

Application of Systemic-Functional Grammar in Critical Discourse Analysis-- Taking Bbc Reports on the Belt and Road as an Example

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Keywords: Systemic-functional grammar, Critical discourse analysis, Bbc, The belt and road

Abstract: Critical Discourse Analysis is a common theory used to analyze the discourse of news reports, and reveals the ideology hidden behind the language through text analysis. This paper takes BBC news reports on the Belt and Road Initiative as the material, and adopts Halliday's Systemic-functional Grammar to conduct a qualitative study on it. The aim is to summarize the attitudes and views of the Western media, represented by the BBC, towards the Belt and Road through the analysis of the discourse in the reports, and the thinking caused by it.

1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has formed a complete theoretical analysis framework since its rise in the 1970s. CDA focuses on language and the ideological relationship expressed behind it, aims to analyze the relationship among language, power, and ideology, and reveals how discourse originates from social structure and power relationship, and serves them. CDA has provided a new method and perspective for language and discourse research since its birth, because it regards discourse not only as a reflection or representation of reality, but also as an important part of social practice. It advocates to understand and explain social reality from the perspective of text or semiotics. As a method of discourse analysis, CDA has been widely used in the analysis and research of various discourses, and has achieved fruitful results. It has greatly deepened people's understanding of the relationship between language and society [1].

Due to the expansion and intrusion of English and cultures of Britain and America, the current mainstream western media using English as the medium has a wide-ranging impact on the social and cultural life of most countries. It can be said that English news dominates world public opinion to some extent, and influences and even manipulates people's ideology. Some seemingly objective and fair news reports have been manipulated by political forces and power groups behind the scenes, concealing various ideologies, and invisibly affecting readers. In 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping embodies China's responsibility and wisdom. However, some western media have always been skeptical or even negative about this. This paper attempts to analyze the BBC news discourse from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, aiming to objectively analyze the British media and government's attitudes and views on the Belt and Road Initiative.

2. Theoretical Basis and Analytical Framework

The research methods and perspectives of CDA are influenced by systemic-functional linguistics. Some methods and analysis ideas are directly derived from systemic-functional linguistics and are in continuous development without a fixed theoretical paradigm. This paper analyzes English news reports by Halliday's Systemic-functional Grammar.

In the 1970s, under the influence of Halliday's linguistic theory, critical linguistics has always used Systemic-functional Grammar as the most important basis for text analysis. It examines the ideology behind the language mainly by analyzing the linguistic features of the text. Different from other linguistic schools, systemic-functional linguistics emphasizes the sociality of users and the functionality of language, mainly studying the meaning of language in actual situations, and paying attention to the relationship between people and society [2]. Halliday summarized and abstracted

these specific functions into the three major metafunctions of language: ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function.

The ideational part refers to the content of the discourse. When expressing these contents, there are various choices, such as transitive system, voice, modal meaning, etc. This paper analyzes the linguistic characteristics of these news discourses using vocabulary selection and material processes in the transitive system. Vocabulary selection focuses on the meaning of selected words in news discourse. The choice of vocabulary is to show the main aspects of implicit opinions and ideologies in news discourse. The transitive system is used to represent a certain relationship between people participating in a certain communication activity and the relationship between the activities, status or environment of the participants. The material process is the process of doing something, and the process itself is represented by dynamic verbs.

Interpersonal function is the function of expressing social and personal relationships with language. Interpersonal function is mainly reflected in tone and modality. This paper mainly uses modality as an analysis tool. Halliday's modality refers to judgmental adverbs and expressions, which express the speaker's judgment and foresight. His modality system can be summarized into four types: probability, frequency, obligation and tendency. Probability refers to the degree of possibility; frequency refers to the number of times; obligation refers to an order; and tendency refers to a willingness. Each type can be further divided into three assignments: high, medium and low.

Textual function refers to how to make the components of the language related to each other. Generally speaking, the ideational function is related to the discourse theme, the interpersonal function is related to the direct context, and the textual function is only related to the internal structure of the language, and has little to do with the non-verbal context [3].

Analyzing news discourse should not only pay attention to the objective description of language facts, pay attention to the "what" questions in language and language usage, but also pay attention to the causes of language facts, that is, the source of language facts [4]. Therefore, on the basis of text analysis, the analysis of discourse practice and social practice is the higher goal of research.

