

On Features of Legal Terms Applied in the Criminal Case News: Based on Xinran Ji Reports

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Abstract

The legal terms stand as an essential part of legal language representing specialized concepts in laws, acts and regulations, whose distinguishing features remains, even with the applications in other non-legal instruments, and keep affecting the writing style of legal instruments, explicitly, the case news. Criminal cases are the main staples reported in case news, because people's preferences, social controversies and public policies are able to be indicated in criminal cases. Furthermore, criminal cases can also inspect senses of social justice and morality in a more profound perspective, therefore the criminal case news is more valuable than the civil case news. But relatively speaking there are numerous legal terms being involved in criminal news reports, which requires reporters or editors should possess the corresponding attainment of legal knowledge, master the features of legal language and precisely understand the relation between the legal terms and the news story so that the news events could be represented in the presence of readers objectively and veritably, at the same time the communication effects made by news media could be actually exerted.

This paper selects news reports of the case of Chinese graduate Xinran Ji studying in America murdered from media as research texts, which combine with features of the legal terms and criminal case news to add up and analyze the legal terms utilized in news reports on the case. In the end, it is hoped that the summary on features of the legal term applied in criminal case news would be drew out to contribute some inspirations and reflections.

Key words: Legal terms features; Criminal case news; Practicality

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INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, a criminal case which is supposed to take a reporter so much time to cover and follow, because there would be a great amount of newsworthy existing in every stage from the beginning occurrence to the ended closure of the case, even sometimes subsequent reports are also required. But the dominating difference between the criminal case news and other sorts of news which is the reporting content usually made up of three parts: the news fact, the court decision and statements from all parties. Thus besides the general features of journalistic style, the criminal case news has its own features such as the specific language characteristic including a great number of sophisticated legal terms employed in reporting texts. Likewise, the experienced reporters are aware to use corresponding legal terms to emphasize different points with the development of the case. And in this way, there exists a strong link between the legal terms and the criminal case news.

Furthermore, according to Yost (2012, p.180), crime should be reported by the media because not only is it an appropriate way but a public duty. Next then Yost (2012, p.181) stated that how essential for society to comprehend the crime, which is explained the following: Crime and vice are menaces to society, and as such must be continuously and actively opposed by the agencies which society creates for its protection. But in the protection of society the law, the courts and the police must have the

public support which can only come from a measure of acquaintance with the facts and conditions to which they have to deal. If the news of this character were suppressed the people would be deprived of only general and constant source of knowledge as to such events. In summary, Yost pointed out the situation in which the crime should be known by the society and the public that are able to solve a series of problems triggered by the crime. Thus the news media play a critical role in that process and undertake a significant responsibility. On the other hand, criminal case news is the reflection, transformed by media workers, to the social fact of committing crime, is a vital and an organic part of the society, which has a significant influence on the social environment.

In conclusion, it is necessary and essential for media workers to possess the corresponding attainment of legal knowledge, master the feature of legal language and understand precisely the relation between the legal terms and the news stories so that the news events could be represented in the presence of readers objectively and veritably. Thus the author generally analyzes news reports of the case of Chinese graduate Xinran Ji studying in America murdered from Yahoo News through some methods. For example, making comparison between different scripts that selected according to the same reporting time can inspect the mistake of under-interpreting the legal terms connotations and over-entertaining the news fact, mainly caused by criminal case news writing features, and how the legal terms features affect the application in the news is able to be indicated by graphic statistics. At last the research purpose, which refers to offer some suggestions and inspirations in the practical field of covering the criminal case news, can be achieved.

1. THEORY FOUNDATION OF THE LEGAL TERMS AND THE CRIMINAL CASE NEWS

As the philosophical concept of “theory determining practice” points out that theoretical knowledge is the cornerstone and guideline of carrying out something. Through great researching and reading, the author realizes that applying the legal terms in the criminal case news tends to the field of practicality, and the relevant theories much often do not directly illustrate legal terms features in the criminal case news but either describe legal terms characteristics or elucidate linguistic specialties of journalistic English, then the theories further express the importance of reporting criminal case news through mastering features of legal terms, acquainting linguistic background of the crime news and at last combining both of them practically.

1.1 Literature Review

Given the significant social meanings and the practicability of covering the criminal case stories, so many researchers at home and abroad in recent years have devoted great efforts to discussing and studying the legal terms features in the crime news directly or indirectly including the performance of criminal phenomena in the mass media, the standards of legal language in news reports and comparison between Chinese and English case news. Thus the literature materials that are found by the author will be summarized from perspectives of the existed research fruits and some deficiencies in the relevant fields as following.

On the whole various researches focus on different points.

Firstly, many writers such as Van Dijk (1998, 2005) considers the criminal case news or case news as a core or a carrier to describe how the media reflect the criminal actions by using media writing techniques, to explore political motives behind the news, to explain reasons leading to some certain phenomenon during the process of covering criminal news and to evaluate how the social circumstances of public opinions about crimes and value system directed or favored by the news media. Thus this sort of researches emphasis on the influences of criminal phenomena exposed and shaped by the news media on the society.

