

Critical Discourse Analysis Based on Different Media Reports about China

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Abstract: The main purpose of critical discourse analysis is to reveal the implicit relationship among discourse, ideology and rights. Based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar, this paper will conduct a critical discourse analysis of the news reports about China in Boao and Davos forums by many news media. This article aims to explore the different standpoints and intentions conveyed by these news media and stimulate readers' awareness of critical thinking in news reports.

Keywords: News discourse; Halliday; Systemic functional linguistics.

1. Background

The news media or news industry are forms of mass media that focus on delivering news to the general public or a target public. These include news agencies, print media (newspapers, news magazines), broadcast news (radio and television), and the internet (online newspapers, online news magazines, news websites etc.). The functions of news media are: 1) to arouse social attention; 2) to pay attention to the development process of the event; 3) to record the beginning and end of the event; 4) to publicize the power of justice. However, some media outlets are currently biased in their coverage of other countries because of the countries which they serve. While some media outlets maintain the principle of always reporting the facts, some media outlets write reports with a strong ideology.

This article will use AntConc to analyze the content of several Western media reports in the corpus, and determine the ideology of the media by finding the words that appear more frequently in the reports and going back to the original text for content analysis. In this paper, the content will be analyzed by using Halliday's systemic functional linguistics.

2. Literature Review

Halliday derived the notion system of signs from Saussure (1922), information structure from Mathesius (1975), context of the situation from Malinowski (1923) and Firth (1957), threefold functions from Bühler (1934), options from Vachek (1976) and analyzed them then placed function as the central property of language. When Halliday began to develop the theory in the 1960s, the functional model was usually not an organizational model of the language itself but based on considerations outside the language (Halliday, 1985). He tried to explain the configuration of the elements of the natural language based on their functions. Halliday proposed the concept of systemic functional linguistics that there are no fundamental functions of language in human communication. It is argued that communication always has a goal or a motif, and language is used as a means to achieve the goal (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Furthermore, Halliday explained about language metafunctions. There are mainly three functions that a language must serve, namely the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunction. Interpersonal metafunction concerns with the social aspect of language. Humans use

language not only as a means of communicating something, but also as a way of enacting personal and social act. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) stated that humans interact by making propositions, informing, questioning as well as giving an order and making an offer. Furthermore, interpersonal metafunction also focuses on the relationship between the speaker, the message, and the audience. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), speakers put themselves in a particular speech role when communicating and wish their audience to adapt to their role and to give respond. The core components of communication are subject and finite. The finite element is divided into three degrees of polarity namely the low, median, and high polarity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In Halliday's conception of language functions, there is an expression of statement known as declarative category, which is used by meaning maker to state or assert something. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) also considered communication as a rhetorical exchange in which the participants are exchanging commodities in the form of products and services, as well as information.

Halliday recognized the intrinsic language function of creating text, the textual function additionally. Halliday found that language is organized into three functions: ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function. Because of their diversity of the functions of the elements of the language, he identified the term 'meta-function' as his "own model" to interpret functions of language (Halliday, 1975). The term meta-function distinguishes the comprehensive functions from the micro-functions such as Theme, Subject, and Actor of grammatical organization and the macro-functions such as instrumental, regulatory, and heuristic of early child language.

The structural function of clauses differs from the structural options of the transitivity system, structural options of the mood system, and structural options of the theme system. But none of these options sets itself fully specifies the structure of the clause; each determines a different set of structural functions. Therefore, the systems based on structural functions are divided into three groups: transitivity, mood, and theme. These tags relate specifically to the clause system in which they relate to these general elements of the language.

Halliday's meta-functions are not the labels of different uses of the language from the external views but the functional principles of the internal organization of lexicogrammar and semantics. All three functions are

simultaneously organized in a clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Ideational function: This function specifies that a language is used to represent our experience of our world. This function can be identified as two functions, namely experiential and logical. The experiential function is organized by the system of transitivity with a typical grammatical resource. This conveys the message about what matters get communicated, participants involved in the communication, and the circumstances where it was taking place.

