A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Reports on Sino-Japan Boat Collision

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ABSTRACT: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to reveal the embedded ideologies by integrating the textual analysis with the wider socio-cultural context and further brings to light the relationship among language, power and ideologies. Based upon the theoretical framework of Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, the paper makes a critical discourse analysis of the ten news reports from China Daily and New York Times respectively. The study shows that news discourse could not simply reproduce social reality in an absolute objective and unbiased way. The choice of linguistic forms carries particular ideological orientations. Theoretically, it validates that CDA is an effective tool in revealing the relationship between language and ideologies. It also proves that Fairclough’s three-dimensional model can be applied in the study of news discourse. Practically, it draws people’s attention to the ideologies embedded in news discourse and encourages them to improve their critical reading.

1 INTRODUCTION

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (Van Dijk, 2001). Until now, CDA has been widely applied to non-literary discourse studies, especially public discourse. Among public discourse, news discourse is especially worthy of our attention. Newspapers and their affiliated news agencies tend to claim that they are independent of any governmental intervention or influence. However, anything that is said or written about the world is essentially articulated from a particular ideological perspective. Language is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium (Fowler, 1991).

Many domestic scholars have done a lot of CDA research on news discourse. Among them, Xin Bin (2006) investigates news source and reporting patterns in news reports. Lai Yan (2009) investigates intertextuality of news headlines.

This paper intends to conduct a detailed critical discourse analysis of ten news reports on the boat collision between China and Japan in East China Sea on September 9th, 2010 within the three dimensional analytical framework of Norman Fairclough. The data are readily available from official websites of China Daily (CD) and New York Times (NYT).

2 FAIRCLOUGH’S THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL

Generally speaking, Fairclough takes a socio-cultural approach to CDA. He holds that there is no direct link between discourse structure and social structure. Rather, it is mediated by discourse practice involving such process as text production and interpretation. Critical to the understanding of Fairclough’s three-dimensional model is the characterization of the notion of discourse. Fairclough defines discourse as a form of social practice which implies that discourse serves as a mode of action, one form in which people can act upon the world and upon each other, as well as a mode of representation. It also implies that there is a dialectic relationship between discourse and social structure or more generally, there is a dialectic relationship between social practice and social structure.

Discourse is socially shaped and socially constitutive. Any discursive event is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice (Fairclough, 1992). The text dimension relates to the linguistic analysis of texts. The discursive practice dimension is concerned with text production and interpretation. The social practice dimension deals with the social analysis of discourse, it attempts to relate discourse to wider socio-cultural context of which discourse is one part, especially the reproduction and transformation of ideology through discursive practice and the constraining effect of
socio-cultural factors upon the choices of particular linguistic features in discourse. This method developed by Fairclough is widely known as the three-dimensional model. Thus, any discourse analysis involves analysis of texts (spoken, written, or involving a combination of semiotic modalities, e.g. televisual texts); analysis of discourse practices of text production, distribution and consumption; analysis of social and cultural practices which frame discourse practices and texts (Fairclough, 1998).

3 A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NEWS REPORTS ON SINO-JAPAN BOAT COLLISION

Based upon the three-dimensional model, the analysis is correspondingly conducted in three stages, namely, description, interpretation and explanation.

3.1 Description

The description of linguistic features involves such categories as lexical classification. Lexical items can be used to construct personal experience and social reality. Lexical items employed by China Daily and New York Times generally represent different attitudes and ideological positions. This can be clearly shown by the attribution of the sovereignty of Diaoyu Islands where boat collision between Chinese fishing boat and Japanese patrol vessel took place.

Table 1. Coverage of the sovereignty of Diaoyu Islands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China Daily</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea</td>
<td>territorial disputes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China’s Diaoyu Islands</td>
<td>disputed islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China’s inherent territory since ancient times</td>
<td>controlled by Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integral part of China’s territory</td>
<td>China’s territorial claims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China’s inherent territory</td>
<td>claimed by both countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>claimed by China and Taiwan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The factor that who has the sovereignty over Diaoyu Islands plays a very important role in identifying who should be responsible for the boat collision between China and Japan. CD employs a prepositional phrase “in the East China Sea” to modify “Diaoyu Islands”. The modifier “in the East China Sea” implies vaguely that Diaoyu Islands may or maybe not belong to China. As the event continues to deteriorates, CD changes its wordings and chooses such possessive phrases as “China’s Diaoyu Islands”, “China’s inherent territory since ancient times”, “integral part of China’s territory”, “China’s inherent territory” etc. Possessive phrase generally defines the possessive relationship between China and Diaoyu Islands.

