

A Corpse-driven Discourse Analysis of *China Daily's* National Image Construction in News Reports on Beijing 2022

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Abstract

This paper combines the research methods of critical discourse analysis and corpus study, selects *China Daily's* news reports about Beijing 2022, and analyses the discourse strategies of China's national image construction. Through the construction and analysis of the corpus, this paper contends that there is a certain relationship between the types of relevant reports and the attitudes of their representations. In the specific analysis, three main discourse strategies are revealed: constructing a national image through a paradigmatic discourse through the identity of Chinese athletes, constructing a national image through globalisation discourse by the representation of international visitors, and realising a national image through reporting on high technology associated with objectivity.

Keywords

Beijing 2022, CDA, Corpus, National image, China Daily.

1. Introduction

For a country, the coverage of sports has great significance in maintaining international relations and shaping the national image[1]. From Feb. 4 to 20, 2022, the 2022 Winter Olympics (Beijing 2022) was held in Beijing, China. During this period, sports reports were crucial in shaping China's national image. As China's national external newspaper, *China Daily* is an important window to view China. Its coverage of Beijing 2022 can also reflect its role in constructing the country's image.

Through the discourse analysis of *China Daily's* national image construction in the news report of Beijing 2022, the characteristics of the discourse strategies of Chinese official news media in the construction of national image can be revealed. Relevant advice can be given to the national media to help them better display the country's image, and provide a certain reference to enhance the country's international discourse power.

For the methodology, this research adopts the research method of combining critical discourse analysis and Corpse-driven study. Through the combination of these two methods, the discourse strategy of the text can be analysed and revealed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Discourse strategies of media in the construction of national image

The mainstream research on the strategies of the media in the construction of national image mainly utilises the method of discourse analysis. Through diverse empirical studies, Louisa Ha and Lars Willnat examined the effects of Chinese and US news media on constructing the national image during the trade war[2]. By choosing a macroscopic point of view, Xing Li-ju and Yan Chuanruolan analyse China's national image construction model. By classifying its process,

they summarised the problems of the strategies of China's national image construction in the media[3].

2.2. China's external media

The current research on China's external media mainly focuses on *China Daily's* reports on current events. The research angle is centred on the text and presented from various perspectives. Choosing systemic functional linguistics as methodology, Liu Lihua investigated patterns of interpersonal rhetoric devised in *China Daily* to construct and shape public opinion. Liu contends that the authors tend to be explicit in evaluating events and implicit in evaluating behaviour. The role of modality in the editorial discourse has also been examined[4]. Alice Ekman and Cristina de Esperanza Picardo investigated *China Daily Europe's* role in the construction of China's soft power in Europe and its discourse strategies to promote its influence at the EU level[5].

2.3. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) and corpus-based study

For the application of CDA in media news texts, many scholars have combined this method with corpus to analyse the discourse strategy. The feasibility of combining two different approaches has been proven by previous studies. Paul Baker's research team analysed a corpus of British news articles about refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants and suggested a framework for adopting corpus approaches in CDA[6]. By taking "birthmother letters" as an example, Thomas A. Upton and Mary Ann Cohen present a corpus-based approach to discourse analysis[7]. For more detailed and concrete research, Xiong Wenxin combined the method of CDA and bottom-up corpus-driven study. By choosing keywords, collocation, semantic prosody and intertextuality as the focuses, he used the framework of CDA and interpret how the subjectivity of news reports can be demonstrated[8].

3. Analysis

3.1. Collection of reports and construction of the corpus

3.1.1. Choice of the search keyword and collection of reports

The first step of the research is collecting news reports from the official websites of *China Daily*. By choosing "Beijing" and "Olympic" as separate keywords in advanced search and dates from Jan. 2022 to Mar. 2022 as the range, the result has 110 non-replicating news reports in the source of *China Daily*. After removing results that are irrelevant to Beijing 2022, 71 relevant news reports can be used to construct the corpus.

3.1.2. Preliminary analysis

A remarkable feature of the reports is that the classification of reports is clear according to the report themes. They can be classified into two categories, documentary reports on Beijing 2022 and political commentary.

