



Pursuit of Power: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the CNN and China Daily South China Sea Reports

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Abstract

With the value of news report prominently increasing, the issue of South China Sea has drawn attention from plenty western media and the public and consequently become a hot topic reported by presses around the globe. CNN and China Daily, the two representative English-language presses from the U.S. and China, tend to adopt different dictions while they report the same event or news from the same source, in order to convey their own attitudes to readers and inculcate different value judgments in an imperceptible way. In this article, with relevant theories and methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and from the perspective of word selection, the author compared and analyzed two pieces of typical news in seven aspects, revealed the inconspicuous ideologies and power factors in the texts so as to help readers cultivate their rational thinking and take critical reading of news reports.

Key words: News English; Critical discourse analysis; South China Sea; Ideology

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INTRODUCTION

Objectivity and authenticity are two basic requirements for news report. However, driven by various interest-based relationships or different ideologies, some news presses always tend to deliberately emphasize some elaborately-selected “facts” and implicitly convey the prejudicial ideologies in the news texts, aiming to influence the readers’ thinking or even mislead them in an imperceptible way. In recent years, with the changing of the international situations, the dispute on sovereignty of South China Sea between China and some Southeast Asia countries is becoming more and more severe, and the South China Sea issue has become one of the most sensitive and hottest problems in the world that involves most countries. With the value of news report prominently increasing, the issue of South China Sea has drawn attention from plenty western media and the public and consequently become a hot topic reported by presses around the globe. On August 10, 2017, the USS McCain missile destroyer, without Chinese Government’s permission, trespassed into the neighboring waters of Nansha Islands in South China Sea and took the so-called “Freedom of Navigation Operations”. The Chinese Army instantly set out its warships to examine, recognize, warn and expel the American warships according to the law (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, n.d.). This event immediately became a focus of attention, drawing broad reports of presses from home and abroad. Reports from the American Cable News Network (abbreviated as CNN below) and China Daily USA Network (addressed as China Daily below) provided us perfect materials for comparing research. CNN has a great influence around the world with over 200 countries rebroadcasting its news and 150 million audiences. And China Daily is our country’s only newspaper that has effectively entered the western mainstream society with the highest reprinting rate by foreign presses and enjoyed sufficient authority and public credibility (Deng, 2015).

In this article, the author selected two pieces of news reports on August 11, 2017 about the South China Sea event respectively from CNN (2017) and China Daily USA (2017), and analyzed the texts with Critical Discourse Analysis theories and methods so as to reveal the inconspicuous ideologies and power factors, help readers cultivate their rational thinking and take critical reading of news reports.

1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND WORD SELECTION

The Critical Discourse Analysis is a language subject that developed in 1980s, philosophically based on Frankfurt School’s critical theories with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer as representatives in 1930s, and linguistically on American anthropologists Sapir & Whorf’s hypothesis about language and mind as well as Halliday’s System-functional Linguistics. Different from the traditional discourse analysis without the context, the Critical Discourse Analysis pays attention to the relating social and historical context and reveals the implied ideologies by analyzing the linguistic forms and structures in the discourse.

While critical linguists are criticizing and analyzing the public discourses, trying to reveal the embodied social ideology, their main tool is modern linguistics, of which Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar takes the dominant position (Chen, 1995). Halliday pointed out

that language has three meta-functions: the ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function, all of which have verified sociality of language and provided tools for Critical Discourse Analysis. The critical linguists, while doing discourse analysis, relate the linguistic forms to the three functions with word selection, passivization, direct quotation, indirect quotation and mood as their tools. In this article, the author is going to, from the perspective of word selection, deeply analyze two pieces of English news discourses and try to reveal the ideologies and points of view behind the texts.

2. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO NEWS REPORTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WORD SELECTION

Lexicon is the reflection to the world by one specific culture (Fowler, 1991). Although the relations between lexical forms and meanings are conventionalized, people’s word selection is neither occasional nor arbitrary, that is to say, the word selection shall serve the construction of meaning. Nuances of expressions and dictions in news reports generally reflect different views, positions and attitudes (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 1989, p.25). We can, as the following table shows how CNN and China Daily are different in the selection of several word categories while reporting the same event, dove into the deep meanings of the reporters try to convey.