Interpersonal function: According to this function, language is a resource for communicators, and it directs both speaker and listener to continue the communication process. The interpersonal function is organized by the system of mood and modality with typical lexico-grammatical resources available in a language. The function is to examine the types of relationships established through dialogue, the attitudes of the interacting partners towards one another and towards expression, the types they find interesting, how they take turns negotiating, etc.

Textual function: By this function, language can be demonstrated as a resource for creating and presenting text by facilitating to express the experiences and indicate participants' relationships in the communication process. The textual function is organized by the point of departure- theme and landing point – rheme is the basic textual resources in lexicogrammar. It involves looking at the different types of cohesion, the different patterns of emphasis and emphasis used to bond the different parts of the conversation together, etc.

3. Data and Methods

According to Entman (1996), if the audience lacks rich direct experience of an issue, then their understanding of the issue or event depends greatly on the news media and on the nature of the news narrative. Since foreign publics usually lack the opportunity and experience of comprehensive and in-depth exposure to other countries, the media dependence becomes more evident in the process of generating their international image of a country. Therefore, the type of news media, the choice of news topics, the information and views reported in the news often determine the foreign public's perception of the news involving the image of the country, the trend of international public opinion, and the formation of a country's other image. Existing studies on content analysis through media news reports are mostly based on single media or single event foreign media news coverage analysis and comparative studies of international media for a single event. Therefore, this paper will analyze the coverage of similar forums in the news media of several countries. The forums selected for this article are Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) and Davos. BFA is an unofficial, non-profit, regular, site-specific international organization based in China and co-sponsored by 29-member countries. The World Economic Forum (WEF) is also known as the "Davos Forum" because it was first held in Davos, Switzerland. It is an unofficial international organization that aims to study and discuss problems in the world economy and promote international economic cooperation and exchange. Full consideration should be given to the influence and credibility of the news media, namely the mainstream position of the news media in the world political economy and media market pattern, including economic strength, social reputation, market scope, audience contact habits and degree, the influence of new media, etc. Based on

the above considerations, this paper will analyze news reports about China from The Guardian, BBC, CNN, Reuters News, The Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post in a total number of 117. The news was mostly delivered in recent 10 years.

News media	Report number
BBC	19
CNN	12
The Guardian	16
The Wall Street Journal	10
The Washington Post	2
Reuters News	37
The Associated Press	21

4. Analysis

According to word frequency statistics of BBC reports, it can be found that "economy" appears 51 times, while "economy" appears 38 times, as shown in Figure 1. Some representative reports will be analyzed.

This is a BBC report on the US-China climate change agreement in April 2021. The title of the report is China and US pledge climate change commitment. The relevant word in the original text is:

Is China heading in the right direction on coal? No - its regional governors have been building even more coal plants to stimulate the economy.

"No" in the text clearly shows the writer's disagreement with this matter. The writer used the present perfect continuous tense to describe that Chinese local governments have been building coal plants. It can be told that the writer think China has made their comments without an effective practice. Their regional governors were still using coal-fired power to fuel their local economies with low costs and high returns. With words "even more", using even to strengthen the mood, the writer stressed that China has not kept its promise to reduce carbon emissions. It is also mentioned in the second half of the article:

According to the Climate Action Tracker, an independent scientific analysis that tracks government climate action, China's NDC rating is "highly insufficient" and "are not at all consistent with holding warming to below 2C". China has pledged to peak its emissions by 2030, and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 (that means cutting out all carbon emissions from fossil fuels but still allowing farm emissions of methane - another planet-heating gas). However, China is currently running 1,058 coal plants - more than half the world's capacity. The US, meanwhile, has the worst NDC rating of "critically insufficient" on the Climate Action Tracker.

The author exemplifies that China's current indicator was far from international standards, indicating that China's current actions are far from meeting international requirements. However, the writer only pointed the rate of China and the US, and did not show the data of other countries for comparison. Intended Nationally Determined Contributions of other countries should be listed out to make a right judgement on this problem. So, it could be told that there is a temptation to lead the reader to condemn China and the US. The writer used the adjective "but" to emphasize that China will also emit methane, another planet-warming gas, to illustrate that even if China meets its promised targets, there will still be other actions that contribute to global warming. The writer failed to stress that this is a widespread problem in growing food and that methane emissions are inevitable.

