

Critical Discourse Analysis of Covid-19 Reporting in the International Press: the Case of USA and China

تحليل الخطاب النقدي لتقرير الكوفيد 19 في الصحافة الدولية: حالة الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية والصين

Hadjer Belghoul¹

Samir DJELTI² *

1 Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University Mostaganem, Algeria

2 Mustapha Stambouli University Mascara, Algeria

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Abstract: Times New Roman12 (not more than 10 Lines)

The present paper uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the analysis of political social actors in media report news of the Corona virus in 2020. It examine texts of two news articles from two international newspapers: 'The New York Times and China Daily'. This paper aims to highlight the clash in patterns' interpretations among the selected newspapers. Particularly, the latter foreground the origin, evolution and spread of the Covid-19 which has appeared in Wuhan (China). By contrast, the different interpretations of the two newspapers lead to discursive clash between US and Chinese social actors. The findings of this study suggest that news reports on the Corona virus based on biased patterns. Therefore, they are influenced by political and economic orientations and also liberal and communist ideological motifs.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Reporting, Covid 19, USA and China.

ملخص:

تعتمد المقالة التي بين أيدينا على تحليل الخطاب النقدي في تحليل المحددات السياسية والاجتماعية في تقارير الاعلام التي خصت جائحة الكورونا خلال 2020. تحاول المقالة التدقيق في نصوص نشرت في جرائد دولية حول الموضوع: أوقات نيويورك ويوميات الصين. يبين المقال الصراع بين الجريدين فيما يخص ترجمة ما يريدون قوله عبر المقالات. على وجه الخصوص، فإن الجريدتان تتبعتا نشأة، تطور وانتشار الفيروس والذي ظهر لأول مرة في مدينة يوهان الصينية. في نفس السياق، الترجمات المختلفة لتقرير الكوفيد 19 أدى الى صراع بين الفاعلين الاجتماعيين للولايات المتحدة الأمريكية والصين. بينت نتائج التحليل أن التقارير الجديدة حول جائحة الكورونا بالنسبة للجريدين تعتمد على أنماط منحازة. وبالتالي فإنها متأثرة بالتوجهات السياسية والاقتصادية للدولتين وكذا الأيديولوجيات الاشتراكية والليبرالية.

الكلمات المتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي، تقارير الاعلام، جائحة الكورونا، الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية والصين.

* Corresponding Author

1. Introduction:

Appeared for the first time in Wuhan, during December 2019, the Covid-19 virus has spread to reach the four corners of the world, with 10302867 confirmed cases and 505018 deaths worldwide (29th June 2020 13:24). The fast spread of the virus and the increasing of the number of contaminations and deaths have been transformed into an international pressure with social, political and economic dimensions. The China's origin of the virus created an international controversy about the accusation of China, or another country that has an advantage in accusing China.

Media in general, and journals in particular has exacerbate the debate and the accusations at the international arena. In addition to medias, the social and the political actors have contributed to defend, not only, their positions towards the covid issue, but their ideology can also influence the debate and lead to a biased reporting. Is the Covid-19 media reporting biased? What is the effect of the social actors and political pressure on media reporting in, both, China and USA?

In order to understand the debate and analyse its meanings, the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of US and China press report of the Corona pandemic is necessary. Such tool portrays in particular the discursive actions and linguistic properties that are responsible for drawing a particular representation of the social actors. Among the various motives for conducting the present article are the following dimensions:

CDA aims primarily, according to Fairclough (2014), to bring a change to the living social reality whereby discourse is linked particularly to various social elements like ideologies, economic and political strategies. From such perspective, this is the main goal of this study in the analysis of the Covid-19 pandemic report in the international press. The aim of this paper is not to side with one part over the other, but rather to demonstrate the elements involved in reporting the pandemic spread.

This paper adopts the socio-semantic inventory that was introduced by Van Leeuwen (1996) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). It offers a scrutiny of socio-linguistic principles and choices representation. This model is based on the literal representation of social actors in discourse. In this framework, among the discursive features are: deletion, rearrangement and substitutions in the analysis of the data.

Regarding methodology, Van Dijk (1993) has proposed a model of critical discourse analysis. In his model, the author describes the interactions between power and dominance used to text and discourse structures. More precisely, his model connects the macro level (social cognitive understandings) to the micro (text and talk) in order to detect how power and/or dominance are presented, produced, and reproduced in discourse. In this paper, the Van Dijk model of CD analysis will be applied on the debate about the Covid-19 origin and evolution between USA and China journals.