Table 1. Numbers of different categories of reports in different months

	Documentary reports	Political commentary
Jan.	26	1
Feb.	33	2
Mar.	9	0
Total	68	3

Although the number of political commentaries is small, they have played a very important role in the construction of the country's image. These reports are highly targeted (concentrating on

the US), unified in attitude (showing a negative attitude), and scattered about specific incidents. Example 1 is the excerpts from the three reports:

Example 1: Those who have accused Gu Ailing of being a "traitor" or of being "ungrateful" to the US [...] reflects the reflexive animosities that plague the world today. ("The label 'traitor' fits no athlete" 2022-02-16)

They should reflect on what the US has been doing in its attempt to contain the rise of China, [...] their broader downsides to the global situation as a whole, which serve no country's interests. ("Sports show friendship can prevail over politics: China Daily editorial" 2022-02-17) *China Daily* demonstrated a convergent attitude through its reports on these events, showing a relatively unified and clear foreign policy. The discourse features presented in this process are very similar to and inseparable from China's diplomatic discourse[9].

In the documentary reports on the Winter Olympics itself, despite the relatively large number of reports and a very broad field of coverage, the attitudes are generally positive. Arguably, to some extent, the attitude of the reports is characterised by the topic or the theme of each report.

3.2. Characteristics of discourse strategy to construct a national image

3.2.1. Chinese athlete: a paradigmatic discourse

In the relevant reports, China's national image is largely based on the identity of Chinese athletes. Through direct quotes, indirect quotes and portrayals of related events of Chinese athletes, the image of athletes is constructed; based on the image of athletes, the image of the country can be indirectly constructed.

3.2.1.1 Example 2

Dinigeer, 20, [...], a men's Nordic combined athlete, jointly lit the cauldron at the opening ceremony [...] "The arrangement illustrates that China has successors in the cause of winter sports [...] ("Torchbearer completes memorable 18 hours" 2022-02-07)

In many different reports, the introduction and direct quotation of the Chinese athlete have the same paradigm: first, the objective introduction of the athlete (including the age, the sport type, etc.), then a subjective summary of the athlete's opinion or others' opinion, and finally the direct quotation as evidence or supplement. The excerpt above and the following excerpts are examples of this paradigm.

3.2.1.2 Example 3

Su Yiming, an athlete from [...] said it was a precious moment to be able to take part in the Winter Olympics in his home country [...] "Being able to win a silver medal at my first Winter Olympics on home soil is just unbelievable," [...] ("Shanxi teenager enters record book with Olympic silver medal" 2022-02-11)

Two Tibetan skiers, Yungkhen Lhamo and Tsering Dradul, [...] Their experiences and dedication have inspired Tibetans to participate in winter sports. [...] "There had been no athletes from Tibet at previous (Winter Olympic) Games," [...] ("Two athletes prove hot appeal for winter sports in Tibet" 2022-03-02)

In these excerpts, the mixture of the representations of voices is prominent. The first two parts of this paradigm, the objective introduction and the subjective summary, reflect the role played by the author of the report. The third part, the direct speech of the athletes, represents the interviews of athletes selectively to achieve the consistency of reporting intentions. Through the paradigm, the athlete's identity is used to project the nation's identity. This is remarkable in Example 1: the father of the athlete "has been excited and proud" in the summary of the interview; the "arrangement" "shows that China is a firm pursuer of the Olympic ideal" according to the direct speech.

3.2.2. Globalisation: the role of globalisation discourse

The news report discourse related to international athletes is also a significant discourse strategy that reflects the construction of the national image. In summary, international athletes have played a role in this process by adding a foreign voice and thereby improving discursive representations, especially through the discourses of globalisation [11].

