

Ideologies in Chinese News Reports on South China Sea from the Perspective of CDA

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Abstract: This paper attempts to explore and compare the hidden ideologies especially such as the relationship between China and the involved countries in the news reports concerning the South China Sea from Chinese Xinhua News Agency. Through an observation of the diversities in lexical choices and transitivity at the language level, it finds that the Chinese medium wishes to construct a good state and bright prospect of the relationship between China and the involved countries. The findings confirm that CDA is an efficient way to explore how news represent social interests, national spirit, territorial integrity and so on. The research thus provides some implications for common readers to improve the ability of political writing and reading, and intercultural communicative competence.

1. Introduction

This paper is to investigate news reports, as a non-literary discourse, on South China Sea from Chinese media, in order to display the attitudes toward the relationship between the involved countries and China from Chinese news agencies. Since the 1970s, the conflict of the South China Sea has attached great attention both at home and abroad, which has also come with a spate of news reports. In the meantime, the relationship between China and the involved countries has been complicated and misty. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), as an available and specialized tool to elucidate the text, is widely used in the field of discourse analysis and would be useful to explore the imbedded ideology in the news.

The paper firstly conducts a review on CDA and its application on the study of news analysis. Meanwhile, it draws out the rationale of this study and then describes the research purposes of this study. In what follows, it reports the procedures and results and has a discussion. Finally, it concludes this study and puts forward some implications.

2. Literature review

2.1 Critical discourse analysis and Systemic Functional Grammar

Critical discourse analysis was proposed by western philosophers in the 1970s. It was developed to be an important linguistic theory through Fairclough (1989), who pointed out that CDA is not only an analysis but a criticism. He thought that CDA could reveal the connotative relations among language,

power and ideology, as well as how ruling classes utilized language to control ideology and maintain power and status [5].

Fairclough further pointed out that discourse was concerned with the whole process of social interaction [5,6]. Three dimensions are thus involved with the discourse, which are text, discursive practice and social practice. Text refers to language that is written or spoken in a discursive event. Discursive practice includes production, distribution and consumption. And social practice contains situational, institutional and societal practices. The three dimensions and their relationship are presented in Figure 1.

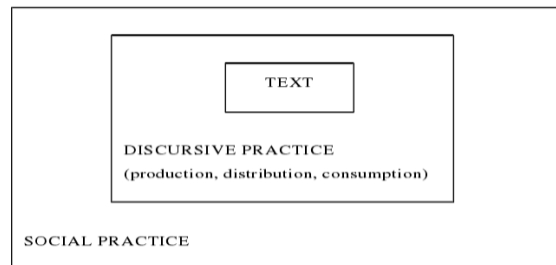


Figure 1: Three-dimensional conception of discourse (Adapted from Fairclough [6])

In Figure 1, it can be seen that the discursive practice produces text and is also influenced by social practice. It includes three stages – description, interpretation and explanation. Specifically, description refers to a linguistic analysis, such as vocabulary, grammar, structure of the text to some extent. Vocabulary can be thought of words and metaphors. Grammar has something to do with sentences and clauses. Structure of the text is about the organization. At the second stage, the goal of interpretation is offering an explanation of discursive process, which also is in connection with the relationship with the text. Production, distribution and consumption of the text are the process of producing the text and depend on factors of social practice. During the process of production, the text becomes a product consequently. At the last stage, explanation is about the analysis of the socio-cultural practice. It would uncover the hidden power and ideology in those contexts. In brief, explanation involves the relationship between interaction and social context. Reversely, text and discourse practice would be affected profoundly.

While Fairclough’s three-dimensional model sketches out language in its social-cultural context and the ideological assumptions established through interactions and texts, Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFL) could be complementary to it as an analytical tool [6,11]. To Halliday (2000), language is structured to achieve social-cultural meanings. It is regarded as a semantic system which is organized into three meta-functional components– ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. And the meta-functions are realized by lexico-grammar.

Ideational function means language can embody objects and processes existing in our subjective and objective world. Interpersonal function refers to that language is a tool which people use to do meaningful activities or things in society, which is bound to reflect the relationship among people. Textual function refers to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken and written discourse into a coherent and unified text.