2. Theoretical Background

CDA is an intricate sub-discipline of discourse analysis that is characterised by its various theories and analyses (Wodak and Meyer 2015). It is ‘concerned with the ‘hidden agenda’ of discourse, its ideological dimension... in analysing the ideological significance of a text’ (Cameron 2001: 123/8). This implies that more focus needs to be put not only on its surface linguistic features but also on what is *not* said, i.e. it is rather deduced or guessed. In other words, CDA seeks to bridge the link between language discourse and social power. Basing on this ideology, the current paper underlines the following:

Critical discourse analysis research strives to offer interpretations of textual meanings instead of merely measuring the linguistic features and extracting meaning from this process (Mohamed Wissam, 2009). Hence, it aims to link the written or pronounced discourse elements in a context where it happens instead of simply deducing patterns and standards from texts; and holding that the meaning is derived from ‘an interaction between producer, text and consumer rather than simply being read off the page by all readers in exactly the same way’ (ibid, 2009). Such approach holds that discursive meaning underlies in the words of the used language, and thus represents the image of social actors.

Moreover, the fact of being more and more aware of the way language functions in constructing discursive meaning or the different ways of conceiving the world. According to Baker (2006), one has to be more and more resistant to writers’ temptations to manipulate us by proposing what is ‘common sense’ and ‘accepted wisdom’. This implies that every single part of speech may refer to an underlying meaning. However, apart from being biased, meaning construction may sometimes be difficult to draw since we live in ‘a society saturated with literacy’ (Blommaert, 2005) cited in Baker (2006). Here, Blommaert asserts that communication does not solely depend on personal linguistic choices, but it also depends on the standards which are represented by patterns and inequalities (ibid). Therefore, in order to construct meaning, one has to be critical. To put it in another way, more clarifications and explanations should be presented for discourse description instead of merely interpreting texts or identifying discursive features.

In this respect, critical discourse analysis aims at highlighting the discursive practices that are shaped and introduced in a set of processes of news. From Fairclough’s (1995, 2004) perspective, every discursive action implies three main dimensions: a text, either spoken or written; a discursive practice, which involves the production and consumption of discourse, and a social action.

Critically speaking, CDA strives to show that language is a social and practical action which is manifested by reciprocal relationship with the society. In this light, Fairclough and Wodak (1997) offer a set of principles for CDA that can be summed up as followed:

- a. CDA emphasises social issues.
- b. Power connections are based on discursive actions.

- c. Discursive acts involve society and culture.
- d. Discourse is an ideological and a historical action.
- e. The relationship between society and text is interlinked.
- f. Discourse analysis is expository and interpretative.
- g. Discourse is defined as a social act.

In respect to such norms and goals, CDA is used to investigate the way social actors are represented (Chinese and US) in the discourse of two symbolic and international US and Chinese newspapers in the coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic. It sheds light on the linguistic elements and discursive actions presented by media producers in their portrayal of social actors. In other words, it tries to manage the cognitive aspect and knowledge of the discourse in reporting such event. Therefore, CDA studies ideological implications or visions in the press discourses on this pandemic. Power evidence is, then, apparent in media discourse interactions as explained in the following section.

3. Interaction of media discourse and ideology

Media discourse is based mainly on texts, which are related to news events, and processes to build and produce the texts. Moreover, media discourse depicts inevitably ideological concerns vis-à-vis powerful mediators such as, journalists and politicians (Fairclough, 2003; Recharadson 2007). In this light, Fairclough (2001) sees media discourse as a 'one-sided' event that is able to clearly distinguish producers from interpreters. Specifically, it aims to communicate between the private and the public areas depending on the media location features. Media presents news about multiple matters, e.g., social, economic, political or health to people via TV, newspapers and social media as Facebook, etc. This study focuses on the way the chosen newspapers report the event of the Covid-19 pandemic and present it to their readers. Within such texts, discursive actions are interrelated and point out the representation of social actors.

Representation lays on particular stands from which social actors are based. According to Wenden (2005), representation implies that the language used in a text or talk carry meanings to people and their social practices, to social conditions and elements of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Particularly, the current paper shows that representation is associated to the process of yielding meaning though textual combination. Hence, meaning construction is based on the linguistic implications in news media. The representation of social actors combines them with specific attitudes, such as, accusation about the origin of the virus, virus spread, making efforts to control the pandemic propagation, striving to invent the vaccine against the virus; etc. Such specific representations of social groups in media are related to some ideologies.