3. Statistical Analysis of Corpus

3.1 The Selection of Corpus

In September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping gave an important speech entitled "Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future" at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan, and pointed out that "To forge closer economic ties, deepen cooperation and expand development space in the Eurasian region, we should take an innovative approach and jointly build an 'economic belt along the Silk Road'. we may start with work in individual areas and link them up over time to cover the whole region. [5]" As a result, China's strategic concept of building a "Silk Road Economic Belt" was first proposed. Subsequently, western media reported on this one after another. Empirical research on these reports in the domestic academic community began to emerge in 2016. Previous studies have mostly focused on American mainstream media, such as CNN, the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, and New York Times, Voice of America (VOA), etc. The analysis of mainstream media in the UK is relatively rare, mainly focusing on Financial Times, The Economist, etc. There are also some studies on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), but mainly concentrated in a certain year or years before 2017. The current BBC reports on the Belt and Road had not been comprehensively sorted out. As the largest news broadcaster in the UK, BBC is also one of the largest news broadcasters in the world. It is an important channel for people from all walks of life in the UK and even people from other countries in the world to obtain information (BBC World Service). BBC reports can best reflect the political stance and views of British society, especially the authorities. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of its related reports is important and necessary. It has a certain news value and typical research value.

3.2 Corpus Characteristics and Analysis

By entering the keyword “belt and road” on the BBC official website, and eliminating duplicate reports, there are a total of 67 related reports, of which, 7 are themed reports since 2014. The main content of this paper is samples that are directly related to each other. Qualitative methods are used for specific analysis. Through comparative analysis of the selected discourses, the author categorized the selected news discourses into two types based on the emphasis of the content: “China risk” discourse and “Chinese leader” discourse.

The “China risk” discourse refers to a series of discourses around “China's impacts on world security” and “China tends to be one of the leading countries”. Through these discourses, the media has conveyed to the world an image of China with huge ambitions. At the same time, China's responsibilities and contributions as a major developing country are not the focus of the British and American media. They mainly focus on China's own interests and development needs, weakening China's sense of responsibility and mission in participating in international affairs.

“Chinese leader” discourse refers to the discourse formed by the description and evaluation of Chinese leadership, especially President Xi Jinping, in news reports. Some related reports did not correctly evaluate President Xi Jinping using language means

This article selects some representative sample sentences from the above two discourses and analyzes them in detail from the perspective of qualitative analysis.

3.2.1 China Risk

Sentence 1: The Chinese government is investing tens of billions of dollars as part of an ambitious economic plan to rebuild ports, roads and rail networks.

Sentence 2: But neighbours Japan and India have stayed away from the summit, suspicious that China's development agenda masks a bid for strategic assets and geopolitical ambitions. And some economists are cautious about the viability of projects in areas of political instability and poor governance.

Sentence 3: Critics in Washington, Tokyo and New Delhi observe that some of the biggest belt and road projects seem to be for strategically significant assets. Like the oil and gas pipelines across Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean ports in Pakistan and Sri Lanka which might serve military as well as commercial uses.

Sentence 4: To make the plan less threatening, it frames it as a revival of the ancient Silk Road whose camel caravans carried Chinese goods west across Asia more than 1,000 years ago. But the belt and road is much more ambitious than a camel caravan.

Sentence 5: All of this comes at a price. What does China want? Access to Kazakhstan's mineral resources for one thing. It is blessed with huge oil and gas deposits, and the Chinese are looking for a way to secure their energy needs in the future.

Sentence 6: “The official point of view is full of beautiful statements: China is our good neighbour, our good partner, China is our future,” Dosym Satpayev, director of the Risk Assessment Group told me. “But... the ordinary people have a lot of different [opinions] about China because traditionally inside Kazakh society there are a lot of fears about China.”

Sentence 7: In some ways the dangers are arguably greater today. Sparta and Athens were the interests of neither and that war would be catastrophic.

First of all, in terms of ideational function, the semantic difference shown by the choice of words is an aspect of ideological conflict. In the above example sentences, the vocabularies used created such a cognitive atmosphere that the Belt One Road Initiative is a strategic path for China to achieve international influence: China uses its strong economic power to seize the resources of other countries. It can even be called a military strategy in the cloak of peace. The words “ambitious”, “ambition”, “strategic” and “strategically” appearing in Sentences 1-3 also frequently appear in Western media reports on the Belt and Road. “Ambitious” and “strategic” distorted the inclusive and open core of the policy itself, and portrayed the Belt and Road as economic competition and resource plunder between countries. The word “threatening” in Sentence 4 directly expressed this misunderstanding. It positioned the Belt and Road as an impure motive, “more ambitious than a camel caravan”, implying that the intention of this policy is not only a business

transaction. Generally, in order to reflect objectivity in news discourse, biased modifier words are rarely used, especially adjectives and adverbs. However, the series of words used in the above BBC reports bring readers into the concepts set by it. The content of these concepts shows a hegemonic image of bullying, threatening the economy and politics of other countries. In addition, unlike adjectives and adverbs, nouns and verbs usually give people a neutral reading experience. In fact, the “mask” in Sentence 2 and the “fears” in Sentence 6 hid the reporter's subjective judgment. It seemed an objective report, but in fact, these words expressed the so-called concerns of the international community.

