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Legitimation and Leadership Communication During Crisis: A Case Study of President Uhuru Kenyatta's Political Speeches on the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic harmed millions of Kenyans and created a social and political crisis necessitating interventionist approaches by the government. This article examines the discursive strategies of legitimation embedded in Kenya's public policy initiatives to contain the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic. This article examines the discursive strategies of legitimation in Kenya's public policy initiatives to contain the spread of COVID-19. Using Van Leeuwen's legitimation strategies and Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, this paper examines the legitimation strategies in President Uhuru Kenyatta's speeches on managing COVID-19, as well as the linguistic and rhetorical means through which such strategies were realized in discourse. Drawing on speeches made by Uhuru Kenyatta, this paper demonstrates how engagement strategies are linguistically and rhetorically constituted and fashioned to justify given policy proposals and actions for containing the spread of the Coronavirus. Moreover, the study uncovers how leaders use language to evoke historical memories and legitimize authority.

Keywords: COVID-19, legitimation, policy interventions, rhetoric, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Exploring the relationship between legitimation and leadership communication reveals how social actors validate their actions within institutional frameworks. The discourse surrounding legitimation is not merely rhetorical but encompasses communicative acts reflecting socio-political realities and the need for leaders to uphold official norms. This discussion of legitimation strategies and theoretical frameworks will clarify how these

theories inform the legitimation processes employed by leaders during crises like COVID-19.

1.1 Legitimation

Legitimation refers to the process through which social actors endorse or authorize social behavior in institutional contexts where power dynamics play a crucial role (Reyes, 2011). This process becomes significant during crises, necessitating robust justification of actions taken

by leaders (Dorskaya, 2002; Van Dijk, 1998).

Van Dijk (1998) suggests that legitimization justifies 'official' actions based on the rights and duties associated with a particular role or position, whether political, social, or legal. Consequently, everyday interactions rarely involve legitimization (Bjorkvall & Hoog, 2019). Legitimation becomes crucial during crises when the legitimacy of the state is challenged (Van Dijk, 1998). For instance, when state officials face accusations of law violations, they resort to 'legitimizing their deeds and actions' (Dorskaya, 2002). Van Dijk (1998) emphasizes that legitimization implies that the institutional actor adheres to or claims to uphold official norms. Furthermore, legitimization is 'prototypically political' due to its association with individuals holding public office and exercising power derived from that position (Van Dijk, 1998). Most studies on legitimization focus on 'legitimation of political issues' (Bjorkvall & Hoog, 2019), such as corporate and governmental power structures (Weber, 1968), political campaigns and parties (Chaidas, 2018; Mackay, 2015), and the media's influence on politics (Hart, 2017; Pasitselska, 2017).

Dorskaya (2002) characterizes legitimization as a 'speech act of defending oneself.' This often manifests through persuasive discourses, particularly evident in the intentional planning of political speeches to legitimize specific goals (Capone, 2017). However, Martin Rojo and Van Dijk (1997) caution that persuasive discourse alone is insufficient for legitimization. They argue that context is essential for a discourse to fulfill a legitimating function. To be considered legitimate, a discourse must meet three key conditions: (i) its source (speakers, institutions, etc.) must be legitimate, (ii) its representation of events must appear truthful and trustworthy, and (iii) its linguistic and discursive forms must be socially appropriate, authorized, or "politically correct" (Martin Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997).

Martin-Rojo and Van Dijk (1997) propose a three-level framework for analyzing the discursive act of legitimization: pragmatic, semantic, and socio-political; the semantic dimension encompasses the linguistic, semantic, and rhetorical strategies employed by speakers to reinforce and justify their claims. This dimension is closely linked to the pragmatic

level, which focuses on the speaker's intended outcomes (Said, 2017; Van Dijk, 1998).

The socio-political dimension emphasizes the social and political contexts that promote the 'pragmatic and semantic aspects of legitimization' (Said, 2017, p. 12). While many studies on legitimization operate at a rhetorical level (Bjorkvall & Hoog, 2019, p. 402), utilizing analytical tools like metaphors, frames (Hart, 2017), narratives (Chaidas, 2018), and lexico-grammatical features (Oddo, 2011), the discursive characteristics of legitimization often receive limited attention. This is despite the fact that legitimization is inherently a 'communicative act' (Dorskaya, 2002, p. 74). Recognizing this, Rojo and Van Dijk (1997, pp. 527–528) emphasize the limitations of analyzing legitimization without considering its "linguistic, discursive, communicative, or interactional characteristics." Van Leeuwen (2007, 2008) subsequently developed a methodological framework for analyzing the 'sociological, discursive, and linguistic practice of legitimization,' including a 'detailed analysis of lexico-grammatical realizations of legitimations' (Bjorkvall & Hoog, 2019, p. 402).

Given the nature of political discourse, political speeches warrant attention since 'political leaders justify their political agenda to maintain or alter the direction of a whole nation' (Reyes, 2011). Therefore, while legitimization is a crucial function of discourse, its discursive characteristics have not received sufficient attention from discourse analysts. This highlights the need for further research into the linguistic and communicative aspects of legitimization within leadership communication, particularly in the African context.

1.2 Strategies of Legitimation

Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 105) notes that the legitimization of social practices answers questions like, 'Why should we do this?' or 'Why should we do it this way? He identifies four main legitimization strategies: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis. These can be used individually or in combination to legitimize political actions or policy decisions.

These can be used individually or in combination to legitimize or delegitimize political actions or policy decisions.

Table 1. Categories of legitimation

Categories	Sub-categorization
Authorization	Personal authority, impersonal authority, tradition, conformity, expert authority, role model authority
Moral Evaluation	Evaluation, abstraction, analogies, comparison
Rationalization	Instrumental rationalization, theoretical rationalization
Mythopoesis	Moral tales, cautionary tales

Adopted from Van Leeuwen (2007).

Authorization involves legitimizing actions through references to authority, including tradition, laws (impersonal authority), personal authority, expert authority (citing specialists) (Rivers & Ross, 2020, p. 5), role model authority, and conformity authorization based on widespread acceptance (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 105).

Moral evaluation is achieved through references to value systems linked to specific ‘discourses of moral values’ (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 109). These discourses imply that certain actions or policies are ‘just’ within the legal or political system (Van Dijk, 1998). Moral evaluation is indicated by evaluative adjectives (e.g., useful, good, bad) and through analogies and abstractions that connect practices to moral discourses (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 111).

Rationalization refers to the goals and uses of institutionalized social actions, along with the knowledge that society constructs to validate them (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 91). This type of legitimation justifies decisions based on their goals, uses, and effects (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 91). It can involve referencing social practices and expert knowledge. Rationalization includes: (1) *Instrumental rationality*, which legitimizes actions by linking them to their goals and effects (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 113); and (2) *theoretical rationality*, which legitimizes practices through expertise and predictions about the natural order (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 113-116). This form can also include definitions and explanations of habitual activities (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 116). Reyes (2011, p. 876) notes that this legitimation is expressed through phrases like “After consultations with...” or verbs indicating mental processes, such as “explore” and “consult.” Importantly, this type of legitimation derives its moral logic from commonly accepted moral values that promote

“mass loyalty” (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 106).

Mythopoesis involves legitimation through storytelling, including cautionary tales that illustrate the consequences of deviating from social norms and moral tales that reward adherence to legitimate practices (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 117-118). As Said (2017, p. 20) states, “mythopoesis is enacted whenever narratives are utilized to legitimize actions,” highlighting potential outcomes of complying with or ignoring expectations.

These strategies are often interwoven within texts, and speakers typically employ various strategies to achieve their goals. This paper aims to enhance understanding of leadership during the coronavirus pandemic by examining the discursive processes through which Kenyatta asserts his leadership claims and how these claims are justified across different texts related to the pandemic’s spread and control.

2. Leadership Communication

In examining the legitimation strategies used by Uhuru Kenyatta during the COVID-19 pandemic, various theories of leadership communication provide valuable frameworks. This section reviews the literature on key theories of leadership communication, highlighting their key arguments, relevance, and limitations in understanding presidential political discourse. The study draws insights from five theories: Charismatic Leadership Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Servant Leadership Communication Theory, and Social Identity Theory (SIT), highlighting the complexities of legitimation and public communication during crises.

Charismatic Leadership Theory, articulated by House (1976), posits that certain leaders have an

innate ability to inspire and engage followers through unique personality traits and communication styles. Charismatic leadership stems from the personal qualities and extraordinary capabilities of individual leaders, eliciting strong emotional reactions and loyalty. These leaders are characterized by their vision, desire to influence, exceptional communication skills, self-confidence, and personal sacrifice (Walker & Aritz, 2014; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). In crises, charismatic leaders foster collective identity and purpose, alleviating public fear and encouraging compliance with directives (Gichuki, Karanja & Atikiya, 2024; Goleman, 1995). However, the theory's focus on charismatic leaders can lead to authoritarian tendencies, undermining governance checks and balances (Lepsius, 2014). The sustainability of such leadership is also questionable, as it relies heavily on personal relationships that may falter without sustained charisma (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Furthermore, charismatic leaders' persuasive language can sometimes be viewed as deceptive (Walker & Aritz, 2014).

Transformational Leadership Theory, introduced by James MacGregor Burns (1978), emphasizes leaders' roles in inspiring and motivating followers through compelling visions. Burns argues that true leadership is closely connected to the followers' needs, distinguishing between transactional leadership, based on exchanges, and transformational leadership, which fosters deeper engagement and enhances morale (Walker & Aritz, 2014). Transformational leaders are seen as role models who build trust and respect, especially during crises when followers seek guidance (Northouse, 2025). The theory emphasizes four key tenets: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, contributing to a collaborative environment conducive to innovation and effective crisis response (Bass & Avolio, 1993). However, this style may create dependency on charismatic figures, thereby hindering individual agency among followers (Yukl, 1999).

Situational Leadership Theory, developed by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969, asserts that no single leadership style is best; effective leadership depends on context and situational demands. According to this theory, therefore, leaders ought to adapt their communication styles to meet the changing needs of their team members, emphasizing two key dimensions:

directive and supportive behaviors (Walker & Aritz, 2014). This flexibility is vital during crises, although it raises concerns about messaging consistency and its effects on public trust (Graeff, 1983). Furthermore, critics argue that situational leadership may oversimplify complex interactions by rigidly categorizing styles and maturity levels, thereby overlooking organizational culture and external influences. (Brown & Barker, 2001) Nonetheless, its focus on adaptability and responsive communication resonates well in crises.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides insights into leadership communication by emphasizing that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from group memberships. This theory highlights social categorization, identification, and comparison, influencing perceptions and behaviors during crises (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Litzenberg, 2024). Leaders often invoke social identities to foster unity and instill confidence, legitimizing their authority and rallying support (Haslam, 2004). However, critics contend that SIT may oversimplify group dynamics by focusing predominantly on categorization while neglecting intersectional factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). In contexts like Kenya, where ethnic identities can be divisive, it is crucial to consider the complexities arising from multiple and often conflicting identities.

Servant Leadership Communication Theory, stemming from Robert K. Greenleaf's essay "The Servant as Leader" (1970), posits that a leader's primary role is to serve others by prioritizing their needs. This approach emphasizes empathetic communication, active listening, and community building. Greenleaf (1977) identifies four key tenets for leaders: active listening, empathy, stewardship, and prioritizing followers. This promotes a collaborative and inclusive environment, encouraging open communication and growth among team members (Daniels, 2021; Gotsis & Grimani, 2016). However, while this theory promotes a collaborative and inclusive environment, it may lack sufficient focus on the leader's authority and decision-making efficacy, potentially leading to indecision or lack of direction during crises (Peterlin, Pearse & Dimovski, 2015).

In the context of the phenomenon under investigation, the theories of leadership communication above offer valuable insights into the dynamics of legitimation during crises.

That is, though these theories provide a robust framework for analyzing leadership communication, their application in African contexts, particularly in this study, has not been sufficiently explored, i.e., to unravel of local complexities, power dynamics, cultural diversity, and historical legacies that underpin their use in varied contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This study is grounded in Fairclough's three-tier approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which encompasses textual analysis focusing on linguistic features, discursive practice examining the production and consumption of texts, and social practice that investigates the broader socio-political context of discourse (Fairclough, 1992; 1995; 2020). Utilizing strategies of legitimation from Van Leeuwen (2007; 2008), Rojo and Van Dijk (1997), and Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999), the article analyzes the discursive techniques employed in Kenyatta's speeches regarding COVID-19, along with the linguistic and rhetorical tactics that support these strategies. In this respect, four categories were identified i.e., authorization, mythopoesis, moralization, and rationalization, which leaders employ to justify their policy decisions and to woo the public. Data for the study were gathered from 6 speeches delivered between March 2020 and November 2021, to ensure accuracy and authenticity. This was taken to constitute a sufficiently comprehensive corpus for the study. Notice that the study exclusively focuses on Uhuru Kenyatta's speeches, which limits the capture of the broader public discourse surrounding COVID-19 in Kenya. Furthermore, the analysis is confined to speeches delivered during the pandemic, thus overlooking shifts in discourse before or after the crisis. Efforts were made to ensure that all quotes from public speeches were accurately attributed and contextualized. The researcher also remained conscious of personal biases and aimed for objectivity in the analysis, owing to the subjective nature of interpreting political discourse.

4. Key Findings

This study reveals several critical strategies employed by the speaker to legitimize his leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, rooted in Van Leeuwen's (2007; 2008) frameworks of legitimation. Firstly, the use of tradition as a legitimating strategy is prominent,

with the speaker invoking collective historical resilience to foster a sense of stability and continuity. For instance, statements like "Our Nation has always overcome and emerged from seemingly insurmountable challenges stronger and better" underscore the importance of historical memory in reinforcing national identity and mobilizing public sentiment towards cooperative action (see section 5.1). Secondly, the study noted the speaker's invocation of personal authority to enhance the legitimacy of his directives, as seen in his use of authoritative language, such as "I, as your President, ORDER and DIRECT..." (See section 5.2). This was found to be focused on establishing a clear chain of command, and compelling adherence to the government's policy regulations. This reliance on personal authority was found to pose concerns about inclusivity and democratic engagement in leadership communication during crises.

Moreover, aside from the utilization of instrumental rationalization aimed at linking governmental actions to tangible outcomes, (see section 5.5), the study highlights the significance of moral evaluations and emotional appeals in shaping public perception. In this context, the framing of the pandemic as a moral crisis was noted to be aimed at necessitating collective action, with the speaker emphasizing shared responsibility through statements like "Wearing your mask and washing your hands will save lives" (Uhuru, 202C) (See sections 5.3-5.6). This not only reinforces the urgency of compliance but also connects individual actions to the collective well-being of society (Reyes, 2011). In the same vein, the use of cautionary tales, such as the narrative about a young man who disregarded health guidelines, serves to illustrate the social repercussions of non-compliance and reinforces the need for adherence to public health measures (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Ultimately, these findings underscore the complexities of leadership communication during crises, highlighting the necessity for a more nuanced approach that balances authority with inclusivity and moral responsibility.

5. Discussions

This section discusses how the speaker uses various strategies of legitimation (i.e., appeals to tradition, personal authority, moral evaluations, emotional appeals, and mythopoesis — Van Leeuwen 2007; 2008) during the COVID-19

pandemic to shape public perceptions, mobilize collective action, reinforce authority and compliance to health directives. This includes an exploration of the nuances of particular communication strategies utilized and their implications for understanding leadership in the face of a national crisis.

5.1 Legitimation Through Appeals to Tradition

According to Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 20), legitimation can be achieved through appeals to tradition, and is usually realised by invoking keywords such as “tradition,” “practice,” “custom,” and “habit,”; it rests on the premise “because this is what we always do” or “because this is what we have always done.” The use of tradition as a strategy for legitimation is illustrated through the excerpts below:

- 1) Our Nation has always overcome and emerged from seemingly insurmountable challenges stronger and better. (Uhuru, 2020A)
- 2) Every time, we have been faced with adversity Kenyans have coalesced together and pulled each other out of the situation. (Uhuru, 2020A)

In excerpts 1 and 2 above, the speaker’s statements — “Our Nation has always overcome and emerged from seemingly insurmountable challenges stronger and better” and “Every time we have been faced with adversity Kenyans have coalesced together and pulled each other out of the situation” illustrate a strategic reliance on historical resilience and unity. By invoking these themes, the speaker establishes continuity and stability, suggesting that Kenya’s past successes can guide current efforts to navigate the pandemic (Uhuru, 2020A). In this context, the speaker deliberately uses historical references (authority of tradition) to underscore the strength of Kenyan society. The categorical assertion that “Our Nation has always overcome” not only highlights a collective memory of resilience (Moore, Metcalf & Metcalf, 2023) but also positions the current government’s actions within a framework of historical legitimacy. According to Van Leeuwen (2008), this approach serves to legitimize present actions by aligning them with past successes, thereby reinforcing national identity and fostering a sense of hope among citizens. Moreover, the emphasis on collective identity in the second statement, where the speaker notes that “Kenyans have coalesced together,” serves

to mobilize public sentiments towards cooperative action. This aligns with Fairclough’s (1995) view that language shapes social identities. From the standpoint of the social identity theory, the speaker’s invocation of a collective Kenyan identity can be said to be tailored to foster unity and instill confidence, thus legitimizing his authority and rallying support for government initiatives.

Ideologically, invoking the authority of tradition suggests that established norms and values guide societal responses to challenges. That is, through manifest intertextuality (Fairclough, 2003; 2020) the speaker situates his leadership within the invoked historical continuum. This rhetorical strategy helps him to align himself with previous leaders who have successfully navigated crises, thereby reinforcing his authority. In terms of leadership communication, this rhetorical motif is tailored to rally public support for government initiatives against COVID-19, hence fostering compliance with health measures by emphasizing shared history and collective action. In effect, the invocation of tradition not only serves to legitimize current governmental actions but also reinforces existing power structures, where authority is derived from historical successes rather than contemporary democratic accountability (Van Leeuwen, 2008). However, this reliance on tradition can lead to an uncritical acceptance of governmental authority based on past achievements, potentially stifling critical engagement with current policies.

5.2 Legitimation Through Personal Authority

Drawing on his authority as the president of Kenya vested with “institutional authority” (Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 105) to govern/lead, the speaker could be said to be speaking from an authoritative position as the head of government to legitimize his claim:

- 3) *I, as your President, ORDER and DIRECT...* that all Ministries and Departments shall cause the payment of at least of Ksh. 13 Billion of the *verified pending bills*. (Uhuru, 2020A)
- 4) *I hereby order and direct* that all State and Public Officers with pre-existing medical conditions and/or aged 58 years and above... take leave or forthwith work from home. (Uhuru, 2020A)
- 5) *I further direct* the Ministry of Health, the

County Governments and the Public Service Commission to *expedite the recruitment process*. (Uhuru, 2020A)

In relation to authority and legitimacy, the phrase “I, as your President” (extract 3) invokes personal authority, thereby positioning the speaker as the legitimate leader with the power to issue directives. This assertion establishes a clear chain of command, reinforcing the expectation that the directive ought to be followed; it implies that the action is not merely permissible but obligatory within the framework of governance. It is in this sense that Van Leeuwen (2008) emphasizes that personal authority is crucial in leadership discourse, as it cultivates a sense of trust and expectation among the populace. In this context, the use of the words “ORDER” and “DIRECT” (extract 3) references the regulatory authority vested upon the presidency, which communicates the idea that adherence to his directive is a requirement rather than a choice. The authoritative tone employed here reinforces the necessity of compliance, framing it as an obligation rather than a suggestion. That is, the directives imply conformity authorization (Van Leeuwen, 2007; 2008), indicating that this action is consistent with broader governmental practices and expectations. This aligns with Fairclough’s (2003) notion of legitimation, where authority is derived from established institutional norms. In the same vein, the sentiments expressed in excerpts 4 and 5 above highlight the speaker’s authoritative position as president through phrases like “I hereby order and direct...” and “I further direct,” which position him as a leader with the power and authority to issue directives that are expected to be followed without question (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 46; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 96). By asserting his role as a recognized leader, the speaker enhances the legitimacy of his commands, reinforcing their basis in institutional authority, particularly when addressing “State and Public Officers” (see extract 4). This context situates the directives within the framework of institutional governance, thereby affirming their legitimacy and the expectation of compliance (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 96). Besides, the manifest intertextual references (Fairclough, 1995; 2020) to institutions like the Ministry of Health and the Public Service Commission (excerpt 5) further serve to legitimize the directive within established governmental

operations, aligning it with the responsibilities of these institutions. What is more, this connection not only bolsters the credibility of the directive but also underscores its significance in the governance structure. This is in line with Dibattista (2006) and Kostova (2020), who posit that such intertextual references to institutional structures are integral to broader strategies of authority legitimation.

From the Perspective of Leadership Communication, the use of personal authority, as highlighted in the phrase “I, as your President ORDER and DIRECT,” (excerpt 3) is a powerful rhetorical strategy that reinforces the speaker’s position as the legitimate leader who embraces servant leadership. This approach aligns with the principles of transformational leadership, which emphasize the importance of a leader’s ability to inspire trust and commitment among followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). However, while the invocation of personal authority can enhance legitimacy, it may also raise concerns regarding authoritarianism in leadership communication. That is, the commanding language—such as “ORDER” and “DIRECT” — can be perceived as top-down communication that limits dialogue and participation from stakeholders. Effective leadership communication ought both to assert authority and foster an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued. Moreover, the reliance on conformity authorization, as described by Van Leeuwen (2007, 2008), while effective in establishing a chain of command, may inadvertently stifle critical discourse. This means that leadership communication needs to ideally balance authority with openness to feedback and discussion, as this promotes a culture of trust and collaboration (Edmondson & Levy, 2019).

5.3 Legitimation Through Moral Evaluation

The call to “expedite the recruitment process” (extract 3) carries a moral evaluation, implying a responsibility to act swiftly and efficiently. According to Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 109, p. 111), moral evaluation involves justifying actions and decisions through evaluative language, and is usually achieved through the use of evaluative adjectives, analogies that seek to legitimate particular actions by means of comparisons, and abstractions anchoring actions in moral discourses. In this respect, the implied urgency above suggests that any delays in recruitment could be seen as neglectful or harmful, aligning the action with societal values of accountability

and responsiveness in governance (Edmondson & Levy, 2019). Implicitly, the statement evokes the values associated with public service, particularly the necessity for adequate staffing in health services, which is critical for ensuring public welfare (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Moreover, the directives above also carry a moral evaluation, implying a moral obligation on the part of the government to pay the pending bills, failure to which will be considered unfair or unjust, in line with the societal values of fairness and responsibility. This is better exemplified by the use of the proposition “verified pending bills” in extract 3, thus reinforcing the moral obligation and accompanying expectation that financial commitments ought to be honoured by the government. Other examples of the use of moral evaluation as a legitimation strategy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic are better elucidated in the ensuing discussion.

- 6) Choices are nothing without leadership. I say so because when COVID-19 hit our country, My Administration found itself confronted with a *Dilemma of Two Rights*. Opinion was, divided on, whether to lockdown the country or to leave it open. What made the difference was leadership. One side of the divide presented an economic argument. They wanted us to leave the country “open” and save the economy. They argued that COVID was a health crisis that should not trump economic imperatives. The other side of the divide made a compelling health argument against the economic argument. Led by a *brain trust of medical scientists and researchers*, they argued that the country had no option but to lockdown. Their models pointed to a soaring crisis if drastic choices, were not made. *After much reflection*, My Administration opted for the *public health argument* over the economic argument. Our rationale was that we can always *revive an ailing economy*; but we cannot *bring to life those who die from COVID-19* (Uhuru, 2020H).
- 7) The COVID-19 Pandemic has led to an *unprecedented loss of life*, global economic slow-down; the postponement of major cultural, religious, political, and sporting events including the 2020 Olympic Games (Uhuru, 2020G).
- 8) The most effective way to limit the spread of the virus is through basic changes in

individual behaviour and hygiene (Uhuru, 2020A).