The other article was a commentary on Premier Li Keqiang’s speech at the Boao Forum, reported by the BBC in 2016. The title is China’s growth mantra becoming hard sell.

It can’t be easy being China’s premier these days. Gone are the times when China could flaunt its success on the international stage, touting its ability to grow its economy at a pace the rest of the world envied. All Chinese leaders can do these days is to try to defend their track record, and attempt to reassure the financial community they know what they’re doing when it comes to dealing with the risks the world’s second biggest economy is facing. And that’s exactly what Premier Li Keqiang did during his keynote speech at the Boao Forum. He sought to address all of the concerns that have been raised about his country’s economy in recent months - from worries about an economic slowdown to the volatility in the Chinese currency, the yuan. He also spoke about whether China can manage its difficult transition from a manufacturing and investment-led economy to one that’s

more dependent on services and innovation. Mr. Li admitted that the country is going through a difficult time, but he also pointed to the troubles the global economy is facing and talked of how those troubles are impacting China’s fortunes. Against this backdrop, the premier noted what an achievement it was for China’s massive economy to grow at between 6.5% and 7%. He said the country had enough policy tools left to deal with the risks its economy is facing, and that it has the solutions to fix the problems with debt and over-capacity. A lot of the same stuff that we have heard before, frankly, and often from the premier himself at other international forums. It’s become the mantra for China. But increasingly it is becoming a hard sell. Today’s address was very much about putting on a good face for the world - though it’s doubtful whether the premier’s words will be enough to convince those who have real concerns about China’s economic future.