Secondly, others such as Shen (2014) pay more attentions to the application of legal language in the news and reasons behind that from the linguistic perspective and national legal system. It is demonstrated by the forms of making contrasts between Chinese and English crime news like differences in utilizing legal language, or directly discussing the application of legal languages in the news without classifying the kind of the news.

Overall, all of the studies indicate researchers’ profound understandings on the legal language and the criminal case news and obviously express the tendency of practical research. However, as far as the author is considered, there still exist some blanks or deficiencies.

The most obvious shortcoming is that researchers neglect the interactions of the legal terms and the crime news, although the both singly have its own features or impacts. Furthermore, making a general review of the domestic studying, it shows that most researchers such as Yu (2005) and Liu (2006) tend to analyze the Chinese legal terms applied in the Chinese case news, which is called legal news in China, rather than explore the original legal words used in the criminal case news involving comprehensive acquaintance of the western legal system and professional legal English knowledge.

Considering the above deficiencies, this paper will primarily discuss the mutual influences of the legal terms and the criminal case news under the support of the theory about how the news media affects the criminal case news

reports in addition to the general analysis of news scripts, and ultimately disclose features of the legal terms in the crime news.

1.2 Social Functions of Current Criminal Case Reports

Generally speaking, any individual who is divorced from the society can not achieve personal value because the individual psychology and action are linked with the concept of socialization, and the connection affects people's various aspects in daily life nonetheless includes positive and negative effects. In other words, an optimistic social environment can not only boost the accomplishment of a person's normal socialization but also is the key to solve criminal problems. While the mass media such as news reports on the criminal case is a powerful tool to build such a social environment. The most important is that news stories are the reflection of the social images transformed and shaped by the news media. Thus it is essential and meaningful to report the criminal case news well according to the relevant principles such as comprehensive mastery of the legal terms features in the crime news.

1.2.1 The Definition of the Criminal Case News

Crime, on the one hand, is considered as an action of violating social general regulations, which has a severe impact on people's belief to the social value, the subsistence and development of the whole community. On the other hand, not only is crime itself the social contradictions but the reflection of current social situation having been distorted (Pan, 2005, p.2). While according to Xue (2011, pp.93-94), the criminal case news, reported by the news media, refers to the content consisting of the news fact, the court decision and statements from all parties. Thus the criminal case news that aims at crime coverage provides social institutions and the public an access to have knowledge about the facts of criminal conducts, and at last the social environment synthesizes other relevant elements to relieve and even solve the social matter crime and conflicts step by step.

Noted in the above, during the process of knowing about a criminal case story or fact, it is no doubt that the news media is a bridge and a key to connect individuals with the social environment. Furthermore, the news media has the ability to use its own language to reflect the world. And among various theory models, the Theory of News Construction can explain thoroughly this capability owned by the news media and its impacts on the definition of criminal case news reporting.

According to Li (2013, p.168), the Theory of News Construction is transformed from the concept of Pseudo-environment.

He firstly summarized the description of Pseudo-environment from the work *Public Opinion* written by the famous American theorist Walter Lippmann in 1922, and it refers that people always make reflections to the reality

in accordance with the intrinsic realistic picture in their mind, while with the development of the complication in the real world, people in some extent depend on materials and information provided by the mass media to grow the view of reality over days and months multiplying. In the meanwhile, the mass media portrays the reality under its own thoughts consciously or unconsciously, which ultimately establishes the Pseudo-environment.

Next he pointed that on the basis of Pseudo-environment, in recent years scholars raised the Theory of News Construction which straightforwardly considers that the present world in audiences' minds is constructed by continual news reporting from the mass media. This constructed world is not imaginary, because on a microscopic level each story may be authentic or close to the real. News reporting, however, accomplishes the construction through highlighting some certain fact while hiding some others. Authorities, capital powers and various ideologies are in the competition of capturing the might of the news construction and shape the reality according to their intentions. What is more is that compared with the Pseudo-environment, the Theory of News Construction more stresses the self-awareness of news constructors.

All in all, the Theory of News Construction indicates that news media use the symbolic system of language and images to interpret the criminal case stories for audiences in a constructed society where people get information about the criminal actions from the media. In addition, when the news media covers a criminal fact, the standards of social value can be presented between the lines even from the layout, implying audiences what the two figures "violators" and "defenders", which are repeatedly shaped and built in a mode, ought to be. And ultimately the construction would be helpful for individuals and the society to change the way of treating the criminal phenomena.

1.2.2 Comprehensive Mastery of the Legal Terms Features

Since criminal case news has such many enormous influences on the social function, then it is significant to report the crime news as well as it is possible.

However, the linguistic background of criminal case news whose application of many legal terms is one of the most distinguishing features, and specific characteristics owned by the legal terms which also affect the criminal case reporting. So if it is to report a criminal case that must have positive effects on individuals and the society, discussing features of the legal terms is requisite and primary. But it has to acknowledge that the discussion is from the micro level, which can not be complete without the macro level of the whole features of criminal case news itself owning such as common news writing skills, and after all the crime news belongs to one of the news styles.