The framing of the situation as a “Dilemma of Two Rights” (extract 4) above presents a moral complexity, suggesting that the Kenyan Government faced a tough ethical choice. That is, the framing of the situation as a “Dilemma of Two Rights” (extract 6) underscores the moral complexity of decision-making during a crisis, thereby legitimizing the government’s choice by portraying it as a responsible and thoughtful consideration of competing values. This tactic serves to legitimize the decision by portraying it as a responsible and thoughtful consideration of competing values. Similarly, the proposition, “*we can always revive an ailing economy; but we cannot bring to life those who die from COVID-19* (extract 4) acts as a *strong moral justification for prioritizing health*, hence reinforcing the ethical considerations behind the decision. In this context, the government’s invocation of “*a brain trust of medical scientists and researchers*,” helps to justify its policy choices as being anchored in credible authorities (expert authority) that prioritize public health over economic proposals. Furthermore, by presenting the government as being able to make a rational judgment after evaluating both sides of the debate (economic vs. health), the speaker seeks to position himself as a decisive leader, and one who is capable of making balanced decisions during a crisis. This understanding is brought to the fore by the strategic use of the phrase “*after much reflection*,” which helps to legitimize the chosen course of action underlying his leadership’s decision-making process in response to the coronavirus pandemic. What is more, the speaker’s acknowledgement of differing perspectives enhances the legitimacy of his leadership by portraying it as inclusive and considerate of various viewpoints.

The fact that the speaker does not completely dismiss the economic argument (i.e., by stating that, “we did not dismiss the economic argument in toto)” has implications for leadership communication. That is, this concession serves to enhance the legitimacy of the speaker’s mode of leadership, by portraying it as one that takes into account divergent perspectives before arriving at particular policy decisions.

In excerpt 5 above, the use of the evaluative proposition “*unprecedented loss of life*” serves to convey the severity of the pandemic. That is, the

term “unprecedented” not only highlights the magnitude of the crisis, but also calls for a moral response, suggesting that the loss is not just statistical but deeply tragic. In effect, this mode of framing helps to legitimize the urgency of the response by emphasizing the need to act against such a dire situation. In this context, the mention of the “*global economic slow-down*” and the “*postponement of major cultural, religious, political, and sporting events*” in the same excerpt serves to situate the pandemic within a broad moral framework, thereby implying that the pandemic does not only affect our health, but also the very fabric of society, including cultural and communal aspects. By invoking these elements, the speaker underscores the moral imperative to respond decisively to protect lives and maintain societal cohesion. What is more, the abstract nature of terms like “*loss of life*” and “*global economic slow-down*” in allows for a moral interpretation that transcends individual experiences. This abstraction invokes a discourse of moral values that emphasizes the importance of protecting life and community well-being. It elevates the discussion from merely describing the situation to framing it as a moral crisis that requires collective action.

In the same vein, the argument, “*The most effective way to limit the spread of the virus is through basic changes in individual behaviour and hygiene,*” (excerpt 6) embeds a moral evaluation of personal responsibility, signaled through the use of the evaluative adjective “most” in the term “most effective,” thus implying a normative judgment, supporting the need to adopt the prescribed health practices/protocols as the morally advisable and necessary option. Similarly, the reference to “*basic changes* in excerpt 6 above” suggests that the prescribed actions are essential and straightforward, as moral obligations. In this case, by stressing hygiene as a fundamental practice, the speaker can be said to want to legitimize the need for citizens to engage in these behaviours for the greater good, thereby linking personal responsibility to collective health outcomes. Furthermore, the call for “*basic changes*” can be said to be abstracting specific actions, thereby transforming them into moral duties. In effect, this abstraction allows the speaker to moralize the aforementioned practices by associating them with values such as health, safety, and community well-being- which elevates the discussion from mere recommendations to a

moral discourse on responsibility and care for others. This moral framing serves to enhance the legitimacy of governmental actions by aligning them with the ethical expectations of the populace. Moreover, the understanding herein coheres with Van Leeuwen’s (2008) emphasis that moral evaluation is often realized in text and talk by use of evaluation, analogies that seek to legitimate particular actions through comparisons, or through “*abstraction,*” which involves invoking practices (or their component parts) in abstract ways for purposes of moralizing them.

5.4 Legitimation Through Emotional Appeals

Reyes (2011) emphasizes that emotions play a crucial role in legitimizing political discourse. That is, political actors often incorporate terms such as fear, destruction, and death into their rhetoric as a strategy to legitimize their actions or decisions through evoking anxiety and fear among the public. In this respect, Khajavi and Rasti (2020, p. 11) highlight the ability of emotions to mobilize the public, prompting them into action. The use of emotional appeals can effectively resonate with the audience’s fears and anxieties, legitimizing the government’s response to the crisis. For instance, the speaker justifies the danger of the Coronavirus by invoking words that spell destruction and death attributed to the pandemic:

- 9) “*Lakini wesangu, na mimi sitaki niwadanganye wale ambao wamekata kuona huu ugonjwa kama ni kitu cha kweli. Nataka tu mwangalie makaburi ambayo imechimbwa duniani, msima kushika maiti za watu*” (“But my friends, I do not want to deceive those who have refused to see this disease as something real. I just want you to look at the graves that have been dug all over the world to bury the dead”) (Uhuru, 2020E).

As evidenced in extract 9 above, the speaker uses emotional appeals as a legitimation strategy. For instance, the phrase “*Lakini wesangu*” (But my friends) in the first line of the extract serves to establish a personal connection with the audience, thereby setting a tone of urgency and intimacy. Similarly, the speaker’s declaration, “*sitaki niwadanganye*” (I do not want to deceive you), in the same line invokes sincerity and trust, hence positioning the speaker as a truthful person in the face of skepticism. In this context, the evocation of

death through the references to “makaburi” (graves) and *kushika maiti za watu* (to bury the dead) is a stark reminder of mortality, hence a strong emotional appeal that not only instills fear, but also compels the audience to acknowledge the seriousness of the disease, thereby increasing the urgency of compliance. The mentioning of graves and implied deaths seeks to instil a sense of fear regarding the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby pushing the audience to reconsider their stance. This explains why the speaker directly addresses those who “have refused to see this disease as something real,” hence confronting their denial of the same. Besides, in view of the above said, it is arguable that the speaker justifies the danger of the Coronavirus by invoking words that spell destruction and death attributed to the Coronavirus pandemic (Khajavi & Rasti, 2020, p. 9), thereby evoking fear in his audience about the possible consequences of not adhering to the prescribed health protocols. The rampant use of emotions as a legitimization strategy (Reyes, 2011) is further exemplified in the extracts below:

- 10) I share the *heavy hearts* of all the faithful who can no longer congregate and share in worship of The Almighty (Uhuru, 2020F).
- 11) As a parent and a grandparent, I share in the *pain and frustration* of most parents in having our children home for nearly an entire year (Uhuru, 2020G, pp. 19-20).
- 12) *I recognize the anxiety* that this pandemic has caused millions of Kenyan families; *fearful of what the future may hold* for them and their children.
- 13) We condole with the families and friends of the 6 that we have *regrettably lost to the pandemic* (Uhuru 2020C).
- 14) *Our hearts go out to the families who have lost loved ones* to Coronavirus (Uhuru, 2020G).
- 15) As a *caring, responsive Government*, and to cushion all Kenyan households against the economic shocks triggered by the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic, we continue to progressively roll out targeted measures to sustain livelihood (Uhuru, 2020F).

At the textual level, the choices and use of lexical terms such as “heavy hearts,” (excerpt 10), “pain and frustration,” (excerpt 11) “fearful of what the future may holds,” (excerpt 12), “condole

with the families and friends” (excerpt 13), “families who have lost loved ones,” (excerpt 14), and caring and responsive Government (Extracts 15), are laden with emotional weight. These lexical choices are not only tailored to convey empathy but also serve to align the speaker with the audience’s sentiments, fostering a sense of shared experience- amidst widespread fear and uncertainty surrounding the pandemic that makes the public more receptive to messages that resonate with their emotional state. This aligns with Reyes (2011) view that emotions, particularly fear, can be powerful tools for legitimating claims and motivating action, in which case, fear can prompt individuals to confront uncomfortable realities and catalyze collective responses. From the perspective of the servant leadership theory, by expressing empathy towards families affected by the pandemic, the speaker can be said to embody the servant leader’s commitment to serving the community. This approach not only builds trust but also validates the government’s actions as prioritizing the welfare of the citizens, thereby emphasizing the idea that true leadership is essentially about serving the community.

5.5 Instrumental Rationalization

Instrumental rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 113) involves the legitimization of political actions or decisions by refereeing to the goals, *purposes/uses/usefulness* or *effects of institutionalized social actions/practices*, including clarifying why such actions or practices “take the forms they do.” This understanding is better illustrated in the following discussion.

- 16) In order to protect jobs for our people and to provide some certainty for both employees and their employers, I, as your President, ORDER and DIRECT... The National Treasury shall cause an immediate reduction of the VAT from 16% to 14%, effective 1st April (2020A, p. 8).
- 17) The lowering of the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) to 4.25 percent from 5.25 percent will provide additional liquidity of Ksh. 35 Billion to commercial banks to directly support borrowers who are distressed as a result of the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Uhuru, 2020A, p. 19).
- 18) Wearing your mask and washing your hands will save lives (Uhuru, 2020C).

The decision to reduce the VAT from 16% to 14%

reflects a strategic move by the government to protect jobs and provide economic certainty, exemplifying instrumental rationality. This exemplifies instrumental rationality, where the justification for reducing VAT stems from its anticipated outcomes, such as enhanced job security and overall economic stability (Uhuru, 2020A, p. 8). The speaker's directive employs logical discourse that ties fiscal policy directly to socio-economic objectives, portraying this tax reduction as a pragmatic solution to urgent economic challenges. From Wodak's (2015) theory of argumentation, the authoritative tone conveyed through phrases like "ORDER and DIRECT" underscores the decisive nature of the action, enhancing its perceived legitimacy as a necessary response to the socio-economic crisis intensified by the pandemic. That is, by positioning this fiscal adjustment as a preventative measure against potential financial collapse, the statement effectively reinforces the legitimacy of government intervention. The same understanding is conveyed through the reduction of the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) (excerpt 17), which is another instance of instrumental rationality aiming to inject Ksh. 35 billion into the economy to assist distressed borrowers and address the financial difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic (Uhuru, 2020A).

In the same vein, excerpt 18 "Wearing your mask and washing your hands will save lives" presents a factual claim that wearing masks and practicing hand hygiene are effective measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. In this context, the speaker's reliance on scientific evidence (public health protocols) lends credibility to the message, thereby making it a rational argument. In other words, the statement suggests that adherence to the aforesaid measures is a rational choice for individuals who care about the well-being of themselves and others. What is more, the mention of "saving lives" taps into fear and concern for loved ones, enhancing the persuasive power of the message through emotional appeals. By positioning this fiscal adjustment as a preventative measure against potential financial collapse, the statement effectively reinforces the legitimacy of government intervention.

5.6 Mythopoesis in the Service of Legitimation

In line with Van Leeuwen's (2008) concept of Mythopoesis (a type of legitimation achieved by

means of storytelling and the use of *Cautionary tales*), each of the excerpts below serves to construct a narrative that legitimizes the actions and leadership of President Kenyatta during the pandemic:

- 19) Globally, over 400,000 cases of the virus have been reported. Yesterday, Kenya had 25 confirmed cases of the Coronavirus. Today, we have received confirmation of an additional 3 new cases (Uhuru, 2020A).
- 20) Here in Kenya, it has been 12 days since our first confirmed case of Coronavirus (Uhuru, 2020A).
- 21) The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30th January 2020, and a Pandemic on 11th March 2020 (Uhuru 2020G).
- 22) On 25th March 2020, I announced State interventions to cushion Kenyans against adverse economic effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic (Uhuru, 2020G).
- 23) Kenya's first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on 13th March 2020 (Uhuru, 2020G).

In extract 19- "Globally, over 400,000 cases of the virus have been reported. Yesterday, Kenya had 25 confirmed cases of the Coronavirus. Today, we have received confirmation of an additional 3 new cases..." for instance, the speaker utilizes factual data to establish a sense of urgency and gravity surrounding the pandemic. Moreover, the numerical data acts as a form of legitimation by providing an empirical basis for the need for compliance, framing the pandemic as a grave threat that requires collective action. In the same vein, by referencing global statistics alongside national figures, Kenyatta situates Kenya within a broader context of a global crisis, thereby legitimizing the government's response. This mode of framing aligns with Wodak's (2015; 2018) concepts of history and numbers, where historical and numerical data are used strategically to legitimize the government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic. From Van Leeuwen's (2008) perspective of legitimation through narrative/mythopoesis, the presentation of increasing case numbers of people falling victim to the coronavirus functions as a cautionary tale, meant to warn citizens of the potential for rapid increases in cases, if norms around health practices are not observed. According to Van Leeuwen (2008), such a

narrative can be said to illustrate the consequences of “deviant activities,” which in this context would refer to ignoring health guidelines. This understanding is heightened further in excerpt 20: “Here in Kenya, it has been 12 days since our first confirmed case of Coronavirus,” where the reference to time emphasizes the immediacy of the situation and the need for vigilance. That is, the framing of the timeline above serves to remind Kenyans of the pandemic’s progression, reinforcing the narrative that collective swift action is necessary to mitigate its impact. This approach coheres with Fairclough’s (1995) notion of historicity, as it situates the current events within a specific historical context, reinforcing the idea that the government has a moral obligation to respond decisively. In other words, the use of *mythopoesis* here can be said to suggest the idea that time is of the essence, invoking a sense of responsibility among citizens to adhere to public health measures. The same understanding is demonstrated in excerpt 5: “Kenya’s first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on 13th March 2020,” where the announcement of the first confirmed case serves as a pivotal moment in the narrative of the pandemic in Kenya. In this context, by pinpointing this date, the speaker not only constructs a historical marker that signifies the beginning of a national crisis, but also legitimizes subsequent actions taken by the government, as necessary responses to a clearly defined threat.

From a rhetorical standpoint, Kenyatta references authoritative sources: “The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30th January 2020, and a Pandemic on 11th March 2020” (excerpt 3) to legitimize the seriousness of the COVID-19 crisis. In this respect, he invokes the World Health Organization (a globally recognized institution) probably to reinforce his narrative. In effect, this use of external validation serves to construct a narrative that frames the pandemic as a universally acknowledged threat, thereby legitimizing the government’s response as part of a broader international effort. Furthermore, this alignment with authoritative global bodies serves to enhance the credibility of his narrative, by suggesting that the Kenyan government is responding appropriately to a recognized threat. In the same vein, Kenyatta presents a narrative of proactive leadership in response to the

pandemic’s economic impact. That is, by specifying the date of the announcement “25th March 2020,” (see excerpt 4), he creates a sense of accountability and transparency, thereby reinforcing the idea that the government is taking decisive action. From the perspective of Van Leeuwen’s (2008) concept of mythopoesis, the use of the narrative here suggests that the government’s interventions are not only necessary but also morally justified as a means of protecting citizens. Moreover, the framing of state interventions as a protective measure can be said to be tailored to encourage citizens to view the government as a legitimate authority acting in their best interests during a crisis.

Besides, the announcement of state interventions to cushion Kenyans against economic effects (excerpt 4) acts as a moral tale by positioning the government as a protector of the people, reinforcing the idea that engaging in legitimate social practices—such as adhering to health regulations—will lead to positive outcomes for individuals and society as a whole. This narrative of protection and intervention serves to justify the government’s actions and encourages public support.

5.6.1 Cautionary Tales

As mentioned above, *Cautionary tales* are part of Van Leeuwen’s (2008) concept of Mythopoesis (a type of legitimation achieved by means of storytelling or the use of narratives to explain what may happen if an individual fails to observe given norms of social practices, as in indulging oneself in “deviant activities that lead to unhappy endings,” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 117-118). A good example of a cautionary tale is manifested during the President Uhuru Kenyatta’s 6th televised speech in Swahili to Kenyans about the status of the Corona Virus Pandemic:

24) “Nataka niwaeleze kuhusu kijana mmoja kwa sababu yeye alikuwa amejiona kwamba ameshinda askari, ameponyoka, amepita road blocks, ametoka Mombasa, ameenda mpaka Kathiani, Machakos, na anajipigia makofi ya vile amefaulu. Kufika Kathiani pahali ambapo huo ugonjwa haukuwa umesikika, ameambukiza dadake. Na hatujui ni watu wangapi huku Kathiani ambao sasa dadake naye pia ameambukiza. Kujipenda kuliko kupenda wale ambao wakupenda. Huu ugonjwa ni hatari.” (“I want to tell you about a young

man because he believed he had defeated the police, escaped, passed through roadblocks, left Mombasa, went all the way to Kathiani, Machakos, and is applauding himself for how he succeeded. Upon reaching Kathiani, a place where the disease had not been heard of, he infected his sister. And we do not know how many people here in Kathiani who now his sister has also been infected. Loving oneself more than loving those who love you. This disease is dangerous.” (Uhuru, 2020C): (https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=president+uhuru+6th+address+on+corona+virus)

This narrative serves both as a cautionary tale and a moral lesson, illustrating the consequences of individualistic behaviour in the context of public health. That is, by framing the story around the young man’s journey, the speaker constructs a trajectory from individual triumph to collective tragedy, thereby demonstrating the social repercussions of non-compliance. According to Leeuwen (2008) and Said (2017), mythopoesis functions as a powerful tool for legitimizing actions and encouraging compliance with social norms through storytelling. In this context, for instance, the speaker in the excerpt above gives the story of a young man who believed he had successfully evaded law enforcement to travel undetected during the pandemic. In this way, this narrative serves both as a cautionary tale and a moral lesson: the young man’s actions, rooted in self-interest and disregard for public health guidelines, result in harm to others, thereby illustrating the consequences of “deviant activities” (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 117). In this respect, by framing the story around the young man’s journey from Mombasa, including escaping “roadblocks” and traveling to a place “where the disease had not been heard of,” the speaker successfully constructs a clear trajectory from individual triumph to collective tragedy, thereby demonstrating the social repercussions of individualistic behaviour. The moral undertone of the narrative is reinforced by the admonition that “loving oneself more than loving those who love you” is dangerous, pointing to the need for communal concern and adherence to collective norms (Schnurr et al., 2015).

From the perspective of Wodak’s (2015; 2018) concept of tops of history and Fairclough’s (1995;

2020) notion of historicity that emphasizes the importance of context and the temporal dimensions of discourse, by framing the actions of the young man within the contemporary crisis, the speaker invokes a sense of urgency and reality surrounding the corona-virus disease. The historical context is strategically used to legitimize the call for action by all Kenyans, in addition to anchoring his message in a broader narrative specific to national identity and responsibility during a crisis. From the perspective of leadership communication, by highlighting the historical milestones achieved in combating the pandemic, the speaker not only justifies his leadership, but also utilizes historical legitimacy to prompt action among citizens. Moreover, the speaker’s narrative technique of juxtaposing personal failure against a backdrop of collective achievement serves as a compelling rhetorical device both for emphasizing the consequences of inaction and the need for immediate and collective compliance to the given health directives.

In the same vein, using the *Us/Them* dichotomy (Van Dijk, 2001; Oddo, 2011; Sowinska, 2013; Khajavi & Rasti, 2020) as a delegitimizing strategy, where the ‘us’ entails large groups of people/states including the speaker and the audience, and ‘them’ a smaller group of ‘others’ who are often depicted as doing ‘the wrong’ or ‘bad’ things” (Schnurr et al., 2015, p. 197), the speaker reiterates that,

25) We have recently experienced cases within our country where transmission was from our political and religious leaders who unfortunately did not heed the guidance by the Ministry of Health on self-quarantine and social distancing. I therefore once more call on everyone to wash hands frequently with hand sanitizers or soap and water for at least 20 seconds (Uhuru, 202A).

In this context, the speaker uses the *us/them* strategy within a historical context to delegitimize political and religious leaders, by presenting them as breaking or violating the given rules/health protocols proposed by the WHO and the Ministry of Health in Kenya. By portraying them in a more negative light, and “presenting alternative courses of action” (Hansson, 2017), the speaker uses the presupposed undesirable behaviour of political and religious leaders as a justification for his leadership role in calling for collective action: “I therefore once more call on everyone to wash

hands frequently with hand sanitizers or soap and water for at least 20 seconds.” In this way, therefore, the speaker can be said to be using *Cautionary tales* to delegitimize the actions of those seen as operating against the set rules, thereby legitimizing his moral responsibility to act during the pandemic. It is in this sense that Said (2017) posits that where the speaker has authoritative power that is socio-political in nature, legitimization practices can be enacted with the express aim of achieving compliance, more so, where those in authority strive to defend an action, decision or policy, by persuading the audience of its rightfulness, hence their compliance with it.

6. Conclusions

This study elucidates how the speaker employed various discursive strategies rooted in Van Leeuwen’s (2007; 2008) and Van Leeuwen and Wodak’s (1999) frameworks, to navigate the varied challenges posed by a national crisis. In this context, the study findings reveal that the speaker utilizes appeals to tradition, personal authority, and moral evaluation in shaping public perception and fostering compliance to the given public health directives (see sections 5.1-5.5). Following Van Leeuwen (2008), invoking tradition serves to reinforce a sense of continuity and stability, thereby legitimizing contemporary actions by aligning them with historical successes. As such, the speaker’s references to Kenya’s collective resilience were found to be tailored not only to evoke a shared national identity but also to mobilize public sentiment toward cooperative action. Moreover, this strategic reliance on historical narratives underscores the importance of collective memory in legitimizing governmental authority, suggesting that such approaches can effectively cultivate a sense of hope and unity among citizens.

Furthermore, the invocation of personal authority was noted to be a significant rhetorical strategy that serves to enhance the legitimacy of the speaker’s directives. That is, by asserting his position as the head of state and employing authoritative language, the speaker was found to be focused on establishing a clear chain of command that compels adherence to government mandates (See section 5.2). However, this reliance on conformity authorization was found to raise significant questions about the balance between authority and democratic engagement, as effective

leadership communication ought to in practice to foster an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives (Edmondson & Levy, 2019).

The study further confirms the strategic use of instrumental rationalization, emotional appeals through storytelling/cautionary tales and moral evaluations to legitimize the government’s response to the pandemic by framing the situation as a moral crisis that necessitates collective action (see sections 5.3-5.5.1). By evoking fear and empathy, the speaker effectively mobilizes public sentiments, reinforcing the idea that individual actions are crucial to the collective well-being (Reyes, 2011; Cap, 2017). Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Kenyan government’s discourse on COVID-19 employed varied strategies of legitimation, namely authority of tradition, personal authority, instrumental rationalization, legitimation through emotional appeals, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis/storytelling, to justify the government’s actions and policy decision.

7. Implications of the Study

This study highlights how effective communication strategies can enhance the legitimacy of governmental actions in times of crisis, illustrating the critical role of rhetoric in shaping public perception and compliance. By employing various legitimation strategies—such as appeals to tradition, moral evaluations, and emotional appeals (see sections 5.1-5.5), the speaker not only justified his administration’s decisions but also fostered a sense of national unity and collective responsibility. This underscores the importance of contextually relevant communication that resonates with the populace’s values and experiences, particularly in an African setting where historical narratives and communal identity are pivotal. Furthermore, the findings suggest that leaders must balance authority with inclusivity to avoid perceptions of authoritarianism, thereby promoting democratic engagement even during crises. This understanding contributes to our understanding of how political discourse can be strategically utilized to navigate complex socio-political landscapes, highlighting the need for embracing a more nuanced approach that balances authority with inclusivity and moral responsibility in the face of crises.