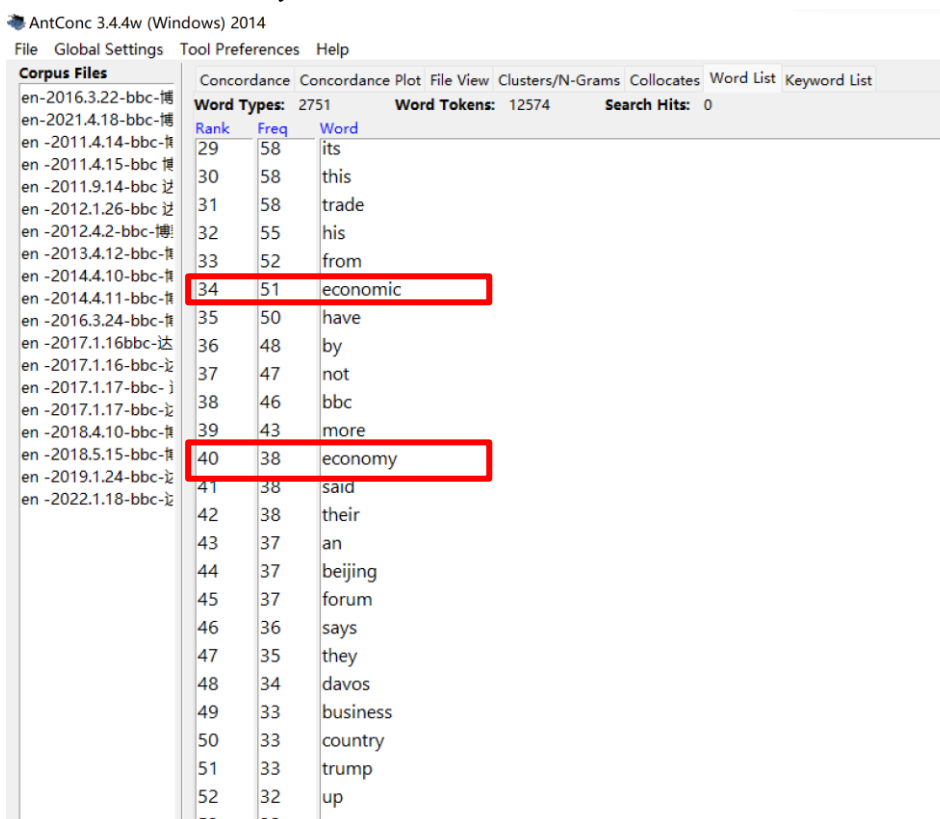


Figure 1. Word frequency statistics of news reports in BBC

The writer used “flaunt” and “touting” in the opening part to explain that there is a recession in China’s economy, indicating that he is not optimistic about China’s economy. Flaunt has the meaning of show off and to exhibit ostentatiously or shamelessly, which could be defined as a negative term. Tout has the meaning of to solicit or importune. It still has a negative connotation. The writer’s use of these two words here shows his disapproval of Chinese leader’s continues use of rapid economic growth to gain recognition on the international stage. This sentence also shows the phenomenon of China’s economic depression, for the later writer of the tie man’s remarks to do the groundwork. In the later part, the writer used two verbs “try”, “attempt” and “sought” to indicate the efforts China do and words they say will not be trusted by other countries. And China still wants to change people’s mind to they can go through the financial problem in their old word. From “defend their track record”,

we can also find the writer has no confidence in China’s economic development and take the future failure of Chinese economy for the fact. The writer used “attempt to reassure the financial community they know what they’re doing” to satirize China for not having the right response to the economic crisis it is facing. “A lot of the same stuff that we have heard before, frankly, and often from the premier himself at other international forums.” This sentence shows the author’s disdain for such cliches, as well as his pessimistic view of China’s economic prospects. The whole article directly reflects the writer’s attitude from the words that expressing attitude, and tries to make the readers jointly question China’s economic strategy and show the attitude of no longer listening to what Chinese leaders have always said to cover they are at a loss.

A word frequency analysis of 21 Associated Press articles shows that “economy” appears 38 times and ranks 51, while

“economy” appears only 15 times and ranks 130, as shown in Figure 2 and 3.

This is an Associated Press report on the speech of president Xi at the Boao Forum.

AntConc 3.4.4w (Windows) 2014

File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help

Corpus Files	Concordance	Concordance Plot	File View	Clusters/N-Grams	Collocates	Word List	Keyword List
en-2015.03.28-美联社	Word Types: 3155			Word Tokens: 15772		Search Hits: 0	
en-2017.01.11-美联社	Rank	Freq	Word				
en-2017.01.18-美联社	47	40	asia				
en-2017.02.11-美联社	48	40	business				
en-2018.03.21-美联社	49	40	development				
en-2018.04.10-美联社	50	38	development				
en-2018.04.11-美联社	51	38	economic				
en-2019.01.15-美联社	52	38	over				
en-2019.03.28-美联社	52	38	over				
en-2019.10.31-美联社	53	38	technology				
en-2020.01.23-美联社	54	37	boao				
en-2021.01.25-美联社	54	37	boao				
en-2021.03.11-美联社	55	36	countries				
en-2021.03.28-美联社	56	36	industry				
en-2021.04.20-美联社	57	36	not				
en-2021.04.20-美联社	57	36	not				
en-2021.04.20-美联社	58	35	his				

AntConc 3.4.4w (Windows) 2014

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Corpus Files	Concordance	Concordance Plot	File View	Clusters/N-Grams	Collocates	Word List	Keyword List
en-2015.03.28-美联社	Word Types: 3155			Word Tokens: 15772		Search Hits: 0	
en-2017.01.11-美联社	Rank	Freq	Word				
en-2017.01.18-美联社	124	16	should				
en-2017.02.11-美联社	125	16	such				
en-2018.03.21-美联社	126	16	tuesday				
en-2018.04.10-美联社	126	16	tuesday				
en-2018.04.11-美联社	127	15	accounts				
en-2019.01.15-美联社	128	15	annual				
en-2019.03.28-美联社	129	15	diseases				
en-2019.10.31-美联社	129	15	diseases				
en-2020.01.23-美联社	130	15	economy				
en-2021.01.25-美联社	131	15	free				
en-2021.03.11-美联社	132	15	government				
en-2021.03.28-美联社	133	15	official				
en-2021.04.20-美联社	133	15	official				
en-2021.04.20-美联社	134	15	or				
en-2021.04.20-美联社	134	15	or				
en-2021.04.20-美联社	135	15	out				
en-2021.07.29-美联社	135	15	out				