In conclusion, comprehensive mastery of knowing about features of the legal terms under the support line of the criminal case news and their interactions is crucial and necessary to cover the news in a good quality.

1.3 The Features of the Legal Terms

The legal terms refer to the words or group of words representing specific concepts in the Acts, Laws or Regulations, and generally they do not appeal to the transformation of words or do not tend to use synonyms alternatively, which emerge repeatedly in the legal context. Later they are confirmed and fixed by usual practices as further to inform a set of sophisticated rules. Thus the legal terms are different from common expressions in daily life and equipped with the following features according to Liu (2005, pp.66-67).

1.3.1 Semantic Oneness

Each legal term expresses one specific legal concept under the requirement that anybody must use the term to give the same explanation on the concept in any case, and considering other terms as the replacement is not allowed. For example, “sentence” and “verdict” both point to the meaning of ruling or decision, but there is a substantial distinction between the two words. In a law court, the former refers to the punishment that a person received after they have been found guilty of a crime, usually decided by a judge while the later indicates the decision that is given by the jury or judge at the end of trial. That is to say, the jury is responsible to make a verdict in accordance with the evidence, and then the judge makes the sentence on the basis of verdict. By this taken, although some legal terms share the same meaning literally, as a matter of fact they state a vast connotation because of judicial procedure, main body and practice.

1.3.2 Semantic Contrariety

Many legal terms are mutually contradictory and opposite but exits causality of on another as well, which means that one is not supposed to be without the other one. Like the illustrations: prosecutor-accused, omission-commission, intention- negligence, guilty-innocent, prosecute-respond and so forth.¹ The feature precisely gives a sign that the function of law is to deal with conflicts, and main bodies that it faces often are tied together by the relationship of interest contraries. Thus the legal language can not express various opposite legal nexuses without semantic contrariety.

1.3.3 Hyponymy

Objects regulated by law involve a variety of legal relations. However, most of the concepts that give definition of those legal relations are the connection of

¹ All the illustrated terms here are applicable to the field of criminal law since in accordance with the Common Law and principles of legal language, there exists distinctions between civil lawsuit and criminal lawsuit such as “plaintiff” used to mean the person who brings a civil lawsuit while “defendant” being the opposite part.

category, which to some extent are hyponymy.² Thereupon the generic-specific concept of different levels comes into being. For instance, American modern criminal law is recognized three types of crime: felonies, misdemeanors and treason. And felonies can be classified into murder, manslaughter, rape, sodomy, robbery, larceny, arson, more serious forms of battery and burglary. To some extent, hyponymy presents the accuracy, objectiveness and definiteness of legal language, and it is also an important flag to decide a crime in the legal procedure.

1.3.4 Group of Terms

The legal branch contributes to the formation of group of terms, whether the content or its function has obvious system of classes which are classified by the theoretical jurisprudence and the department law. Like in procedural law³, there are criminal proceeding, preliminary hearing, arraignment, and so on. Group of terms are usually derived from the specific law that must be used in the light of the definition given by the law.

1.4 The Linguistic Background of the Criminal Case News

The criminal case news is different from other kinds of news, because a great amount of legal terms applied in reporting texts is the specific language feature owned by it. But it can not deny that the universal and common news writing techniques makes the crime news be equipped with basic news characteristics as same as other types of news. Thus not only should a reporter meet the requirements of fundamental journalism attainment but also of the acquaintance and understanding of the judicial procedure and legal knowledge when to report a criminal case.

1.4.1 Features of the Criminal Case News

From the linguistic aspect the criminal case news is identified as a part of the social superstructure that has its own particularities including the law and legal procedure both have fixed preciseness and seriousness as well as obscure language used by attorneys and judges, so on the one hand, it is needful to quote original sentences from them to promise and strengthen the objectiveness and authenticity of news, and on the other hand the report should explain those professional words to serve readers through news writing skills. And this is one of the crime news features.

In consideration of interactions that will be discussed in Chapter 3, the author selected some materials about journalistic English features in need from Zhang (2004, pp.8-14, 34-40, 57) as follows:

² According to Brinton, Laurel, J. (2000), in linguistics, a hyponymy (from Greek hupó, “under” and onomas, “name”) is a word or phrase whose semantic field.

³ See *Course of Legal English* (2010, p.21) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press [FLTRP], for an explanation on procedural law.

Firstly, the foremost vocabulary feature. As is well known that the purpose of news report is to spread information and bring convenience to audiences in reading, so abbreviations and midget words are always utilized in writing to take the pursuit of conciseness. The news phrase hardly uses vague and general but precise and vivid terms. In a word, the more straightway and short use terms, the more people understand and the purpose of communicating effect can be accomplished.