Table 1
Difference in Word Selection by CNN and China Daily USA Reporting the South China Sea Event

	CNN	China Daily USA
Nature	Appropriate under international law; “freedom of navigation” operation; “freedom of navigation exercise”; under the banner of ‘freedom of navigation’	Trespassing of a US missile destroyer; provocation; provocative actions under the guise of “navigation freedom”; flaunting of force; promotion of militarization; under the pretext of “navigation freedom”; made unauthorized entry into China’s territorial waters; violated Chinese and international law; harmed Chinese sovereignty and security; endangered the lives of personnel; damaged mutual strategic trust; undermined the development of Sino-US military relations
Location	Man-made island; artificial island; Mischief Reef; Spratly Islands; contentious region; international waters; disputed island; Triton Island; Paracel archipelago; 600 miles from the Chinese coast; surrounded by rich fishing grounds—and potentially by gas and oil deposits	Nansha Islands; Meiji Reef
Time	Thursday; awkward and tense moment; amid the war of words between the United States and North Korea	Late Thursday local time
Move	Performed a drill; shadowed by Chinese frigates	Very displeased with this; bring up the issue with the US side; sent warships to identify the destroyer and warn off it
Reason	Maritime disputes; territorial disputes; China’s claim of sovereignty to the Spratlys; about its neighbors’ claims; encroach upon them; reclaimed land; massive dredging operations; turning sandbars into islands equipped with airfields, ports and lighthouses	Indisputable sovereignty of the Nansha Islands and its adjacent waters
Relevant party	North Korea; Vietnam; Taiwan; Australia; Japan; Malaysia; the Philippines; Brunei	Joint efforts by China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

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	CNN	China Daily USA
Outcome	Punctuated that stance; continue to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows; true in other places around the world; called on Beijing to endorse a legally binding code of conduct	Current situation in the South China Sea has stabilized and maintains a sound development momentum; some parties from outside continue to meddle in the region under the guise of 'free navigation'; take further measures to strengthen homeland defense capacity; increase various defense capability buildups to resolutely protect national sovereignty and security

2.1 Nature of the Event

In its report, CNN described the intrusion event as a “legal and reasonable act abiding by the International Law” and the U.S. was defending and practicing the “freedom of navigation” philosophy. But China believes it is an illegal encroachment for the U.S. destroyer to sail into the South China Sea. On one hand, the U.S. Army was provoking brazenly and making a show of force in disguise of “free navigation” so China’s got to reinforce the militarization in this area; on the other hand, the U.S. destroyer has violated both China’s law and the International Law to sail into China’s territorial waters without permission from Chinese Government, causing threatens not only to China’s territorial sovereignty and national defense security, but also the strategic mutual trust and the development of bilateral relations between the U.S. and China.

It is universally acknowledged that in April 30, 1982, the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea enacted the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, which is praised as the “constitution of the oceans” in current world. At that time, the U.S. was one of the four holdouts. Since its coming into force in November 16, 1994, there have been 167 countries and regions, including China and EU, becoming members of the *Convention*, but the U.S. is still refusing to take part in (SINA, 2016). America’s attitude towards the *Convention* also reflects a maritime hegemony mind of “agreeable, I’m in; non-agreeable, I quit”. However, the U.S., as a country outside the South China Sea region and a non-contracting state of the *Convention* and in order to pursue its Asia-Pacific strategy and get itself involved in the South China Sea dispute, ironically tried to consolidate the legal and moral principles of its involvement with the help of the *Convention*, depicting the intrusion event as a “legal and reasonable act abiding by the International Law”. In terms of the legal principles, the U.S., as a non-contracting state of the *Convention*, has no such rights to negotiate with China about the agreement obligations; even worse, it has infringed China’s sovereignty. In terms of the moral principles, in order for its maritime hegemonic interests, the U.S. has refused to take part in the *Convention*, but now it is intervening other countries’ affairs in pretense of the *Convention*, which uncovered its power politics and hegemonic behavior.

2.2 Location of the Event

In its report, CNN repeatedly emphasized that the South China Sea is “a region of dispute” and “international

waters”, rather than admitting the many islands in this area had always been China’s territory since the ancient time. It also emphasized the South China Sea Islands are located far away from China’s main land, indicating the irrationality of Chinese Government’s claim of sovereignty. According to CNN, China’s claim of sovereignty is meant for the fishery and oil resources in this area; by repeatedly emphasizing these islands are artificial islands and not approving China’s constructing activities, CNN is indicating itself not admitting China’s legitimate rights as a sovereign state which are granted by the International Law. However, China Daily just considered the event as it stands and merely mentioned Meiji Reef in Nansha Islands.

In addition, while translating the islands in the South China Sea, CNN adopted the vernacular words in English language with colonial features, which indicated its denial of the fact that the South China Sea islands are China’s inherent territory. For example, CNN adopted Spratly Islands rather than Nansha Islands and Mischief Reef instead of Meiji Reef. As a matter of fact, the UN has, as early as in 1967, regulated all countries and regions should use the Roman Alphabet for the translation of places in international communications, and each place shall have only one spelling form in Roman Alphabet. For our country, the international standard on translation of place names is actually in accordance with the spelling regulation of Pinyin, which was decided by the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1977 (UN, 1983). Since place names are the product of history as well as the token of the territorial sovereignty, CNN’s declining to spell South China Sea islands in Pinyin reflects the tendentiousness and ideological prejudice of American media.

