Discourse Representation of Covid-19 Editorials between China Daily and the New York Times

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Abstract

Since the first COVID-19 pandemic hit China in December 2019, there is a "narrative battle" between China and the US. Misleading and prejudicial coverage of the respective countries has arisen, further influencing the public's opinion and leading to discrimination. Although scholars have begun to explore media reports during the pandemic, very little is known about how the COVID-19 pandemic is reported, discussed, and presented in the Chinese and American media from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. This study investigates linguistic units per se, and further studies the in-depth power relations and social phenomena through employing three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). It analyzes 2 editorials from China Daily (CD) and the New York Times (NYT) to evaluate how the COVID-19 crisis is represented textually, discursively, and socially in CD and the NYT. It finds that both CD and NYT contribute to the rise in the sentiments of opposing each other. The authors suggest global powers should have the responsibility to cooperate with each other at this critical time instead of the "narrative battle".

Keywords: COVID-19, Media Reports, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

On Feb. 3, 2020, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) published an article "China Is the Real Sick Man of Asia", which aroused public anger from China. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in China swiftly blasted the author for his "arrogance, bigotry, and stupidity," accusing the WSJ of being "racially discriminating," and demanded a public apology. After receiving no apology, the Global Times, a prominent Chinese news organization, published an opinion piece on February 18 mocking the WSJ for not having the bravery to even say sorry. The US State Department then recognized five Chinese media outlets as official government entities under the Foreign Missions Act. Beijing replied quickly, issuing five-day notices to three WSJ journalists (Jaworsky & Qiaoan, 2020). The disputes over journalism had begun.

Against the backdrop of the narrative war between China and the US, misleading and prejudicial coverage of the respective countries has arisen, further influencing the public's opinion and leading to discrimination. Although scholars have begun to explore media reports during the pandemic, very little is known about how the COVID-19 pandemic is reported, discussed, and presented in the Chinese and American media from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. This study investigates linguistic units per se, and further studies the in-

depth power relations and social phenomena through employing three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). It analyzes 2 editorials from China Daily (CD) and the New York Times (NYT) to evaluate how the COVID-19 crisis is represented textually, discursively, and socially in CD and the NYT. It finds that both CD and NYT contribute to the rise in the sentiments of opposing each other. The authors suggest global powers should have the responsibility to cooperate with each other at this critical time instead of the "narrative battle".

Methodology

Against the background of the disputes, two editorials are published in CD and NYT respectively. They are "US Media Should Not Play to Anti-China Crowd" (CD, 2020-03-16), and "China's Ill-Timed Attack on the Free Press" (NYT, 2020-03-17). The study analyzes the two editorials through three-dimensional model under CDA approach.

CDA approach has been largely adopted in the analysis of news discourse. Fairclough (1992, 1995) proposes the three-dimensional model, which contains three dimensions to analyze the media reports, namely textual practice (text analysis), discourse practice (processing analysis), and social practice (social analysis). According to Fairclough (1992, P. 3-4), "textual analysis" means analysis the semantics, textual structure, the tone. In addition, the "language established around processes of text generation, diffusion, and consumption" is referred to as discursive practice, which demonstrates an "interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, through which texts are produced and received" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 71). Social practices are broader actions that "constitute social fields, institutions, and organizations to ultimately form 'orders of discourse'", and it is an "explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 71). This approach has been widely used in CDA research around the world because of its explicit relationship with popular critical perspectives.

Data Analysis

Against the background of the disputes, two editorials are published in CD and NYT respectively. They are "US Media Should Not Play to Anti-China Crowd" (CD, 2020-03-16), and "China's Ill-Timed Attack on the Free Press" (NYT, 2020-03-17). The study analysis the two editorials through textual, discourse and social dimensions.

Textual Analysis

CD published the editorial "US Media Should Not Play to Anti-China Crowd" on Mar. 16, 2020. It employs some negative words to criticize China-bashers' actions in the US. This article begins with a sentence: "long been latent anti-Asian sentiment in the US", it employs "latent" to emphasize the anti-Asian sentiment had never disappeared, and remind the public of the unforgettable history in the last few centuries: "Yellow Peril" and "the Red Scare". It implies the discrimination comes again. In the following contents, the editorial employs some phrases, for example "incessant allegations" and "desperate to believe", to attributes the responsibility to Trump administration for the disputes. Also, the editorial emphasizes the rising number of abuse actions is due to the failure of the US testing system and the fear from the US public. In addition, it emphasizes the scenario of the anti-Chinese discrimination. Then the author proceeds to criticize WSJ leads to a sociopolitical crisis due to its disrespect for science and truth. Semantically, the editorial uses "justify" to indicate the unreasonable and captious excuse from WSJ, presents a villain image of this press. Hereby, the employment of "justify" here proves the unreasonable defense of WSJ. Then, CD describes the "so-called

freedom of speech" of WSJ as a "fig leaf" to uncover the ugly image of US media and its intention. In addition, it uses "harbored" to highlight the original desire of the WSJ is full of anti-China racism. Hence, it demonstrates WSJ "added fuel to" the "already poisonous" political atmosphere in the US.