Figure 2 & 3. Word frequency statistics of news reports in Associated Press

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday called for a rejection of hegemonic power structures in global governance, amid growing tensions between Washington and Beijing over a widening range of issues including alleged human rights abuses. Speaking at the annual Boao Forum for Asia, Xi criticised efforts by some countries to “build barriers” and “decouple”, which he said would harm others and benefit no one. China has long called for reforms of the global governance system to better reflect a more diverse range of perspectives and values from the international community, including its own, instead of those of a few major nations. It has also repeatedly clashed with the biggest stakeholders in world governance, particularly the United States, over a range of issues from human rights to China’s economic influence over other countries. “The world wants justice, not hegemony,” Xi said in remarks broadcast to the forum. “A big country should look like a big country by showing that it is shouldering more responsibility,” he said.

The Associated Press report is a direct paraphrase of what the speaker said, without adding the author’s claims. The words used are neither positive nor negative and faithfully convey the truth. There is no bias in the events mentioned in

this report. The content in the second half of this story mentioned:

As the Biden administration rallies other democratic allies to harden their stance on China, Beijing is seeking to strengthen ties with its autocratic partners and economically dependent neighbours in Southeast Asia.

The writer mentions that the United States has taken measures to sanction China, and the writer does not criticize China’s measures to solve their problem. This report shows the neutrality of the newspaper’s language, which aims to relay facts. However, from the content of another report, we can judge more carefully whether the discourse is oriented or not.

Xi’s comments reflected the ruling Communist Party’s desire for global influence to match China’s status as the second-largest economy and frustration at what party leaders see as U.S. efforts to block its ambitions. Those sentiments have been fueled by sanctions imposed by former President Donald Trump that block access to U.S. processor chips and other technology for Chinese tech giant Huawei and some other companies. Some of Xi’s comments clashed with Beijing’s stepped-up military activity in the South China Sea

and other areas where its territorial claims conflict with those of Japan, the Philippines, India and other countries. “No matter how far it develops, China will never seek hegemony, expand, seek spheres of influence or engage in an arms race,” Xi said. China’s military spending is the second-highest after the United States. Beijing is developing nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, submarines, stealth fighters and other weapons to extend its military reach.

The article says China is angry because the United States is limiting its technological development. It made clear which Chinese companies were targeted by the U.S. restrictions. The whole thing is described in declarative sentences with the facts. The reader can judge the thing according to their own opinion. The same goes for the rest of the report. China has always insisted that there will be no arms race, while China is

second only to the US in spending on its military. By describing the facts, the writer questions China’s failure to keep its promise. There is no clear direction in the statement, but it makes readers realize that China is not living up to its promises and allows readers to compare and judge the words of Chinese leaders. It can be seen that the Associated Press prefers to state the facts and allow readers make their own judgment about the content. It does not use words with clear meaning of praise or criticism to comment on the event, so as to influence readers’ judgment.

According to the word frequency statistics of news reports in Reuters, it can be found that “economic” appears 43 times in rank 53, while “economy” appears 42 times in rank 55, as shown in Figure 4. Some representative reports will be analyzed.