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Linguistic Manipulation and Logical Fallacies: How Frank Underwood Constructs Verbal Traps to Influence Audience Perception in *House of Cards*

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Abstract

Frank Underwood, the central figure in *House of Cards*, exemplifies the strategic use of linguistic manipulation to consolidate power, disarm adversaries, and influence public perception. This paper examines how Underwood constructs verbal traps using logical fallacies such as ad hominem attacks, false dilemmas, appeals to emotion, post hoc reasoning, and straw man arguments. By analyzing the frequency and contextual deployment of these fallacies in his monologues and dialogues, this study highlights how Underwood tailors his rhetorical approach depending on whether he is persuading the audience or coercing opponents. His monologues serve as narrative control mechanisms, using emotional appeals and causal distortions to justify his actions, while his dialogues function as battlefields of manipulation, where he employs character attacks, forced choices, and misrepresentations to dominate his rivals. Through a quantitative analysis of his speech patterns, this paper reveals the systematic nature of Underwood's linguistic deception and its broader implications for political rhetoric. The study concludes by drawing parallels between Underwood's strategies and real-world political discourse, emphasizing the dangers of uncritical acceptance of rhetorical persuasion in governance and media.

Keywords: linguistic manipulation, logical fallacies, verbal traps, ad hominem attacks, false dilemmas, appeals to emotion, post hoc reasoning

1. Introduction

Language is one of the most powerful tools in politics, capable of shaping perceptions, influencing decisions, and consolidating control. In *House of Cards*, Frank Underwood exemplifies the strategic use of linguistic manipulation to dominate both his adversaries and the audience. His mastery of rhetoric allows him to construct verbal traps that force opponents into vulnerable positions, often without them

realizing they have been manipulated. Through careful wordplay, deception, and misdirection, Underwood establishes himself as an unrivaled political tactician, turning conversations into battlegrounds where he almost always emerges victorious. A central component of Underwood's rhetorical power is his ability to exploit logical fallacies. Rather than relying solely on factual accuracy, he often distorts logic to serve his own agenda, using tactics such as ad hominem

attacks to discredit opponents, false dilemmas to limit perceived choices, and emotional appeals to manipulate public sentiment. What makes his persuasion even more compelling is his frequent direct address to the audience—breaking the fourth wall to share his inner thoughts and rationalize his actions. This unique narrative device creates an illusion of trust between Underwood and the viewer, reinforcing the perception that his manipulative strategies are not only effective but also justified. This paper explores how Frank Underwood's use of logical fallacies and verbal traps serves as a tool for control, examining his rhetorical strategies in monologues and dialogues to reveal the deeper mechanisms behind his persuasive influence. By analyzing his most frequently used tactics—ad hominem arguments, false dilemmas, appeals to emotion, and post hoc reasoning—this study provides insight into how political figures, both fictional and real, employ linguistic manipulation to maintain power.

2. The Art of Verbal Traps in Frank Underwood's Rhetoric

Frank Underwood, the cunning protagonist of *House of Cards*, demonstrates an extraordinary ability to construct verbal traps that not only disarm his opponents but also lead them into self-destructive decisions. His mastery of rhetoric is not limited to persuasion; rather, it is a calculated form of manipulation designed to control conversations, frame reality, and eliminate threats. Through the strategic use of logical fallacies, psychological pressure, and linguistic precision, Underwood creates situations where his adversaries unknowingly dig their own graves. His verbal traps function as intellectual minefields—once someone steps into a conversation with him, escape without consequence becomes nearly impossible.

This section explores how Underwood builds these traps through ad hominem attacks, false dilemmas, and the illusion of choice, demonstrating his unparalleled ability to dictate the terms of discourse and control outcomes.

2.1 Ad Hominem Attacks: Undermining Opponents Before They Speak

One of Underwood's most frequently employed tactics is the ad hominem attack, which involves attacking the character, credibility, or personal flaws of an opponent rather than engaging with their argument. This is an essential tool in his arsenal because it allows him to discredit

adversaries before they even have a chance to present a compelling case. Instead of debating policy or ideology, he focuses on personal shortcomings, past failures, or ethical lapses to ensure that whatever his opponents say is perceived as unreliable, biased, or hypocritical.

A striking example occurs in *House of Cards* Season 2 when journalist Zoe Barnes starts gathering information that could expose Underwood's corrupt dealings. Instead of confronting her accusations head-on, Underwood undermines her credibility by subtly reminding others of her ethically questionable relationship with him, positioning her as an opportunist rather than a serious journalist. The public begins to question her motives, making her claims appear as a personal vendetta rather than an objective pursuit of truth. This kind of preemptive character assassination is key to Underwood's strategy—by planting doubt before a challenge even materializes, he ensures that his opposition is weakened before they can effectively strike. Similarly, in political confrontations, Underwood leverages ad hominem attacks to destroy the reputations of his adversaries. If a senator challenges him on policy, he might not counter with logic but instead remind everyone of that senator's past political failures, painting them as incompetent or untrustworthy. Even if the senator's argument is valid, Underwood's framing shifts the focus away from policy and onto personality, ensuring that his own position appears stronger simply because the alternative has been tainted.

2.2 False Dilemmas: Forcing Opponents into No-Win Scenarios

Another key strategy in Underwood's rhetorical arsenal is the false dilemma, where he presents a situation as having only two possible outcomes—both of which ultimately serve his interests. By carefully constructing these dilemmas, he forces opponents into making choices that seem inevitable, even when better alternatives exist. Underwood creates these scenarios by eliminating middle ground, accelerating decision-making, and increasing pressure until his target feels trapped.

A prime example of this occurs in his dealings with President Walker. When the president begins to distance himself from Underwood, the latter quickly maneuvers the situation into a stark choice: either Walker fully trusts Underwood's guidance or risks political collapse

due to a scandal that Underwood himself helped engineer. What makes this trap so effective is that Walker believes he is making a rational decision, not realizing that the entire situation has been orchestrated by Underwood to limit his options. In reality, Walker could have sought alternative counsel, exposed Underwood's machinations, or engaged in damage control—but because Underwood frames the crisis as an urgent, binary choice, Walker is unable to see these possibilities and ultimately falls into the trap. Underwood frequently employs false dilemmas in his legislative maneuvers as well. When pushing controversial policies, he frames opposition as a direct threat to national stability. If a congressman hesitates to support his bill, Underwood presents the choice as either voting in favor and securing economic recovery or rejecting it and plunging the country into financial chaos. This kind of forced binary decision-making pressures opponents into compliance, even when alternative solutions exist. The genius of Underwood's false dilemmas lies in his ability to make others believe they are making a choice when, in reality, their options have already been predetermined in his favor.

2.3 *The Illusion of Choice: Manipulating Perception*

Beyond false dilemmas, Underwood often creates the illusion of choice, where his adversaries believe they are acting independently when, in reality, they are following a predetermined path he has laid out. This technique allows him to maintain control while making his targets feel empowered, a psychological manipulation that ensures compliance without resistance.

One of the most devastating examples of this is his manipulation of Peter Russo. Underwood makes Russo believe that he has the power to rebuild his career and run for governor, supporting him publicly while secretly engineering his downfall. Underwood provides him with opportunities, advisors, and resources, all while ensuring that Russo's weaknesses—his struggle with addiction, his self-doubt—are quietly exacerbated behind the scenes. When Russo inevitably collapses under the weight of his own demons, he believes he is solely responsible for his failure. What he never realizes is that every choice he made was influenced, controlled, or outright orchestrated by Underwood. This is the essence of Underwood's illusion of choice: making his

targets believe they are in control while systematically stripping them of any real agency.

This manipulation extends to the media as well. When Underwood wants a certain narrative to dominate the public discourse, he does not simply release a statement or argue his case—he carefully leaks select pieces of information to journalists, leading them down a path that ensures they arrive at his desired conclusion on their own. By controlling the flow of information, he makes it appear as though reporters are independently uncovering the truth when, in fact, they are being guided to a predetermined revelation. The result is a narrative that feels organic and credible but is, in reality, a carefully crafted fiction.

2.4 *The Psychological Impact of Underwood's Verbal Traps*

Frank Underwood's verbal traps are not just about winning individual battles—they are about shaping perception, consolidating power, and ensuring long-term dominance. His ability to manipulate language allows him to maintain an aura of invincibility, create confusion and doubt among his enemies, and control decision-making processes without appearing overtly coercive. His rhetorical strategies function as a form of psychological warfare, where the mere act of engaging in dialogue with him becomes a risk. By systematically discrediting opponents, presenting rigged choices, and constructing narratives that appear self-evident, Underwood ensures that those who challenge him either fail, become complicit, or unknowingly advance his own goals. His success demonstrates how language can be weaponized to manipulate perception, and his downfall—when it finally comes—is a testament to the limits of such deception. Eventually, even the most skillfully constructed lies collapse under the weight of reality.

3. Audience Manipulation Through Logical Fallacies

Frank Underwood's rhetorical mastery extends beyond his direct interactions with political adversaries; he also manipulates the audience's perception by employing logical fallacies in his frequent monologues. His ability to control the narrative and guide interpretation makes him not just a political strategist within the world of *House of Cards*, but also a manipulator of the viewer's own biases and emotions. The show's unique fourth-wall-breaking technique allows

Underwood to address the audience directly, drawing them into his perspective, often convincing them that his unethical actions are necessary, justified, or even admirable. His speeches are designed not only to explain his actions but also to reframe them in ways that elicit sympathy, admiration, or at the very least, reluctant approval. Through carefully crafted appeals to emotion, post hoc reasoning, and selective omission of key facts, Underwood distorts reality to serve his own agenda.

3.1 Appeal to Emotion (Pathos)

One of Underwood's most potent tools is his ability to tap into the audience's emotions to justify his behavior. This technique, known as *pathos*, is particularly effective in his monologues, where he creates a sense of camaraderie between himself and the viewer. By speaking directly to the camera, he establishes an intimate relationship, as though he is confiding in a trusted ally rather than delivering a calculated performance. His use of storytelling, evocative language, and personal anecdotes further enhances this effect. In Season 2, when Underwood engineers the downfall of Peter Russo, he does not frame it as an act of ruthless political maneuvering but rather as a tragic inevitability—Russo was weak, and his self-destruction was merely a matter of time. By presenting himself as a pragmatist who had no choice but to act, Underwood shifts the emotional burden onto the audience, forcing them to see his actions as a painful necessity rather than an outright betrayal. This manipulation is reinforced by his calculated pauses, his measured tone, and his knowing glances—nonverbal cues that subtly reinforce the illusion of honesty and sincerity.

Another striking example occurs when Underwood discusses the importance of power in governance. He does not appeal to reason or ethical principles but instead provokes feelings of urgency and fear. He implies that without a strong, ruthless leader like himself, chaos will ensue. This is a classic case of emotional manipulation: by framing himself as the only safeguard against disorder, he coerces the audience into viewing his questionable actions as the lesser evil.

3.2 Post Hoc Reasoning and the Illusion of Causality

Another common logical fallacy Underwood employs is *post hoc ergo propter hoc* reasoning—the assumption that because one

event follows another, the first must have caused the second. This fallacy is particularly effective in political rhetoric, where complex situations often have multiple contributing factors, but a simple, direct cause-effect relationship is easier to sell to the public and, by extension, to the audience of *House of Cards*. A clear instance of this manipulation appears in Season 3 when Underwood, struggling to pass his America Works jobs program, blames the economic downturn on his political opponents' reluctance to support him. In reality, the economic decline had numerous contributing factors, but by linking it directly to opposition against his policies, he simplifies the issue and deflects blame. This rhetorical move forces both his political adversaries and the audience into a reactive position—either accept his plan or be perceived as responsible for continued economic struggles. The strategy is highly effective because it preys on the human tendency to seek direct cause-and-effect explanations, even when the reality is more nuanced.

This technique is also evident when Underwood takes credit for political victories that were, in reality, orchestrated through deceit and manipulation. By positioning himself as the architect of every success while shifting blame for failures onto others, he constructs a false historical narrative in real time. He does not need to prove causation; he only needs to suggest it with confidence, allowing the audience to fill in the gaps themselves.

3.3 Selective Framing and Omission of Context

Another key element of Underwood's audience manipulation is his strategic use of framing—emphasizing certain details while omitting others to shape perception. This is not a logical fallacy in itself, but it enables fallacious reasoning by controlling what information the audience receives. When Underwood narrates his past decisions, he rarely provides a full account of events. Instead, he focuses on specific moments that support his narrative while downplaying or outright ignoring details that might complicate it. This technique is particularly effective because it allows him to guide the audience's moral judgments. A critical example of this occurs in his monologue after Zoe Barnes' death. Rather than acknowledging his direct role in her murder, he subtly shifts the narrative toward the dangers of ambition and the costs of power. By doing so, he does not deny his involvement, but he frames it in such a

way that the audience is led to view it as a necessary evil rather than a cold-blooded killing. This manipulation is crucial because it keeps the audience complicit—those who continue to watch and support Underwood’s rise are, in a way, endorsing his methods.

3.4 False Equivalence and Moral Relativism

Underwood also employs *false equivalence*—the fallacy of presenting two unequal situations as morally or logically comparable. He frequently argues that his own actions, no matter how extreme, are no worse than those of his adversaries, even when this is demonstrably untrue. When faced with accusations of corruption, he does not attempt to refute them with evidence. Instead, he shifts the discussion by pointing out that corruption is inherent to politics, implying that his actions are simply part of the game. This form of *moral relativism* blurs ethical boundaries, making it easier for both his political peers and the audience to rationalize his wrongdoing. Underwood’s most effective use of false equivalence occurs when he equates his opponents’ legitimate criticisms with petty political attacks. By doing so, he creates the illusion that all opposition to him is either biased, self-serving, or hypocritical. This tactic is particularly effective in today’s political climate, where distrust in the system is widespread, making audiences more receptive to the idea that “everyone is corrupt” and, therefore, Underwood’s actions are no worse than anyone else’s.

4. Analysis of Underwood’s Rhetorical

Strategies

Frank Underwood’s rhetorical strategies are not just anecdotal; they follow distinct patterns that can be analyzed quantitatively. His use of logical fallacies and manipulation tactics occurs systematically, revealing a deliberate approach to controlling both his adversaries and the audience. By examining the frequency of different rhetorical techniques across his monologues and dialogues, we can see clear trends in how he deploys language as a weapon.

Throughout *House of Cards*, Underwood’s rhetorical methods shift depending on the situation. In monologues, where he speaks directly to the audience, his tone is often reflective, explanatory, and persuasive. Here, he relies heavily on appeals to emotion and post hoc reasoning, ensuring that his manipulations appear rational and justified. In dialogues, however, where he is actively maneuvering against political opponents, ad hominem attacks, false dilemmas, and straw man arguments become more frequent. The contrast between these two modes of speech underscores how Underwood tailors his rhetorical strategies depending on whether he is trying to gain the audience’s sympathy or actively outmaneuver his rivals. By categorizing instances of logical fallacies in his monologues and dialogues, we can gain a clearer understanding of which techniques he prioritizes in different contexts. The table below presents the distribution of these rhetorical strategies across four seasons of *House of Cards*:

Table 1. Frequency of Logical Fallacies in Frank Underwood’s Speeches (Seasons 1–4)

Logical Fallacy	Occurrences in Monologues	Occurrences in Dialogues	Total Instances
Ad Hominem	12	24	36
False Dilemma	9	18	27
Appeal to Emotion	15	21	36
Post Hoc Reasoning	8	14	22
Straw Man Argument	11	17	28

The table illustrates several key trends in Underwood’s rhetorical style. Ad hominem attacks and appeals to emotion appear most frequently, emphasizing how his strategy is built on undermining opponents while justifying his own actions. His dialogues feature a notably higher occurrence of false dilemmas and straw

man arguments, suggesting that he relies on these tactics when debating or negotiating. His monologues, on the other hand, contain a greater proportion of post hoc reasoning, where he manipulates cause-and-effect relationships to construct a narrative that portrays his actions as inevitable.

One of the most striking observations is that ad hominem attacks are the most frequent fallacy overall. This reflects Underwood's core belief that credibility is just as important as policy in the world of politics. By attacking an opponent's reputation, he renders their arguments meaningless before they are even voiced. This is particularly effective in political debates, where perception often matters more than the truth. His use of false dilemmas is also crucial to his strategy, as it forces others to choose between two extremes, both of which ultimately serve his interests. When comparing monologues to dialogues, appeals to emotion dominate in monologues, reinforcing the idea that Underwood's direct addresses to the audience serve as moments of persuasion rather than confrontation. In these moments, he does not need to destroy an opponent but rather shape how the viewer perceives events. He speaks as though he is revealing a fundamental truth about power, but in reality, he is manipulating the audience into sympathizing with his actions. His use of post hoc reasoning in these moments strengthens this effect, as he constructs narratives that make his previous decisions appear logical, inevitable, and necessary.

In contrast, dialogues are dominated by strategic verbal combat, where Underwood frequently resorts to straw man arguments to misrepresent his opponents' views and weaken their positions. This allows him to paint rivals as either incompetent or extremist, making his own stance appear more reasonable by comparison. When faced with resistance, he forces adversaries into false dilemmas, ensuring that they feel trapped between two options that ultimately benefit him. These tactics create an illusion of choice while eliminating any real opposition. The quantitative breakdown of Underwood's rhetorical strategies highlights the systematic nature of his manipulation. His ability to alternate between persuasion and coercion, sympathy and attack, makes him a formidable political figure. Through careful deployment of logical fallacies, he ensures that every conversation, every speech, and every moment of self-reflection serves his ultimate goal: the consolidation of power.

5. Conclusion

Frank Underwood's mastery of rhetoric in *House of Cards* serves as a powerful case study in how language can be weaponized for control, persuasion, and manipulation. His ability to

construct verbal traps ensures that his adversaries are discredited, trapped, or coerced into decisions that benefit him, often without realizing they have been manipulated. His monologues, rich with appeals to emotion and post hoc reasoning, create a narrative that justifies his actions and draws the audience into his perspective, while his ad hominem attacks, false dilemmas, and straw man arguments in dialogues ensure that his opponents are neutralized before they can become a threat. Through a combination of psychological coercion, logical distortions, and strategic communication, Underwood not only dictates political outcomes but also controls how the audience perceives him. What makes his rhetorical tactics so effective is their calculated nature. Underwood does not argue simply to convince—he argues to dominate. His use of ad hominem attacks prevents opposition from gaining credibility, while his construction of false dilemmas forces people into choices that are ultimately designed to serve him. His appeals to emotion allow him to create a sense of justification, even for his most unethical actions, while post hoc reasoning enables him to rewrite events so that they appear inevitable. The illusion of choice that he frequently employs ensures that those who engage with him believe they are making independent decisions, when in reality, he has already dictated their path.

This ability to shape reality through language is not unique to fiction. In real-world politics, similar rhetorical techniques are used by leaders, media figures, and corporations to control narratives, frame debates, and push agendas. Underwood's speeches and dialogues reflect the broader mechanisms of persuasion that operate in modern governance, where perception is often more powerful than truth. His success as a character highlights the unsettling reality that political power is not always built on morality or competence, but rather on the ability to control discourse and manipulate perception.

However, *House of Cards* also serves as a cautionary tale about the limits of rhetorical manipulation. While Underwood's ability to control narratives grants him immense power, it is ultimately unsustainable. Over time, his distortions accumulate consequences, and even the most carefully crafted lies begin to unravel. His downfall demonstrates that while persuasion can be used to shape temporary realities, it cannot permanently suppress the

truth. This serves as a reminder that while rhetoric can be a tool for influence, unchecked manipulation ultimately leads to self-destruction. Frank Underwood's rhetorical strategies are a masterclass in political discourse, deception, and persuasion. His ability to weaponize language ensures his dominance, but his reliance on distortion and manipulation ultimately proves to be his greatest weakness. By analyzing his use of logical fallacies and verbal traps, we gain a deeper understanding of how power operates—not just in fiction, but in the real world.

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Effects of Interactive Feedback and Learning Proficiency on Chinese EFL Learners' Affective Engagement

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Abstract

Using Python semantic orientation analysis and SPSS 26.0 to analyze group discussion text of 72 non-English major graduate students, this study investigates the effects of interactive feedback and English learning proficiency on EFL learners' affective engagement in English collaborative learning. The study found that: (1) Interactive feedback positively influenced affective engagement, while the experimental group elicited significantly higher affective engagement than the control group, with richer emotional experiences and enhanced interactivity. (2) Significant differences existed in the effects of English learning proficiency on learners' affective engagement, with high-proficiency learners exhibiting greater engagement than low-proficiency peers. (3) Interactive feedback and English learning proficiency levels had a significant interaction effect on learners' affective engagement. High-proficiency learners in AWE-teacher-peer feedback demonstrated the highest engagement, followed by high-proficiency learners in teacher-peer feedback, low-proficiency learners in AWE-teacher-peer feedback and low-proficiency learners in teacher-peer feedback. These findings offer valuable insights that can guide educators in providing appropriate affordance and emotional support to effectively stimulate learners' affective engagement in English learning.

Keywords: interactive feedback, affective engagement in English collaborative learning, the Control-Value Theory, ecological affordance

1. Introduction

As an essential teaching strategy that provides learners with real-time assessment and diagnostic feedback (Tian & Zhou, 2020), interactive feedback has drawn wide attention in academic circles of linguistic academics. Initial research in second language (L2) writing pedagogy predominantly centered on teacher feedback. Subsequent shifts toward a

process-oriented writing approach spurred scholarly interest in peer assessment mechanisms. Under the multiple interactive perspective, the application of the AWE system provides a new environment of human-machine mixed feedback for second language writing teaching practice (Zhang & Jiang, 2022). During second language learning, the importance of learners' English learning proficiency levels has

also been highlighted, and more researchers have begun exploring this topic (Huang *et al.*, 2017). However, extant research predominantly examines individual learners' affective engagement with feedback and correlations between isolated proficiency levels and affective engagement (Zheng & Yu, 2018; Zheng *et al.*, 2023). Accordingly, it needs to expand its attention from individual learners or single proficiency levels to a collaborative group perspective to further perfect the second language affective research theory.

Affective engagement in collaborative learning refers to learners' positive emotional state when solving a problem or completing a collaborative task (Skinner *et al.*, 2009; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Existing research mainly focuses on the interaction and learning emotions in collaborative learning and explores the influence of peer interaction patterns and emotions on affective engagement in collaborative learning (Barrett *et al.*, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2023). However, the impact of interactive feedback and English learning proficiency level—critical factors shaping collaborative learning—on affective engagement, particularly their interactive effects, remains underexplored. Therefore, guided by Control-Value Theory and Ecological Affordance Theory, this study intends to explore the effect of interactive feedback and English learning proficiency on EFL learners' affective engagement in English collaborative learning with social network analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Studies on Interactive Feedback

In English writing teaching, interactive feedback is a process of communication and discussion between teachers and students regarding the problems with grammar, content, and structure in learners' writing provided by teachers, peers, and AWE (Automated Writing Evaluation) systems, using iterative discourse cycles that can promote multiple rounds of discourse communication for interaction (Zagita & Sun, 2021).