The second one is the basic structures of news. News usually consists of three parts including title, lead and body, and there are three main writing structures: Inverted Pyramid Style, Pyramid Style and Mixed Form of Inverted Pyramid and Pyramid Styles. Inverted Pyramid Style is most frequently used in the news whose feature is in accordance with the order of diminishing importance to organize various items of fact in the news. Saving readers' time and being convenient for journalists in writing and editing is the prominent advantage of the Inverted Pyramid Style, because the freshest and latest information will be showed in the first paragraph or the lead. As for the Pyramid Style, which is suitable for some more complicated cases filling with plots, is organized by the time sequence. As for Mixed Form of Inverted Pyramid, it often uses a summary lead at the beginning to explain the outline of story, and then describes the development of the news according to the time sequence. In summary, the basic structures of news present news value determiners such as timeliness, freshness, prominence, interest and readability.

The last feature lies in the lead. Lead usually refers to the first paragraph that can concentrate on the main points and attract readers. A good lead is a mini-story including three characteristics: succinct, informative and intriguing. Hence journalists always spare no effort to write a qualified lead.

Then the most essential and paramount feature dominating the quality of criminal case news is its legal features as follows.

According to Xue (2011, pp.93-94) whose quotations has been cited in 1.2.1, the primary reporting content of the criminal case news consists of the news fact, the court decision and statements from all parties.

News fact is the narration of objective reality and the mirror of objective society in the linguistic world. Reporters, with the assistance of language, represent the impersonal truth through a way of interviewing and investigating what happened. In other words, the news fact processed by language does not mean the exact same "mirror image" to the objective fact, because most news facts in the text are cited speeches by news figures, directly or indirectly. The ultimate appearance of those speeches of news figures, however, is the result that reporters or editors achieved with subjective efforts. Hence completely unprejudiced coverage is virtually nonexistent.

The second one court decision is the crucial sector as well as the climax of the criminal case news, playing the core role in the news information, but as a matter of fact, court decision is merely a conclusive link of the whole judicial procedure and a unbroken report should include the whole process, which will be discussed in 1.4.2. The reason why the court decision is significant is complete direct quotation of court written judgment which intensely conveys legal terms in the criminal case news.

In regard of the coverage about debating in the court hearing between parties and social responses triggered by the result of judgment or verdict jointly constitute the third part statements from parties. Generally the different statements will be reported in the form of the aftermath, analysis and feature articles on criminal cases.

To summarize, the report on criminal case covers the whole judicial procedure like case filing, prosecuting, hearing and court trial, even involves the aftermath stages of sentence of execution, appeal and amending the original sentence. Therefore a great number of legal terms applied in the criminal case report forms its own linguistic feature. At the same time, the universal news writing features become basic stones supporting to finish a complete news story.

1.4.2 The Process of Reporting a Criminal Case

It is undeniable that accomplishing a criminal case is one of the toughest tasks for journalists under the condition of keeping wholeness, readability and simplicity. Despite difficulties in reporting a case, the greatest challenge is to be acquainted with the judicial system, to master legal procedure and technical terms so that the significance of the case cannot be exaggerated or understated. Also the judicial system makes a contribution of shaping the linguistic features of the criminal case news. Itule and Anderson (2006, pp.377-405) stated the process of reporting a criminal case, especially the whole process of the legal system, and some announcements at length.⁴

Generally speaking, a reporter carries out journalistic activities with the development of the case, which can be divided into three sectors: warm-up, judicial procedure and subsequent reporting.

Warm-up reporting, in the other words, is the preparation before the fact of the case emerging from the water. Many excellent reports can attribute to reporters' thorough early-stage preparations. Firstly, as far as the qualification of a reporter is concerned, the reporter himself or herself must acquire some basic knowledge of the judicial system, federal and state, and studying relevant legal courses is helpful as well. The reason is that when the submissions wanted to be reported with full of

⁴ The process herein stated only refers to the American judicial system.

sophisticated legal terms, a reporter has to interpret them to grasp the fact of the case and understand the influence of the court decision. Furthermore, an experienced reporter has to establish the reliable source of information net which can be knitted by the judge, attorney, court spokesman and so on. These stable sources of messages can contribute the reporter to find out new cases and timely, track down the latest progress of the trial. However, some interviewees especially the attorney and the judge will respond to the interview with interminable and professional legal terms. It is required that the reporter should have the capability of identifying the most vital

statements and even interpreting the legal terms under the condition of combining the trial.

