

A Critical Discourse Analysis of COVID-19 Coverage from the Perspective of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework

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Abstract: This study investigates news reports of COVID-19 in *The New York Times* and *China Daily* from February 2020 to April 2020 utilizing Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for analysis of discourse. This paper is to explore the changes of the focuses of the two media's coverage on COVID-19, the images of China created by them, and the ideological differences between China and America behind the news reports.

Keywords: Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Covid-19

1. Introduction

COVID-19 is a major public health event in human history which has been of great concern since its outbreak in early 2020. News reports, as the most disseminating media, are an important source of information for the public. People seek information about the crisis and evaluate the cause of the event and the organizational responsibility for the crisis based on media coverage of the crisis. Therefore, it is important to look at how the media frame a crisis event, the cause of the crisis, and the actor responsible for it because those frames influence the public's perception and impressions of the organization (Coombs, 2006). Although news reports emphasize objectivity, it is inevitable that the information they convey is often formed after the subjective reflection of objective facts by the reporter. Therefore, the ideology hidden in the news report plays a subtle but crucial role in guiding the public.

This essay investigates the news reports of COVID-19 in *The New York Times* and *China Daily* to explore the attitudes conveyed by the two media through news reports and dig out the different ideologies of the two countries.

2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1. Research Objects

The *New York Times* is one of the most influential newspapers in the United States. *China Daily* has the widest print circulation of any English-language newspaper in China. Therefore, both media have authority.

In this study, we established three corpora according to the COVID-19 reports of the two media from February 2020 to April 2020.

2.2. Theories Used for the Study

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a linguistic trend developed in the European linguistics field in the late 1970s, aiming at analyzing the relationship between discourse, power and ideology. The reason why this research chose Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model of critical discourse as its theoretical framework is that Fairclough combines discourse analysis with social theory. His focus is political, upon the discursive event within relations of power and domination. (Norman Fairclough, 1993)

Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis of critical discourse has three dimensions or facets: it is a spoken or written language *text*, it is an instance of *discourse practice* involving the production and interpretation of text, and it is a piece of *social practice*. (Norman Fairclough, 1993)

In this paper, the text analysis includes the word frequency and index line analysis. The discourse practice analysis includes the news source analysis. And the social practice includes the analysis of ideologies of China and America.

2.3. Methodology

Firstly, build corpora. We obtained COVID-19 reports in The New York Times and China Daily by searching for “COVID-19”, “virus” and “coronavirus”, and retained news reports with strong correlation. Three corpora were established with the same standard.

Secondly, analyze the corpora in detail. We used AntConc (Version 4.0.3) to conduct the analysis of high-frequency words and index lines of these words based on Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework for analysis of discourse. Word frequency analysis is to determine the hot spots and their changing trends through the variation of word frequency. The index line analysis is to further dig out the attitude and ideology behind these high frequency words.

3. Data Analysis and Results

3.1. Corpus of February

3.1.1. Word Frequency Analysis

AntConc (Version 4.0.3) was used to sort the high-frequency words in this corpus, and the meaningless words were manually deleted. The top 15 high-frequency words were obtained and made into Table 1.

Table 1: The top 15 high-frequency words.

The New York Times			China Daily		
Total No. of Word Types: 2344			Total No. of Word Types: 2389		
Total No. of Word Tokens: 10464			Total No. of Word Tokens: 10508		
Rank	Type	Freq	Rank	Type	Freq
1	China	86	1	China	124
2	coronavirus	64	2	said	103
3	said	63	3	virus	67
4	people	46	4	coronavirus	58
5	new	46	5	medical	57
6	Wuhan	37	6	epidemic	55
7	Chinese	35	7	people	51
8	virus	34	8	novel	35
9	continue	32	9	Wuhan	34
10	health	32	10	outbreak	33
11	government	31	11	control	32
12	outbreak	31	12	patient	30
13	official	28	13	Chinese	29
14	death	27	14	waste	27
15	wildlife	25	15	fight	25

In February 2020, COVID-19 had not spread widely in the world, and the newly confirmed cases in China were increasing rapidly.

Table 1 shows that the high-frequency words in this corpus are generally similar, including “China”, “coronavirus”, “Wuhan”, “outbreak” and so on. Both media focused on the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan and its impact.

However, the difference is that The New York Times used high-frequency words including “government”, “official”, “wildlife” and “death”, while China Daily used “medical”, “patient”, “waste”, “control” and “fight”. The New York Times paid attention to the death rate caused by the pandemic, wildlife trafficking, measures taken by Chinese government, etc. China Daily focused on the medical

facilities, pandemic situation, etc.