Teacher feedback was the main focus in the early stages of second language writing teaching. In traditional writing teaching, feedback is considered the responsibility of teachers, who are reliable sources of information and are more likely to identify errors and misconceptions (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Early research mainly focused on the focal points of teacher

feedback, the types of feedback preferred by students, and the characteristics of students' reactions, cognitive engagement, and attitude towards written teacher feedback (Omer Hasssan Ali Mahfoodh, 2017). With the deepening of research, the focus of research has gradually shifted toward students' emotional responses to teacher-written feedback (Ranalli, 2021). Research on peer feedback primarily examined the development of a process-oriented writing approach. Currently, the research on peer feedback mainly focuses on the characteristics, cognition, positive and negative effects of peer feedback, and how to improve the quality of peer feedback, prioritizing issues related to content and meaning (Tsui & Ng, 2010; Ruegg, 2015).

The advancement of technology has led to increasing attention to Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems for providing learners with real-time feedback. The application of AWE in teaching mainly focuses on learners' perception and evaluation of online automatic feedback (Chen & Cheng, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2015). However, as increasing evidence highlights the positive effects of feedback on students' L2 writing development, some new perspectives appeared. Bitchener (2012) critically investigated the pedagogical efficacy of written corrective feedback (WCF), systematizing feedback into categories such as direct/indirect and focused/unfocused and evaluating their effects on grammatical acquisition in ESL settings. Moreover, Han (2019) introduced an ecological framework to WCF research, framing feedback as part of a dynamic interplay between learners, educators, and institutional contexts. Han's study advocated for adaptive, context-sensitive strategies and participatory research to capture WCF's multidimensional impacts. Besides the studies on the factors influencing interactive feedback, some researchers pay much attention to the effectiveness of interactive feedback on learners' language production and engagement (Elola & Oskoz, 2016). Interactive feedback highlights the communication and interaction between teachers and students, as well as between students and students.

Since Ellis (2010) proposed the three-dimensional framework of learning engagement (affective engagement, behavioral engagement, and cognitive engagement), researchers have paid much attention to

interactive feedback research under the framework of sociocultural theory (Shi, 2021). Lu (2016) found that AWE feedback has a certain impact on students' writing process. Zhang and Hyland (2018) identified the strengths and weaknesses of both teacher feedback and AWE feedback. The results showed that different types of feedback have great potential in facilitating student involvement in writing tasks, and they highlighted some of these pedagogical implications for promoting student engagement with teacher and AWE feedback. For learning engagement, research mainly focuses on the influencing factors of learning engagement in different feedback environments (Xu & Fan, 2019; Xu & Han, 2020) and learners' learning engagement with varying types of feedback (Han & Yang, 2021; Geng & Yu, 2023). However, research has predominantly examined individual affective engagement with single or multiple feedback sources and influencing factors of learning engagement in different feedback environments while neglecting the exploration of the affective engagement of learners in the learning process from the perspectives of collaborative learning or group learning (Phung *et al.*, 2021), especially in interactive environments with multiple feedback sources such as computers, peers, and teachers, thereby neglecting deeper causal mechanisms in collaborative learning.

2.2 Studies on the Effectiveness of English Proficiency Levels

The difference in English learning proficiency levels, as an important influencing factor of academic emotions like enjoyment and boredom (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019), is crucial in impacting learners' learning performance and engagement in the collaborative learning process (Huang *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, research on the influencing factors of affective engagement in collaborative learning cannot ignore the individual's English learning proficiency level.

Huang *et al.* (2017) implemented a study with a 17-month technology-enhanced collaborative storytelling activity and examined young students' pair performance, flow perception, and learning strategies in relation to English learning proficiency levels. The findings and pedagogical suggestions aimed to address the issue of proficiency differences in EFL classrooms and shed light on future implications and research of EFL collaborative storytelling activities. Teng and Wang (2023) attempted to explore the

incorporation of behavioral, affective, and cognitive student engagement when measuring the learning effectiveness of content-based instruction video learning, highlighting that high-proficiency learners are more capable of referring to the bilingual caption by adopting good strategies. To address underexplored facets of feedback engagement, Tian and Zhou (2020) undertook a longitudinal naturalistic investigation tracking five Chinese EFL learners' interactions with automated peer evaluations and teacher feedback in a 17-week online writing course. Analysis of textual artifacts and semi-structured interviews revealed that high-level and low-level learners have different effects on learning engagement with self-evaluation, teachers, and peer feedback. Tsang and Dewaele (2023) confirmed a significant correlation between learning emotions, learning engagement, and learning proficiency. Based on a quadripartite construct of student engagement, Pan *et al.* (2023) examined how L2 Chinese students with high-proficiency (HP) and with low-proficiency (LP) cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, and agentically engage with teacher WCF. They found imbalances among the four dimensions of affective, cognitive, behavioral, and agentic engagement, which were mediated by the interplay of individual factors like language proficiency, writing self-efficacy, learner belief, etc.

The impact of learning levels on academic emotions and performance has drawn increasing attention from language researchers (Li, 2022). However, there is currently limited research on the relationship between English learning proficiency levels and affective engagement. Most studies focus only on individual learners' affective engagement with different feedback and the influence of a single proficiency level on affective engagement by case studies, questionnaires, self-reports, and semi-structured interviews while neglecting the exploration of the differences in affective engagement of learners in different proficiency levels.

2.3 Studies on Affective Engagement

Affective engagement, as one of the three-dimensional models of learning engagement proposed by Fredricks *et al.* (2004), mainly refers to the learner's emotional response to feedback, reflected in interest, value, and effectiveness. Affective engagement, as one

indicator of learning engagement (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004), refers to students' affective experience towards school, learning activities, and peer partners during collaborative learning. Bond and Bedenlier (2019) conceptualized affective engagement as learners' favorable affective responses to the learning environment, peer/teacher interactions, and their perceived belongingness and intellectual curiosity. As a substantive learning engagement, affective engagement is the key to influencing the quality of learning. While cognitive received more attention in the early years, more and more research in recent years has begun to focus on substantive engagement, that is, affective and behavioral engagement (Liang, 2018; Guo, 2018). Empirically, learners exhibiting heightened affective engagement demonstrated a greater propensity for positive affective states (e.g., enthusiasm, contentment), whereas those with diminished affective engagement displayed avoidance behaviors, passive coping strategies, and reduced academic volition.

Affective engagement in collaborative learning and its influencing factors have garnered significant attention in the field of second language writing. Learners with different group structures have rich learning experiences in a collaborative learning environment, leading to complex emotional states and affecting their affective engagement in collaborative learning (Linnenbrink-Garcia *et al.*, 2011). Few studies have been done on affective engagement alone in foreign language research, especially in collaborative learning. Group interaction is more likely to stimulate strong emotions in learners and significantly impact their affective engagement (Hiver *et al.*, 2021; Payant & Zuniga, 2022). Research on the factors influencing affective engagement in collaborative learning is still relatively limited. The collaborative pattern has been found to have better cognitive engagement effects. However, few have been done on the impact of learners' affective engagement during the collaborative learning process (Chen *et al.*, 2023).

From an ecological perspective, second language learners are situated in a diverse interactive system formed by multiple ecological factors such as teachers, students, and human-computer interaction (Van Lier, 2000). In such a system, affective engagement plays a crucial role in enabling learners to actively and creatively interact with others (Pekrun *et al.*, 2002).

Researchers have found that English learners at different proficiency levels in a collaborative learning environment will interact with multiple feedback sources simultaneously, and learners of different levels regulated their learning process and achieved affective engagement through their perception and action of environmental affordance (Park & Lim, 2019; Xu & Long, 2022).

Some researchers at home and abroad have explored the factors that influence learners' affective engagement in a collaborative learning environment. Fan (2019) studied the effects of task types on college English learners' affective engagement, behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and social engagement in peer interaction. The results showed that in terms of affective engagement, the decision-making task elicited more discourse and interaction. Zhang *et al.* (2021) used structural equation modeling to explore the effects of three affective factors, anxiety, motivation, and willingness to communicate (WTC), on English collaborative learning engagement. However, the study involved three types of emotional factors and did not profoundly explore the complexity of emotions in collaborative learning. Li *et al.* (2018) found that both learners' individual factors (such as second language proficiency) and external factors (such as classroom environment) can affect levels of learning enjoyment and anxiety. Enjoyment exhibits more vital communicative ability and is more influenced by external factors (especially teacher factors), while anxiety is more influenced by personal factors (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2021).

Research on the effects of interactive feedback and English learning proficiency on affective engagement is still relatively limited. Zhang *et al.* (2023) used social network analysis to explore the impact of emotional experiences under different interactive modes on affective engagement in collaborative learning. However, this study did not probe the differences in emotional experiences between groups and individuals and affective engagement among learners at different proficiency levels. Furthermore, research on single or different types of feedback sources has found that the perception of specific feedback sources by different learners shows a dynamic changing trend, which further affects the learners' uptake, evaluation, and engagement in feedback (Koltovskaia, 2020; Tian & Zhou, 2020), but they did not shed light on the differences in the

affective engagement among learners at different proficiency levels. Cai (2023) explored the mechanism of the effect of perceived environmental support on affective engagement among low-level second language learners but did not delve into the perception and engagement of learners at different proficiency levels towards various feedback sources. To conclude, cross-research on affective engagement and learning levels among learners in different feedback environments is relatively rare.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

The research aims to explore the effects of interactive feedback and English learning proficiency levels on Chinese learners' affective engagement during English collaborative learning. The following research questions are addressed in this study:

- 1) Do different interactive feedback patterns impact learners' affective engagement in English collaborative learning?
- 2) Do different English learning proficiency levels impact learners' affective engagement in English collaborative learning?
- 3) How do interactive feedback and English learning proficiency levels interactively influence learners' affective engagement?

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were 72 non-English undergraduate students in a Chinese university, of which 37 were male (51.4%), 35 were female (48.6%), and the average age of them was 23.26 (SD = .46). All of them had experience participating in English collaborative learning.

3.3 Procedures

The research involved five steps and the specific procedures were planned as follows:

(1) Quick Placement Test

Each participant of the experiment would be administered "The Oxford Quick Placement Test" to test their general language proficiency for grouping. The Quick Placement Test-Version 2, designed by Oxford University Press, tested the student's English learning proficiency for grouping according to different English learning proficiency levels.

(2) Group divisions

According to the types of interactive feedback patterns, Class A was treated as a teacher-peer group (receiving feedback from teachers and peers), while Class B was treated as an AWE-teacher-peer group (receiving feedback from Correction Network, teachers, and peers). According to the principle of in-group heterogeneity and out-group homogeneity, each group includes three students with two high-proficiency (HP) and one low-proficiency (LP). The one-way ANOVA results showed no significant difference in the proficiency level between groups A and B ($F = .041, p > .05$).

(3) Tasks arrangements

Participants were required to complete a composition within 40 minutes, and the researcher converted the draft into an electronic version. The initial draft was first uploaded to the correction website for error feedback and annotation. Based on this, teachers and students annotated the omission of errors and scored the composition according to the scoring standard. Then, each student needed to conduct self-correction according to corrective feedback and discuss their doubts with the teacher and peers in the group. The discussion time was about 30 to 45 minutes, and all discussion data was collected with the help of the Tencent Meeting Screen recording function.

(4) Data cleaning

The discussion video is transcribed into text data using the software Feishu and manual proofreading. Normalize the collected data by revising misspelled words, cleaning up meaningless information, and converting emotions or the pause into corresponding text with emotional meaning to accurately capture learners' affective tendencies.

(5) Participants interviews

After the group discussion, some participants would be asked to complete an interview for qualitative data about their emotional changes during the collaborative learning process and their attitudes toward different feedback sources and their peer members.

3.4 Data Processing and Analysis

The data analysis in this study consisted of three steps. Firstly, Python natural language processing was used to analyze the discussion data to calculate sentiment values. The difference between positive and negative

emotions was considered as the affective engagement of that sentence. Then, a qualitative data analysis was conducted by NVivo12 Plus. The researcher imported the cleaned data into NVivo 12 plus and used free coding to establish nodes (The Cohen Kappa coefficient was 0.92). 18 emotion nodes were identified: approval, pride, confidence, pleasure, interest, comfort, admiration, inspiration, gratefulness, confusion, doubt, anxiety, embarrassment, hesitation, guilt, dissatisfaction, oppression, and helplessness. After repeatedly reading, adjusting, or modifying, two primary nodes and 18 secondary nodes were finally formed, including 536 positive codes (63.58%) and 307 (36.42%) negative codes. Finally, UCINET 6 was used to construct learners' affective social networks and to clarify the characteristics and internal relationships of affective engagement. This study converged UCINET ted the emotional node data into a binary matrix, judged the tightness of emotions by network density, explored the importance of each emotion in the entire network diagram by node size, and pointed to the dynamic transformation of emotions based on the aggregation between nodes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Learners' Affective Engagement in Different Interactive Feedback Patterns

In order to investigate the effect of interactive feedback patterns on the affective engagement of English collaborative learning, this study used SPSS 26 to calculate the emotional values of each group's discussion text under the two interactive feedback patterns. One-way ANOVA was conducted on the affective engagement under the two feedback conditions.

Firstly, the homogeneity of variance test ($p > .05$) met the prerequisites of the one-way ANOVA. Secondly, the result indicated significant differences in the affective engagement of the two interactive feedback patterns during collaborative learning ($F = 136.707, p < .05$). The affective engagement in the EG was significantly higher than that of CG ($14.59 > 11.46$), suggesting that the AWE-teacher-peer feedback had a more significant effect on improving affective engagement compared to traditional teacher-peer feedback. It aligns closely with Zhang and Hyland's (2018) foundational argument that hybrid feedback environments stimulate emotional participation through

diversified input.

In addition, the types of emotions in EG (18) were more abundant than those of CG (15). Based on the quantitative criteria of the number of turns of discussion by Xu and Kou (2017), there were significant differences in discussion turns between the two interactive feedback patterns ($F = 70.937, p < .001$), with EG demonstrating significantly more conversational turns than CG ($245.8 > 210.6$). It indicated that learners in EG were more actively involved in communication and interaction in collaborative learning. It further validated the effect of interactive feedback patterns on affective engagement and learning achievement, further corroborating Zhang and Jiang's (2022) experimental evidence that human-machine collaborative feedback increases cognitive-behavioral engagement compared to teacher-only models and suggesting a proportional relationship between feedback source multiplicity and emotional dynamism.

In the process of collaboration, learners in the AWE-teacher-peer feedback pattern developed deep engagement based on an ecological perspective (Han & Gao, 2021). In this study, this kind of learning engagement is reflected in learners' affective engagement with teachers, peers, or online correction systems and their absorption and self-modification with corrective feedback during the discussion process. This observation substantiates Nassaji and Swain's (2000) mediation hypothesis, wherein learners received supportive help from their peers in the interaction, thus validating the view that the deep engagement for learners in a multiple interactive environment is related to multiple feedback sources provided by the environment for learners (Xu & Long, 2022). Conversely, the teacher-peer feedback pattern exhibited constrained emotional flows characterized by three limitations: hierarchical feedback orientation, low emotional reciprocity, and affective dependency on instructor validation. Learners in the teacher-peer feedback pattern paid more attention to self-correction. A lack of attention to the interactive feedback and emotions of other members resulted in lower affective engagement. Based on the semi-structure interview, learners gave more trust in teacher feedback since teacher feedback can provide more detailed and specific modification suggestions in terms of reasoning, article structure, expression in sentences (Jiang,

2023), lacking attention to the interactive feedback, and emotions of their peers, resulting in overall lower affective engagement.

4.2 Learners' Affective Engagement in Various English Learning Proficiency Levels

To explore the impact of English learning proficiency levels on the affective engagement of English collaborative learning, this study calculated the emotional values of each group's discussion text under the two English learning proficiency levels through SPSS 26. One-way ANOVA was used to compare learners' affective engagement.

Firstly, the homogeneity of variance test ($p > .05$) met the prerequisites of the one-way ANOVA. Secondly, the result revealed significant differences in the affective engagement of the two English learning proficiency levels during collaborative learning ($F = 80.732, p < .001$). It showed that the level of affective engagement in the high-proficiency level was significantly higher than that of the low-proficiency level ($17.11 > 10.66$). The study revealed significant disparities in affective engagement between high and low-proficiency learners, corroborating prior assertions that second language (L2) proficiency mediates affective engagement in collaborative learning (Pan *et al.*, 2023). Consistent with Li (2022) and Tsang & Dewaele (2023), our results confirm that high-proficiency learners exhibited markedly higher affective engagement values compared to their low-proficiency counterparts.

Furthermore, the high-proficiency level (17) exhibited more types of emotional experiences than the low-proficiency level (15). There were significant differences in turns of discussion in the group between the two English learning proficiency levels ($F = 45.475, p < .001$), with the high-proficiency level demonstrating significantly more conversational turns than the low-proficiency level ($87.28 > 57.09$). It indicated that learners with high proficiency levels were more actively involved in communication and interaction in collaborative learning, which further validated the effect of English learning proficiency levels on affective engagement and learning achievement. These observations align with the Control-Value Theory (Pekrun & Perry, 2014), which posits that the perceived controllability of learning objectives and self-assessment accuracy modulate academic emotional tendencies.

Analysis of discussion transcripts revealed that high-proficiency learners felt better about self-assessment of the controllability of collaborative learning. They participated more actively in discussions to express their own opinions or knowledge. However, low-proficiency learners paid more attention to their performance and ability obtained from teachers and peers, demonstrated passivity in participating in group discussions, and did not dare to question or refute others. This discovery extends Li's (2021) conclusion that self-assessment and perceived control were antecedents of negative emotions. In contrast, the low number of discussion turns of low-proficiency learners indicated that they were more passive in participating in collaborative learning. Emotional tendencies were less positive, dominated by anxiety and confusion. Semi-structured interviews corroborated this. Low-proficiency learners generally believed that collaborative learning tasks were challenging and required a lot of time and energy to participate in interactive communication. Lower self-control could undermine learners' motivation to participate in collaborative learning (Pekrun, 2006), leading to lower affective engagement.

4.3 Interaction Effect of Interactive Feedback and English Learning Proficiency Levels on Affective Engagement

To investigate the interaction effect of interactive feedback patterns and English learning proficiency levels on the affective engagement of English collaborative learning, this study used UNIANOVA to compare the affective engagement of different English learning proficiency levels under the two interactive feedback patterns. The results showed that there were significant differences existing in the affective engagement of the two English learning proficiency levels under different interactive feedback patterns ($F = 19.237, p < .001$).

In addition, in order to explore the dynamic features of emotional transformation, UCINET 6 was used to calculate the outdegree and indegree of the emotion nodes. Outdegree and indegree represented the release and transfer of emotions, respectively. The outdegree and indegree emotions indicated a dynamic, multi-directional flow in the collaborative learning emotions between learners in the group, echoing Zhou and Han's (2018)

conclusion on reasonable evaluation feedback mechanisms stimulating students' affective engagement: students who had high positive emotions in group collaborative learning could actively participate in learning activities.

To further explore the features of affective engagement in English collaborative learning, the emotional nodes coded from the learners' collaborative learning were binarized into a matrix to draw an affective network figure in

English collaborative learning. In this study, nodes represent different emotions. The size of the node in the network is positively correlated with the degree of centrality of emotions, representing the importance of emotions in the entire affective engagement network (Li & Ren, 2021). In the two low-proficiency figures, "approval" was in the central position while "confidence" was in the central nodes in the two high-proficiency figures.

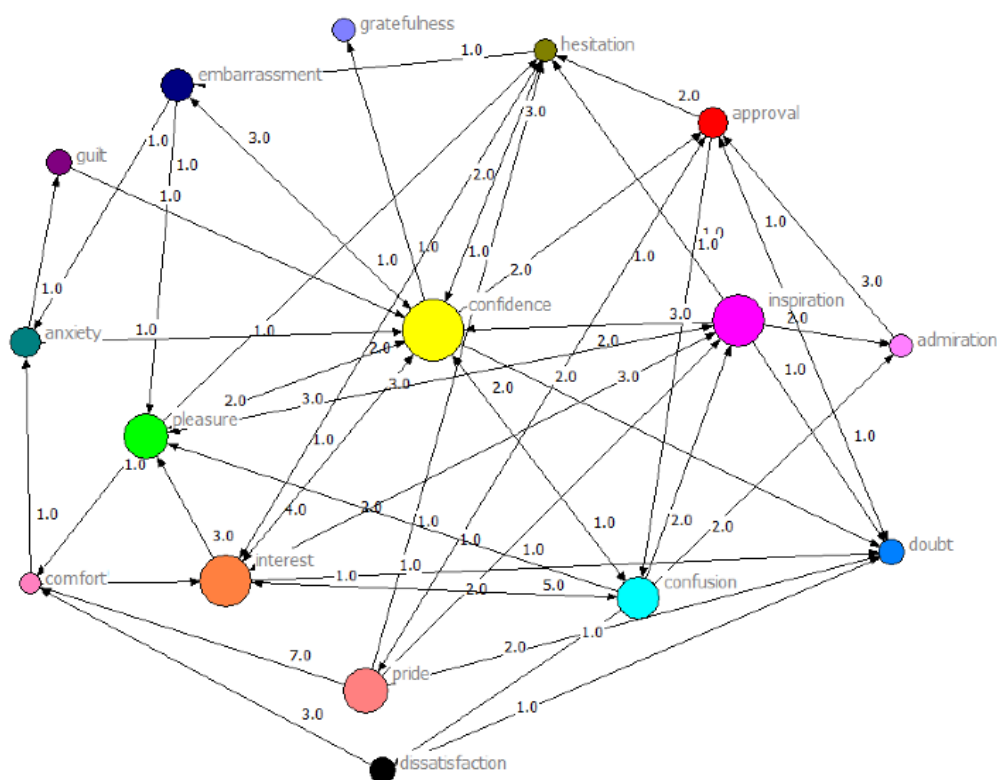


Figure 1. The Affective Network of HP in AWE-teacher-peer Feedback

In Figure 1, the negative emotion nodes such as "doubt," "hesitation," and "anxiety" were relatively small and scattered at the margin of the entire network. The "confidence" node was the largest and was located at the center of the network. Emotions such as "pleasure," "interest," "inspiration," "pride," and "confusion" were relatively large and were located in the sub-central position of the network. The network of the high-proficiency under AWE-teacher-peer feedback, with 17 nodes, its network density (0.50) was higher than that of the other three patterns, indicating that the internal affective interaction was more complex and more diverse in positive and negative emotions than other patterns. The result showed that the high-proficiency under

the AWE-teacher-peer feedback pattern resulted in smooth internal information communication. Members actively participated in discussions to resolve their puzzles and problems in dealing with learning affordance provided by the environment. In contrast, other members took the initiative to give feedback on the ideas and questions raised by members, and mutuality was high. When learners expressed "puzzle" or "doubt" to members, such as "我看不出来怎么改" or "这个词可以这么用吗," the peers would respond with interest or inspiration such as "你是不是想表达" or "这里我认为应该是." Therefore, this group produced a sense of belonging and enthusiasm in the group, which promoted their cooperation quickly.