2.2 News discourse analysis from the perspective of CDA

News could be seen as an important medium through which people learn about the world without leaving their homes because news presented by televisions, newspapers or other mass media would bring the whole world into their homes. Nevertheless, news might not be as objective as people normally regard. Fowler (1991) contended that the reporting of robust facts concerning worldwide affairs was lopsided and unfair in some ways actually [7]. Reporters would like to give interpretation of facts or a political comment and then express their standpoint especially when recording political events whether intentionally or unintentionally. Accordingly, news could be regarded as practice of society and culture.

Therefore, news would spread thoughts, concepts and idea to change the mind of one person, one country and even the world imperceptibly.

CDA has been widely employed to dissect news discourses. Among them, Van Dijk has led the exploration of how to make CDA apply to the news to embody the power, ideology and social background. He deemed that discourse was the production of communicative events and language, as well as patterns of manifestation towards meanings [19,21]. Moreover, Kazemian and Hashemi have introduced an integrated approach by analyzing political discourses according to three disciplines and frameworks [13, 14]. They argued that CDA was a good research tool of portraying, interpreting, inquiring, and critiquing social context and ideologies reflected in texts. On the other hand, CDA, together with Halliday's Grammatical Metaphor (GM) in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), was also applied in the analysis of various political discourses and advertisements. These researches have also shown how politicians and advertisers make the text/talk persuasive, significant, appealing and obscure, as well as how they convey their intended objectives to the audience [1-3,10].

In China, huge amount of research has been conducted on news analysis through CDA. In specific to the news about the South China Sea, some researchers investigated the national image in the news [4, 8, 23, 24]. Other studies are concerned about the relationship between China and the involved countries [9, 16]. However, few researches have been done on the relationship between China and the involved countries in terms of CDA to the news of the South China Sea Issues. This paper is thus designed to investigate the relationship on the news by Chinese newspapers and to see what ideology carried by the national newspaper agency through the CDA approach, which is combined with Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research purposes

This paper is to disclose the hidden ideology of the news on South China Sea from Chinese news agency. It mainly focuses on the exploration on the relationship between China and the involved countries. It aims to explore and analyze the relationships among three objects – language, power and ideology, and to reveal how the discourse conveys the newspaper's staged-managed and pre-planned goals to the audience.

3.2 Data collection

The research is a qualitative one. In consideration of the factors such as influence, feasibility and correlation, the Chinese news resource, i.e. Xinhua News Agency was selected. This is because Xinhua News Agency is one of the main sources of news to Chinese media, whose website is regarded as “the most influential website of China”.

Through surfing the websites <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/> and <http://edition.cnn.com/>, six samples were collected from Xinhua News Agency, which fell in September to October in 2016 when the South China Seas Issue was heating up again because of a series of interwoven hot issues. These issues are involved with South China Sea arbitration, and Japan claims to strengthen its activities in the contested waters, through joint training patrols with the United States and the new president Duterte's visit to China.

For the sake of the diversity, centrality and novelty, three typical events which differ from each other were chosen. Specifically, the first event happened at the time when Chinese ships went around 130 miles west from the Philippine island. The second event is concerning that Japan wanted to get involved in the South China Sea. The third event is concerning a very important issue that Duterte visited China.

3.3 Procedures of data analysis

The data were analyzed in reference to Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model together with

Halliday's SFG [11]. Specifically, the first stage was involved with the description process. It mainly focuses on the ideational meta-function in terms of lexical choice, i.e. classification and transitivity. In other words, key word choices of the news such as verbs and nouns were explored and compared. And then, the transitivity which includes six processes – material process, verbal process, relational process, behavioral process, mental process and existential process were elaborated in accordance with data by steps. Finally, the modes of reports of Xinhua Agency were also traced.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The analysis of the data showed that Xinhua News Agency had a strong wish to construct a good bilateral relationship between China and the south-sea involved countries. These assumptions are manifested in the followings.

4.1.1 Manifestation of the relationship at lexical choices

As Van Dijk (1988) pointed out, lexical choices would embody the values and standard to express the value judgment [20]. The following analysis of the use of nouns and verbs would reflect some ideologies of China's news agency.

In terms of the use of verbs, Xinhua used "opposed" in the sentence "China opposed outside interference in South China Sea issue" to declare the attitude that China resisted interference determinedly. Furthermore, Xinhua used "hopes" to manifest China wanted to solve problems in a peaceful way and to show the wish of harmonious coexistence with ASEAN. While in some other newspapers, the word is always taken place by the word "claim", which might indicate the statement of China is not true. In terms of the meaning of "hope", China might express a good expectation toward the relationship and to put the collision aside. Finally, Xinhua used "maintain peace and stability", "safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests" and "work together" to voice that the activities China had done was to preserve peace and guarantee the territorial integrity of the land.