3.1.2. Analysis of Index Lines

"China" is the most frequently used word. Therefore, we read the index lines of China and found that both media cited a lot of data.

The data cited by The New York Times are mainly related to wildlife trafficking (e. g. 1) and pandemic situation in China (e.g. 2), intending to create the false image that the pandemic was caused by China and Chinese government's inability to control the situation.

- 1) China has approved **54** wild species for commercial breeding and sale, including ...
- 2) The number of infections over all in China now far exceeds that of SARS, rising above **40,100**, compared with **8,000** then.

The data cited by China Daily are mostly related to medical workers (e.g. 3), pandemic situation (e.g. 4), and measures taken by the community to fight the pandemic (e.g. 5). China didn't avoid reporting the number of new cases and deaths. Instead, China used these statistics to show that the pandemic situation in China was getting better thanks to China's effective measures to comfort the public.

- 3) Every 50 patients will be taken care of by four doctors and 12 nurses.
- 4) Hubei... remains the top priority in epidemic control, as the province reported 14,840 additional coronavirus cases ...
- 5) ... asked 449 teams that were engaged in poverty alleviation to help prevent local people from getting infected with the virus.

3.2. Corpus of March

3.2.1. Word Frequency Analysis

AntConc (Version 4.0.3) was used to sort the high-frequency words in this corpus, and the meaningless words were manually deleted. The top 15 high-frequency words were obtained and made into Table 2.

Table 2: The top 15 high-frequency words.

The New York Times			China Daily		
Total No. of Word Types: 2598			Total No. of Word Types: 2389		
Total No. of Word Tokens: 10154			Total No. of Word Tokens: 10508		
Rank	Type	Freq	Rank	Type	Freq
1	said	70	1	China	63
2	coronavirus	65	2	virus	44
3	China	51	3	coronavirus	40
4	new	36	4	said	40
5	people	36	5	medical	36
6	continue	35	6	patient	34
7	Chinese	32	7	day	33
8	wildlife	31	8	hospital	33
9	other	27	9	people	29
10	virus	27	10	covid	24
11	patients	25	11	life	24
12	health	24	12	Chinese	23
13	trade	24	13	first	23
14	country	22	14	passenger	23
15	government	19	15	new	21

In March 2020, the pandemic spread around the world.

Table 3 shows that many of the high-frequency words in the COVID-19 reports of New York Times and China Daily are the same as those in February including "China", "coronavirus", "aid", "Chinese"

and “virus”. However, “patients” and “country” became high-frequency words in New York Times and “medical” and “hospital” became high-frequency words in China Daily.

Since March, the number of infected people in the United States has gradually increased. The New York Times paid more attention to the pandemic in its own country. But, it didn't forget to defame China. The epidemic in China was under control and the figure of new cases fell into single digits. China Daily's coverage focused on China's following arrangements for the resumption of industry.

3.2.2. Analysis of Index Lines

"Said" is the most frequently used word. Therefore, we read the index lines of “said” and found a lot of quotations.

The New York Times quoted lots of experts' remarks. But many of them are individualistic and fabricated. (e.g. 1) By citing these inappropriate remarks, The New York Times intended to convince readers that China's pandemic measures are not effective. They wanted to secure America's status as superpower by smearing China.

1) “The Chinese government has created an enormous problem for itself by encouraging wildlife use,” ...

China Daily quoted lots of words from medical staff (e.g. 1) and the public (e.g. 2). By quoting the words of ordinary people, readers could feel that Chinese government showed great concern to the public. What's more, quoting the words of medical staff can not only make readers feel at ease, but also shows the strong leadership of Chinese government in the pandemic prevention.

2) "It seems that the outbreak of COVID-19 in Hubei has come to an end, although we should be alert to abnormal signals and sporadic cases arising from communities," said Du Bin, director of the hospital's intensive care unit.

3) ... wearing a hat to cover the hair, sun glasses to protect her eyes, a face mask and a pair of gloves. ... That's the only way I could think of to enhance my immunity," the housewife said.

3.3. Corpus of April

3.3.1. Word Frequency Analysis

AntConc (Version 4.0.3) was used to sort the high-frequency words in this corpus, and the meaningless words were manually deleted. The top 15 high-frequency words were obtained and made into Table 3.

Table 3: The top 15 high-frequency words.