In contrast, NYT holds that the legal status of Diaoyu Island has not been decided yet and there is a “territorial dispute” between China and Japan. The use of the word “claim” is especially worthy of our attention. “Claim” means to “assert and demand the recognition of (a right, title, possession, etc.) or ‘assert one's right to’”. It is safe to say that anyone can claim his or her rights to anything, but it does not necessarily mean that one has the legal rights over the thing which one claims. It is no surprising that Diaoyu Islands can be “claimed by China and Taiwan” and it even can be “claimed by both countries” (including China and Japan). By using the word of “claim”, journalists of NYT do not recognize China’s sovereignty over Diaoyu Islands. NYT establishes Japanese jurisdiction over the island by the use of the word “control”. “Control” is a word with connotation entailing what is controlled is a hard fact and it cannot be argued against. The phrase “controlled by Japan” employed by NYT indicates that although Diaoyu Islands are claimed by both countries, it is a fact that it is effectively controlled by Japan rather than China on the ground. Thus, NYT attempts to establish a fact that it is Japan which controls the islands and thus the arrest or detention of the crews and the captain on its part is justified.

The ideological conflict between the two newspapers is also clearly showed in the portrayal of Japanese government and people. “Led by the media” indicates that Japanese government clearly does not give top priority to Sino-Japan relationship. Its decision to extend the illegal detention of the Chinese captain is made so as to sooth a small group of people in Japan. And CD maintains that if DPJ (the ruling Democratic Party of Japan) administration is led by the media; it could not possibly take practical measures to solve the diplomatic crisis. “Escalation of the situation” refers to Japanese detention of the Chinese captain. “Making one mistake after another” refers to Japanese government’s decision to prolong the detention of the captain for a second time. It is Japanese government that ultimately pushes “the serious situation in relations to a deadlock”. All these expressions show that CD attributes the deterioration of already serious situation to Japanese government.

Table 2. Portrayal of Japanese government and people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China Daily</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>escalation of the situation</td>
<td>humiliating retreat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making one mistake after another</td>
<td>weak prime ministers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>led by the media</td>
<td>diplomatic defeat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>push the serious situation in relations to a deadlock</td>
<td>setback weak-kneed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gave in to Chinese pressure</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Surprisingly enough, NYT also seems to paint a negative picture of Japanese government. NYT generally sees the release of the Chinese captain by the Japanese government as a “humiliating retreat”, “diplomatic defeat” and “set back”. NYT does not simply consider the boat collision as a separate incident but more generally as a test of will between resurgent China and Japan, which is facing increasing challenge from China. NYT shows its dissatisfaction or even anger about the way in which the episode between China and Japan settles down. It despises the Japanese government and particularly the prime minister through the uses of such words as “weak” or “weak-kneed”.

To sum up, lexical classification is an indication or barometer of the ideological stance embedded in news discourse. Through the critical discourse analysis of the lexical items employed by CD and NYT, it clearly shows that each presents the news event of boat collision from their own particular ideological orientation. Generally speaking, CD presents Chinese government and its people in favorable lights by using those lexical items or expressions with positive connotations. It emphasizes the good action and properties of Chinese government and the bad action and properties of Japanese government.

3.2 Interpretation

The second stage of discourse analysis involves the interpretation of the relationship between the discourse practice and the text. Discourse practice involves text production, distribution and consumption. One central concern is to specify which orders of discourse (genres, discourses and styles) are drawn upon both in the production process and interpretation process. According to Fairclough, the second stage of discourse analysis is primarily an intertextual analysis. Any texts or discourses are inherently intertextual, constituted from other already existent texts and from potentially diverse text types. This is also true of news reports. Journalists tend to justify their opinions by simply quoting the words from other persons. In some cases, journalists may mark clearly the voice of the person whose discourse is being represented or quoted from the rest of the text by means of quotation marks and a reporting verb. Or they may choose to merge it structurally and stylistically into the surrounding text through a rewording of the original remarks. The choice made by a journalist is not random but ideologically invested. The analysis of discourse representation can therefore shed light on the different ideological orientations of journalists from CD and NYT.