The judicial procedure reporting is the main staple during the process. All the steps in the procedure convey the potential news value and set a standard route to assist journalists to accomplish a criminal case news, because it is extremely important as well as a customary way to account for the news source when a reporter covers the criminal lawsuit, and the coverage which is in accordance with legal documents or statements from the related personnel at court provides the reporter basis. So the following program graph generally indicates the typical judicial procedure.⁵

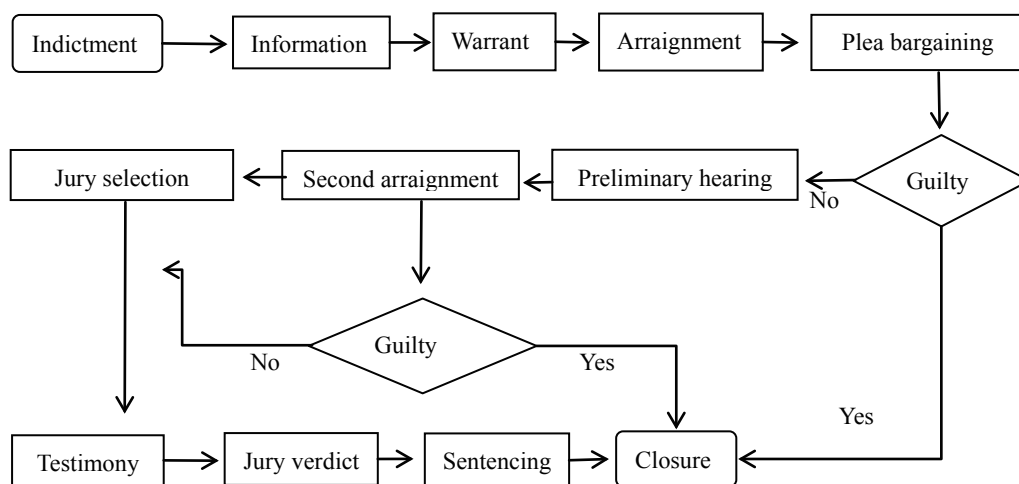


Figure 1
The Typical Judicial Procedure

Besides, knowing the procedure is an efficient approach to avoid defamation. For instance, when to report a murder case, the reporter should not use the term “murdered” until the defendant pleads guilty or is decided as guilty, and it is commended to use such the words “killed or slain” before that. In this sense, the judicial procedure requests that the discourse of criminal case news must be subject to the accuracy, objectiveness and specialty, which are the language features of the criminal case news.

The closure of a case, however, is not equal to the end of a news story, because some cases may have the aftermath, and analysis and features articles on cases can also arouse the reflection of society and convey the news value of a criminal case. That is the necessity of subsequent reporting existing. A meaningful coverage should not only be restricted within the court but also help readers ponder the serial consequences.

2. THE INTERACTIONS ON LEGAL TERMS FEATURES IN THE CRIMINAL CASE NEWS

Through the discussion above, the relation between the legal terms and the criminal case news is so close to

affect the both, but ultimately the interactions can explain clearly features of legal terms in the criminal case news.

2.1 The Relation Between the Legal Terms and the Criminal Case News

It is evident that the relation between the legal terms and the criminal case news is complementary to each other. For the criminal case news, the legal terms are essential and indispensable; for the legal terms, the criminal case news can make an access for the general public to realize the connotation behind the terms in a similar form of telling a story and have a recognition to the criminal phenomena. But how to turn the relation into a more consolidated and an appropriate way is the topic that is always explored, because this kind of relation can still make some mistakes or misunderstandings when to apply the legal terms in the criminal case news. If the legal terms are employed with an unfaithful way in a report, not only will the criminal case news mislead readers but also undermine the reputation and social function of the criminal case news. Therefore journalists must have a thorough grasp of the interactions triggered by the relation.

In a word, these problems can be explained from

⁵ There are some differences between states.

the aspect of mutual influences on them, which will be explored in Chapter 2.2.

2.2 Mutual Influences on the Legal Terms in the Criminal Case News

The most common influence led by the relation is the superficial or confusing interpretation on the connotation and extended meaning, mainly caused by the unfamiliarity to the feature of semantic oneness and judicial procedure. The second influence, to some extent, is the most serious one which refers to some journalists deliberately place grandstanding terms to pursuit the entertainment of news in attracting readers' eyes due to features of the criminal case news. Obviously it breaches the principles of news wording.

2.2.1 The Impacts From Features of the Criminal Case News

According to the interpretation in 1.4.1, actually the universal features of news style such as abbreviations and midget words, basic structures of news and lead mainly affect the application of legal terms.

Firstly, using abbreviations and midget word aims to make the report more plain and readable, but this usage in some extent will damage the legal connotation and make people confusing. For example, "hold" or "nab" replaces "arrest" or "retain" and "prison" is written as "cell" and so on, while some legal terms have their own legal meaning and function that can not be replaced.

Secondly, whatever basic structure of news such as Inverted Pyramid or features of lead, both of them serve the news value determiners such as timeliness, freshness, prominence, interest and readability. However, events like crime along with sex and money are most easily exaggerated by the news media, so some newspapers may over-interpret a criminal case in order to increase the sale of newspapers. For instance, the use of "murder" or "bloody killer" to name a suspect or add spicy to the story other than revealing the truth. As a result, it can turn some legal terms into the symbol of violence and make the coverage become entertained losing its social function.