3.2.2.1 Example 4

Christoph Eisinger, managing director of Ski Amade, [...] said, "I am convinced that Beijing will host a perfect Olympics. ("STRONG VOTE OF CONFIDENCE GIVEN TO WINTER GAMES" 2022-02-10)

Geoff Lipshut, Team Australia chef de mission, said: "The athletes really felt COVID-safe here, [...] I've received many positive comments from our athletes." ("I pass the test and adapt to life in the closed loop with thousands of others" 2022-03-03)

Arguably, in the previous chapter, the Chinese athletes who were selected in the relevant reports tended to have detailed introductions. In the relevant reports on international visitors, however, the selected characters tend to have more direct speeches to the interviewees and fewer generalised texts. The strategy achieves the prominence of their voices, showing that international society has generally positive attitudes toward Beijing 2022.

The choice of visitors also reflects the discourse of globalisation, which is consistent with China's diplomatic strategy[9]. The diverse, global character is evident in the organisations and nationalities of those reported. Related reports consciously emphasised the nationality of the visitors. Although the visitors selected for those reports are different, the topics of events represented through their voices are similar, as the epidemic prevention measures for covid-19 in Example 5.

3.2.2.2 Example 5

Athletes of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics have said the closed-loop management and COVID-19 epidemic control measures have made them feel safe, [...] Australian freestyle moguls skier Britteny Cox said the measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 make her feel secure. ("Athletes praise Games' closed loop management" 2022-02-02)

Geoff Lipshut, Team Australia chef de mission, said: "The athletes really felt COVID-safe here. [...] ("I pass the test and adapt to life in the closed loop with thousands of others" 2022-03-03)

By representing the unified views of visitors on a social event in different reports, the intertextuality of different reports uses such a globalisation discourse to highlight the positive voice of global society, constructing the image of China in this process of globalisation.

3.2.3. Technology: the highlight of the objective

Unlike Chinese athletes and international visitors, the discourse strategies used to highlight technology to construct the national image are characterised by a conscious selection of objective information rather than subjective information (e.g., the views of athletes or visitors).

Example 6: Thanks to technological advances, the cost of green hydrogen, or renewable-based hydrogen, will be further reduced [...] ("NATION MOVES AHEAD WITH AMBITIOUS CLIMATE GOALS" 2022-01-07)

The display system uses 5G technology, providing additional details of the Games and enabling instant interaction with spectators during events. ("CURTAIN READY TO RISE ON A SPORTING SPECTACULAR" 2022-01-05)

For the representation of high technology, relevant reports tend to use a direct and objective way of representation by citing the name and the function of the technology. Through such an objective representation, the author's voice has strong authority and objectivity[11]. China's national image is characterised by authority and objectivity by linking it to discourse related to technology.

Modality is also significant in the discourse about technology to construct the national image. the representation of technology tends to use “epistemic” representation by making statements rather than “deontic” representation[10-11]. This strategy reduces the dialogicality of the text and makes the reports imply a positive and strong evaluation of the technology. The national image built on this basis, therefore, despite the lack of dialogicality, has increased its relatively strong positive attitude and evaluation.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The major discourse strategies to construct a national image have been analysed. By selectively representing the voices of Chinese athletes, the paradigmatic discourse is used to construct the national image. The national image is based on the constructed identities of those Chinese athletes. For those international guests, the reports achieved the prominence of their voices and used a globalisation discourse to realise the construction of the national image. The discourse of technology has a conscious selection of objective information. Modality plays a significant role in this process by reducing the dialogicality to construct the national image with a relatively strong positive evaluation.

However, the drawbacks of the discourse strategies cannot be ignored. The over-prominence of Chinese athletes’ and international visitors’ voices, while achieving a unity of voice, led to the neglect of many other voices. The lack of voices with different attitudes reduces the objectivity and dialectic of reports, thus destabilising the national image constructed on it. Similarly, the reports tend to be one-sided by reducing the dialogicality through a plethora of modalities of statement. Although this highlights the objectivity of the text, its sacrifice of dialogicality degrades the national image into a unilateral statement rather than a consensus, so that the national image it constructs may not be widely accepted. In general, by representing more diverse voices especially those with different attitudes in the discourse, and by enhancing the dialogicality of the text, the national image constructed based on relevant news reports can be more stable and acceptable.

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