Meanwhile, in its report of U.S. destroyer’s intrusion event, CNN also mentioned Triton Island and Paracel archipelago, which are not located in the same place as Nansha Islands. Triton Island in Chinese spells as Zhongjiandao (中建島) and Paracel archipelago as Xishaqundao (西沙群島). Triton Island is one of the many islands in Paracel archipelago. The sovereignty of Xisha, as an indisputable historical fact, is all the same with Nansha, both of which were found, named and effectively administered first by China. The exercise of sovereignty and legal principles practices of Xisha are even clearer than that of Nansha. As known to all, China has delimited the base points and baselines of Xisha Islands (i.e. the

Paracel archipelago), which has already been recognized by other ASEAN countries except Vietnam. On this point, Xisha is totally different from Nansha, which is being controlled and ministered by several countries and regions. Therefore, CNN's mention of Xisha in its report of Nansha made its political purpose and tendentiousness abundantly clear.

2.3 Time of the Event

In addition to Thursday (the time of the intrusion event), CNN also stressed, in its report, that "it was an awkward and tense moment", trying to create an extremely strained situation where the relationships of the relevant countries were at full stretch. However, the fact is, on August 5 the 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting has approved the China-ASEAN Code of Conduct Framework Agreement on South China Sea Actions (the COC Framework), which is a significant initiative of both China and ASEAN to manage and control the South China Sea dispute, reduce tensions in this area and prevent the dispute from destroying China-ASEAN relationship since July of 2016. A small step as the COC Framework might be in the whole negotiation on the code of conduct in South China Sea, it is a significant movement in the history to push forward the China-ASEAN relationship. The American media like CNN deliberately played up the tensed atmosphere in South China Sea with the aim to continue taking this region as a battlefield of power games between Asian-Pacific leading countries and to keep the South China Sea as a tong for the U.S. to carry on its strategy of containment and exert diplomatic pressure towards other countries. Nevertheless, this kind of mind and proposition will contribute no help to the stability and cooperation in South China Sea areas.

Report from China Daily merely introduced time of the event objectively.

2.4 Moves Made by the Two Sides

CNN understated the intrusion event, claiming that the USS McCain Destroyer only carried out the so-called "free navigation" task near the Meiji Reef Waters of South China Sea, which was only an "exercise" with Chinese frigates "following". Apparently, CNN is beautifying America's action of trespassing South China Sea as far as 12 sea miles and provoking China's sovereignty in South China Sea regardless of Asia-Pacific security, China's territorial integrity and state interests.

On the contrary, China Daily reported this event sternly from a sense of justice. It said China was strongly resentful and opposed to America's intrusion and has sent out its warships to recognize, investigate and verify the American warships, and then warned and expelled them. China has always been respecting and maintaining other countries' freedom to navigate and fly over the South China Sea in accordance with the International Law, but also set itself against any actions from any country to

damage China's sovereignty and security interest in the name of freedom of navigation or of flight.

2.5 Reasons of the Event

The foothold of CNN's report is that there exist "maritime dispute" and "territorial dispute" in South China Sea. It believes China's territorial requirement in this region has "reached the doors of neighboring countries and nibbled their territories"; China has always been "broadly reclaiming land in oceans" and "turning shoals into islands with airports, harbors and lighthouses". As a country outside the South China Sea areas, the U.S., out of political purposes, has been generating public opinions and playing up the tensed atmosphere so as to destroy China's sovereignty base towards South China Sea, realize its strategic containment against China, and maintain its own military advantages and political influence in South China Sea as well as in Southeast Asia. Thus, it is not wrong to say that it is America's involvement and change of positions that mainly resulted in a much more complicated situation in South China Sea since 2009. The ideological prejudice in CNN's reports also becomes abundantly clear.

For China Daily, the Chinese Government took those constructing activities because it has indisputable sovereignty to South China Sea islands and its affiliated islands, which has been explicitly admitted by most countries and some organizations in the world. What's more, countries near the South China Sea all acknowledged China's sovereignty in this region before middle 1970s, which shall, according to the Principle of Promissory Estoppel, be legally restrained by the International Law. To settle the South China Sea dispute in an appropriate way, a full respect shall be paid to the history.