Moreover, some key nouns related to South China Sea have been employed by the Xinhua agency to confirm China's rights of South Sea and China's friendship with the involved countries. Specifically, the word "inference" shows inviolability of Chinese territory and "issue" shows the South China Sea was just a problem – a problem to be solved. In addition, Xinhua used "arbitration" and "the unilateral filing" to describe the behavior of other countries on the South China Sea to express its dissatisfaction. All these words have show a positive attitudes toward the relationship between China and involved countries because the news managed to avoid using "tensions" "dispute" and similar words or phrases. This is also avoid leaving an impression on readers that the issue of the South China Sea was an international problem rather than a country's problem, which gives other countries an excuse to get involved in South China Sea event.

4.1.2 Manifestation of the ideology through transitivity

The transitivity system is serviceable to analyze the ideology behind the discourse. Transitivity contains six processes – material process, verbal process, relational process, behavioral process, mental process and existential process. As Hu defined (2013), firstly, material process is that in which something is done. In other words, "doing" is the key in this process, which is also a simple method to find the material process in the sentences or clauses. Secondly, mental processes display some mental phenomena such as "perception", "reaction" and "cognition". To put it simply, seeing and hearing belong to perception, loving and hating pertain to reaction, and understanding and thinking are listed in cognition. Thirdly, the relational process is a process of "being". Attributive and identifying are two types of the relational processes. Fourthly, the verbal processes are those of exchanging information. In other words, "saying" is the critical point. Fifthly, behavior process is concerned with two kinds – physiological

behavior as well as psychological behavior like breathing, coughing, smiling, crying, and dreaming. Finally, the existential process relates something exists or happens. An iconic sentence pattern of this process is “there be”. Table 1 illustrated the processes from the data.

Table 1: Samples of the processes in Xinhua

| Process types | Category meanings | Example |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| Material: Action | Doing, happening | China and ASEN countries have made positive efforts in implementing the South China Sea Declaration and the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea |
| Mental: Perception, Affection, Cognition | feeling, sensing, emotive | ASEN nations have realized that the issues in the region should be solved through dialogues and consultations among the region countries. |
| Verbal | saying | “The page about arbitration has been turned over”, he said. |
| Relational | being | This is a historic visit. It is an “a window of opportunity. |

Following this categorization, it was found that the percentage of material process constitute 35.0% in the news. The percentage of verbal process is a little higher than the material process (37.5%). In contrast, the mental process appeared frequently in Xinhua news (15%).

In a certain sense, processes would be chosen in different situations depending on social, cultural and political background. In terms of the material process, the actors can be mainly divided into four parts – China, China and ASEAN, and the Philippines. When the actor was China, Xinhua only mentioned “oppose” to define its position that China opposed other countries to interfere the South China Sea issue. When the actors were China and ASEAN, Xinhua pointed out the cooperation between the two parts. On the side, Xinhua used “have made”, “complete”, “work together”, “maintain”, “reached” and “restart” to declare that China had built a good relationship with the involved countries and would maintain the ties in the future with great efforts. Finally, when the actor was the Philippines, Duterte was the main character actually. Words such as “arrived”, “choosing” and “meet” were used in news from Xinhua, which aimed to highlight the good relationship between two parts.

Secondly, in terms of the mental process, Xinhua made the wish of keeping good relationship prominently. It has more appreciation toward the new president of Philippine. Most importantly, Xinhua used the word “applauds” which means highly praise.

Thirdly, in terms of the relational process, Xinhua used attributive relational processes to make the attitude clear that China was opposed to the interference of other countries and China was confident to build good relationship with ASEAN. Moreover, China was sociable to maintain friendship with the Philippines.

Fourthly, in terms of the verbal process, Xinhua cited the discourse from Liu and used “said” most of the time to declare for neutrality in the events mentioned in this thesis. This also confirm what was stated above, because in some other new resources, words such as “claim” and “reclaim” to emphasize the hardball of China were often employed.