2.2.2 The Impacts From Features of the Legal Terms

Semantic oneness is the dominating feature of the legal terms affecting the application. As cited in 1.3.1, some legal terms have specific meanings in context. In addition, in consideration of the concrete judicial procedure, semantic oneness further requires accuracy and draws a slight difference between connotations when the legal terms are applied. But it is so that semantic oneness can easily cause confusion and mistakes for journalists to report a criminal case. For example, "jail" and "prison" both refers to the organ of violence lock up the person who has committed a crime, while the former often falls in between detention center and prison where minor offenders or the accused waiting a trail, and the later is used to imprison felons.

3. GENERAL ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS SCRIPTS

The Xinran Ji case both at home and abroad has caused a huge response. It has aroused controversy on how to guarantee the personal safety of students overseas, the problem of campus security and the juvenile crime in America. The case also drew the many attentions from media, thus it is hoped that the features of the legal terms applied in those news texts would be drew out to contribute some inspirations and reflections by the general analysis of them.

3.1 The Relevant Statements of News Scripts

3.1.1 The Narration on Xinran Ji Case

Xinran Ji was born in Hohhot of Inner Mongolia who studied in the University of Southern California (USC) from 2013 as a graduate student. On July 24, 2014, at about 12:45 a.m., Ji was hit with a bat during an attempted robbery made by five juveniles when he walked to his apartment after a study group. He tried to run from the attackers but was caught a second time around a corner where he was seriously beaten. And then Ji struggled to stagger home with a bloody way. A few hours later, his roommate found him dead in bed.

On July 29, the Los Angeles Police Department made a series of arrests in the beating death of Ji and there were five suspects arrested, three of whom were juveniles. Police announced 19-year-old Jonathan Del Carmen, 18-year-old Andrew Garcia, 17-year-old Alberto Ochoa and 16-year-old Alejandra Guerrero had been charged with murder with special circumstances, assault with a deadly weapon and attempted robbery, but a girl who is at the age of 14 had not been charged with murder.

On August 12, the four suspects were brought to the Los Angeles Superior Court for the arraignment, but all of them pleaded not guilty to the murder charges. The Judge ordered the suspects to remain in jail without bail. After several postponed arraignments and hearings testimony and some vital evidences including surveillance footage from the night of Ji's murder being showed, three defendants were ordered on January 15 of 2015 to stand trail on murder charges in the slaying of Ji. Del Carmen and Garcia could face the death penalty if convicted while Ochoa and Guerrero only faced up to life in prison without the possibility of parole because of their ages. But the trail did not convict their crimes because the criminal penalty referred to the death, thus the Judge granted the request that had their arraignment postponed until about a month from January 29 to March 5. Finally, on October 13, 2016, Alejandra Guerrero, 16 years old at the time of the attack, was the first of four people to be tried for attacking Xinran Ji, and The other three defendants, Jonathan Del Carmen, 21, Andrew Garcia, 20, and Alberto Ochoa, 19, will be tried separately next year.

It is no doubt that Ji's tragedy impacts his parents and people who concern him. However, the murder leads to renew concerns about the safety of USC's Chinese students. Ji's parents in their open letter also called on the campus to carry out and enhance effective security measures, and the fact proves that it is necessary to do so, because the surveillance footage becomes the key evidence in this case. It is reported that the university has upgraded its extensive camera and increased safety patrols, especially at night. The most important point is that the problem of juvenile crime at both home and abroad should be taken seriously and avoided.

3.1.2 The Method of Analyzing the News Texts

It is more convicted to explore the features of legal terms applied in the criminal case news by analyzing the specific examples which are chosen from Yahoo news. The reason to choose news texts from Yahoo news is that Yahoo news website as an international web portal embraces various sources of news such as The Guardian, ABC, The Huffington Post, CBS News, and so on, which are fairly professional news media. Thus compared with the single source of illustration, the diversity of news texts can avoid the overgeneralization. Furthermore, websites news can get rid of the influence of interference factors like the editorial policy, which have the capability of reflecting the features of legal terms in the criminal case news objectively and comprehensively.

To give an all-sided presentation on Xinran Ji case and the language features of the criminal case news mentioned in the 1.2, the news texts analyzed here are mainly selected under the principle of temporal sequence. In other words, the principle of temporal sequence, which specifically refers to the initiatory time of the case and several crucial temporal points of judicial procedure, can inspect that whether the texts are subject to the process of reporting a criminal case. In addition, the comparison of them can also indicate some aspects such as the different report angles, the considerable discrepancy about the case and the crux of entertainment and over exaggeration. Here are some excerpts in accordance with the principle of temporal:

- a) A Chinese graduate student from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, was beaten to death in a brutal assault near the campus which police are treating as a "homicide".⁶
- b) Police are investigating after a University of Southern California graduate student was found beaten to death in his off-campus apartment, reports CBS Los Angeles.⁷
- c) Five people have been arrested after a Chinese

student was found beaten to death in his apartment near University of Southern California.⁸