On the other hand, the NYT editorial "China's Ill-Timed Attack on the Free Press" published on March 17, 2020. In the heading, NYT employs "attack" to describe the Chinese response to the US press, which paints China as an attacker, and the US media was described as the "free press", which is the embodiment of justice. In addition, a presupposition is employed in the subheading "Reporting the truth is the only way to stop a global pandemic. Beijing just made that more difficult". In a semantic theory, "presupposition is something the speaker assumed to be case prior of making utterance" (Yule, 1996:25). This subheading makes readers infer that China did not report the truth. Also, NYT employs the clause "Beijing just made that more difficult", to attaches the responsibility for the global spread of COVID-19 to China.Then, NYT proceeds to use "crackdown" to describe China's expulsion on US journalists, which is viewed as an illegal and brutal way, because Journalists are protected by international law. It is an act that puts Chinese authority on the opposite of justice. Then, NYT continues to indicate that this so-called "journalists crackdown" is "an unfortunate echo of the Cold War", it repeatedly employs "Cold War" to describe China as the Soviet Union, and makes China the "enemy" of the US. The author continues to call for "independent and trusted information", which makes the public suspect that China does not provide independent and trusted information. Then, NYT employs the words and phrases, such as "essential" "reliable information" to demonstrate the great significance of the information that China tries to "hide", further indicates implicitly that China had a "hidden conspiracy" for the expulsion of the US reporters. It is followed by the decried statements from US media professionals and US Secretary of State: Mike Pompeo through employing a "Though-lead" transitional sentence. The "Though" clause put the focus on the subsequent clauses, that is "these [the US] publishers are not comparable to the organizations the Communist regimes", which makes the public feel that China has been maliciously taking advantage of the US. NYT then continues to emphasize the negative side of Chinese media, for example, Chinese media are "state-controlled", and "their reports serve the interests of the state and it is common knowledge that their oversize staffs includes spies." In the so-called liberal democratic society, freedom and democracy are embedded in people's values. The media censorship or state-controlled features in an authoritative regime always arise people's hatred. Generally, NYT emphasizes the US media reports "accurate, balanced and comprehensive news and information", contrastly, it could be inferred the value of the Chinese media is "faked, biased, and incomprehensive or fragmented".

Discourse Analysis
According to Zhang et al (2021), the press and broadcast industries in the US are mostly profit-driven businesses that maintain a good financial position in order to exist. Hence, journalists must be aware of their audience's needs. According to Downing (2003), the US media employs a stereotype to satisfy and adapt the taste of the American audience. On the other hand, in socialist China, The Chinese media has been dubbed "the Party's and People's Tongue," as it represents both the government's opinions and the interests of the vast majority of the population. As a result, disasters are generally reported from the viewpoints of the government and the general public (Zhang et al., 2021). Unlike American media, Chinese

media make efforts to eliminate people's fear and anxiety caused by the spread of the epidemic.

Social Analysis

The social-cultural context is the critical factor to be considered. Firstly, in terms of pandemic context, when the editorials were published, the US had declared a national emergency, the pandemic context in the US was getting more serious. Hence, NYT editorial created panic in a strong tone, with the strong blame on China. Secondly, in terms of geopolitical context, after almost three years of the trade war and the disputes over journalism between the two greatest economies, the relationship between the two countries had been extensively damaged. From the perspective of cultural structure, China emphasizes a value orientation centered on collectivism. The interests of society and the state take precedence over the individuals. As a result, in the event of a calamity, the news speech should be based on social stability. However, the American media emphasizes the importance of the individual (Lin, 2001). As a result, individual victims are frequently featured in news coverage of disasters.

Results

It finds that both CD and NYT contribute to the rise in the sentiments of opposing each other. Through the use of negative terms on the other side, both the editorials contribute to the politicization of the pandemic, the NYT editorial board may have inadvertently contributed to the witnessed rise in anti-Asian sentiment across America and around the world. Turn eyes to CD, CD editorial board also contributes to the rising sentiment of anti-Americans through the employment of responsibility frame and rhetorical devices. Differently, NYT uses more attacking terms and plays the active party in the dispute, however, CD is the counter-attack player in this relations, which it employs opposing terms to describe the anti-China actions in the US.

Against the backdrop of an unprecedented global health crisis, global powers have the responsibility to cooperate with each other at this critical time.

Acknowledgement

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