Discursive Othering in the Fighting Against COVID-19: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the China-Related Coverage of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT
This study takes the coverage of China related COVID-19 news as the data to examine how a global epidemic is being reported. Through a corpus assisted analysis of the keywords and collocations, together with a qualitative examination of the discursive strategies, we find that an epidemic paralyzed China who adopts ineffective epidemic prevention measures is constructed. Using headline as a mini narrative, and headlines as a moral lecture are the commonly adopted discursive strategies. The findings have some implications for the fair-minded communication across countries in the era of the global fight of the pandemic.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, China, COVID-19

I. INTRODUCTION
A new crown pneumonia (COVID-19) broke out in China at the start of the new year in 2020 and then spreaded to the whole world after March. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, great attention has been paid to how the epidemic was dealt with in China. Newspapers like The New York Times, Guardian, Times and etc. have released reports on the development of the epidemic in China. In the era of globalization, where the ties between countries are growing closer and closer, people's perception of the outside world is gained and influenced by the media. Media's coverage of international affairs directly influences people's emotional attitude towards a country.

Current research on China-related news coverage focuses on China's national image in terms of what kind of image is constructed by examining political, economic and cultural events. COVID-19 epidemic is a public health emergency that does not involve political factors. Understanding media's coverage of the new coronary epidemic will give us a better understanding of how a public health emergency is represented by news media, and how media ideology, as a mediator of the social events and media discourse, plays its role in the representation of a public health emergency.

This study, therefore, aims to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the China-related coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, with the hope to explore media ideology in the coverage of a global public health emergency.

II. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was first proposed by Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew (1979) in Language and Control. CDA is mainly concerned with the role of discourse in institutionalization, the reproduction of power, the abuse of power (domination), and therefore is particularly interested in the detailed study of interfaces between local and global social structure, between discourse structure and social structure. The representative figure who made a major contribution to critical discourse analysis is Fairclough (1989), who proposed a three-dimensional theoretical model for discourse analysis in terms of text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. For Fairclough, critical discourse analysis must accordingly include three parts: (1) A linguistic description of the discourse. It can generally be analyzed from the perspective of lexical choice, grammar, and the structure of the discourse; (2) Explaining the relationship between discourse and the discourse process in terms of language behavior, coherence and intertextuality; (3) Explaining the relationship between discourse processes and social processes. van Dijk (1993) points out that the link between discourse and society is not direct, but requires a cognitive
interface, namely, mental models. Therefore, a socio-cognitive perspective of CDA can reveal more of implicit meaning and the interface between discourse and society. In summary, critical discourse analysis pays more attention to implicit meaning and the unbalanced distribution of power. A critical analysis of discourse can uncover the abuse of power and thus contribute to the equality in society.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Data collection

The New York Times, one of the papers with considerable influence in the United States, and The Guardian and The Times, papers with considerable influence in the United Kingdom were selected as the sources of the data. The time period of this study is four months from January 8, 2020 to April 30, 2020, which is the time the COVID-19 was discovered and controlled in China.

News reports were retrieved from the Lexis Nexis Academic (https://www.lexisnexis.com/) academic database by setting the sources as "The New York times", "The Times" and "The Guardian", the keywords as "Coronavirus", "China", the language as "English", and the time duration from 8 January 2020 to 30 April 2020. All together a corpus of 2210 news reports were collected.

Considering that the large number of news reports are far beyond the researchers' ability to deal with, a further sampling was conducted. The sampling principle is that each day, three reports from each newspaper are randomly selected, and if the total coverage of a paper in a day is less than three, all the news reports are selected. Finally, a total of 345 reports are sampled.

B. Analytic procedure

We will first examine the overall coverage of COVID-19 in terms of the tendency of coverage and reporting attitude. Then a corpus assisted quantitative analysis will be performed to analyze the keywords and collocation of the word "China" to explore discursive features of the corpus. Finally, a qualitative analysis is conducted to examine the discursive strategies of the media when China related COVID-19 issues are reported.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. An overview of the coverage

"Fig. 1" shows the overall tendency of the coverage from 8 January to 30 April.

Since January 20, when Chinese expert Zhong Nanshan publicly affirmed the existence of human-to-human transmission of the new coronavirus, the number of reports increased sharply, reaching a peak, followed by a sharp increase in The New York Times and a relatively stable number of reports in The Times and The Guardian. Even when China has controlled the outbreak after February, the overall tendency of reporting has not changed significantly.

