

# Critical Discourse Analysis of Reported Speech in China and American Media on the Coverage of COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** In news reports, reported speeches are frequently utilized to convey a specific point. The characteristics of reported speech, particularly news sources, employed in the New York Times and China Daily on the pandemic are examined in this article using the discourse analysis method. Their differing news sources reflect the philosophies of two major news organizations. The analysis of these two newspapers can give Chinese media some insight into how to improve the impact of our communication instruments.

**Keywords:** Linguistics; Critical discourse analysis; Reported speech (news source)

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## 1. Introduction

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, people at home and abroad have been paying close attention. This pandemic has developed into a global public health emergency, and reports of the pandemic released by news media organizations have become particularly important in today's complex and diversified information dissemination system. In order to report the issues concerning COVID-19, reported speech has been widely used in both overseas and domestic media, serving as the major news sources. Based on the statistic and content analysis of Chinese and American newspapers (China Daily (CD) and New York Times (NYT)), this essay analyzes different preferences of them. Due to the difficulty of identifying news source, the linguistic data of this essay was mainly done by manual.

## 2. Theories used for study

### 2.1. Definition of reported speech

Fundamentally, reported speech is a kind of reflexive language, which means using language to refer language itself. John A. Lucy thinks that reported speech is the most explicitly reflexive activities, which "purportedly re-presents another specific speech event <sup>[1]</sup>."

The researches on reported speech mainly involve three aspects: reporting mode, reporting verb and news source. Of the three aspects, news source is the focus of this essay. Van Dijk <sup>[2]</sup> identifies twelve news sources when analyzing news reports in Dutch newspapers. Bell <sup>[3]</sup> lists eight news sources when he was writing a news report. Xin <sup>[4]</sup> divides news source into six aspects according to the subjects of these sources: government agencies, journalists & media, experts & scholars, general public, companies, and social groups. He divides them into three aspects based on the clarity: specified source, unspecified

source, and anonymous source. After the linguistic data is collected from the newspapers, it's believed that Xin's classification is more suitable.

## 2.2. Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is both a theory and a research methodology. In critical linguists' eyes, the relationship between discourse and society is dialectical. Linguistic structures are not directly related to social structures, but are through a medium. There are many well-established theories. This essay employs Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for analysis of discourse. Fairclough's theory [5] involves three dimensions: Description (text analysis), Interpretation (processing analysis) and Explanation (social analysis). Due to the limitation of linguistic data, this essay mainly focuses on the level of processing analysis and social analysis.

## 3. Processing analysis of linguistic data

This essay chooses 88 articles from NYT and 90 articles from CD. Authors collect the reports on COVID-19 in these articles. There are totally 1201 news sources from NYT and 1013 from CD.

**Table 1.** Proportion of different subjects of news source

|                | Government agencies | Journalists & Media | Experts & Scholars | General public | Companies | Social groups |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| New York Times | 38.33%              | 1.67%               | 22.41%             | 19.44%         | 4.63%     | 13.52%        |
| China Daily    | 53.06%              | 5.10%               | 13.27%             | 16.33%         | 9.18%     | 3.06%         |

### 3.1. Subjects of news source

#### 3.1.1. Similarities

Firstly, government agencies constitute the major news sources of both NYT and CD. Herbert J. Gans [6] believes that government agencies and their spokesmen represent authority and responsibility, thus more likely to be chosen as the subjects of news source because they are unable to bear the consequences of lying, which ensures the reliability of the news. These two newspapers' choices of news sources reflect this typical characteristic in news reports. Secondly, due to the special nature of the topic: the pandemic, the reports collected show a large amount of news source from medical experts. Here the experts include both medical workers like doctors and scholars in universities or health organizations.

#### 3.1.2. Differences

Firstly, from the perspective of proportion, **Table 1** shows that although government agencies serve as the major news source, the proportion in CD is higher than that in NYT. The high proportion of reported speeches from the government increases the authority of news report and the credibility of the data source, which is crucial to stabilizing and comforting peoples' minds during the pandemic. The high proportion also reflects Chinese government's high attention to the pandemic and its great concern for people. In order to further explain the differences, the content needs to be analyzed. Here are some examples from China Pushes Back as Coronavirus Crisis Damages Its Image in NYT.

"They have a toolbox that only seems to have a hammer," said Jörg Wuttke, the president of the European Chamber of Commerce in China. (Social groups)

“The epidemic is a lost opportunity for China to rebuild some good will with America and other countries,” Susan L. Shirk, chairwoman of the 21st Century China Center at the University of California, San Diego, wrote in an email. (Experts & Scholars)

Some Trump administration officials and members of Congress have argued that the crisis should force a more decisive reset in relations with China. (Government agencies)

In NYT’s reported speeches, there were few that support the Chinese government’s actions and acknowledge China’s policies. A large part of reported speeches from politics and experts in NYT emphasize the uncontrollability of the pandemic and denigrate China on the grounds that China violates its people’s human rights, intended to further mislead Western readers by exploiting the existing stereotypes of the Chinese government and media. At the same time, it also intentionally relays and amplifies negative voices, deliberately creating a picture of China’s authoritarian and dictatorial governance, lack of human rights and freedom, laggard emergency response system, and low medical levels. Chinese government and officials’ good image has been tarnished by the deliberate attempt to amplify these negative voices. Through the interplay of various voices, the media has infiltrate journalists’ or editors’ personal views and opinions into their reports, influencing the value judgments of their readers, so that the media can control readers’ perception and understanding.