The New York Times			China Daily		
Total No. of Word Types: 2623			Total No. of Word Types: 2384		
Total No. of Word Tokens: 10547			Total No. of Word Tokens: 10522		
Rank	Type	Freq	Rank	Type	Freq
1	said	89	1	China	69
2	coronavirus	56	2	said	57
3	state	52	3	coronavirus	53
4	people	38	4	food	41
5	continue	33	5	said	40
6	patients	33	6	Chinese	37
7	new	32	8	people	30
8	health	27	8	virus	30
9	care	27	9	control	28
10	drugs	25	10	health	27
11	cats	24	11	Wuhan	25
12	virus	23	12	new	24
13	pandemic	21	13	covid	23
14	reopen	18	14	measures	22
15	medical	16	15	countries	21

In April 2020, COVID-19 broke out around the world. The number of COVID-19 cases in China has barely increased, while the number of new cases in the US has increased rapidly.

Table 3 shows that high-frequency words in The New York Times and China Daily became different. What stands out is that the word "China" did not rank among the top 15 in high-frequency words in The New York Times. It shows that the New York Times paid more attention to the pandemic situation in its own country instead that in China. The United States was in turmoil over the rising number of infections and the Trump administration's infuriating practices.

After achieving a major victory in the fight against the pandemic, China actively helped other countries to fight the pandemic. As a result, China Daily's news reports paid more attention to the pandemic situation both at home and abroad.

3.3.2. Analysis of Index Lines

"Said" is the most frequently used word. Therefore, we read the index lines of "said" and found a lot of quotations.

In April 2020, the New York Times shifted its reporting focus from pandemic situation in China to domestic pandemic. The United States began to organize people to stay at home to control the spread of the virus. The New York Times quoted remarks from the public (e.g. 1) and the officials (e.g. 2). From what quoted in The New York Times, we can also see the increasingly fierce contradictions in the United States caused by a series of statements and behaviors inconsistent with science by the Trump administration, especially the opposition of the American people.

1) "I give President Trump no credit," she told Jake Tapper on CNN. "He actually caused this challenge, by tweeting for weeks that we should liberate our economies. And when someone took him up on it, he did as he normally does, which is bend to what he thinks public opinion is."

2) Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, said Americans should expect social distancing guidelines to continue for months. "Social distancing will be with us through the summer," she said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

China Daily paid more attention to the pandemic situation abroad so it quoted many words of foreign people (e.g. 3).

3) In Kansas, Governor Laura Kelly said: "It would be a disaster if we had to shut down, so we're trying to do everything that we can to keep those plants online."

3.4. Ideological Differences

According to Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis of critical discourse, all kinds of discourse are social practices subject to specific ideology, and critical analysis of discourse cannot be separated from the macro-level analysis of discourse as social practices. The following part analyzes the ideological differences between China and America reflected in the two newspapers.

First, differences in social nature. As a socialist country, China gives top priority to the security and interests of the people. When faced with the COVID-19 outbreak, the Chinese government's first concern was how to prevent the spread of the pandemic to ensure the health and safety of the people. Therefore, the Chinese government invested a lot of money to control the spread of the virus and made effort to save people's life. As a developed capitalist country, although the United States has advanced medical technology, money is basically in the hands of capitalists. In the face of the pandemic, capitalists were more concerned with reducing their losses, although Congress wants to do this as soon as possible.

Second, differences in political systems. China is a socialist country under the people's Democratic dictatorship. Faced with such a major public health event, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) led the pandemic prevention work across the country. Governments at all levels strictly implemented the instructions issued by the CPC, and the pandemic was quickly under control. However, the United States is a federal republic with less power in Congress. States in the United States have a great deal of autonomy, and the governor needs to protect the interests of the state first, and then the interests of the country. As a result, when the pandemic broke out in the United States, it was difficult to control the pandemic with national strength.

Third, differences in culture and history. As we all know, the United States is a young country. From the independence Movement to the Civil War, to the anti-fascist wars, for nearly 250 years, the United States has been struggling for freedom. While China's five thousand years of history has brought

collectivism to the Chinese people.

Fourth, differences in foreign policies. To safeguard world peace and promote common development is the aim of China's foreign policy. China has always assumed its responsibility as a major country and helped other countries tide over the pandemic, even when its own country was in dire straits. America's foreign policy is hegemonic. Therefore, from the New York Times reports from February to March, we can also see that the US has always been smearing and framing China, trying to use the pandemic to suppress China and consolidate its status as a world power.

4. Conclusions

Based on the New York Times and China Daily's coverage of COVID-19 from February to April 2020, this paper establishes corpora to analyze the similarities and differences of the news reports in the two medias. Furthermore, this paper analyzes the causes of the ideological differences between China and the United States from the perspectives of social nature, political system, culture and history, and foreign policy.

However, the main shortcoming of this paper is that the corpus is small and the accuracy of data needs to be improved.

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