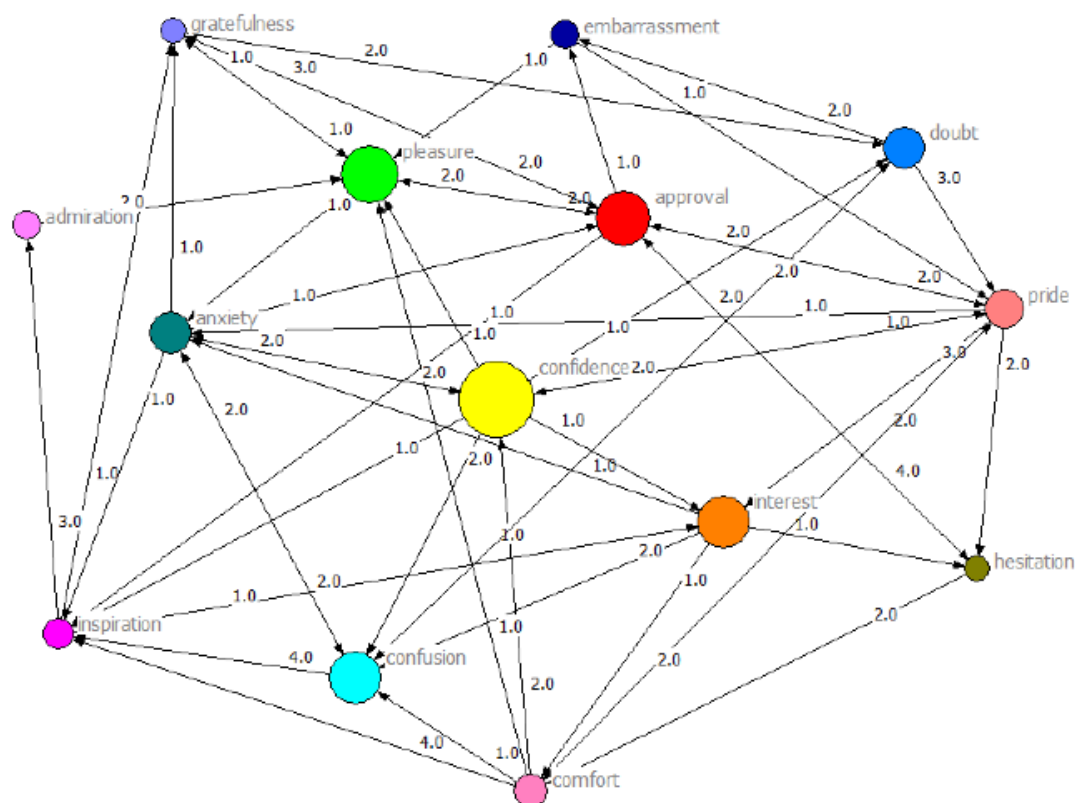


Figure 2. The Affective Network of HP in Teacher-peer Feedback

In the network of high proficiency under the teacher-peer feedback pattern (Figure 2), the negative emotion nodes such as “doubt,” “hesitation,” and “doubt” were relatively small and scattered at the margin of the network, with the “confidence” node at the center of the network. Emotions such as “pleasure,” “interest,” “approval,” “pride,” “anxiety,” and “confusion” were relatively large and were located in the sub-central position. There were no “guilt” or “dissatisfaction” nodes; the number of nodes was 15 and network density was 0.441, less than the first pattern, exhibiting that the communication and interaction between emotions and the complexity of the network were slightly lower. During the discussion, learners often tended to respond positively to others with positive emotions such as approval, pride, interest, etc. The interaction between learners was frequent, and the expression and conversion of emotions increased accordingly. When learners expressed a sense of pride towards their members, such as “咱们组同学提出的问题都很好，从内容和结构上来说很棒!”, other peers were more likely to give a positive response, “同意!大家都好厉害!” The learning affordance provided by the environment promoted interaction and communication

among learners, and everyone actively participated in learning tasks, thereby achieving ideal learning outcomes and further enhancing emotional engagement. It further validated Zhang *et al.*'s (2023) findings on dynamic characteristics of emotions in collaborative learning.

High-proficiency learners received more abundant learning resources in both interactive feedback patterns, which could better explain the finding that no significant difference existed in affective engagement between high-proficiency learners under different interactive feedback patterns, indicating that high-proficiency learners have a stronger ability to regulate foreign language learning emotions, which leads to better learning outcomes (Yu *et al.*, 2015). At the same time, it validates the feasibility of learning affordance in triggering positive learning engagement, as proposed by Van Lier (2004): the emergence of learning affordance in the learning environment came from the interaction effects between environmental factors (immediate affordance) and individual factors (mediated affordance). As long as there is enough target language information in the environment, learners can

adapt to this information and take appropriate actions in interaction.

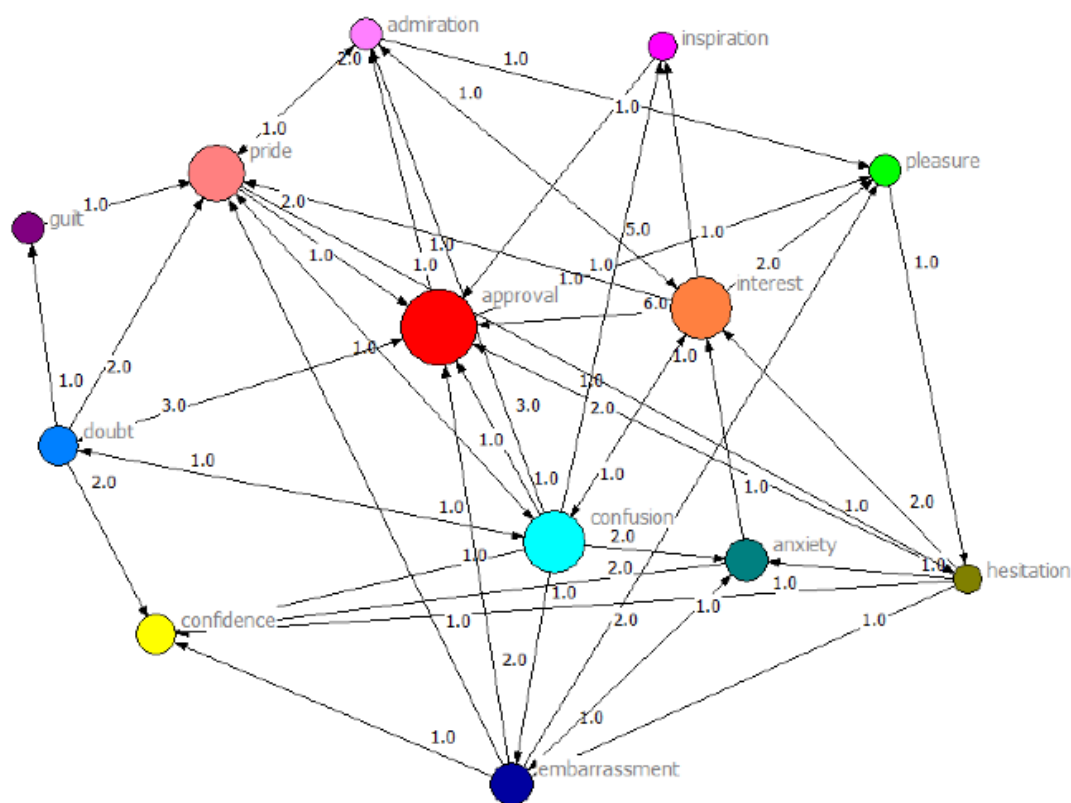


Figure 3. The Affective Network of LP in AWE-teacher-peer Feedback

The network density of the low-proficiency under the AWE-teacher-peer feedback pattern was 0.367. There were 13 emotional nodes: The “approval” was the largest node and was at the center of the network, closely linked to various emotional experiences in the network. Emotions of “interest”, “pride”, “anxiety”, and “confusion” were relatively large and were in the sub-central position of the network. “Admiration”, “inspiration”, “guilt” and “doubt” were the most minor nodes, distributed at the edge of the network. Compared to the teacher-peer feedback pattern, low-proficiency

learners in the AWE-teacher-peer feedback pattern received more feedback sources. They had access to more relevant information and learning opportunities through participating in collaborative learning. However, they required assistance from teachers and peers to make use of and internalize the information, thus further confirming the viewpoint that environmental affordance motivated learners to perceive learning information and engage in learning activities, which brought further affordance, higher-level activities, and more differentiated perceptions (Van Lier, 2004).

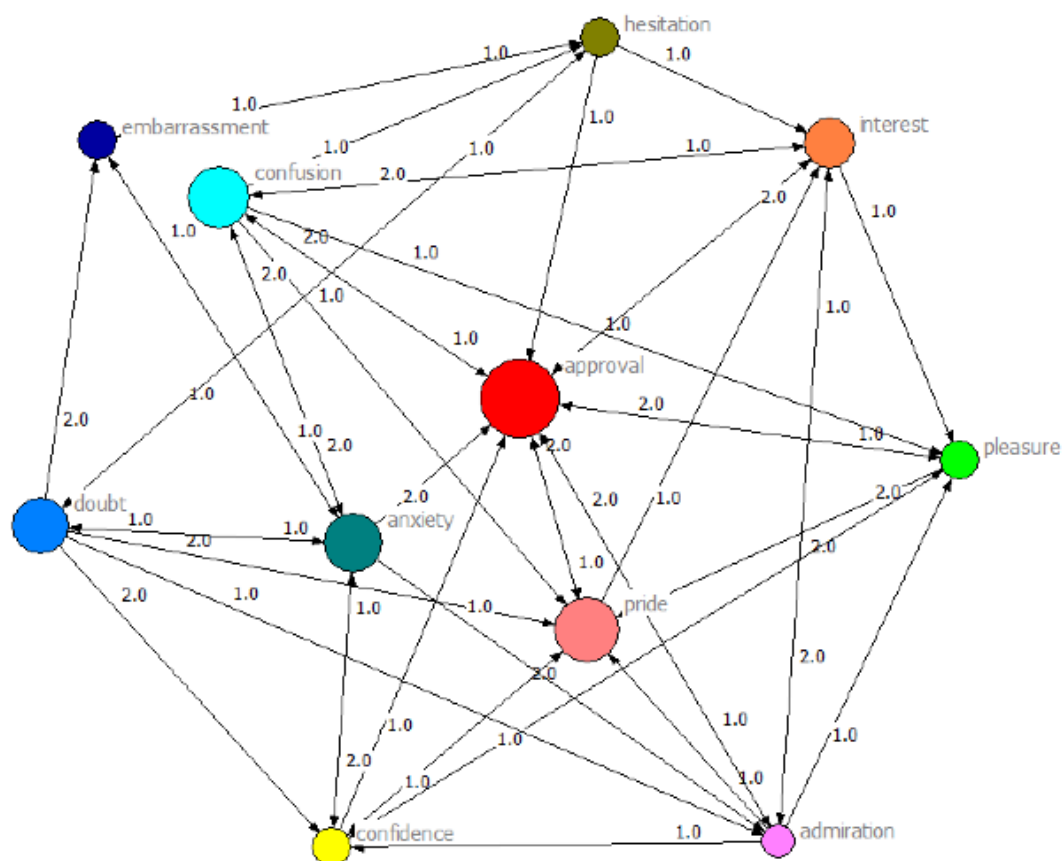


Figure 4. The Affective Network of LP in Teacher-peer Feedback

The network of low-proficiency under teacher-peer feedback patterns had 11 nodes with 0.291 density, less than other interaction patterns. "Approval" played an essential role in the network, and the correlation between nodes decreased obviously compared with the other three networks. "Interest", "pride", "anxiety", and "confusion" were relatively large and were in the sub-central position of the network. The negative emotions "anxiety" and "confusion" became important nodes and a high degree of "doubt" appeared in the last pattern, indicating that negative emotions played a more important role compared with high-proficiency. For low-proficiency learners, the learning affordance that they could receive was less and had less promotion effect on their affective engagement. Their ability to perceive and apply learning affordances from the environment was relatively weak; on this account, they extracted less learning information and other information from multiple feedback sources than high-proficiency learners. This further validated the view that learners at different language proficiency levels could take action to regulate the learning process by perceiving

learning-promoting factors in the environment (Park & Lim, 2019).

5. Conclusion

This study investigates the effects of interactive feedback and English learning proficiency levels on Chinese English learners' affective engagement in collaborative learning, revealing the following three key findings: 1) learners in the AWE-teacher-peer feedback pattern demonstrated higher affective engagement, richer emotion nodes, and more frequent emotion transitions than learners in the teacher-peer feedback pattern, with a more dynamic and complex affective engagement network; 2) English learning proficiency levels had a significant effect on learners' affective engagement, with the highest affective engagement of high-proficiency learners in AWE-teacher-peer feedback and the lowest affective engagement of low-proficiency learners in teacher-peer feedback. High-proficiency learners had higher self-assessments of the controllability of learning and academic emotions; 3) interactive feedback and English learning proficiency levels had an interactive effect on learners' affective engagement in

collaborative learning. The density and complexity of the affective engagement network decrease sequentially from high-proficiency learners in AWE-teacher-peer feedback and high-proficiency learners in teacher-peer feedback to low-proficiency learners in AWE-teacher-peer feedback and low-proficiency learners in teacher-peer feedback, with a corresponding decrease in the degree of transformation and interactions between emotions.

The following implications may deserve English teachers' consideration when employing group classroom activities. Considering the impact of interactive feedback patterns and English learning proficiency levels on affective engagement, teachers should set up groups and interactive feedback patterns scientifically according to learners' personality characteristics and language levels and make use of proper multiple feedback for error correction and guidance. Furthermore, teachers should optimize the supply of learning affordance from the aspects of teaching content and teaching methods, promptly identify the direction of interaction in collaborative learning, and make appropriate interventions to help students perceive learning affordance suitable for their learning needs and take appropriate action.

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From Social Slang to Standard Lexicon: A Corpus-Based Analysis of the Mainstream Adoption of New Verbs in English

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Abstract

Language is a dynamic system that continuously evolves to reflect social, technological, and cultural changes. One of the most intriguing aspects of linguistic evolution is the transition of slang verbs into standard English, a process shaped by multiple factors, including digital media, cultural relevance, grammatical adaptability, and institutional validation. This study employs a corpus-based linguistic analysis to examine how verbs originating in informal speech and online discourse become widely accepted in mainstream language. Through a detailed analysis of selected case studies—including *to Google*, *to binge-watch*, *to ghost*, and *to unfriend*—this research explores the mechanisms by which new verbs gain traction, shift from niche to general usage, and ultimately achieve formal recognition in dictionaries and academic discourse. Findings indicate that digital communication platforms accelerate lexical diffusion, while words that describe emerging behaviors are more likely to endure and become embedded in everyday speech. The study also highlights the role of grammatical integration in determining the success of slang verbs, as well as the influence of institutional endorsement in legitimizing linguistic change. By mapping the trajectory of slang verbs from informal origins to standardized lexicon, this research contributes to the broader understanding of language evolution in the digital age and provides a framework for analyzing future trends in lexical innovation and standardization.

Keywords: lexical innovation, slang verbs, digital communication, grammatical adaptation, mainstream adoption

1. Introduction

Language is a constantly evolving system that mirrors the social, cultural, and technological shifts within a given society. Over time, new words and expressions emerge, often originating as informal slang used by specific social groups before gradually integrating into the standard lexicon. One of the most fascinating aspects of

linguistic change is the transformation of slang into widely accepted vocabulary, particularly in the case of verbs that describe new actions, behaviors, or cultural phenomena. From the advent of digital communication to shifts in social interaction, slang verbs have increasingly found their way into everyday discourse, academic writing, and even formalized

dictionary entries.

The process by which slang verbs transition into mainstream English is neither arbitrary nor instantaneous; rather, it follows a pattern influenced by multiple linguistic and sociocultural factors. The frequency of use, widespread societal adoption, media influence, and grammatical adaptability all play crucial roles in determining whether a verb originating in slang will persist and gain legitimacy in standard English. Some verbs—such as *to Google* or *to binge-watch*—have emerged in response to technological advancements, while others—such as *to ghost* or *to unfriend*—reflect evolving social behaviors, particularly in the digital era. These verbs, initially confined to niche communities or subcultures, have expanded their usage beyond their original contexts, becoming recognized and utilized across various linguistic domains.

The increasing digitization of communication has further accelerated this process. Social media platforms, digital forums, and online entertainment have created an environment where new words spread rapidly, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. Words that were once confined to specific demographics—such as internet users, gamers, or youth subcultures—now permeate mainstream discourse through digital content, mass media, and globalized interactions. The interplay between formal and informal registers has also blurred traditional distinctions between slang and standard lexicon, making it more common for words to move fluidly between colloquial and academic settings.

This study explores the phenomenon of verb adoption from social slang into standard English using a corpus-based linguistic approach. By analyzing large textual datasets, we can track the trajectory of emerging verbs, examining their frequency, semantic shifts, and syntactic integration over time. The corpus-based method allows us to observe patterns of usage across different registers, from informal social media posts to journalistic writing and scholarly discourse. Additionally, this study investigates the broader implications of lexical standardization, addressing questions such as: What factors contribute to the longevity and widespread acceptance of a slang verb? How do grammatical structures and linguistic norms shape the incorporation of new verbs into standard English? And to what extent does institutional validation, such as dictionary

inclusion, serve as the final marker of mainstream adoption?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between social slang and formal language evolution. As digital communication continues to drive linguistic change, studying the integration of slang verbs into mainstream English not only enhances our comprehension of contemporary language shifts but also offers insights into the future trajectory of English lexicon expansion.

2. Theoretical Framework

Language evolves through continuous interaction between social, cultural, and technological influences. One of the key drivers of linguistic change is lexical innovation, which occurs when new words or meanings are created to describe emerging concepts, behaviors, or phenomena. The process of lexical innovation is particularly evident in verbs, as new actions or digital behaviors necessitate the creation of words to describe them. Many of these innovations originate as slang, often confined to specific subcultures, age groups, or communities before gradually permeating mainstream discourse. Over time, some of these slang terms are standardized and become part of the formal lexicon, appearing in dictionaries and being used in professional, academic, and journalistic writing.

The transition from slang to standard lexicon is a complex process influenced by several linguistic, social, and institutional factors. This theoretical framework explores the mechanisms underlying lexical innovation and standardization, focusing on four key factors: frequency of use, media influence, grammatical adaptation, and institutional endorsement.

2.1 Lexical Innovation and the Role of Slang

Lexical innovation occurs in response to societal needs, technological advancements, and shifts in cultural behaviors. Slang, as a major source of lexical innovation, functions as a linguistic laboratory where new expressions are tested, modified, and either abandoned or adopted by wider audiences. Slang verbs often emerge in subcultural communities such as youth groups, online gaming networks, internet forums, and creative industries. These words tend to be informal, playful, and context-specific, often developing new meanings through metaphor, semantic shift, or abbreviation.

For instance, the verb *to ghost*—originally meaning to disappear suddenly—was repurposed in digital communication to describe the act of cutting off contact without explanation, particularly in dating and social interactions. Similarly, *to binge-watch* emerged in response to the rise of streaming platforms, describing a new form of media consumption. These innovations fill linguistic gaps by providing succinct terms for new social realities.

However, not all slang terms achieve long-term survival. Some remain niche expressions or fade into obscurity when their cultural relevance diminishes. The factors determining which words persist and which disappear are central to understanding lexical standardization.

2.2 Lexical Standardization and Its Key Influences

Lexical standardization refers to the process by which an initially informal or non-standard word becomes widely accepted in mainstream language. This process does not happen randomly but follows identifiable linguistic and social patterns.

(a) Frequency of Use

One of the most critical factors in lexical standardization is **usage frequency**. A word that appears frequently across different communicative contexts—informal speech, social media, journalistic writing, and academic discourse—has a higher chance of being recognized as part of the standard lexicon. Corpus studies have shown that when a slang verb crosses a certain threshold of usage, it is more likely to be accepted into formal language.

For example, *to Google* became a standard verb because of its overwhelming usage in everyday communication. Originally a brand name, the verb gained traction due to the widespread need to describe online searching. By analyzing corpora such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC), linguists can track the increasing frequency of a verb over time, identifying trends in its mainstream adoption.

(b) Media and Digital Communication Influence

The modern media landscape, particularly digital and social media platforms, plays a vital role in accelerating lexical adoption. Previously, new words spread through spoken language, print media, and literary works, often taking decades to gain recognition. Today, platforms

like Twitter, TikTok, Reddit, and Instagram serve as catalysts for rapid linguistic change.

When slang verbs are used by influential figures—such as celebrities, journalists, content creators, or politicians—they gain visibility and legitimacy. Memes, viral content, and hashtags further amplify word adoption. Consider how **to cancel** (in the sense of “cancel culture”) gained traction through social media discourse, demonstrating how digital platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination and normalization of new linguistic forms.

In addition to informal media, mainstream journalism and entertainment serve as bridges between slang and formal language. When words appear in reputable sources like *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, or academic journals, they gain credibility and move closer to standardization.

(c) Grammatical Adaptation and Syntactic Integration

For a slang verb to transition into standard usage, it must conform to existing grammatical structures within English. Verbs must follow regular morphological patterns, allowing for conjugation across tenses and agreement with subjects. A word that cannot easily integrate into the verb system is less likely to be widely adopted.

For example, *to binge-watch* successfully adapted to English grammar because it could be conjugated as a regular verb (*binge-watches*, *binge-watched*, *binge-watching*). Conversely, some slang verbs struggle with grammatical adaptation due to irregular formation or pronunciation constraints, limiting their integration into formal English.

Linguistic researchers use collocation analysis to examine how new verbs interact with other words in natural discourse. If a slang verb consistently appears in syntactic structures that align with existing English conventions, its likelihood of standardization increases.

(d) Institutional Endorsement and Dictionary Inclusion

The final stage of lexical standardization often involves institutional validation, particularly through dictionaries, style guides, and academic publications. Major dictionaries such as *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), *Merriam-Webster*, and *Cambridge Dictionary* play a crucial role in determining whether a word has achieved full

linguistic acceptance.

Dictionary inclusion is typically based on:

- 1) Evidence from linguistic corpora showing widespread and sustained usage.
- 2) Diversity of use across different text types (spoken, written, formal, informal).
- 3) Semantic stability, meaning the word's meaning remains consistent over time.
- 4) Once a verb is listed in major dictionaries, it is considered part of standard English and is more likely to be used in formal writing, government documents, and educational materials.

Beyond dictionaries, academic publications and linguistic research further legitimize words by analyzing their development, defining their semantic properties, and incorporating them into discussions on language change.

3. Methodology

A corpus-based linguistic approach provides a systematic and empirical method for tracking the evolution of slang verbs into standard lexicon. Unlike anecdotal observations, corpus linguistics allows for large-scale analysis of linguistic data drawn from real-world texts, capturing patterns in word frequency, usage context, and syntactic integration over time. This methodology enables us to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the mainstream adoption of new verbs in English.

This study employs a multi-stage corpus-based approach to examine the trajectory of slang verbs, using a combination of diachronic, synchronic, and genre-specific corpora. The research follows three key analytical components: (1) tracking frequency changes over time, (2) examining contextual usage in formal and informal texts, and (3) analyzing grammatical adaptation and syntactic roles.

3.1 Selection of Corpora and Data Sources

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, this study utilizes multiple linguistic corpora, each serving a specific function in tracking language change:

Diachronic Corpora

Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): This corpus contains over one billion words from a variety of sources (spoken, fiction, newspapers, magazines, academic texts, blogs) from 1990 to the present, making it a valuable resource for tracking the evolution of new verbs.

- **British National Corpus (BNC):** A 100-million-word corpus covering British English from the late 20th century, useful for cross-comparing trends between American and British English.
- **Google Books Ngram Viewer:** A database of digitized books, allowing researchers to observe lexical frequency trends over several centuries.

Synchronic Corpora

The NOW Corpus (News on the Web Corpus): Contains billions of words from online news sources, updated monthly, providing insights into contemporary usage in formal journalistic writing.

- **Twitter Corpus (Twitter Decahose or Open Social Media Corpora):** Provides data on informal, user-generated language, capturing slang terms before they enter mainstream discourse.

Specialized Genre-Specific Corpora

- **Reddit and Social Media Archives:** Used to analyze slang verbs in their early stages before standardization.
- **Academic and Legal Corpora (e.g., the Corpus of Academic English, the Corpus of Legal English):** To determine the degree of acceptance of new verbs in formal discourse.

The integration of these diverse corpora enables a triangulated approach, ensuring that findings are not limited to a single linguistic register but reflect broader language usage across different communication domains.