- d) Two of the suspects were juveniles charged as adults in the slaying of Xinran Ji, 24, an engineering student from China who was attacked early Thursday. He was able to make his way to his apartment despite being hit in the head with the bat. A roommate discovered him dead hours later. The defendants—17-year-old Alberto Ochoa, 16-year-old Alejandra Guerrero, 18-year-old Andrew Garcia and 19-year-old Jonathan Del Carmen—will be arraigned Aug. 12 on one count each of murder with a special circumstance of murder during an attempted robbery. Garcia, Ochoa and Guerrero also face a special allegation for personally using a dangerous weapon—the bat and wrench.⁹
- e) Four teenagers pleaded not guilty Tuesday morning to murder charges in the beating death of a USC graduate student from China.¹⁰
- f) Prosecutors for the murder case of USC graduate student Xinran Ji may have potential DNA evidence, according to Rose Tsai, the legal representative for Ji's parents. Earlier Thursday morning, a status hearing for the four defendants charged with the fatal beating of USC graduate student Xinran Ji only took minutes, but supporters waited in the courtroom for over an hour to hear the latest update on the case.¹¹
- g) In between those still frames taken outside his apartment, police found two cameras that captured footage of a group of teens attacking him as he walked home from school early the morning of July 24.¹²
- h) Three Los Angeles teenagers were ordered on Thursday to stand trial on murder charges in the slaying of a Chinese graduate student at the University of Southern California.¹³
- i) Three of the four defendants charged with the death of USC graduate student Xinran Ji have had their arraignment postponed until about a month from now on March 5th. Judge James R. Brandlin granted this request on Thursday morning during a court proceeding in downtown Los Angeles.¹⁴

⁸ See five arrested after Chinese student was found beaten to death in his apartment near University of Southern California. *Brady of Daily Mail*, July 29, 2014.

⁹ See teens charged with murdering Xinran Ji, USC student from China. *Abdollah of Huffington Post*, July 29, 2014.

¹⁰ See *Usc student death: 4 suspects plead not guilty*. *Stallworth of ABC7*, August 12, 2014.

¹¹ See *Status hearing in Xinran Ji Case*. (Shuang Li of Annenberg Media Center, November 6, 2014).

¹² See *Video shows group of teens attacking Chinese USC student*. *Fox News*, January 14, 2015.

¹³ See Los Angeles teenagers to stand trial in USC student Xinran Ji's murder. *The Guardian*, January 15, 2015.

¹⁴ See *Arraignment Postponed in Xinran Ji Case* (La Voice & Crandall of Annenberg Media Center, January 29).

⁶ See Chinese graduate student beaten to death near University of Southern California. *Robinson of Daily Mail*, July 25, 2014.

⁷ See Cops: USC grad student found dead in apartment after beating. *CBS News*, July 28, 2014.

j) An 18-year-old woman has been convicted of first-degree murder in the death of a Chinese graduate student at the University of Southern California in 2014. Though Guerrero was a juvenile at the time of the crime, she was prosecuted as an adult. Guerrero is facing a possible sentence of 25 years to life in prison, which will be decided on November 28. The defendants admitted they targeted Ji because he was a Chinese student, and they believed that he had money.¹⁵

The development of the case can be tracked through the excerpts above which include the typical steps of judicial process from the arrests of suspects to the court trail. It is worth noticing that all the scripts do not describe the parties who committed the outrage as “defendants or suspects” from the beginning until they were charged by prosecutors. Furthermore, through the complete reading of the news texts, the problem of entertaining and over exaggerating the truth of the case does not show up. Instead the different news websites emphasis on various

points in the coverage published in the same day. For instance, *Five arrested after Chinese student was found beaten to death in his apartment near University of Southern California* from the Daily Mail supplements the information on a shot murder case of two Chinese students studying in USC, which happened in 2012. Despite the laudable aspects of those reports, however, there still exists a deficiency that some reports simplify the legal terms too much such as “hearing” and “arraignment” with the late development of the case, easily causing confusion to readers, because the case held multiple hearings and arraignments while there are still some distinctions between them.

3.2 Application of the Legal Terms in Xinran Ji Case

3.2.1 The Relevant Statistics

The legal terms in the news texts are scattered, thus it is visualized to clear them up as the form of statistical diagrams to indicate the features of legal terms in the case news.

Table 1
The Terms of Judicial Procedure

The judicial procedure	Terms in the news texts	Times of application
Indictment	Allegation	1
	Charges; charged with/as/for	14
Warrant	Prosecution	1
	Arrest; be arrested	9
Arraignment	Be arraigned to; arraignment	8
Plea bargaining	PLea not guilty	9
Preliminary hearing	A preliminary hearing; hearing	9
Testimony	Testify; testimony; hearing testimony	3
Sentencing	Convicted	1

Table 2
The Semantic Contrariety of Legal Terms

The party	The opposite party	Times of application	
Victim	Assailants	5	3
Prosecutors	Defendants	6	9
The prosecuting attorney	The defense attorney	1	2
Prosecutors	Defendants	6	9
The prosecuting attorney	The defense attorney	1	2

Table 3
A View at the Hyponymy of Legal Terms

The hypernyms	The hyponyms	Times of application
	(Follow the sheet above)	
Felonies	Assault; assault with a deadly weapon	7
	Murder; suspicion of murder; homicide; suspicion of homicide	13
	Suspicion of robbery; an attempted robbery; robbery; second-degree robbery	11
	First-degree murder	1

¹⁵ See *Teen convicted in murder of Chinese USC student* (Xinhua, October 17 2016).