Here are some examples of reported speeches from Government agencies in CD:

Premier Li Keqiang said during an inspection of one of the mask makers in Beijing that China would need to boost efforts to push face mask production to over 100 million a day to meet national demand. (New reusable face masks in production)

President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission. On various occasions, he has said that winning the battle in Wuhan will lead to a victory in Hubei, which, in turn, will lead to triumph in the fight nationwide. (Helping hands make life easier in Wuhan)

Reported speeches from Government agencies involve both central and local governments. Quite a number of reported speeches come from President Xi Jinping. They clarify the work direction and general policy. His encouragement and firm belief boost the morale of the whole nation, embodying a courageous, responsible and united nation image.

Secondly, the difference also lies in the proportion of experts and general public. In NYT, general public ranks third and in CD this kind of news source ranks second. People’s voices matter in China because people are the masters of China. The content of reported speech from General public also varies a lot between these two newspapers.

One man, 35, who returned last week from Japan. He went to an emergency room in Brooklyn, where he was deemed ineligible for a test, he said in an interview. “I was really shocked,” the man, who asked not to be identified by name, said in a Skype interview from his Brooklyn apartment, where he has quarantined himself. (City Pleads for More Coronavirus Tests as Cases Rise in New York from NYT)

Shortly after Mr. Pence’s briefing: the captain said that he had not received any advance notice about the news briefing and that the ship would notify individuals of their test results “as soon as possible.” (In the U.S., More Than 300 Coronavirus Cases Are Confirmed from NYT)

Peng Jing, 33, a community worker with 11 years’ experience, faced her toughest challenge to date when novel coronavirus pneumonia hit Wuhan, Hubei province. ....” We have a total of 11 community workers, which means that every one of us is responsible for looking after around 400 households,” Peng said: Peng Jing said she fully understands the significance of communities in winning the battle. (Helping hands make life easier in Wuhan from CD)

In the first example, that New Yorker expressed his complaint to the criteria of receiving a coronavirus test. In the second example, passengers were stranded on a ship halted off the coast due to the

potential coronavirus symptoms on some of them. The captain's notifications showed the low-efficiency of local disease control apartment. These two examples are typical reported speeches from General public in New York Times, which usually express civilians' dissatisfaction with the government. The third example is a whole different picture. Community workers, along with medical workers, serve at the frontier of this battle against coronavirus. Reported speech in China Daily shows Chinese people's responsibility and courage in this pandemic. No one shows fear and all of them devote themselves into it. They support the country's policy and puts it into practice. People work together to fight the coronavirus. This kind of report boosts people's spirit, which is crucial in this struggling fight.

### 3.2. Clarity

Based on **Table 2**, it is evident that the proportions of three types of news source are similar in the two newspapers. The difference is that the combined proportion of anonymous source and unspecified source has a higher proportion in NYT than that in CD. If the report is full of information from unspecified and anonymous sources, readers will be suspicious of the authenticity of the news report. It is possible that the reason out of protection for the source providers. Of course, it is not excluded that journalists conceal their sources by reinforcing a viewpoint favorable to their own country.

|                | Specified Source | Unspecified Source | Anonymous Source | Total |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------|
| New York Times | 807; 67%         | 358; 30%           | 36; 3%           | 1201  |
| China Daily    | 709; 70%         | 221; 22%           | 83; 8%           | 1013  |

**Table 2.** The proportion of differed clarity of news source

### 4. Social analysis

Through the analysis above, it is obvious that different reported speeches construct different media images. The linguistic data showed that both NYT and CD use many reported speeches from government agencies and experts. NYT uses reported speeches from experts to present an image of Chinese inefficient response to the pandemic and the sufferings of patients. On reported speeches from government agencies, CD quote many words from President Xi Jinping and central governments to lift the spirits of Chinese people, while NYT use those from politics to show the uncontrollability and severity of the pandemic. On reported speeches from General public, CD focus on the responsibility and courage of people in the frontiers while NYT reports people's dissatisfaction with government's measures. The core reason is that America is a meritocracy society, representing the interests of bourgeoisie and China is a socialist society, representing the interests of people.

### 5. Conclusion

News report is the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, reflecting the standpoint and attitudes of reporters in a negative or positive way. Based on the analysis of reported speech from the perspective of news source, the difference of these two newspapers' coverage of the pandemic is clearly revealed. Both of the newspapers quote a lot from government agencies and experts, but New York Times' reported speech focuses on the uncontrollability and severity of the pandemic and shows an unfavorable attitude towards

China's countermeasures against the pandemic, passing a negative emotional climate. New York Times also employs a large proportion of unspecified and anonymous news sources, lowering the confidence of American people. On the contrary, China Daily's reported speeches are mostly positive. The high proportion of Government agencies and General public reveal China's confidence on overcoming the difficulties and winning the battle against the coronavirus. Exploring the ideology behind the reported speeches in media helps us to gain insight into the values and attitudes of Western societies toward China. Chinese media should pay attention to western media's reports on China and improve the communication methods to build a positive image in the international society.

### **Disclosure statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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