The samples used are mostly involved in the material process. The participants in the material process are the actors and targets. The choice of actors and targets in the process is determined by reporters with specific ideologies. For example, the actors emphasized in Sentence 2 are Japan and India. The phrasal “stayed away” used in the sentence shows that neighboring countries are holding a wait-and-see attitude towards participating in the Belt and Road Summit Cooperation Forum. The report seemed objective, but it denied the starting point and end of the policy by putting forward the prejudice of a few countries. However, reports rarely mentioned or even not mentioned the active response and in-depth cooperation of most countries along the route to this policy. For another example, the subject of “look for” in Sentence 5 is China. The occurrence of this action answered the question raised above: What does China want? Here, the “look for” action is issued to obtain energy. In other words, China's support for funds and projects in neighboring countries is not for economic integration, but for the resources of other countries.

In terms of interpersonal function, “arguably” in Sentence 7 is used as a modality adverb, which is a low probability modality. It means that the reporter believes that the information provided in the text is possible. This message is that due to the transfer of international hegemony, disputes between China and the United States will inevitably erupt, forming a threat to the old order of the world. In Sentence 2, reporters cleverly used the low probability modality to show that their perception of China's risk to the world is vague, thus avoiding the risk of being accused of unprofessional articles. In fact, the reporter compared China-US relations with the historical Athens and Sparta, as well as Britain and Germany, and clearly expressed the affirmation that China threatened the world.

In terms of textual function, Sentence 6 can be a good example. It first relayed the official statement of the Belt and Road to convey the policy orientation of China's friendly neighbors and common prosperity. Then the conversation turned to the true point and essence through the turning word “but”. The whole speech is connected into a unified whole through the simple conjunction “but”. Obviously, the focus is on the content after the transition word, trying to cite the so-called public concerns to prove that such a policy is not the world wants. Another example is the use of “as well as” in Sentence 3, indicating that the construction of oil and gas pipelines and ports is not only for commercial purposes, but also for military purposes, thus highlighting the aggressive characteristics of the Belt and Road.

3.3 Interpretation of Text Analysis

The tendency reflected in the above text is the result of being catalyzed by political and economic factors. On the surface, most western media do not belong to a certain party or group, but government's control of information channels makes the reports reflect the ideology of the elite to serve the country's politics and governance. The ideological differences between countries directly lead to the inability of objective and fair reports in the western mainstream media. Its distortion and even demonization of China's image are mostly due to inherent prejudices and conflicts of interest. For a long time, western countries have had a hostile attitude towards China. Western media have promoted the dictatorship of the Chinese government and that the Chinese people have no human rights. Especially with the continuous growth of China's economic strength, western countries believe that the rise of China's economy has squeezed their interest space. The Sino-US trade war is a good example. Although China has publicly stated its stance of tolerance and openness on many occasions, China's prosperity and development is still regarded as a risk.

In fact, the Belt and Road emphasizes the principles of extensive consultation, co-construction,

and sharing. It emphasizes the concept of openness and tolerance: First, it is compatible with the existing local cooperation structure, and try not to start anew. Second, it is tolerant with foreign powers, not to exclude foreign forces such as Russia, the United States, Europe and Japan. It emphasizes the public spirit and public product attributes of the international cooperation, rather than China's unilateral strategy. It is different from colonialism, imperialism, and hegemonism in which international plundering and competition are the normal in modern times, and cooperation and compromise are abnormal conditions. It is also different from the post-war Western foreign aid and other international cooperation models [6] [7].

4. Conclusion

This paper uses the BBC's reports on the Belt and Road Initiative as the material, and according to the content emphasized in the reports, divides the samples into two categories: "China Risk Theory" and "Chinese Leader". With Halliday's Systematic-functional Grammar as the theoretical support, it analyzes the selected samples in terms of ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function, and interprets the ideology hidden behind the text analysis.

At present, the mainstream media in Britain and America are still the dominant players in the international discourse power [8]. The academic community should continue to analyze and interpret their reports, so as to make targeted responses, which can make the world's people fully and correctly understand China's foreign policies such as the Belt and Road. As the second largest economy in the world, China's economic strength has improved for all to see. There is still a long way to go to successfully transform economic power into soft power, strengthen China's right to speak, and eliminate prejudice and discrimination caused by political and economic factors.

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