4. Conception of the pandemic reporting

Reporting pandemics in media is an essential resource for press and readers. Regarding news communication, and in line with Bedrosian (2016) view about pandemic news, the dissemination of news is a result of a great deal; they must be clear,

Table 1 . Practice:

China Daily	NewYork Times
<p>Rumor 1: The COVID-19 virus is engineered at a Chinese laboratory.</p> <p>Fact: All evidence shows that SARS-CoV-2 originated in nature.</p>	<p>Pneumonic Plague is Diagnosed in China</p> <p>Two cases of the fatal and highly infectious illness, which is related to bubonic plague, were found in Beijing, prompting fears of an outbreak.</p>
<p>Rumor 2: The SARS-CoV-2 was released as the result of lab accident at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.</p> <p>Fact: The Wuhan Institute of Virology has nothing to do with the virus' origin.</p>	<p>China Reports First Death from New Virus</p> <p>The Coronavirus, which surfaced in the city of Wuhan, has put the region on alert, but there is no evidence that it can spread among humans.</p>
<p>Rumor 3: The novel coronavirus is a Chinese virus because it came from Wuhan.</p> <p>Fact: The official name for the virus is SARS-CoV-2. Wuhan is where the COVID-19 case was first reported, but it is not necessary the place where the virus originates.</p>	<p>Trump Depends Using ‘Chinses Virus’ Label, Ignoring Growing Criticism</p> <p>“It’s not racist at all”, the president said. But experts warned that the term could result in xenophobia.</p>

<p>Rumor 4: As early as mid-November, China has known about the COVID-19 outbreak but withheld the information for 45 days.</p> <p>Fact: Chinese authorities first received a report of the pneumonia case of unknown cause on Dec 27 and released its first outbreak notice on Dec 31.</p>	<p>China Spins Tale that the US Army Started the Corona Virus. After criticizing American officials for politicizing the pandemic, Chinese officials and news outlets have floated unfounded theories that the United States was the source of the virus.</p>
<p>-Rumor 5: China has withheld key information about the epidemic, which has led to a worldwide pandemic.</p> <p>Fact: China has notified the world as early as possible, and resorted to the strictest epidemic control measures, which gave at least six weeks for other countries to get prepared for the outbreak.</p>	<p>Chinese Agents Helped Spread Messages that Sowed Virus American officials were alarmed by fake text messages and social media posts that said President Trump was locking down the country.</p>
<p>Rumor 6: China attempted to suppress information about the epidemic by arresting whistle-blowing doctors.</p> <p>Fact: No doctors have been arrested for whistle-blowing. In contrary, doctors who reported the disease to their higher-ups were rewarded by central authorities.</p>	<p>On W.H.O. Trip, China Refused to Hand Over Important Data The information could be key to determining how and when the outbreak started, and to learning how to prevent future pandemics.</p>

Source: Authors' elaboration

5. Methodological Framework

In CDA framework, the current paper uses Van Dijk (2009) socio-cognitive approach to analyse the extracts of the texts of the sampled news reports.

5.1. Research questions

The news from the Chinese newspapers is considered to be international and foreign for the US ones and vice-versa. In this regard, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do the US and the Chinese newspapers discursively represent the social actors in reporting the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. How are the representational categories used to construct the social actors in news stories?

In order to answer the research questions, this investigatory work applies certain procedures to collect and examine the sample data.

5.2. Data collection and sampling

This study aims to analyse a Chinese and American newspapers (Daily China and NewYork Times). This selection is mainly based on the large circulation in their countries and their popularity around the world, and this makes them international. According to the international Audit Bureau of Circulations (2014), the circulation of China Daily is 883,419 copies and the alliance for Audited Medias shows that the circulation of 'The NewYork Time' is 1,865,318 copies. Such selection of newspapers is made for their political orientation and ideological positions. Both newspapers are regarded as important publications on the international level.

The collected data is related to the covid-19 pandemic. It uses a purposive sample which aims to examine and analyse the data. In this regard, Seale (2012) demonstrates that the fact of using purposive sample reveals that the chosen materials have a relevant relation to the main research topic. It aims to reflect or represent the population; in this case, it consists of two selected newspapers from which it is chosen systematically. The sample includes some news' extracts presented in news stories. From these news stories, I selected 06 news texts based on basic criteria.

- News is reported on homepages, news pages and international ones of each selected newspaper. Such pages the most relevant to the news reporting published on the current sanitary situation at that period. To say it otherwise, such news extracts and headlines are reported in a direct way by news' correspondents and journalists.

- In respect to the previous criterion, the news' discourse covers the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic period. Five news stories are selected from each newspaper to represent the average news of the published data which show the clash between China and the US (the world).