"Table I" shows the reporting attitude in the corpus. The overall coverage is dominated by negative attitudes, with 30-50 percent neutral coverage, and with relatively little positive coverage. A typical feature is that all the three newspapers mentioned 2003 SARS-related events in China from the very first article and claimed that the seriousness of the epidemic was initially masked.
TABLE I. REPORTING ATTITUDE

| Tendency | The New York Times | % | The Guardian | % | The Times | % |
|----------|--------------------|---|-------------|---|-----------|---|
| Positive | 2                  | 1.11% | 5 | 4.11% | 0 | 0 |
| Neutral  | 60                 | 33.33% | 27 | 36.99% | 43 | 46.24% |
| Negative | 118                | 65.56% | 43 | 58.90% | 50 | 53.76% |
| Total    | 180                | 100% | 73 | 100% | 93 | 100% |

B. A corpus assisted analysis of the keywords and collocations

A keyword analysis could reveal the discursive features of the coverage that distinguish it from other reports. Table II shows the top 30 keywords of the corpus, which can be put into 3 categories.

TABLE II. KEYWORDS IN THE CORPORA

| NO  | Keywords       | Keyness | NO  | Keywords       | Keyness | NO  | Keywords       | Keyness |
|-----|----------------|---------|-----|----------------|---------|-----|----------------|---------|
| 1   | China          | 10491.8 | 11  | people         | 1561.49 | 21  | masks          | 978.32  |
| 2   | coronavirus    | 6278.98 | 12  | said           | 1445.48 | 22  | medical        | 966.38  |
| 3   | Chinese        | 4687.03 | 13  | Hong Kong Kong | 1439.45 | 23  | quarantine     | 936.23  |
| 4   | Wuhan          | 4601.06 | 14  | epidemic       | 1410.07 | 24  | government     | 913.59  |
| 5   | virus          | 4388.19 | 15  | Trump          | 1391.08 | 25  | Xi             | 891.22  |
| 6   | outbreak       | 3953.58 | 16  | spread         | 1322.28 | 26  | Hubei          | 886.27  |
| 7   | health         | 2470.78 | 17  | Sars           | 1201.52 | 27  | authorities    | 884.05  |
| 8   | officials      | 2436.29 | 18  | infected       | 1166.92 | 28  | patients       | 856.33  |
| 9   | cases          | 1902.65 | 19  | disease        | 1129.71 | 29  | travel         | 838.6   |
| 10  | Beijing        | 1655.8  | 20  | global         | 1031.93 | 30  | passengers     | 734.16  |

The first category is related to the epidemic in terms of the location and description of the epidemic. Keywords like "China", "Wuhan" and "Hubei" indicate the epicenter; "coronavirus", "patients", "Sars", "spread", "infected", "virus", "disease", and "outbreak" give a description of the epidemic and its spread. The second category is related to epidemic prevention measures. Keywords like "Chinese", "officials", "Beijing", "Xi", "government" and "authorities" indicate the key figures in the prevention of the epidemic; "masks", "quarantine", "medical" shows the measures being taken. The third category is related to other external actors that of news value to the media, with Trump and Hong Kong being two typical words. To fully uncover how China is discursive constructed in the coverage, we have retrieved the top 30 collocations of the world "China", which can be seen in "Table III".

TABLE III. COLLOCATIONS FOR THE WORD "CHINA"

| NO  | Collocate | Stat | NO  | Collocate | Stat | NO  | Collocate | Stat |
|-----|-----------|------|-----|-----------|------|-----|-----------|------|
| 1   | vocalized | 7.93621 | 11  | condemn   | 7.36505 | 21  | unstoppable | 6.93621 |
| 2   | reciprocated | 7.93621 | 12  | smear     | 7.35125 | 22  | unknowingly | 6.93621 |
| 3   | outnumber | 7.93621 | 13  | expels    | 7.35125 | 23  | unheard     | 6.93621 |
| 4   | interrogate | 7.93621 | 14  | wrested   | 7.35125 | 24  | unescapable | 6.93621 |
| 5   | insidious | 7.93621 | 15  | wrecks    | 7.35125 | 25  | undo        | 6.93621 |
| 6   | hobble    | 7.93621 | 16  | wise      | 7.35125 | 26  | undisrupted | 6.93621 |
| 7   | ousting   | 7.93621 | 17  | wheels    | 7.29878 | 27  | underplaying | 6.93621 |
| 8   | improvising | 7.93621 | 18  | wealthier | 7.19924 | 28  | undergraduates | 6.93621 |
| 9   | opposes   | 7.52117 | 19  | unwillingness | 7.12885 | 29  | undercutting | 6.93621 |
| 10  | confuse   | 7.52117 | 20  | unsurpassed | 6.93621 | 30  | unavailable | 6.93621 |
Collocations of the word "China" is characterized by words of negative semantic features. On the one hand, collocates like "outnumber", "unstoppable", "hobble", "inescapable", "undo" and "insidious" indicate the uncontrollable spread of the epidemic in China, by which an epidemic paralyzed China is constructed; on the other hand, collocates like "interrogate", "expels", "wrested", "unheard", "smear", "improvising", and "wreak" put the blame on China and show the media's suspicion of China's epidemic prevention measures, which has been proved effective later in the battle against the epidemic.