Fairclough classifies discourse representation into DD (Direct Discourse), ID (Indirect Discourse), DDS (subtype of DD) and UNSIG. Among them, UNSIG designates the situation in which secondary discourse appears in primary discourse without being clearly marked as represented discourse. Based upon this classification, different discourse representations are calculated in the two newspapers and the distribution of each type is shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DD(S)</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China Daily</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is found that all of the three discourse representations have been used in the two newspapers. ID in CD has the highest distribution, accounting for 71% of the total. The second most frequently used discourse representation is DD, which accounts for 27%. DD(S) accounts for only 2%. With respect to NYT, DD is used overall as frequently as ID, with DD and ID accounting for 52.6% and 42.1% respectively. Similarly, DD(S) is seldom used, accounting for only 5.3% of the total. Vertically, ID in CD exceeds that of NYT by more than 28 percentage points, accounting for 71% and 42.1% respectively. DD in NYT overwhelms that of CD by about 25 percentage points, accounting for 52.6% and 27% respectively. In others words, journalists of CD show a stronger tendency to employ ID that their counterparts. Journalists of NYT are more likely to use DD that Chinese Journalists.

Compared with CD, DD in NYT has a much higher distribution. Fairclough identifies several reasons for the employment of DD. According to him, DD is used primarily when (a) it is important, dramatic, witty etc; (B) it is from an authoritative source; (C) the journalist wishes to distance from or associate with it; (D) the report has ample space assigned to it(Fairclough, 1995). DD carries a commitment to present the exact form of words used. By representing the exact wording of the person whose voice is being made heard, DD invariably leaves the readers with the impression that journalists present an objective picture of the events being reported. Despite the fact that DD in NYT has an exceedingly higher distribution than that of CD, however, it does not necessarily mean that its reports are objective or even closer to the fact. The overall objectivity is measured by the total number of reported speeches rather than the individual case of DD. CD employs slightly more reported speeches than that of NYT. Therefore, CD is more objective in its reporting.
3.3 Explanation

At this stage, the discourse under study is put in a wider socio-political context so as to expose or reveal the embedded power and ideology and their constraining effects both on text and discourse practice. Explanation of socio-cultural context will enable us to better understand why different newspapers report the same news event from dramatically different perspectives.

From the linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis, it is quite clear that NYT and CD labels the same event in different terms and NYT creates a negative picture of China. These differences can be traced to different ideological orientations of the two newspapers. Newspaper basically manipulates peoples' attitude and beliefs towards a social event by representing the mainstream ideologies in a society. As the throat of the government, newspaper invariably presents the news event in the interest and stance of the government. So, to a certain extent, news report is not a representation of the social event but largely a construction of it. Berger and Luckmann maintains that news as a practice is a ‘the social construction of reality’ (Fowler, 1991).

The boat collision incident is a bilateral issue between China and Japan. United States intervenes and views the boat collision incident as a test of wills between Japan, the region’s established power but now-fading economic giant, and China, a rising force that use its powerful military to press its territorial claim. From the beginning to the end, United States plays a negative role in the long process leading up to the settlement of the crisis. In the beginning, NYT characterizes the incident as a territorial dispute between the two countries. When the incident has come to a peaceful end, United States is so desperate that it criticizes Japan as too weak-kneed and considers it as a humiliating diplomatic defeat for Japan and a victory for China.

Internationally, China has played an increasingly important and positive role in the world affairs. China aims to build a multi-polarized world in which the issues of common concern, such as climatic change, disease, nuclear proliferation etc. should be dealt with through multilateral talks and negotiations. Therefore, Unite States views a powerful China as a grave threat to the realization of its dreams.

United States has maintained a close military relationship with Japan. It has signed the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan with Japan back in 1960. Hillary Clinton even held that the Diaoyu Islands fall within the scope of the US-Japan security treaty. Different representations of the same news event are guided by different ideological orientations. United States basically sees a rising China as a serious threat to its status as the only superpower. And it makes use of its closest alliance with Japan in East Asia to contain China. The boat collision incident provides the United States an opportunity to tighten its relationship with Japan and to create a bad image of Chinese government and its people.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Through this study, it is found that there exist great differences in the reports of the same incident between the two newspapers. Generally speaking, CD presents a favorable image of Chinese government and its people by using those lexical items or expressions with positive connotations. In contrast, NYT depicts Chinese government and its people in exclusively negative terms.