4.1.3 Modes of news reports

According to Fairclough’s theory [5,6], modes of news reports should be divided into three kinds – direct speech, indirect speech and slipping mode. In the field of direct speech, the original sentence without any change will be stated in the news. Indirect speech means that the reporter changes the sentences through transforming voice, view of person or some grammatical change. Slipping mode falls in between, which has features both in direct speech and indirect speech. Reporters are allowed to express their own understandings and meanwhile report the original intention by copying technical terms or some key words. No matter what kind of modes reporters use, concealed ideology would be manifested.

Following this way, it was found that indirect discourses have been employed most frequently (Indirect discourse, 70.6%; Direct discourse, 11.8%; Slipping mode, 17.6%). This finding is not strange, as Fairclough (1989) put, news agencies would like to combine the objectivity and hidden ideology together to achieve their purposes and to express their ideologies [5].

4.2 Discussion

The assumptions toward the relationship between China and the involved countries might be due to national economy, culture and politics. Firstly, as regards the economical factors, South China Sea issues can be seen as an international conflict of economic interest. China is supposed to defend its rights, which is consistent with the result concluded by the preceding researchers [22-24]. All of them have discussed that even if the problem of ownership is not solved, China will strive to defend it.

In terms of the cultural aspect, as the Analects recorded, “Harmony is what matters”. In other words, harmony has been highly valued in the Chinese Confucian culture [15]. It is a state of existing and improving, and a confirmation of balance and relationship among oneself, others, society and nature. Being extended to the South China Sea issue, harmony can be seen as a stable state where the relation among homeland, other countries, society i.e. the world and territory. The above is also one reason that President Hu stuck to philosophy of harmony in the Summit on the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations. Therefore, China holds the views of “Harmonious World”, which will be represented in the news.

The last is the political aspect. Chinese government inspects and looks at the ASEAN-China relationship with a concept of “Fate Community”. China tends to construct “ASEAN-China Fate Community” together with the involved countries. Increasing strategic mutual trust and forming cooperative relationship are also expectations that China wants to attain. China news agency managed to argue that the issue is a bilateral dispute relating to territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, which means no intrusion from the third [18].

5. Conclusion

The study investigated the relationship among language, power, and ideology. After the analysis of the news from Xinhua, it finds that the relationship between the involved countries and China was friendly constructed in terms of lexical choices, distribution of processes in transitivity. China assumes that the involved countries and China are in harmony. And the ideologies of China’s news agency were caused by the economic benefits, national cultures and political stands. Therefore, the study has further confirmed that news could be explored by the CDA to make the readers deeply understand its hidden ideologies.

However, due to the fact that sample size is small in this study, the objectivity and sufficiency of the study might not be fully addressed. Therefore, sufficient data are supposed to be collected, classified and analyzed for a further study.

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Appendix

China opposes outside interference in South China Sea issue: Vice FM (Excerpt)

Source: Xinhua | 2016-09-08 | Editor: Mu Xuequan

VIENTIANE, Sept. 8 (Xinhua) -- It is not appropriate for some countries outside the region to push the

so-called South China Sea “arbitration” at the East Asia Summit, which runs against the trend of solving disputes through dialogues and consultations, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin said on Thursday.

All leaders of ASEAN countries speaking at the summit supported the efforts that have been made by China and ASEAN countries to implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), Liu told a press briefing after the summit.

Only two countries outside the region proposed to push the “arbitration”, Liu said, adding that instead of solving problems, such a meddling act can only expand differences and contradictions, to which China is firmly opposed.

China and ASEAN countries have made positive efforts in implementing DOC and the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC), he said, noting that before the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting in July 2017, the two sides will complete drafting a COC framework so as to let consultations enter a substantive discussion phase.

“Some countries outside the region intend to meddle after seeing regional nations make progress on strengthening cooperation,” Liu said, adding that ASEAN nations have realized that the issues in the region should be solved through dialogues and consultations among the countries in the region.

ASEAN countries have learned that the key to solving the South China Sea issue should be held in their own hands and they should return to the channel of a complete and effective implementation of the DOC, and only strengthening cooperation and building mutual trust can safeguard East Asia's peace and security and maintain its economic prosperity, he said.

“The page about arbitration has been turned over,” he said, adding that China hopes countries concerned should not sow discord again between China and ASEAN.

“It is the Cold War mentality to count on bilateral defense cooperation and military alliance to safeguard East Asian peace,” Liu said, stressing the need to formulate a new Asian security concept.

Meanwhile, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has sent a signal of improving bilateral relations with China after he took office, and China is confident that Sino-Philippine ties could be improved with the joint efforts of the two sides.