C. Analysis of discursive strategies

1) Headline as a negative mini narrative: Headline presents the topic of an event in a concise manner from a certain perspective. An examination of the corpus shows that in the coverage of China's performance in COVID-19, news headlines were used as a negative mini narrative to inform the readers not only of what had happened, but also the media's negative evaluation of the occurrence as well. Four categories of news headlines were identified.

The first category presents a negative evaluation of the government. In a report entitled "Virus Spreads as World Pays for Dictator Xi," a dictatorial government and leader were constructed in the headline narrative by using just one sentence. Other examples of headlines in this category are "Offers to Send Expertise to China Remain Ignored", "Chinese Officials Race to Contain Anger Over Virus", "China Expels 3 Wall Street Journal Reporters as Media Relations Sour" and etc. The second category shows the negative influence of the epidemic. Headlines like "Coronavirus Spurs China to Suspend Tours Abroad and Xi to Warn of a 'Grave Situation'" and "Coronavirus Empties European Cities of Chinese Tourists" emphasized the negative influence of the epidemic to China. The third category shows the media's blame of China for the negative global influence. Headlines like "China's Coronavirus Has Revived Global Economic Fears" linked the COVID-19 with China closely by the noun construction "China's" and attributed all the negative global influence of the epidemic to China. The last category presents a negative evaluation of the China's epidemic prevention measures. Headlines like "Many in China Wear Them, but Do Masks Block Coronavirus?" shows the media's doubts on the epidemic prevention measure of wearing mask in China.

2) Headline as a moral lecture: Besides being used as negative mini narratives, headlines were also moral lectures in which what should do and should not do were lectured. An examination of the corpus shows three categories. The first category is a blame of the data sharing. Headlines like "China must share all it knows about this mystery virus" and "The government needs to communicate with the public clearly, honestly and often about the coronavirus" show a moral blame by presupposing that China has not sharing data. The second category is an order for China to pay for the epidemic. Headlines like "Beijing must be called to account after this crisis for its lies about the spread of coronavirus, West can no longer turn a blind eye to China" use the modal verb "must be" to put China on the responsible part of the epidemic's negative influence. The third category is a blame on China's diplomatic policy of expelling American journalists. Headlines like "Trump Administration Considers Punishing Chinese News Organizations" depicted China as morally wrong party by using the word "punish", which presuppose a blame on the party who has made a mistake.

V. Conclusion

This study takes the coverage of China related COVID-19 news as the data to examine how a global epidemic is being reported. Through a corpus assisted analysis of the keywords and collocations, together with a qualitative examination of the discursive strategies, we found that an epidemic paralyzed China who adopts ineffective epidemic prevention measures is constructed. Using headline as a mini narrative, and a moral lecture are the commonly adopted discursive strategies.

van Dijk (1993) argues that the discourse of American news, when reporting on "non-white", "non-capitalist", "non-Western" cultural, racial or social groups, tends to manifest itself in polarized, antagonistic discourse patterns of "positive us and negative them" (Wodak, 2001). Western media's coverage of China is implicitly biased. As Zhang (2020) points out, "Western media coverage of the COVID-19 epidemic far exceeds that of Ebola, reflecting the fear and panic of the Western media and their discrimination against China and Chinese communities.

China's epidemic prevention results have disproved the suspicion of China's epidemic prevention measures. However, all the epidemic prevention measures were misinterpreted in the media discourse. The globalization and global fight of the pandemic calls for a fair-minded communication across countries. Apart from media criticism like the current study, in the practice, social networking such as Twitter Facebook, Tik Tok, and Weibo could be important platforms for people to tell stories of their own and fight against discourse abuse, so that power abuse and biased
communication can be hold and fair-minded communication can be promoted.

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