the government. In the above list, say and announce have come after the country and the government many times, emphasizing the government's policy release and implementation, while work, take, develop, combat and provide can reflect the government's determination and the diverse prevention and control means. Adjectives and adverbs are used as attributives and adverbial. High frequency adjectives basically belong to the neutral word without emotional tendency, which conforms to the objectivity of news. Among them, the words international and globally reflect that the outbreak is not limited to China, but a global battle.

From the above high-frequency words, we can see the main tone of China. That is effective measures should be taken to control the spread and prevent the second outbreak. Besides, on the premise of ensuring people's health, we should gradually restore economic development and develop the vaccine as soon as possible.

### 3.1.2. Transitivity Analysis

Transitivity is regarded a semantic system finishing the ideational function. It can reflect how people understand the reality and explain their experience in the world outside and inside them. It utilizes different processes to represent people's perception and experience of the real world. There are three elements for each process: the process itself, the participants, and the environment. In the actual news report, the reporter, by selecting different processes and arranging the participants, implicitly expresses his text intention and understanding toward the event. In this paper, 10 articles are investigated based on the six processes. The statistics are as follows:

Table 2: Distribution of process types

| Process    | Material | Verbal | Mental | Relational | Existential | Behavioral |
|------------|----------|--------|--------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Number     | 336      | 71     | 31     | 27         | 3           | 0          |
| Percentage | 71.8%    | 15.2%  | 6.6%   | 5.8%       | 0.6%        | 0          |

(1) Material process is the process of doing something, and is usually realized by dynamic verbs.

The constituents include actor (doer of the action) and goal (receiver of the action). Commonly they are acted by nouns or pronouns. This process can not only represent specific actions but also can reflect some abstract behaviors or events. A text usually contains multiple processes, but material processes account for the most because the material world comes first. As can be seen from the table 2, material process accounts for more than half, up to 71.8%, which meets the requirements of news objectivity. At the same time, the choice of words and the arrangement of actors and goals in the material process also reflect the ideological significance of news discourse.

Table 3: Material process analysis

| Actor          | Goal   |
|----------------|--|
| The Disease    | Exploded Into A Full-Blown Epidemic In Late January  |
| Governments    | Have Worked Tirelessly To Not Only Contain The Pathogen's Spread And Save Lives But Minimize The Outbreak's Impact On Various Economic Sectors |
| The Government | Has Taken Proactive Measures And Sanctioned Local Leaders  |

From table 3, the actor of the first material process is the disease, which through the verb explode objectively reproduces the outbreak and the severe situation. The actor of the second is governments, which shows the government's indomitable commitment to curb the spread of the epidemic and save the lives of the people, while minimizing the impact on the economy by the verb have worked tirelessly to. In the third line, the government's actions and responsibility are highlighted through the actor government, the verbs has taken and sanctioned, and the targets measures and local leaders. Country and government appeared as the actor many times, which via the material process, objectively presents us a government image of fighting preservingly and indomitably in the face of the epidemic, constructing a positive national image. This is in line with the fact that the Chinese government has actively responded to the epidemic, prevented and taken targeted measures at various levels since the outbreak.

(2) Verbal process refers to the process of verbal communication by language. It includes sayer (the speaker), receiver (the listener) and verbiage (verbal contents). In order to reflect objectivity and credibility, news reports often quote relevant people to increase persuasion. Thus, the source of the quotations reflects the stances and attitudes and the analysis of the speaker helps to reflect the ideology behind it.

Table 4: Verbal Process Analysis

| Sayer                                | Verbiage   |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| WHO                                  | Has declared it a global pandemic                    |
| Redfield, director of the US Centers | Said that it's wrong to refer to a "Chinese illness" |

According to table 4, by citing the world health organization and the director of the US center for control and prevention, the news report seemingly fused the voice, actually expressed the reporter's position skillfully. That means the illness is not Chinese, but the global. This is a refute to the international assertion. By the verbal process, the reporter achieved his stance construction.

(3) Mental process expresses people's emotion, perception, feeling and willingness. It includes sensor and phenomenon. This process analysis helps us to experience the sensor's internal world.

Example 1: I hope to get inoculated with the vaccine as soon as possible.

Example 2: We are deeply concerned by the alarming levels of spread and severity

Example 3: Healthcare experts in countries and regions around the world are worried that the pandemic will see a new peak in fall and winter.

The above three examples reflect the public's concerns and anxiety about the epidemic and their willingness to get vaccinated as soon as possible. There are few mental processes in news. On the

one hand, news discourse requires objective reporting, while the mental process reflects more individual's emotions. On the other hand, it does not want to aggravate the anxiety of the public.

(4) Relational process refers to the process of describing the relationship or the properties. The following two examples describes China's features, affirming China's performance during the outbreak. This is in line with the mainstream values in China.

Example 1: China is undoubtedly a good example in control and prevention.

Example 2: China's containment efforts to stem the spread within mainland China and globally is riveting and commendable.

Through the above transitivity analysis, we can see that both the verbs choice and the participants arrangement in the news discourse all reflect the position and attitude of the news producers. A large number of material processes conform to news objectivity, but the choice of action words and the arrangement of the actors and the targets also contain the ideological motivation. The different quotations in the verbal process seem diverse, but actually express the reporter's stances skillfully. The mental process reflects the public's anxiety. The relational process affirms China's efforts.

### 3.2. Discursive Practice Analysis

Discursive practice pays more attention to the process of discourse production, communication and consumption. In order to reflect the objectivity, news reports often quote the words of relevant people. These quotations come from all parties and represent different positions and attitudes. Therefore, the analysis of the news sources is beneficial to reflect the ideology behind it [7]. Sources can be classified into specific, semi-specific, and unidentified. The statistics are as follows:

Table 5: Distribution of news source

| News source | Specific | Semi-specific | Unidentified |
|-------------|----------|---------------|--------------|
| Number      | 22       | 6             | 1            |
| Percentage  | 75.9%    | 20.7%         | 3.4%         |

About specific source, journalists clearly provide the name, title and occupation. For semi-specific source, journalists just give an organization name or his occupation through which the subject's identity cannot be determined. As for unidentified source, journalists usually employ some expressions like "It is reported/ said that ...," or "According to an anonymous person ...". From the above table 5, China Daily uses a lot of specific sources to increase the objectivity and credibility. The specific sources are mainly from some authorities or professionals, such as the director of the US Centers for Control and Prevention and the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To some extent, it makes the news more persuasive

### 3.3. Social Practice Analysis

Social practice focuses on the social environment existing in the discourse, that is, its relationship with politics, society and culture [8-10]. As China's English Daily, China Daily aims to spread China's voice and is rooted in China. Traditional Chinese values are collectivism-oriented, emphasizing unity, patriotism, collective interests, emphasizing the mission and responsibility of the government and the unity of the people. This is consistent with the ideology contained in the news and articles studied in this paper. Our political system is a system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, which also provides a guarantee for us to quickly form effective national strength, unite all forces, form a united front against the epidemic and successfully control it. In addition, China's socialism adheres to the principle of democratic centralism and guarantees the safety of people's lives to the maximum

extent. The superiority of its mechanism and system has been vividly reflected in the fight against the epidemic.

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