3.2 Tracking Frequency Trends Over Time

One of the primary objectives of this study is to measure the **diachronic evolution** of slang verbs to determine their trajectory from informal use to mainstream adoption. This process involves:

- Extracting the yearly frequency counts of selected verbs (e.g., *to ghost*, *to binge-watch*, *to Google*, *to unfriend*) across diachronic corpora.
- Identifying inflectional variations (e.g., *ghosted*, *ghosting*) to analyze the grammatical flexibility of new verbs.
- Comparing frequency patterns across American and British English to assess regional adoption differences.
- Visualizing trends using word frequency

graphs, demonstrating the increasing (or declining) usage of selected verbs over time.

By identifying inflectional frequency ratios, this study determines whether new verbs follow standard verb conjugation patterns—a key indicator of mainstream linguistic adoption.

3.3 Examining Contextual Usage in Formal and Informal Texts

To understand how slang verbs transition from colloquial speech to standard lexicon, we analyze their contextual usage across different text genres. This involves:

- Extracting concordance lines from corpus data to examine how new verbs are used in sentences.
- Analyzing collocations (words that frequently appear alongside new verbs) to determine semantic stability. For example, the verb *to ghost* often collocates with “relationship,” “message,” and “dating apps,” indicating its specialized meaning.
- Comparing the use of slang verbs in informal vs. formal settings: Informal contexts: Social media posts, Reddit discussions, Twitter feeds, entertainment blogs. Formal contexts: News articles, academic papers, legal documents, business reports.

A gradual shift in context distribution (from social media to journalism, and eventually to academic/legal discourse) signals the increasing formalization of a verb.

Sentiment analysis is applied to determine whether slang verbs carry neutral, positive, or negative connotations in different contexts. This is crucial since verbs with strong social or emotional connotations (e.g., *to ghost* or *to cancel*) may experience semantic drift as they enter formal language.

3.4 Analyzing Grammatical Adaptation and Syntactic Integration

For a slang verb to gain widespread acceptance, it must conform to standard grammatical structures and be able to integrate into various syntactic constructions. This study assesses grammatical adaptation through:

- Morphological Analysis: Examining whether new verbs follow regular verb inflection patterns (e.g., -ed for past tense, -ing for gerunds).

- Syntactic Patterning: Identifying common grammatical constructions (e.g., transitive vs. intransitive usage). Some verbs transition from intransitive to transitive (e.g., “*He ghosted.*” → “*He ghosted his friend.*”), indicating linguistic expansion.
- Lexical Productivity: Evaluating whether slang verbs generate derivational forms (e.g., “*binge-watch*” → “*binge-watcher*” (noun), “*ghost*” → “*ghosting*” (noun)), signifying deeper integration into English morphology.
- Comparison with Older Verbs: Comparing new slang verbs to historically adopted slang verbs (e.g., *to text*, *to surf (the internet)*) to establish similarities in linguistic standardization.

By applying these grammatical and syntactic analyses, this study identifies **which features** facilitate or hinder the standardization of a slang verb.

3.5 Validation Through Dictionary and Institutional Recognition

To determine the final stage of mainstream adoption, we assess whether a verb has been institutionally validated by examining:

- Inclusion in major dictionaries (OED, Merriam-Webster, Cambridge).
- Citation frequency in academic literature.
- Usage in government or corporate language guidelines.
- Adoption in educational settings (e.g., English language teaching materials).

Words that meet corpus-based frequency thresholds and appear in dictionaries can be considered fully standardized.

This corpus-based methodology offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the transition of slang verbs into standard English. By tracking frequency trends, contextual shifts, grammatical integration, and institutional recognition, this study provides empirical evidence of how new verbs evolve over time. The insights derived from this analysis contribute to a broader understanding of language change mechanisms, demonstrating how social, digital, and institutional forces shape the English lexicon.

This study establishes a replicable model for future research on language standardization, allowing linguists to monitor emerging slang

and predict which new words are likely to achieve mainstream acceptance. As digital communication continues to drive rapid linguistic innovation, corpus-based analysis remains an essential tool for documenting and understanding the evolution of modern English.

4. The Evolution of Selected Verbs

To illustrate the process of lexical standardization, this section presents four case studies of verbs that originated as slang but have since become widely accepted in mainstream English: *to Google*, *to binge-watch*, *to ghost*, and *to unfriend*. These verbs demonstrate different pathways through which slang words transition into the standard lexicon, influenced by technological advancements, social behaviors, and media usage. By examining their origins, frequency patterns, grammatical adaptation, and institutional recognition, we can better understand the mechanisms that drive the adoption of new verbs in English.

4.1 *To Google: The Branding of a Common Action*

Origin and Early Usage

The verb *to Google* originated from the company name Google Inc., which was founded in 1998. Initially, “Google” was exclusively a proper noun referring to the brand and its search engine. However, as Google’s search engine became the dominant means of retrieving online information, users began using “Google” informally as a verb to mean “searching for information online.”

The first recorded instances of *to Google* as a verb appeared in tech forums and blogs around 1999-2000. By the early 2000s, the phrase “just Google it” was commonly used in casual conversation, reflecting the word’s increasing frequency.

Transition to Standard English

- In 2006, the verb *to Google* was officially added to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Merriam-Webster Dictionary, marking its formal recognition.
- Google Inc. initially opposed the verb’s use, fearing genericization (where a brand name becomes a common noun or verb, potentially weakening trademark protection). However, the ubiquity of the term made it impossible to control.
- Corpus data from COCA and the BNC show a steep increase in frequency of *to*

Google in news, academic texts, and general writing between 2000 and 2010.

Grammatical Adaptation

- *To Google* follows standard English verb conjugation rules: Google – Googled – Googling.
- The verb can be used transitively (*I Googled the answer*) and intransitively (*I spent the afternoon Googling*).
- It has generated derivative forms, such as:
Googleable (adjective, meaning “searchable on Google”).
Googling (gerund, widely used in professional and casual contexts).

The case of *to Google* exemplifies how a brand name can become a verb through widespread public usage, high-frequency adoption, and formal dictionary recognition. Its acceptance was driven by technological necessity, as the verb provided a succinct way to describe online searching.

4.2 *To Binge-Watch: The Impact of Digital Media on Language*

Origin and Early Usage

The term *binge* has long been used to describe excessive consumption, particularly in relation to eating (*binge-eating*) and drinking (*binge-drinking*). The verb *to binge-watch* emerged in the late 2000s and early 2010s, coinciding with the rise of streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu.

Initially, *binge-watch* was used informally on social media platforms and entertainment blogs to describe the habit of watching multiple episodes of a TV series in one sitting.

Transition to Standard English

- 2013-2015: Major publications (The New York Times, BBC, The Guardian) began using *binge-watch* in articles discussing TV consumption trends.
- 2015: The word was added to the Collins English Dictionary and Oxford Dictionaries Online.
- 2018: Netflix publicly embraced the term, further solidifying its mainstream status.

Corpus data analysis shows a sharp increase in usage frequency from 2010 to 2017, reflecting the global shift in media consumption habits.

Grammatical Adaptation

The verb follows regular English verb conjugation patterns:

Binge-watch – binge-watched – binge-watching.

It is predominantly transitive (*I binge-watched an entire season*).

It has led to new lexical formations:

Binge-worthy (adjective, meaning “a show worth binge-watching”).

Binge-watcher (noun, referring to a person who binge-watches).

The rise of *binge-watch* illustrates how technological and cultural changes drive linguistic evolution. The increasing use of on-demand streaming services created a new behavior that required a new verb, demonstrating the influence of digital media on English vocabulary.

4.3 To Ghost: Digital Communication and Social Relationships

Origin and Early Usage

The verb *to ghost* originated in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), where it originally meant “to leave suddenly.” The term gained a new meaning in the 2010s with the rise of online dating and instant messaging, referring to the practice of abruptly cutting off communication without warning.

Early usage of *to ghost* in this sense appeared in dating blogs, Reddit discussions, and social media posts around 2012-2014. The term quickly gained traction due to its relevance in digital communication.

Transition to Standard English

- 2015: Mainstream news outlets such as The Washington Post and Time Magazine published articles discussing the phenomenon of ghosting.
- 2017: *Ghosting* was added to Merriam-Webster Dictionary and the Oxford English Dictionary.
- 2020s: The word extended beyond dating and is now used in professional settings (e.g., “*The candidate ghosted the recruiter.*”).

Corpus-based studies indicate that *to ghost* underwent semantic broadening, now applying to friendships, workplace interactions, and customer service scenarios.

Grammatical Adaptation

The verb follows standard inflectional rules:

Ghost – ghosted – ghosting.

It can function as both transitive (*He ghosted his friend*) and intransitive (*He ghosted after our last conversation*).

The noun *ghosting* is widely used (“Ghosting is a common online dating issue.”).

The evolution of *to ghost* highlights how **new** social behaviors in digital communication create linguistic needs. The rapid spread of online dating and messaging apps facilitated the verb’s mainstream acceptance.

4.4 To Unfriend: Social Media and Lexical Creation

Origin and Early Usage

The verb *to unfriend* predates social media, with early uses recorded as far back as **1659**, meaning “to remove from a circle of friends.” However, it fell out of common usage until Facebook reintroduced the term in the 2000s.

By 2005, *to unfriend* was widely used within Facebook’s interface, referring to removing someone from a contact list.

Transition to Standard English

- 2009: The verb *to unfriend* was named Oxford English Dictionary’s “Word of the Year”, recognizing its widespread digital use.
- 2010s: Major newspapers and academic discussions on social media psychology frequently included *unfriend*.
- Present day: The term is commonly used beyond Facebook (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram).

Grammatical Adaptation

- The verb follows standard conjugation: Unfriend – unfriended – unfriending.
- It is exclusively transitive (*She unfriended me*).
- Related forms include:
Unfriending (noun, meaning “the act of removing a friend”).
Unfrienable (adjective, though less common).

To unfriend illustrates how platform-specific terminology can enter mainstream language. Social media has significantly influenced digital-age vocabulary, demonstrating that verbs coined for online actions can evolve into common linguistic expressions.

These case studies illustrate the different

pathways by which slang verbs enter standard English. Key factors influencing lexical standardization include:

Technological advancement (*to Google, to binge-watch*).

Digital communication norms (*to ghost, to unfriend*).

Widespread media adoption and dictionary inclusion.

The study of these verbs provides a framework for predicting future lexical trends, particularly as digital culture continues to shape the English language.

5. Factors Driving Mainstream Adoption of Slang Verbs in English

The transition of slang verbs into standard English is a complex linguistic process influenced by multiple social, technological, and institutional factors. While some slang words remain confined to subcultures, others achieve mainstream status and gain recognition in dictionaries, journalism, and academic discourse. This section explores the key drivers behind the mainstream adoption of new verbs, including the role of digital communication, cultural relevance, grammatical adaptability, and institutional validation.

5.1 Digital and Social Media Influence: The Accelerator of Linguistic Change

The rise of digital communication has significantly accelerated the spread of new words. Unlike earlier linguistic changes, which often took decades to become widely accepted, the internet has drastically shortened the adoption cycle of slang verbs. Social media platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and Reddit have become powerful incubators for lexical innovation, providing a space where new words are coined, popularized, and disseminated at an unprecedented rate. Social networking algorithms favor trending words and expressions, pushing them into mainstream discourse faster than traditional print or spoken media ever could.

Online discourse plays a crucial role in making slang verbs more visible to the general public. Memes, hashtags, and viral trends allow words to gain traction within specific online communities before expanding to broader audiences. For example, the verb *to ghost* gained prominence through dating apps and online forums, where users needed a term to describe

the modern phenomenon of abruptly cutting off communication. The popularity of the term on platforms such as Reddit and Twitter led to its adoption by mainstream media, accelerating its transition into everyday speech. Similarly, *to binge-watch* became a widely recognized verb due to the rise of streaming services, with discussions about excessive TV consumption fueling its rapid spread.

Social media influencers, celebrities, and public figures further contribute to the adoption of new verbs. When high-profile individuals use a slang word in interviews, tweets, or digital content, it gains legitimacy and exposure to millions of followers. A prime example is the verb *to cancel*, which originated from internet activism and social justice movements but quickly became a commonly used term across mainstream media, business, and politics. The interaction between digital communities and mass media creates a feedback loop, reinforcing the prominence of slang verbs and embedding them into the cultural lexicon.

5.2 Cultural Relevance: The Need for New Words to Describe Emerging Behaviors

Slang verbs that successfully transition into mainstream English often do so because they fill a linguistic gap, providing a precise term for a new or evolving social behavior. Words that capture contemporary experiences, particularly those shaped by technological, cultural, or economic changes, are more likely to be adopted widely. This linguistic necessity is evident in the emergence of verbs such as *to Google, to binge-watch, to ghost, and to unfriend*, all of which describe behaviors that did not exist in the same form prior to the digital age.

The rapid expansion of the internet and social media has transformed human interaction, necessitating new vocabulary to describe these changes. Before the internet, searching for information involved consulting books, encyclopedias, or asking experts, but the dominance of online search engines created the need for a verb that specifically describes looking up information online. *To Google* became the default verb for this action, quickly surpassing other search-related expressions. Likewise, *to binge-watch* emerged as television consumption habits changed, with streaming services allowing users to watch multiple episodes in one sitting—a behavior that traditional TV viewing patterns did not

previously accommodate.

Beyond technology, broader societal shifts also contribute to lexical innovation. The increasing reliance on digital communication has transformed interpersonal relationships, leading to behaviors that lacked specific terminology in the past. The verb *to ghost* reflects a cultural change in dating and social interactions, where digital communication allows individuals to disappear from conversations without explanation. The rise of *to cancel* as a verb, meaning to publicly reject or withdraw support from someone, mirrors shifting attitudes toward accountability, justice, and collective social action in the internet era.

Cultural relevance ensures that a slang verb resonates with a large audience, making it more likely to spread beyond niche communities. When a term accurately captures a widespread phenomenon, it becomes an essential linguistic tool, increasing its chances of becoming part of the standard lexicon.

5.3 Grammatical Flexibility: The Ease of Integration into English Syntax

For a slang verb to achieve mainstream adoption, it must conform to English grammatical norms and be easily integrated into everyday speech and writing. Words that follow standard conjugation and sentence structures are more likely to be accepted, while those with irregular forms or syntactic constraints often remain confined to slang usage.

Most successful slang verbs follow regular English verb inflection patterns, making them easy to incorporate into different grammatical contexts. *To Google*, *to binge-watch*, and *to ghost* all follow the standard **-ed** past tense formation (*Googled*, *binge-watched*, *ghosted*), allowing them to be used naturally in past, present, and future tenses. The ease of conjugation ensures that these verbs can be flexibly used in various sentence structures, making them more adaptable to different registers of communication.

The ability of a verb to function both transitively and intransitively also enhances its usability. A verb like *to ghost* can be used in different ways—both intransitively (*He ghosted after our last conversation*) and transitively (*She ghosted her friend*). Similarly, *to binge-watch* can appear in different syntactic constructions (*I spent the weekend binge-watching* vs. *I binge-watched an entire season*), increasing its versatility and

likelihood of widespread adoption.

Another key factor in grammatical integration is lexical productivity. Successful slang verbs often give rise to derivative forms, further embedding them into everyday language. The noun *ghosting* evolved from *to ghost*, while *binge-worthy* emerged as an adjective related to *binge-watching*. These extended usages signal deeper integration into the lexicon, as they allow for greater semantic flexibility across different contexts.

Verbs that struggle to fit into standard grammatical patterns are less likely to transition into formal English. Some internet slang terms, such as *yeet* or *finna*, face challenges due to their inconsistent inflectional patterns and limited syntactic flexibility, making them more resistant to mainstream adoption. The grammatical adaptability of a verb is therefore a crucial determinant of its ability to transition from slang to standard usage.

5.4 Media and Institutional Recognition: The Role of Dictionaries and Academic Endorsement

The final stage of mainstream adoption often involves institutional validation, particularly through media recognition, literary inclusion, and dictionary entries. While social media accelerates the spread of slang verbs, their ultimate legitimacy is solidified when they appear in reputable news sources, books, and academic discussions.

Major news organizations such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, and *BBC* play a crucial role in legitimizing new words. When a slang verb is used in professional journalism, it gains credibility and exposure beyond its original user base. For example, *to ghost* transitioned from internet slang to standard language after being widely discussed in articles about dating and social behavior. Similarly, *to binge-watch* became a household term after being featured in entertainment journalism and academic discussions on digital media consumption.

The inclusion of a verb in dictionaries marks its full acceptance into standard English. Lexicographers monitor word frequency, usage patterns, and longevity to determine when a term meets the criteria for dictionary inclusion. *To Google* was officially added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster* in 2006, signaling its complete integration into formal language. *To binge-watch* followed a similar path, being recognized in major dictionaries by the

mid-2010s. Words that pass this final institutional threshold become embedded in the lexicon, used in formal writing, education, and even legal contexts.

The mainstream adoption of slang verbs is driven by a combination of digital acceleration, cultural necessity, grammatical flexibility, and institutional recognition. Words that describe new behaviors, conform to linguistic norms, and gain validation from media and dictionaries are more likely to transition from slang to standard English. As digital communication continues to reshape linguistic trends, the process of lexical adoption is becoming increasingly rapid. The interaction between social media, journalism, and formal linguistic institutions ensures that new verbs will continue to emerge, evolve, and establish themselves in the English lexicon.

6. Conclusion

The transformation of slang verbs into standard English is a complex yet structured process shaped by various linguistic, social, and cultural forces. This study has shown that the mainstream adoption of new verbs is not an arbitrary development but follows identifiable patterns that involve their proliferation in informal settings, their increasing frequency in wider discourse, their grammatical adaptability, and their eventual recognition by linguistic institutions. The evolution of language is inherently linked to changes in technology, social behaviors, and communication methods, and in the digital age, this process has become more rapid than ever. While in previous centuries lexical innovation was a gradual development, requiring decades for new words to gain widespread recognition, the rise of social media and online communication has significantly shortened the timeline for slang verbs to transition from niche expressions to standard vocabulary.

One of the most significant drivers of this acceleration is the role of digital platforms in amplifying linguistic change. The internet has created a new space for lexical innovation, where slang verbs emerge, spread, and evolve at a pace unmatched by traditional modes of linguistic transmission. Social media, online forums, and digital news outlets provide an environment where words can rapidly gain traction, particularly when they describe emerging behaviors that reflect contemporary lifestyles. Viral trends, hashtags, memes, and

influencer culture contribute to the mainstreaming of these words, making them more visible and accessible to a wider audience. The digital landscape has also made language more democratic; whereas in the past, linguistic standardization was heavily influenced by elite institutions such as academia and literature, today's language change is largely driven by everyday users, whose collective influence on digital platforms determines which words survive and which fade into obscurity.

Beyond digital amplification, cultural necessity plays a fundamental role in the success of slang verbs. Words that fill a lexical gap, capturing a new or evolving behavior for which no precise term previously existed, are more likely to endure. The verbs examined in this study—*to Google*, *to binge-watch*, *to ghost*, and *to unfriend*—each reflect a modern phenomenon that required linguistic expression. The advent of search engines, the rise of on-demand media consumption, the changing nature of interpersonal relationships in the digital era, and the restructuring of social interactions through social media all contributed to the emergence of new verbs that succinctly describe these experiences. Language evolves as a reflection of human needs, and the widespread adoption of these verbs demonstrates that linguistic innovation is often a response to social and technological transformation.

A critical factor in the standardization of new verbs is their ability to conform to English grammar and syntactic structures. Words that can be seamlessly integrated into existing linguistic frameworks are more likely to gain widespread acceptance. Slang verbs that follow regular verb conjugation patterns, such as *Google* → *Googled* → *Googling* and *ghost* → *ghosted* → *ghosting*, are easier to use in both spoken and written language, increasing their chances of survival. Additionally, verbs that demonstrate syntactic flexibility—allowing both transitive and intransitive usage—become more versatile, expanding their applicability across different registers of communication. The development of derivative forms further reinforces the integration of new verbs into the language. Nouns such as *ghosting* and adjectives such as *binge-worthy* extend the usability of these verbs beyond their original forms, solidifying their presence in the lexicon. Conversely, slang terms that resist grammatical adaptation or fail to fit into common syntactic patterns often struggle to

transition into standard usage.

Institutional recognition serves as the final stage in the journey from slang to standard lexicon. While social media and digital discourse play a crucial role in popularizing new verbs, their full legitimacy is often cemented by their appearance in major newspapers, academic publications, and linguistic authorities such as dictionaries. Once a verb is used in professional journalism, scholarly writing, and government or corporate communication, it gains credibility and is perceived as a formal component of the language. The inclusion of a word in dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster* signifies its full integration into standard English, providing it with an official status that extends its longevity. While dictionary editors rely on linguistic corpora and usage data to determine which words to include, their decisions reflect broader social trends and the evolving nature of communication. As seen in the case of *to Google* and *to binge-watch*, words that consistently appear in multiple linguistic domains, from casual conversation to academic discussion, are the most likely to be recognized and preserved in the long term.

As the process of lexical standardization continues to evolve, the speed at which slang verbs become mainstream will likely increase even further. With the expansion of artificial intelligence, algorithm-driven content distribution, and globalization, language change is no longer confined to specific geographic or cultural boundaries. Future linguistic studies will need to examine how digital ecosystems influence the spread of new words and whether institutional authorities, such as dictionaries and academic institutions, will maintain their traditional role in legitimizing language or whether real-time digital usage will become the primary determinant of linguistic standardization. The boundary between formal and informal language is increasingly fluid, and the acceptance of new verbs is no longer dictated solely by established linguistic norms but by the collective habits of language users.

The evolution of slang verbs into standard English is a testament to the adaptability of language and its responsiveness to human experience. The words we use today reflect the technological, social, and cultural realities of our time, just as previous linguistic changes mirrored the transformations of earlier eras. By studying how new verbs emerge and become

standardized, we gain deeper insights into the mechanisms of linguistic evolution and the ways in which language continues to shape and be shaped by society. In an era of rapid technological progress and global connectivity, the process of lexical innovation and standardization will remain an ongoing and dynamic feature of the English language, ensuring that it continues to evolve in step with the changing world.

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Social Capital and Emotional Labor: The Dual Dynamics Mechanism of “Goods” Sharing in Online Communities Among Young Women

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Abstract

This study, grounded in Bourdieu’s theory of social capital and Hochschild’s theory of emotional labor, explores the dual dynamics mechanism driving young women to continuously share “good finds” in online communities, using the Xiaohongshu platform as a case study. Through in-depth interviews and textual analysis, the research reveals two key findings: First, the accumulation of social capital (including bridging and bonding social capital) and emotional labor (such as emotional investment and labor monetization) are the core factors motivating young women to persistently share. Second, by sharing “good finds”, they not only expand their social networks and enhance their sense of social recognition but also maintain a sense of community belonging through emotional investment and achieve the reproduction of personal value. This paper provides an in-depth exploration of the behavioral motivations and underlying psychological mechanisms of young women in online communities. The study offers a dual “structure-agency” perspective for understanding the digital practices of young women in the digital era and provides insights for optimizing platform governance mechanisms.