2.6 Relevant Parties of the Event

The interested "countries" in this intrusion event mentioned by CNN included North Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Australia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei. As always, CNN put Taiwan on a par with other sovereign states, which has breached its commitment to admitting "One China" and posed a provocation to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. For the ASEAN countries like Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei, CNN spared no effort in accentuating their territorial disputes with China but mentioned nothing about the "Code of Conduct Framework Agreement on South China Sea Actions" (the COC Framework) established. On the contrary, China Daily expressed compliment to both China and the ASEAN for their efforts on this issue.

In addition, CNN also mentioned Australia and Japan in its report. In fact, the South China Sea dispute is just about the divergence of territorial sovereignty and maritime rights between China and some of ASEAN

countries, specifically, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei and Malaysia rather than ASEAN the whole organization. Hence China has always been insisting the relevant countries should settle the dispute in a peaceful way such as bilateral negotiation and political consultation. Therefore, countries outside this region like the U.S., Japan and Australia, which have nothing to do with this issue, have no tenable reasons to butt in South China Sea Affairs. However, in recent years, these countries, as an alliance, can hardly wait to rudely intervene in the South China Sea affairs by means of taking military exercise, issuing joint declaration and so on (CCTV, 2016). CNN's report is meant to draw America's allies like Japan and Australia to provoke China's sovereignty in South China Sea together, which has totally exposed its hegemonism and audacious ambition to besiege China.

What has gone beyond all the expectations is that the report should associate the tensed relationship between the U.S. and the North Korea, which had actually been caused by nuclear issues, with the intrusion event. CNN's declaration that China and the North Korea belong to the same power group reflected American media's binary oppositional narrative mode and the few remaining Cold War mentality. Owing to the ideological differences and the impact of political purposes, the American media deliberately overstated China's influence on the North Korea and has consequently led the unwitting readers to misunderstand China.

2.7 Outcome of the Event

In its report, CNN repeatedly emphasized that "America will take flight, navigation and actions in any areas allowed by the International Law, like the South China Sea and other places in the world". The intrusion of the USS Destroyer exactly aimed to "declare this attitude". At the meantime, as a press from a country outside this region, CNN, to our surprise, "called on Beijing to endorse a legally binding code of conduct", leaving the readers a false impression that only China is not complying with the rules so that the U.S. shall force China to sign one. The western world has got a prejudice to China for a long history, which resulted in the media's (like CNN) neglect to China's great efforts in solving the South China Sea dispute, and instead put China on the opposite to other ASEAN countries and countries outside this region. This kind of negative report and non-objective value judgment from western media, with CNN as a representative, tends to cause readers' misunderstanding for China.

Faced with the deceptive reports and attempt to expand the dispute by media from countries outside the region, China Daily gave tit for tat by first stressing that "current situation in the South China Sea has stabilized and maintains a sound development momentum", and then putting forward the main reason why the South China Sea conflict is getting more and more

severe, which is because "some parties from outside continue meddle in the region under the guise of 'free navigation'". In order to defend the sovereignty and its territorial integrity and maintain the peace and stability in Asian-Pacific and even in the whole world, China has no choice but to "take further measures to strengthen homeland defense capacity and increase various defense capability buildups to resolutely protect national sovereignty and security".

Hence, we can see that due to the prominent constructional contradiction between China and the U.S., and the U.S.'s continual damage to China's sovereignty in the name of "free navigation" as well as its refusal to abandon the obsolete hegemonic behavior model and the consistent containment against China, the two parties' war of words and strategic game concerning the South China Sea is going to continue in the process of bilateral conflicts and co-operations.

CONCLUSION

With the accelerating of globalization, we are becoming more and clearer about what the world is like. However, it is a world constructed by the media rather than a real one. Owing to the difference of ideologies and the influence of political purposes, the American media are watching and assessing China through tinted glasses and even smearing China's images intentionally, which consequently has misled the general readers who are not clear about the facts to have wrong knowledge of China. In this article, under the guidance of Critical Discourse Analysis methods, the author analyzed two pieces of reporting news from CNN and China Daily concerning the issue of South China Sea. It is not hard to see, from their different dictions, that even though some news media seem to be propagating the fair and objective truth, they are actually implying the ideologies and political attitudes of their own and the power organizations they stand for.

Much importance should be attached to word selection in news discourses, which embody both the implied attitudes and the hidden ideologies. Reporters usually achieve their purposes of conveying attitudes and affecting readers' cognition by means of taking varied descriptions to the same event. The differences in word selection by CNN and China Daily spring from their different positions. The subjective judgment and assessment added to the objective description renders the text a sort of carrier of ideology and introduces it to readers. In this way, CNN has managed to convey their attitudes and instill the western values to readers imperceptibly through extremely covert "objective" report. Therefore, readers should read and understand news discourses with a rational and objective mind; moreover, they should reinforce their sensitivity to

power and ideology with critical attitudes so as to recognize the truths and facts.

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