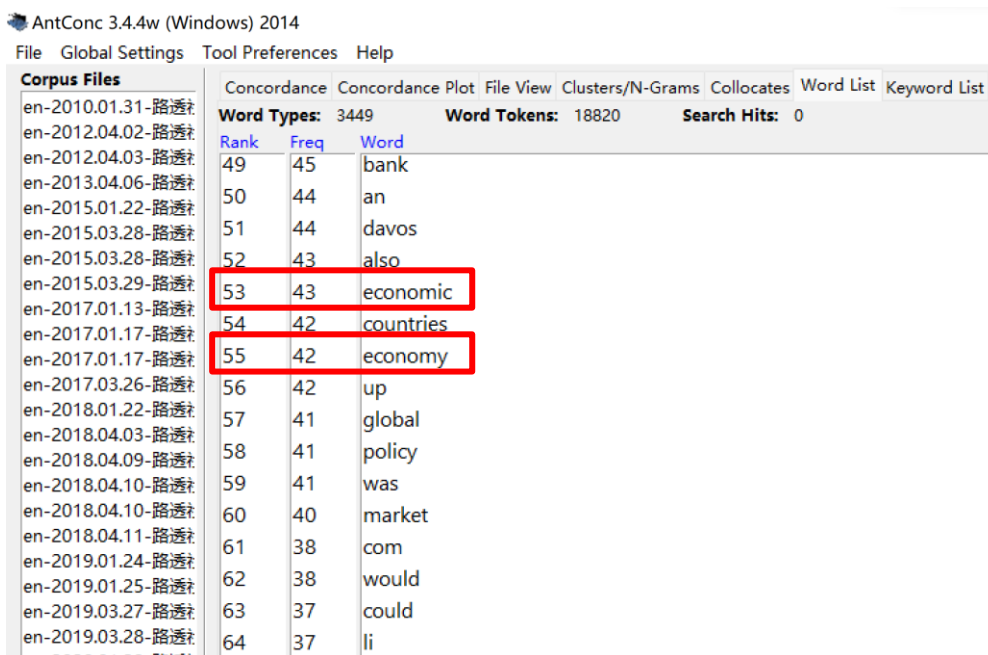


Figure 4. Word frequency statistics of news reports in Reuters

China’s big factories were surprisingly busy in March as a stream of new orders lifted activity to an 11-month high, but credit-constrained smaller manufacturers struggled, suggesting that the economy is still losing steam. Annual economic growth is widely expected to slow to just over 8 percent in the first quarter from 8.9 percent in the previous quarter - the fifth consecutive quarter of slower growth.

In this report, the author objectively expresses the fact that China’s economy is still not recovering by first describing the huge increase in orders of China’s large manufacturers and the fact that small manufacturers are still facing economic problems. This leads to the possibility that China’s economy will also face a slowdown in the first quarter of 2012. “The fifth consecutive quarter of slower growth” including facts that have happened and plausible speculation. And it leads readers to accept the condition that there is a recession in China’s economy in manufacturing. By combining facts with reasoning, the writer eventually leads the reader to an unproven result, but the process seems reasonable.

The comments came as a growing number of analysts cut their China growth forecasts due to extended COVID-19 lockdowns in many big cities, which have clogged highways and ports, stranded workers and shut factories.

In this sentence, the author first directly explains what he wants to express, and then adds a reason analysis, which makes the content very convincing.

Under the so-called “One Belt, One Road” initiative, China aims to create a modern Silk Road Economic Belt and a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to boost trade and extend its global influence. Commerce Minister Gao Hucheng said previously that more than 50 countries had shown interest in the initiative.

The meaning of the word “so-called” implies a meaning of disagreement. The writer used this expression here to convey his unfavourable attitude towards the Belt and Road Initiative. The writer’s feelings and attitudes are not reflected in the content of the latter part, but the reader will still doubt the reliability of this initiative in the case of the previous preparation.

5. Conclusion

Systemic-functional grammar provides a multi-level and multifunctional theoretical framework for news discourse analysis. The explicit ideological meaning in a discourse is easy to identify because it is mainly embodied in the conceptual meaning of words, while many subtle meanings are hidden in something that seems to be common sense. Therefore, understanding the structural characteristics of English transitive and modal systems will enable us to express our language more accurately, enhance our sensitivity to language manipulation, and help us to reveal the ideological

meaning contained in discourse. Different news media expressed different political positions in reporting events, reflecting different ideologies behind them. Thus it can be seen that Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics objectively presents how the speaker or author conveys the ideology and power hidden behind the words through discourse. This article is expected to stimulate readers' awareness of critical language in news reports, so as to realize objective analysis of news reports and understand the truth.

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