Keywords: social capital, emotional labor, young women, online communities, symbolic social investment

1. Introduction

With the widespread development of mobile internet technology and online virtual communities, the scale of Chinese internet users has been steadily increasing in recent years, reaching new heights. According to the *55th Statistical Report on China’s Internet Development*, as of December 2024, the number of internet users in China has grown from 620,000 in 1997

to 1.108 billion, with the internet penetration rate rising to 78.6%. Among them, the scale of online shopping users reached 974 million, an increase of 59.47 million compared to December 2023, accounting for 87.9% of the total internet users. The age structure of internet users is trending younger, with the 20–29 age group accounting for 26.8% of the total (The 55th Statistical Report on China’s Internet

Development Released, 2025). Driven by the diversity of users' personal interests and needs, the vast number of internet users has constructed a wide variety of online virtual communities through various social media platforms. Under the widespread influence of sharing culture and collaborative consumption concepts, an increasing number of internet users are willing to share various resources in online communities, such as photos, videos, experiences, and information. At this stage, users of online communities have shifted from merely "extracting" information from apps to actively "outputting" content, a phenomenon that is now ubiquitous. Platforms such as Sina Weibo, Zhihu Columns, Douban Groups, and Xiaohongshu are typical examples of user-generated content. Meanwhile, there are significant gender differences in this behavior. Overall, young women (especially female college students) are more active and exhibit higher engagement in virtual communities focused on instant interaction, product recommendations, and shopping. They not only frequently utilize "community explicit resources" (such as browsing posts, obtaining product reviews, performance introductions, usage methods, or learning from other members' experiences) but also actively contribute new content to the platform (such as posting, sharing photos, uploading files, and posting videos).

Taking Xiaohongshu, a platform with high popularity and download rates, as an example, it has adopted a differentiated content production strategy. Research shows that nearly 90% of Xiaohongshu users are female, primarily aged 25–35, with women under 35 accounting for approximately 85% of the user base (Zheng Danlin, 2022). Various types of communities on the platform generate billions of daily note exposures. Over more than a decade of development, users visit Xiaohongshu with the intention of being "influenced" to seek purchasing advice. After completing their purchases, they often return to share their product experiences, thereby "influencing" other users. Content sharing on the platform spans over 200 vertical categories, including emotions, fashion, travel, and music (Yu Ru & Wu Jingying, 2025). This raises the question: Why are young women so enthusiastic about continuously sharing and contributing various types of "content" in online communities? What are the underlying mechanisms driving this

behavior?

2. Literature Review

Existing research has revealed the core motivations for user participation in virtual communities from multiple dimensions. Early studies, based on social capital theory, emphasize users' core desire to accumulate social capital (such as reputation and relational networks) within communities. In the context of social media, which comprises various elements, the concept of "social capital" primarily refers to "online social capital". Williams pointed out that in the development space of the internet, there exists a form of social capital distinct from that of real society. This capital relies on the powerful technology of the internet and is constructed through computer-mediated communication, strengthening bridging ties and enhancing bonding ties, which is referred to as online social capital. Chae Jiyoung (2018) through a comparison of four social media platforms — Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter — found that users' online social capital influences their fundamental attitudes toward life. The use of social media benefits individuals with higher online social capital, and the greater the online social capital, the greater the sense of happiness it brings (Chae, Jiyoung, 2018). Lin (2001) proposed that users gain social recognition and establish interpersonal connections through content sharing, which is essentially a process of social capital reproduction (Lin, N., 2001). Such research has been validated in e-commerce communities (e.g., Taobao's "product recommendations") and knowledge-sharing communities (e.g., Zhihu), where users enhance their influence levels within the community through information sharing (Hui Bingran, 2023). Young people use social media to establish a foundation for reciprocal communication with others and expand the practical means of engaging in dialogue with society. By sharing scientific knowledge, common visions, and values with others, young users accumulate a certain amount of social capital. This social reciprocity is of significant importance in driving the aggregation of capital among young social media users.

At the same time, the theory of emotional labor provides a new perspective for understanding user participation in online virtual communities. The concept of emotional labor, introduced by Hochschild (1983), has been incorporated into digital labor studies (Hochschild, A., 2002),

highlighting that users need to invest emotional energy in content creation to sustain community interactions (Duffy & Hund, 2019). For instance, Instagram influencers convey an “idealized self” through meticulously designed makeup tutorials, which essentially combines emotional labor with personal branding (Abidin, 2016). Such research reveals the coexistence of instrumental rationality and emotional investment in user participation but primarily focuses on professional creators, paying insufficient attention to the non-profit emotional labor of ordinary users. Compared to professional creators, the emotional labor of ordinary users in virtual communities is more non-transactional and autonomous. For example, in online gaming communities, teenage players invest emotional energy through activities like accompanying others in games and social interactions to maintain a sense of belonging within the online community (Yan Daocheng et al., 2024). Fan communities engage in “emotional labor” through secondary creations and topic discussions, producing cultural capital and facilitating value exchange within the community (Zhang Yongjun, 2024). Although such practices do not directly generate economic benefits, they sustain the activity and cohesion of the community through emotional investment (Wang Gang, 2017). However, existing research still lacks in-depth exploration of the motivations, manifestations, and impacts of such non-profit emotional labor on users’ mental health.

In summary, the dual dynamics of social capital and emotional labor provide an important theoretical lens for understanding the behavior of young women sharing “good finds” in online communities. By segmenting the membership of virtual online communities and focusing on young women — the main drivers of the “she economy” — this study takes Xiaohongshu as a representative case to deeply analyze the motivations behind young women’s “sharing good finds” or “product recommendations” in these communities. The research finds that the accumulation of social capital (e.g., gaining attention, likes, and comments) and the investment of emotional labor (e.g., meticulously designing content and maintaining interactive relationships) jointly constitute the primary driving forces behind their sharing behavior. However, this process may also lead to issues such as content homogenization,

information overload, and emotional fatigue. By revealing the lifestyles and consumption psychology of young women in virtual communities, this study offers new insights into the behavioral patterns of female users in the new era and provides practical implications for optimizing user governance and enhancing the quality of user-generated content (UGC) in virtual online communities.

3. Data Sources and Research Methods

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the motivations behind young women sharing “good finds” in online communities in the new era. Xiaohongshu, currently one of the most popular platforms among young people, was selected as a representative of new online communities. As a homegrown social e-commerce platform in China, Xiaohongshu has pioneered a dual-core driven model of “content community-consumption loop” since its inception in 2013. By integrating user-generated content (UGC) and cross-border e-commerce services, it has built a unique consumer culture ecosystem. By early 2019, its registered user base had exceeded 200 million, with a distinctive demographic profile: young women (born between 1990 and 2009) constitute the absolute majority, accounting for over 70% of users, forming a highly homogeneous “female-centric” network. This user profile aligns closely with the trends of increasing female consumer decision-making power and expanding social shopping demands in the era of the “she economy”. Additionally, the seamless integration of “product recommendations” (种草) and “instant purchases” (拔草) on the platform makes Xiaohongshu an ideal sample field for exploring the digital practices and consumer identity of young women.

This study employs qualitative research methods to focus on the “good finds” sharing behavior of young female users in the Xiaohongshu community. Based on the principle of purposive sampling, the researcher recruited 15 active female users (aged 18–30) through online recruitment and snowball sampling for semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview formats included face-to-face (8 participants) and video calls (7 participants), with each session lasting 60–90 minutes. Core questions included, “What is your primary motivation for consistently posting notes on Xiaohongshu?” and “How do you evaluate the quality and limitations of the current UGC

content in the community?" Preliminary data analysis revealed that while the respondents exhibited significant heterogeneity in demographic dimensions (such as occupation, education level, and geographic distribution), their sharing motivations displayed structural homogeneity — centered around the accumulation of social capital and the investment of emotional labor. To further uncover the internal differences in motivation types, the researcher selected seven typical cases from the original sample based on the case study screening criteria proposed by Robert K. Yin (2018). These cases serve as the foundation for analyzing the motivations behind young women's "good finds" sharing in online communities.

4. Motivation Analysis of Young Women's "Good Finds" Sharing in Online Communities

Motivation Theory provides a core framework for analyzing the driving forces and sustainability of individual behaviors. Its central proposition lies in categorizing behavioral motivations into two main domains: intrinsic motivation (stemming from internal interests or a sense of pleasure) and extrinsic motivation (driven by external rewards or pressures) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Building on this, scholars have further incorporated the formation process of self-concept into the analysis, proposing a hierarchical model of motivation that refines motivations into five types:

- 1) Intrinsic-Interest Motivation: Behavior aimed at satisfying self-exploration or interest fulfillment, such as immersing oneself in the joy of creation (Deci et al., 1999).
- 2) Instrumental Motivation: Behavior oriented toward obtaining external benefits like material rewards or social status, such as pursuing platform traffic revenue (Bhattacharjee, 2012).
- 3) Social-Identity Motivation: Behavior intended to meet group expectations and strengthen a sense of social belonging, such as mimicking "influencer" personas to gain community recognition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).
- 4) Self-Actualization Motivation: Behavior focused on enhancing self-value perception and competence recognition, such as shaping an "expert" identity through knowledge sharing (Bandura, 1986).
- 5) Internalized-Value Motivation: Behavior deeply tied to social norms or ethical principles,

such as promoting environmental protection to advocate for public welfare (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Based on this framework, the motivations behind Xiaohongshu users' "good finds" sharing behavior can be deconstructed into two main domains: social capital and emotional labor.

4.1 Social Capital Driving Mechanism: Resource Accumulation and Power Dynamics

Based on Bourdieu's (1986) *social capital theory* (Bourdieu, P., 1986), the "good finds" sharing behavior of Xiaohongshu users can be viewed as a form of symbolic social investment, with motivations centered on the construction of relational networks and the convertibility of resources.

Drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical theory and the behavioral characteristics of online community users, this study reconstructs the theoretical framework for understanding the motivations behind young women's "good finds" sharing on Xiaohongshu. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman posits that social interactions are akin to theatrical performances, where individuals manage impressions through the dynamic interplay of the "front stage" (the deliberate presentation of an idealized image) and the "backstage" (the private space where the true self is concealed) (Goffman, E., 2022). The study finds that Xiaohongshu's unique anonymous social mechanism transforms it into a "digital enclave" for backstage performances. Unlike the strong relational constraints of WeChat Moments, the platform's stranger-based social mechanism alleviates the disciplinary pressures of acquaintance society, allowing users to break free from societal role restrictions and engage in unconscious authentic self-expression.

Specifically, the "good finds" sharing behavior of young female users exhibits a dual performance logic: In the backstage creation field, they transform personal life experiences into collective emotional resonance through embodied narratives such as home renovation and makeup tutorials, achieving "self-healing without judgment" ("My skincare notes are written for another version of myself in a parallel world" — Respondent F). However, when the content enters the frontstage performance phase driven by algorithmic recommendations, users actively adjust their narrative strategies, adopting standardized

templates like “clickbait titles and comparison images” to craft a “curated lifestyle expert” persona that meets audience expectations. This tension between frontstage and backstage behaviors confirms Goffman’s assertion about “performance segregation”: users need the authenticity of the backstage to sustain their creative drive, while simultaneously relying on frontstage impression management to acquire social capital.

Notably, the platform’s technical architecture amplifies the complexity of these performances. Xiaohongshu’s content “re-editing” feature (e.g., multiple revisions of notes, hiding historical versions) makes the backstage creation process reversible, allowing users to transition from authentic expression to strategic performance through a cycle of “trial and error-correction”. The study further reveals that sustained frontstage performances can lead to identity alienation, with some users experiencing “account personality splitting” — maintaining a polished persona on their main account while documenting moments of emotional breakdown on a secondary account, creating a new form of frontstage-backstage segregation in digital existence. This highlights a deeper paradox of self-presentation in the social media era: the expressive freedom enabled by technological empowerment ironically exacerbates the estrangement between the true self and the virtual persona.

“Actually, at the beginning, I just posted casually for fun. When I posted a selfie on WeChat Moments, people would ask, ‘Is this too photoshopped?’ But here on Xiaohongshu, when I share makeup tutorials, I get a lot of comments like ‘What’s the lipstick shade?’ or ‘Link to the eyeshadow palette?’ This feeling of being recognized by strangers is like finding another version of myself in a parallel world. Later, I realized that the better the traffic, the more ‘tactics’ the notes require — like adding comparison photos or using titles like ‘Personally Tested and Effective’ — otherwise, the algorithm won’t recommend them at all. (Fiddling with her phone to show her draft notes) Look at this note about concealer techniques. I revised the cover six times just to make the words ‘for clumsy hands’ stand out more. Nowadays, even genuine sharing has to be ‘designed’ to fit what the audience wants to see.” (Respondent Ms. Z)

“WeChat Moments is like dancing in shackles. Every post has to consider how classmates and relatives will perceive it. Here on Xiaohongshu, it’s more like an anonymous diary. I can showcase a polished makeup

look (scrolling through her phone to show a vlog of a store visit) or use a secondary account to post bare-faced photos and vent about workplace stress. But recently, I’ve noticed a strange phenomenon: the beauty bloggers recommended on the homepage are starting to look more and more alike, even their eyeshadow color schemes are almost identical. Is the algorithm creating an aesthetic bubble?” (Respondent Ms. L)

4.2 Emotional Labor Driving Mechanism: Emotional Investment and Labor Monetization

In the “good finds” sharing behavior of young women in online communities, the emotional labor driving mechanism manifests as a two-way interaction between emotional investment and labor monetization. This mechanism encompasses both the subjective agency of users in maintaining community relationships through emotional expression and the capitalization of emotional value within the platform economy.

4.2.1 Emotional Investment: Emotional Bonding and Self-Performance

According to Hochschild’s theory of emotional labor, individuals actively regulate and manage their emotions to meet social expectations (Hochschild, A., 2002). In online communities, young women sharing “good finds” not only transmit information but also establish emotional connections with their audience through “deep acting” (e.g., meticulously crafting usage experiences and pairing them with visual content). For instance, on platforms like Xiaohongshu, users often employ affinity-driven language such as “sisterly recommendations” or “pitfall avoidance guides” to create an empathetic space. This emotional investment fulfills social needs while simultaneously shaping their identity as “thoughtful sharers”. In this process, emotional labor extends from the private sphere to the public domain, enabling users to accumulate social capital through continuous emotional performances, thereby forming a cycle of “emotion-trust-influence.”

“When I first started sharing ‘good finds’, it was purely out of interest. But gradually, I realized that to consistently gain attention, I had to invest a lot of ‘invisible emotions.’ For example, every time I write a product review, I have to carefully consider the tone, using phrases like ‘Sisters, you have to try this!’ or ‘Helping you dodge a bullet here’. Even the lighting and filters in the photos need to be adjusted to make

them feel warm and relatable. Sometimes, even when I'm in a bad mood, I have to maintain an enthusiastic tone in the comments, like wearing a mask of the 'perfect blogger'— I guess this is what they call 'deep acting'." (Respondent Ms. T)

4.2.2 Labor Monetization: The Capitalization of Emotional Value

Bourdieu's field theory of capital posits that social capital, cultural capital, and economic capital can be converted through specific mechanisms (Li Yanpei, 2008). In the digital platform ecosystem, the emotional labor of young women is integrated into the "emotional economy" system:

1) Accumulation of cultural capital: High-quality emotional content, such as immersive unboxing videos and emotional product evaluations, can enhance users' content competitiveness and gain preferential treatment in terms of platform traffic.

2) Transformation of economic capital: Top-tier users monetize their emotional influence through means such as brand collaborations and live-streaming e-commerce. For example, "fans' trust level" is directly related to the conversion rate of products, and the platform algorithm quantifies emotional labor into tradable digital capital through data indicators (such as the number of likes and favorites).

3) Strengthening of social capital: The strong community bonds created by emotional labor (such as interactions within fan groups) further consolidate users' status, forming a positive feedback loop of "emotional investment — traffic growth — business cooperation".

"But this kind of investment really pays off. Fans started calling me their 'thoughtful little bestie', and brands began approaching me for collaborations. However, the pressure keeps growing. Last week, because of a drop in engagement, I stayed up all night reshooting a video three times, crying while editing... I feel like I've become an 'emotional perpetual motion machine', constantly pushed by the platform's algorithm to produce 'likable' content. But when I see fans commenting, 'I've never been disappointed following your recommendations', I feel like all this emotional labor is worth it..." (Respondent Ms. S)

5. Psychological Pathways of Young Women Sharing "Good Finds" in Online Communities

Generally, motivation serves as the starting point of behavior, but such initiation can be occasional or one-time. For studies on sustained

behavior, in addition to focusing on the driving role of motivation, it is essential to delve into the mediating pathways through which motivation translates into behavior — that is, the underlying psychological mechanisms of individual actions. Through in-depth interviews with young women in the Xiaohongshu community, it was found that the behavior of sharing "good finds" is not only directly influenced by individual motivations but is also profoundly moderated by internal psychological mechanisms. Among these, self-identity and social capital are the two core psychological mechanisms driving young women to continuously share "good finds".

5.1 Self-Identity

In Taylor's theory of self-identity, self-identity refers to an individual's reflective understanding of themselves based on their experiences. In the context of late modernity, Taylor imbues this concept with a new interpretation, arguing that each individual possesses unique traits. Through practices in life, work, and social interactions, individuals accumulate life experiences and develop a deeper reflective understanding of themselves. Therefore, self-identity is neither a fixed social construct nor an inevitable stage-specific outcome in the process of individual development.

Self-identity is the primary psychological mechanism influencing young women's continuous sharing of "good finds" in the Xiaohongshu community. This is first reflected in the proactive nature of self-identity behavior, which undergoes a transition from an unconscious stage to a conscious stage. Young women active on the Xiaohongshu platform collectively form an "invisible group", where the norms within the group and interactions among members make individuals deeply feel the attraction and value of the group. They are passionate about "showing off" their lives in virtual communities, and this "showing off" is essentially a conscious display of self-information. The premise of this behavior is that individuals have a clear awareness of themselves, and its goal is to achieve self-identity. Compared to previous generations, the self-identity of contemporary youth exhibits significant differences: it is no longer confined to an implicit and passive state but instead places greater emphasis on recognition from mainstream culture, even carrying a tendency toward excessive artificial modification. For

example, the popular online self-media program *Chen Xiang's Six-Thirty* vividly reflects how youth shape their self-identity through excessive modification on social media. In this process, external explicit discourse and internal implicit expression intertwine, jointly driving the social convergence and deconstructive reconstruction of youth self-identity.

Furthermore, during interactions with group members, when an individual's sharing of "good finds" receives positive responses from others (such as likes, shares, etc.), it indicates that the individual's self-concept aligns with the group evaluation. This consistency not only reinforces their role positioning in the virtual online space but also further solidifies their self-identity. Based on this identity, individuals continue to produce content for the community, thereby forming a virtuous cycle.

5.2 Social Capital

The behavior of young people using social media is closely related to their personal social traits, with social capital being a core concept. Bourdieu pointed out that traditional economic research has overlooked the diversity of capital, which primarily manifests in three basic categories: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital (Bourdieu, P., 1986). He defined social capital as the sum of real and virtual resources possessed by individuals or groups, which are accumulated and maintained through a network of interpersonal relationships with varying degrees of institutionalization (e.g., acquaintances or recognized connections). American scholar Putnam further divided social capital into two forms: bridging social capital, which emphasizes information communication and exchange between different individuals but lacks emotional support; and bonding social capital, typically formed by family or close friends, characterized by strong interest connections and emotional bonds (Putnam, R. D., 2000).

Research indicates that social media plays a significant role in the accumulation of social capital among youth. Ellison et al. found that online interactions through social media networks can strengthen offline real-world social interactions. Additionally, as the frequency of social media use increases, users' acquisition of both bridging and bonding social capital also significantly improves. For example, the intensity of Facebook use positively

correlates with the increase in bridging social capital, while having more "real friends" offline or interacting with offline friends through social media significantly impacts the accumulation of both bridging and bonding social capital.

In the context of young women sharing "good finds" in online communities, the role of social capital is particularly prominent. By sharing "good finds", young women construct an invisible social network. This network not only provides them with a platform for information exchange (bridging social capital) but also strengthens close connections within the group through emotional interactions and trust-building (e.g., likes, comments, and shares) (bonding social capital). The accumulation of this dual social capital not only expands the real-world carriers for their social dialogue but also enables them to gain more social resources and a sense of identity in both virtual and real-world spaces.

"Sharing 'good finds' has given me a greater sense of presence on Xiaohongshu. I feel recognized. Additionally, through interactions with other users, I've learned many new things, like skincare tips and fashion advice, which have made me more confident in my daily life. Moreover, I sometimes receive collaboration invitations from brands. Although I don't share for the sake of making money, these opportunities make me feel that my sharing is meaningful. The Xiaohongshu community is incredible — it brings together so many people. If you're willing to explore, you can find the information you need. Overall, sharing on Xiaohongshu has not only given me a sense of belonging in life but also provided me with more resources and opportunities." (Respondent Ms. W)

6. Conclusion

This study, through the dual lenses of social capital theory and emotional labor theory, provides an in-depth analysis of the dual dynamics driving young women to share "good finds" in online communities. The research finds that the accumulation of social capital and emotional labor are not only the primary drivers of their sharing behavior but also crucial pathways for achieving self-identity and acquiring social resources in virtual communities. By sharing "good finds", young women not only construct extensive social networks but also sustain the activity and cohesion of the community through emotional investment. This behavior fulfills their need for

social capital while also enabling the reproduction of personal value through emotional labor.

However, this study has certain limitations. First, it primarily focuses on the Xiaohongshu platform. Future research could expand to other social media platforms to validate the generalizability of the findings. Second, this paper does not deeply explore the impact of factors such as age, professional background, and cultural differences on sharing behavior. Future studies could segment user groups to reveal more complex behavioral motivations. Lastly, as social media platforms become increasingly commercialized, whether young women's sharing behavior will shift from non-profit to professionalization is also a noteworthy research direction.

In conclusion, this paper provides a new theoretical framework for understanding the behavioral motivations of young women in online communities, while also offering practical insights for social media platforms to optimize user experience and enhance community engagement. Future research could build on this foundation to further explore the diversity and complexity of social media user behavior, enriching both theoretical research and practical applications in related fields.

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Development of a Reference Book for the HSK (Chinese Proficiency Test): A Study on the Development of the “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide”

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the development of the “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide”. Based on an analysis of the current situation and problems of existing HSK Chinese character learning materials, this paper explains the significance of developing this guide, and details its writing ideas, including the innovative approach of using phonetic components to connect content, strictly defining levels, introducing words and sentences through characters, and incorporating images and bilingual comparisons. Additionally, the paper conducts a comparative experiment on the application effect of the “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide”, showing that it significantly enhances learning effectiveness for intermediate and advanced learners.

Keywords: HSK, Pictophonetic characters, phonetic components

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of international Chinese education, Chinese character teaching remains a major challenge for both teachers and learners. Chinese characters, as an important part of the Chinese language, have unique ideographic properties and a complex structure, which present challenges to learners from non-character-based language backgrounds. Furthermore, the requirements for assessing Chinese characters in the HSK have continuously increased. Existing Chinese character learning materials on the market have

certain shortcomings and are insufficient to meet the test preparation needs of second language learners. This paper aims to explore the systematic and regular development of a Chinese character and word mnemonic handbook based on the examination context, by starting from the study of Chinese characters themselves and combining the needs of second language learners.

2. Literature Review on Existing HSK Chinese Character Materials

2.1 Overview of Existing HSK Chinese Character

Materials

Comprehensive Chinese textbooks are a common way for second language learners to begin learning Chinese characters. Textbooks by Rong Jihua (2011), Quan Jun (2013), Liu Xun (2015), and Jiang Liping (2014) generally integrate Chinese character teaching into the text content, arranging character learning from simple to complex, and providing training in recognition and writing. This approach helps learners accumulate Chinese characters to some extent but lacks a systematic structure. The rules of character construction and cultural implications are not sufficiently explored, making it difficult for learners to form a complete knowledge system and use character rules effectively to improve learning efficiency.