With regard to the mode representation in CD, ID is the dominant used accounting for 71% and DD takes up only 27%. The exceedingly high distribution of ID provides validation to a wider tendency in media discourse. Newspaper tends to reword or transform official ‘voices’ to common sense easily accepted by the public. While in NYT, DD and ID each almost accounts for half of the total reported speech used. DD(S) is seldom used in both newspapers. The total number of reported speech used in CD exceeds that of NYT by five instances.

The above findings clearly demonstrate that the news reports is not value free but highly ideologically invested. Generally, CD describes Chinese government and its people in positive terms and puts Japanese government in negative lights. In contrast, NYT emphasizes the bad behaviors and qualities of Chinese government and its people. The choices of words on the part of the journalists are not random but essentially guided by certain ideologies. Such polarized portrayal of Chinese government and its people are shaped and constrained by the particular ideological investment in dominance of the two countries. United States sees China as a serious threat to its status as the only superpower and wants to make use of its military alliance with Japan to contain a rising China. In contrast, China aims to maintain a friendly and cooperative relationship with its neighbors and solves the diplomatic crisis through bilateral talks and negotiations.

The major conclusions can be summarized as follows:

News discourse just as any other type of discourse is not value-free but ideologically invested. The news reports are not merely a representation or mirror but largely an active and subjective construction of social reality on the part of journalists driven by particular ideological positions.

News reports by the two newspapers are shaped and constrained by the dominant ideologies of the
The linguistic differences involving such areas as lexical classification, process types, discourse representation and news sources between CD and NYT can be traced back to individual ideological orientations. That is to say, all these differences cannot be adequately explained without taking the different ideological orientations and power relations into consideration. Basically, language is shaped by power and ideology.

Ideologies reside in discourse. The different ideologies of the two newspapers can be brought to light by conducting critical analysis of the news reports on the same news event. Ideology and power is primarily discursive in nature. Ideology is primarily established, sustained and challenged through discourse.

5 CONCLUSION

Through the critical discourse analysis of the news reports on the boat collision in CD and NYT, the paper provides a further validation to the theory of critical discourse analysis. It proves that CDA is indeed an effective tool in conducting analysis of news discourse. It helps us better understand why the discourse under study takes the form as it is but not others.

News report could not simply reproduce social reality in an absolute objective and unbiased way. News reports cannot be simply treated as a representation of social reality but largely a construction from particular ideological stance. In other words, news reports are essentially ideologically invested or loaded. The choice of linguistic forms carries particular ideological orientations. Theoretically, it validates that CDA is an effective tool in revealing the relationship between language and ideologies. It also proves that Fairclough’s three-dimensional model can be applied in the study of news discourse. Practically, it draws people’s attention to the ideologies embedded in news discourse and encourages them to improve their critical reading.

It also has pedagogical significance in classroom teaching. Traditionally, teachers always focus on grammatical points and organizational pattern in reading materials. Instead, teachers should apply CDA in teaching and they should draw students’ attention to the shaping effect of the underlying power and ideologies upon the meaningful choices of words or expressions on the part of the author.

This study is by no means an exhaustive and comprehensive study of the different ideologies embedded in the news reports of boat collision by CD and NYT. It has its own limitations. Firstly, due to the limit of time, other linguistic choices made by journalists may be ideologically invested, such as the choices of different reporting verbs by the two newspapers, but they are not included in the present study. Secondly, the data under examination only cover ten news reports by each of the two newspapers; as a result, the validity and significance of the present study is reduced to some degree. Thirdly, it is widely admitted that everyone is inevitably confined to his or her own socio-cultural context. Consequently, the explanation of the ideologies embedded in the news reports could not be absolutely objective and impartial. The subjectivity of CDA research has always come under criticism by other critics. This is also true of the present study. All that we can do is to offer a sensible explanation as objective as possible. Anyway, the critical study of the news reports of boat collision by the two newspapers has drawn readers’ attention to the interplay of language, power and ideology.

The present study shed some lights on the ideological differences on the news reports of boat collision primarily from the perspective of ideational meanings expressed in CD and NYT. A full and clear picture of the ideological differences between the two newspapers can be possibly obtained by focusing on the other two aspects: interpersonal meaning and textual meaning.

REFERENCES