By applying Van Dijk CDA model, which is based on three dimensions: text (discourse), social cognition and context, the present work seeks to analyse the textual extracts reported in the newspapers. In this regard, Van Dijk distinguishes three elements in analyzing the textual discourse: the macrostructure, superstructure and the microstructure. It illustrates an interactive connection between discourse and society, and highlights how linguistic structure (micro-level) can impact the social ideologies and vice versa.

6. Collection of the data and discussion

In this section, I try to answer the previous research questions of the study. In doing this, the newspapers' texts are analysed according to Van Dijk model.

6.1. Text/discourse Structure (macro-structure/ideology)

The macrostructure level refers to the topic that is being discussed in the text or discourse. Practically, the following table illustrates the collected data of the discourse reported in the US and the Chinese news:

Table 2. Comparison table

Topic/Theme	
Daily China Newspaper	NewYork Times Newspaper
<p>The theme in the rubric section in this newspaper represents a series of rumors or accusations about China with facts (factual defense) about the Covid-19 virus.</p> <p>This theme demonstrates the clash between the world and China by accusing the latter for the origin of the virus as it is shown in the discourse that is reported, i.e. accusation (rumor) and defense (fact).</p>	<p>The theme in the rubric section in this newspaper represents a series of American officials' accusations and self-defense vis-à-vis the origin of the virus.</p> <p>Such theme, as it is reported in the news' discourse, indicates the American authorities' accusation of China for the origin of the Covid-19 virus.</p>

Source: Authors' elaboration

6.2. The superstructure (schemata)

It depicts the way news' order and reports are schemed. In this case, it represents a series of accusations of both China and USA. Each side is launching verbal reactions to defend itself and to show that the other is faulty. The headlines are the most appealing part in the reports, this is why text makers use strong terms to appeal the audience.

Table 3. superstructure compraison

Daily China Newspaper	NewYork Times Newspaper
<p>The news report about Covid-19 in this newspaper is presented as followed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Titles/ Headings which are presented as rumors and facts in order to appeal the readers that the accusations made are just rumors. 2. The contents give more details about what is already mentioned in the headings. 3. Closing: refers to the summary of the report. It ends up by denying that the accusations against China and accusing the other group. 	<p>The news report about Covid-19 in this newspaper is presented as followed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Titles/Heading which are presented as US accusations against China for the origin of the Covid-19. 2. The contents provide more factual data about those accusations that have already been mentioned in the titles. 3. The closing demonstrate that USA and the world re pointing on China for the appearance of this virus.

Source: Authors' elaboration

6.3. The microstructure level of analysis

By relying on Van Dijk CDA model, the following table demonstrates some of the linguistic strategies that have been adopted by the news text makers of both Daily China and NewYork Times.

Table 4. Microstructure compraison

Microstructure strategies (linguistic mechanisms)	Daily China	NewYork Times
Assertion vs. denial	Denial	Assertion (accusing the other group)
Headlining vs. marginalization	Marginalizing the president accusation	Headlining the Chinese COVID19 origin
Detailed description Vs. vague description	Detailed description in self defense	Vague description in self-defense
Representation of social actors	In-group Vs. out group	In-group (USA)Vs. out group (China)
Functionalization		'Chinese virus' label
Categorizations		Chinese / China, American officials, US army

Source: Authors' elaboration

Conclusion:

After the appearance of the covid-19 pandemic, international media in general, and those of USA and China in particular have entered in a war of accusations. The main rationale of this paper is: Is the Covid-19 media reporting biased? What is the effect of the social actors and political pressure on media reporting in, both, China and USA?

This analysis referred to the discourses found in the analysis of Van Dijk CDA model, rather than merely focusing on overall differences between newspapers in news reporting. In this process, three main structures have been in the analysis of the news report: the macrostructure, the superstructure and the microstructure. The latter refers to the linguistic selection strategies which allowed to analyse the news reports which were presented as a series of news war, i.e. launching verbal accusations and verbal self-defense.

Overall, the analysis shows that the US and Chinese audiences did not have enough data to see if China was the real responsible for the emergence of the Covid-19. This paper was restricted to the fact of representing media clash between countries by highlighting both the Chinese and the American social actors. By doing such, the latter accuse the former for being responsible; whereas the Chinese text makers defend the Chinese doctors and population by considering those accusations as being rumors. However, it is important to claim that the present paper does not claim that it has used all the linguistic structures but it is limited to examine the media war and how strong it can be. Within this limitation, this study is not interested in highlighting who is right or wrong in their ideological patterns, but in shedding light on how meanings are yielded and how social actors are represented.

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