Table 4
The Group of Terms and Times of Application

Group of terms	Times of application
A wrongful death lawsuit	1
Sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole/ life in prison	5
The death penalty	9
Held without bail; remain in jail without bail	3

The last bar graph will show a part of terms that are applied in quantity.

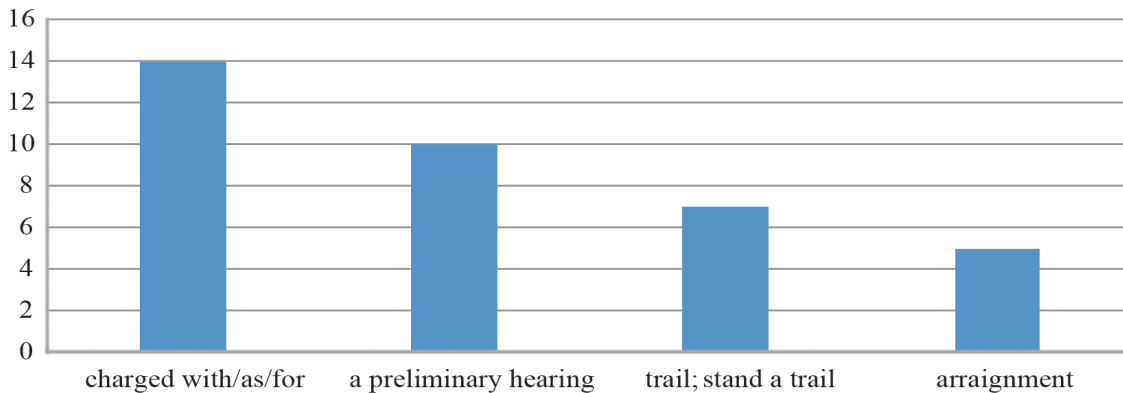


Figure 2
Numbers of Relevant Terms Application

3.2.2 The Summary on Features of Legal Terms in Xinran Ji Case News

The features of legal terms in Xinran Ji case news can be summarized vividly from the statistical diagrams. The first sheet gives the proof that there is no obvious discrepancy with the typical judicial procedure when the relevant legal terms are used in reports. Thus it reflects the linguistic features of the criminal case news that judicial procedure shapes. In the third sheet, however, the terms such as “homicide” and “suspicion of homicide” have the same semantic meaning with “murder”, it is improper and too general to classify them into the professional legal concept of felonies. Furthermore, there is a mistake showing in the scripts (4) that “suspect” and “defendant” both are used in one article. Actually the four persons have been prosecuted due to tangible proofs and the prosecutors have confirmed their crime, so it is improper to use “suspect” to describe their identification in the judicial procedure. And this mistake indicates the impact from the feature semantic oneness of the legal terms. Despite the above-mentioned summaries, making a general view of the times of legal terms, especially the last bar graph, it can be found that the most terms are associated with the court trail, and this point is just coincide with the principle of the criminal case news that legal terms are centralized in the part of the court decision. Then from a full view about these scripts, the universal journalistic style features also play an important role. For example, most news use “slaying” to replace “murder” at the beginning of the case. Inverted

Pyramid is applied mostly to write the news and basically the scripts, which are not dramatically reported, are committed to the truth and to delivery the correct value of crime to individuals and the society.

CONCLUSION

Although it is too drastic to describe the legal terms as the crucial soul of the criminal case news, the necessity and significance of them can not be denied. They exchange of needful elements referring to the features of the legal terms support a railway of reporting a criminal case while the criminal case news transports the truth of crime, legal connotation and justice to the society. Also features of journalistic style do not make the criminal case news become tedious and obscure moralizers.

At last, the author wants to emphasize that the news media is more like a guardian of public morals who conveys its constant revelation of wrong. That is to say, the responsibility of journalism referring to the criminal news is to reveal the ugliness, magnitude and danger of crime. Therefore realizing the essence of social functions of news media under the Theory of News Construction is the basis of world view to direct the specific practice, and comprehensive understanding interactions of the legal terms and the crime news as well as achieving mastering features of them thoroughly are the methodology.

Nowadays, with the sharp upsurge of new media, more and more criminal case news are diverging the objective, authentic and professional railway. The situation warns

the journalists that the traditional but quintessential methods of reporting should not be abandoned, no matter to the criminal case news or other types of news. But it does not mean that the innovation has no ability to follow the development of age. Under the precondition of understanding the features of legal terms applied in the criminal case news, simplicity and conciseness of legal terms in the news can contribute to the progress of this sector as well.

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