Additionally, specialized Chinese character learning materials provide more comprehensive content. Textbooks by Wang Xiaojun (2009), Shi Dingguo and Luo Weidong (2009), for example, not only introduce the basic properties and characteristics of Chinese characters but also delve into their historical origins, artistic features, and related cultural knowledge, offering learners a broader cultural perspective. However, such materials are lacking in exam guidance and do not adequately address the needs of second language learners preparing for exams like the HSK. Zhang Jingxian (2004) and Ma Yanhua (2017) have provided some learning methods in their respective Chinese character tutorials. Fu Yunhua (2018) authored “Chinese Character Dominoes,” which explains commonly used characters in pinyin order and introduces related vocabulary, sentences, and Chinese cultural elements, offering some help for second language learners.

In addition to printed textbooks, auxiliary learning tools like flashcards have also been used in character teaching. For instance, Melissa Sconyers (2007) developed flashcards selecting 800 characters from the HSK character list and organizing common vocabulary and example sentences around them, which helps learners memorize characters and accumulate vocabulary. Overall, existing materials meet the basic needs of second language learners but are still lacking in materials designed for efficient exam preparation.

2.2 Overview of Chinese Character Studies

Xu Shen in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* discusses six methods of character creation: pictograms,

indicative characters, associative compounds, phonetic compounds, derivatives, and borrowed characters. The productivity of phonetic compounds is particularly prominent in the development of Chinese characters. Research shows that phonetic compounds dominate the Chinese character system. According to statistics based on 7,000 common characters, phonetic compounds account for 80.5%, and in the 1,000 most frequent characters, phonetic compounds make up 58.3%. This underscores their significance as a key point of intervention for second language learners.

In the study of phonetic compounds, academic focus has been on their phonetic efficiency. Zhang Xichang (2007) found that the phonetic component has an overall phonetic efficiency of 66.02%, significantly higher than the semantic efficiency of the meaning component at 43.79%. This finding provides an ontological basis for the “phonetic component first” teaching strategy. Typical phonetic components like “qing” generate characters such as “qing” (please), “qing” (clear), “qing” (feeling), and “qing” (sunny), with phonetic consistency confirming the function of phonetic components to cue pronunciation. Research by Xu Caihua (2017) further supports this, categorizing phonetic components into five families and demonstrating that 93.72% of these families possess varying degrees of phonetic functionality.

Studies in second language acquisition further confirm the effectiveness of using phonetic components in teaching. Jiang Xin (2001) found that the effectiveness of phonetic rules for foreign students increases significantly with language proficiency, indicating that phonetic awareness develops dynamically.

3. System of Writing the “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide”

3.1 Scientific Arrangement Based on Pinyin Phonemes and Phonetic Components

The “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide” breaks from tradition by arranging Chinese characters in alphabetical order based on their initial pinyin phonemes, while also integrating the characteristics of phonetic compounds into the system. This arrangement has multiple advantages. From a cognitive perspective, the alphabetical order is familiar to most second language learners, lowering the learning threshold and enabling quick

engagement. For instance, in the “B” section, the root characters such as “ba” (eight) and “ba” (bash) are used to introduce related characters derived from these phonetic components, such as “ba” (to push), “ba” (climb), and “pa” (to lie down).

3.2 *Progressive Learning from Characters to Words to Sentences*

The “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide” adopts a progressive learning method, starting from characters to words and then to sentences. This arrangement conforms to the cognitive rules of language learning, expanding from basic Chinese character knowledge to vocabulary and sentence usage, thereby improving the learner’s language ability as a whole. For example, starting with the character “包” (bāo), the guide first presents the pronunciation of “包” followed by words such as “包含” (bāo hán, to contain) and “包括” (bāo kuò, to include), reinforcing the learner’s understanding of the pronunciation and meaning of the character “包”. Then, related sentences like “这个账户里包含了你的所有信息” (This account contains all your information) and “他爱她, 包括她的缺点” (He loves her, including her flaws) are introduced. This method, progressing from character to word to sentence, helps learners learn Chinese characters within a practical context, improving both their ability to memorize characters and their flexibility in using them accurately in different contexts.

3.3 *Clear Level Differentiation*

This guide is based on the “International Chinese Language Proficiency Standards” and assigns levels to each character and word. For foreign students, the HSK exam serves as an important measure of their Chinese proficiency, and the level indicators in the guide provide learners with clear learning goals and directions for exam preparation. For example, the character “大” (dà, big) is marked as a level one character, which means it is essential for learners to master it. During exam preparation, learners can focus on reviewing characters and words corresponding to their proficiency level, efficiently distributing their study time and energy. For those preparing for the intermediate and advanced levels of the HSK exam, the clear differentiation of intermediate and advanced characters in the guide helps them tackle more difficult vocabulary, boosting their confidence for the exam.

3.4 *Bilingual Examples to Enhance Understanding and Application*

This guide uses English as the medium for providing bilingual example sentences, which offers several advantages. Since English is a widely used international language, most learners are familiar with it. Through English example sentences, learners can better understand the meaning of Chinese characters and their usage in sentences. For instance, for the word “抱怨” (bào yuàn, to complain), the guide provides a bilingual example sentence: “同学们经常抱怨寝室环境不好” (The students often complain about the bad environment in the dormitory). These examples help learners directly understand how the word is used in real-life contexts, minimizing misunderstandings caused by cultural differences and language barriers.

Additionally, the bilingual examples provide learners with models for translating between Chinese and English, helping them develop bilingual thinking skills. While learning Chinese, learners can compare the expressions in both languages, improving their flexibility in language conversion.

4. **Significance of Developing the “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide”**

4.1 *Overcoming Learning Challenges*

The “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide” effectively reduces cognitive load for learners by using phonetic component associations. For example, the phonetic component “青” (qīng) is used to link a series of characters such as “请” (qǐng), “清” (qīng), “情” (qíng), and “晴” (qíng). Learners only need to remember the pronunciation and meaning of “青” and the relationship between it and the other characters, making it easier to memorize these characters and significantly reducing the number of individual memory units. This approach breaks the traditional model of memorizing characters one by one, enabling learners to learn characters systematically and more efficiently.

Furthermore, Shi Xianghui (2022) mentioned, “HSK is the most internationally influential part of Chinese language teaching. As part of academic and national strategies, all Chinese textbooks inevitably have to address it.” By using the HSK vocabulary requirements as a benchmark and focusing on phonetic characters that appear frequently in the HSK exam, the

guide is tailored to help learners become familiar with exam-related character points and master test-taking strategies. This approach meets the learners' needs in terms of exam preparation.

4.2 Filling a Market Gap

Compared to traditional Chinese character learning materials, the "HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide" demonstrates significant advantages in its systematic approach. Traditional materials often present characters in isolation, making it difficult for learners to recognize the internal connections between characters, which increases the difficulty of constructing a knowledge system. In contrast, this guide groups characters with the same phonetic components together, creating an organic knowledge framework. Learners can clearly observe the relationships between phonetic components and their derived characters, gaining a deeper understanding of how pictophonetic characters are constructed, which helps them memorize and understand characters more efficiently.

5. Experimental Results on the Effectiveness of the "HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide"

5.1 Experiment Design

To verify the effectiveness of the "HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide," the author selected 30 Chinese learners with HSK level 4 to level 5 proficiency as subjects for the experiment. The participants were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group, with 15 individuals in each group.

During the grouping process, factors such as language proficiency and learning background were considered to ensure similarity between the groups, minimizing experimental errors.

The experimental group used the "HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide" for learning, while the control group used traditional textbooks. Both groups were given the same study time (2 hours per week) for a period of 4 weeks.

The testing tools used were HSK level 4 test questions and specially designed tests for pictophonetic character skills. The HSK level 4 test assessed learners' performance in actual exam situations, while the pictophonetic character test evaluated learners' mastery of pictophonetic characters in terms of writing, distinguishing similar characters, and reading. Both groups were tested before and after the 4-week study period, and their performance changes were recorded.

5.2 Data Statistics and Analysis

After 4 weeks of study, the experimental group demonstrated significant improvement. In terms of correct rate for writing pictophonetic characters, the experimental group reached 72%, while the control group was at 63%, with an improvement rate of +9%. For distinguishing similar characters, the experimental group scored 75%, the control group 69%, with a +6% improvement rate. For reading pictophonetic characters, the experimental group achieved 88%, the control group 76%, with an improvement rate of +12%. The data is summarized in the table below:

Table 1. Effectiveness of the "HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide"

Indicator	Experimental Group	Control Group	Improvement Rate
Pictophonetic Character Writing Accuracy	72%	63%	+9%
Similar Character Discrimination Accuracy	75%	69%	+6%
Pictophonetic Character Reading Accuracy	88%	76%	+12%

These experimental results demonstrate that the "HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide" is highly effective in improving learners' ability to study pictophonetic characters. The experimental group showed clear improvement

in all key indicators, including writing, distinguishing similar characters, and reading, with improvement rates of 9%, 6%, and 12%, respectively. The guide's systematic arrangement based on pinyin phonemes and phonetic

components helped learners establish connections between character shapes and pronunciations, enhancing their ability to recognize and remember pictophonetic characters.

6. Conclusion

This study confirms that the “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide,” based on phonetic component clues, significantly improves the effectiveness of Chinese character teaching. It successfully addresses the issues of lack of systematization and level adaptation present in existing materials. Through its innovative writing system and teaching methods, it enhances learners’ learning efficiency and exam preparedness. Moreover, the guide plays a positive role in promoting Chinese character culture, helping learners better understand the cultural connotations of Chinese characters.

In the future, the “HSK Pictophonetic Character Mnemonic Guide” can be further expanded and refined, creating a multilingual database for the interpretation of pictophonetic characters in various languages, providing more targeted learning resources for learners with different native languages, and further promoting the development of Chinese language education globally.

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A Study on Game Localization Translation from the Perspective of Communicative Translation Theory: A Case Study of *Black Myth: Wukong*

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Abstract

With China's increasing cultural influence in the global market, video game localization has become essential in ensuring accessibility and cultural authenticity. As China's first AAA single-player game, *Black Myth: Wukong* presents unique localization challenges due to its rich cultural and narrative elements. This study applies Communicative Translation Theory (CTT) to analyze its English localization, focusing on translating character names, in-game achievements, and dialogues. Using qualitative textual analysis, the research evaluates strategies such as adaptation, simplification, and idiomatic rendering. Findings reveal both effective localization techniques and areas to be improved, offering insights for refining Chinese video game localization strategies.

Keywords: communicative translation theory, game localization, *Black Myth: Wukong*

1. Introduction

In recent years, China has strengthened its global cultural presence, striving hard to develop various forms of media — including film, literature, and animation — to enhance its soft power. Among these, video games have emerged as an influential medium, introducing Chinese cultures and traditions to the rest of the world. As these games reach global audiences, localization becomes crucial in ensuring accessibility and cultural authenticity. One notable example is *Black Myth: Wukong*, developed by Game Science, representing a landmark in China's gaming industry as its first AAA single-player game. Its localization effectively integrates text, visuals, and interactivity, allowing global players to enjoy the

game while gaining insight into classical Chinese mythology and literary traditions. This study explores how *Black Myth: Wukong*'s English localization adapts its rich cultural and narrative elements, shedding light on strategies for enhancing the global reach of Chinese games.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Localization and Game Localization

O'Hagan & Ashworth (2002, p. 15) defined localization as "the process of adapting a product or service to a specific linguistic and cultural context, ensuring it exhibits the expressive characteristics of that context." According to ISO/TC37, localization involves making a product linguistically and culturally

appropriate for use and sale in the target locale (country/region and language). What's more, localization requires adherence to legal, technical, and professional norms to ensure both accuracy and cultural appropriateness (Wang & Lu, 2015).

Game localization involves translating diverse components such as pop-up windows, tooltips, system messages, and in-game text, with particular attention to preserving narrative and imaginative content (Yan, 2009). The dual objectives of it are to ensure players understand gameplay mechanics accurately and maintain the immersive atmosphere and emotional resonance of the original text.

In the aspect of linguistics and translation, previous studies have explored deeply from many angles, emphasizing the importance of culturally appropriate translation strategies and multimodal integration to enhance player engagement. Bai & Yuan (2023) analyzed common translation strategies in English-to-Chinese game localization, highlighting the necessity of cultural adaptation while noting a lack of industry-wide representation and practical implementation. Similarly, Chen (2021), using multimodal discourse analysis, examines Genshin Impact and emphasizes the integration of text, visuals, and audio to maintain narrative coherence and player immersion. Some scholars applied translation aesthetics, demonstrating that transliteration and free translation effectively preserve linguistic nuances while enhancing emotional resonance through poetic expressions (Hao, 2022). Sun (2024) employed ecological translation theory in *Honkai: Star Rail*, advocating a “three-dimensional transformation” approach that balances linguistic, cultural, and communicative adaptation.

While these studies provide valuable perspectives, they often focus on specific cases without establishing a systematic framework for strategy selection. Additionally, few studies have comprehensively addressed how multimodal elements interact in localization, highlighting the need for a more holistic and adaptable localization approach.

2.2 Communicative Translation Theory

Peter Newmark first introduced Communicative Translation Theory (CTT) in *Approaches to Translation* in 1981 and later refined it in *A*

Textbook of Translation (1988), where he clarified the differences between communicative translation and semantic translation. Communicative translation aims to produce an effect on the target audience that is as close as possible to that of the original audience, focusing on readability and natural expression. In contrast, semantic translation strives for linguistic accuracy, maintaining the original text's structure and meaning as precisely as possible.

Newmark categorized texts into different types, each aligning with a specific translation strategy. Expressive texts, such as literature and poetry, require semantic translation to preserve artistic and stylistic nuances. In contrast, communicative translation is more effective for informative and vocative texts, such as advertisements, public notices, and video games, where conveying intent and audience engagement is more significant. As video games function as multimodal texts that integrate narrative, interaction, and audiovisual elements, their localization necessitates a communicative approach to ensure a seamless and culturally resonant player experience. Therefore, communicative translation is the preferred strategy in game localization. For instance, in the study of Wang (2023), the scholar studied the localization of *Detroit: Become Human*, showing that communicative translation enables concise, idiomatic expressions that preserve meaning and cultural nuances, especially effective for narrative-driven games.

Recent studies on *Black Myth: Wukong* have explored various localization strategies but have yet to fully apply communicative translation theory. Ma (2024) analyzed the game through ecological translation theory, focusing on cultural adaptation and emotional resonance. Lu (2024) examined the translation of culturally loaded terms, advocating strategies such as transliteration and creative translation to retain cultural depth. The study pointed out that by prioritizing functional equivalence to achieve audience engagement, the localization not only preserves cultural authenticity but also enhances player immersion.

3. Research Design

This study examines the localization of *Black Myth: Wukong* and examines how communicative translation theory can improve the English translation of key in-game elements.

The following three questions are to be addressed:

- 1) What are the key elements in the localization process of *Black Myth: Wukong* and what strategies are employed for those key game elements?
- 2) How can CTT be used to assess the effectiveness of these strategies, identifying successful practices and areas for further refinement?
- 3) What insights can the localization of *Black Myth: Wukong* offer for the localization of similar video games?

To address these questions, this study adopts a qualitative approach, combining textual analysis and case studies. It examines selected character names, in-game achievements, and dialogues to evaluate their English translations in terms of cultural fidelity, readability, and player engagement. The study compares the original Chinese text with its English localization, assessing the effectiveness of communicative translation strategies such as adaptation, simplification, and idiomatic rendering. By applying Communicative Translation Theory, this research aims to develop localization strategies that balance cultural authenticity with accessibility, offering insights for more effective game localization practices.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Character Names

In the game localization, translating character names is a critical task that goes beyond merely conveying physical traits and personality. It not only involves accurately conveying the physical traits and characteristics of characters but also preserving the cultural nuances inherent in the original language. A well-executed translation not only prevents cultural misunderstandings but also enhances player immersion and comprehension. The translations of character names in *Black Myth: Wu Kong* offer insightful examples.

Example 1:

Source Text: 黑熊精 (Black Bear Monster)

Target Text: Black Bear Guai

In translating 黑熊精, the translator employs a strategy that combines literal translation with transliteration. "Black Bear" directly reflects the physical appearance of the character, allowing the target audience to easily understand its

animalistic nature. Instead of translating "精" as "monster," which often conveys a frightening or destructive connotation in Western cultures, the translator chooses to use "Guai," a transliteration that preserves the cultural significance of "妖怪" (Guai) in Chinese folklore. In this context, such creatures are often depicted as mysterious, shape-shifting entities that can be both beautiful and grotesque. By opting for "Guai," the translation retains the cultural context and avoids misinterpretation among English-speaking players. This choice enables players to appreciate the concept of "妖怪" within its cultural framework.

From the perspective of communicative translation theory, this approach achieves cultural equivalence by maintaining the original connotations in the target language. It also ensures functional equivalence, allowing players to grasp the name's literal meaning while preserving its symbolic depth. Through transliteration, the translator effectively communicates the cultural symbol of "妖怪," allowing players worldwide to engage with the character's complexity and mystique.

Example 2:

Source Text: 亢金龙 (Exalted Golden Dragon)

Target Text: Kang-jin Loong

The translation of 亢金龙 follows a similar pattern of combining literal translation and transliteration. "Kang-jin" directly translates "亢金," preserving the celestial and astrological references inherent in the original name. For "龙" (dragon), the translator chooses "Loong" instead of the commonly used "Dragon," a deliberate choice that acknowledges the profound cultural differences in dragon symbolism between Chinese and Western traditions. In Chinese culture, dragons symbolize auspiciousness, authority, and nobility, while in Western cultures, they are often associated with evil and destruction. By using "Loong," retains the dragon's positive connotations in Chinese culture, helping international players correctly interpret its role and symbolic value in Chinese mythology.

This translation method effectively achieves cultural equivalence, ensuring the name is both authentic and accessible to the target audience. The use of "Loong" enhances functional equivalence by conveying the dragon's unique cultural significance, enriching the global gaming experience and fostering a deeper

understanding of Chinese mythological elements.

Therefore, in *Black Myth: Wukong*, translators often employ a “literal translation + transliteration” strategy to convey both the literal and cultural meanings of character names. This approach minimizes cultural misunderstandings and aligns with the target language’s expression habits, enhancing acceptance and appreciation of the target culture. By retaining original cultural connotations through transliteration, the translation creates a more immersive gameplay experience, allowing global audiences to better understand and enjoy the rich cultural backgrounds embedded in the game.

4.2 Game Achievements

Achievements in games refer to in-game rewards or titles that players earn upon completing specific tasks or reaching certain goals within the game. These achievements are often named using concise, impactful four-character phrases that encapsulate deep symbolic and cultural significance. They reflect the game’s storyline and atmosphere but also enhance players’ sense of accomplishment and emotional connection. The achievement names in *Black Myth: Wu Kong* utilize distinct four-character structures, effectively conveying rich cultural meanings through careful translation.

Example 3: Cultural Adaptation by Citing Classics

Source Text: 下降尘凡第一难 (The First Trial of Descending into the Mortal World)

Target Text: Home is Behind

The translation “Home is Behind” draws upon a line from *The Lord of the Rings*: “Home is behind, the world ahead.” By referencing this well-known Western literary classic, the translator not only enriches the cultural depth of the achievement but also enhances its relatability for players familiar with the source material. “下降尘凡第一难” conveys the notion of leaving one’s homeland and confronting life’s challenges. The reference to *The Lord of the Rings* allows Western players to easily grasp the emotional and symbolic meaning of the achievement, as the poem is widely recognized and symbolically rich. This method exemplifies cultural adaptation within communicative translation, effectively leveraging Western

literary symbols to enhance emotional resonance and acceptance among the target audience.

Example 4: Maintaining Rhythm and Rhyme

Source Text: 龟蛇盘结二十八难 (The Twenty-Eighth Trial of Tortoise and Snake Entwined)

Target Text: Shell and Scales

Source Text: 熟门熟路七十难 (The Seventieth Trial of Familiar Paths)

Target Text: Treaded Tracks

Both translations retain the concise, impactful structure of the original four-character achievement names, preserving their rhythmic quality. The translated achievement names are enhanced with alliteration and sound repetition, improving their memorability and ease of pronunciation.

In the case of “龟蛇盘结二十八难” translated as “Shell and Scales”, which preserves the symbolic imagery of the tortoise and snake while fitting smoothly into English. The repetition of the “s” sound also enhances the rhythmic flow of the phrase. This approach demonstrates phonetic equivalence within communicative translation, allowing the achievement name to be both symbolic and easy to recall.

For “熟门熟路七十难”, the translation “Treaded Tracks” uses “trod” (meaning well-worn or familiar) and “tracks” (representing paths) together to reinforce the notion of expertise and repetition. Additionally, the alliteration of the “t” sound strengthens the rhythm, making the translation more memorable. This translation successfully preserves the sense of familiarity and expertise from the original, while adhering to English linguistic conventions, thus enhancing pragmatic equivalence.

In summary, when translating four-character achievement names through the lens of communicative translation theory, translators must prioritize cultural adaptation. This can be achieved by incorporating familiar allusions or expressions from the target culture to foster cultural recognition. Additionally, employing phonetic techniques such as alliteration and sound repetition can improve the rhythmic and memorable quality of translations, effectively conveying the emotions and imagery of the original text. Moreover, translators should ensure semantic equivalence by carefully selecting vocabulary that captures the subtle nuances of the source material. These strategies

ensure that the translation is faithful to the original while aligning with the linguistic and cultural preferences of the target audience.

4.3 Character Dialogues

In the process of localizing a game, the translation of character dialogues is crucial, as it directly influences players' understanding of the characters and their emotional connection to the game. By applying communicative translation theory, translators can retain the essence of the original dialogue while seamlessly adapting it to the cultural and linguistic nuances of the target language. This helps players better immerse themselves in the game world and enhances the overall gaming experience.

Example 5:

Source Text: 又有一赤脸神仙冷笑道:“他们哪里是冲着蟠桃来,多是想来拜拜玉帝三清,见见西天佛老,难得找个由头上来走动走动。”

Target Text: A red-faced immortal sneered, “It’s not the peaches they seek, but rather to bow before the Jade Emperor and the Three Supremes, and worship the Buddhas of the West. Such assemblies are scarce pretexts for them to curry favor and bask in the company of the divine.”

The phrase “拜拜” is differentiated into “bow before” and “worship,” reflecting varying levels of reverence for different deities. The idiomatic expression “难得找个由头上来走动走动” is translated as “scarce pretexts for them to curry favor and bask in the company of the divine,” maintaining the original meaning while emphasizing the social motives of the immortals. This translation employs techniques of dynamic equivalence and domestication, adjusting sentence structures to align with English expressions and amplifying implicit meanings. From a pragmatic equivalence standpoint, the translation effectively conveys the sarcastic tone of the immortal, ensuring English-speaking readers understand the humor. Semantically, “curry favor” accurately captures the underlying intent, avoiding potential cultural misunderstandings.

Example 6:

Source Text: 王母正色道:“蟠桃宴何等重大,今日设宴正是预演,该走的流程,都老老实实走一遍。”

Target Text: The Queen Mother spoke with solemn dignity, “The Peach Banquet is no trivial matter. Our gathering today is but a prelude, a

rehearsal of the rites and rituals that must be executed with exactness and reverence.”

In this translation, “蟠桃宴何等重大” is rendered as “The Peach Banquet is no trivial matter,” emphasizing the importance of the event. “预演” is translated as “prelude, a rehearsal,” reflecting both the preparatory and ritualistic nature of the gathering. The phrase “老老实实” is translated as “with exactness and reverence,” preserving the formality and gravity of the original. The translation employs amplification and structural adjustments to ensure natural English flow while maintaining the solemn tone, thereby effectively conveying the Queen Mother’s authority and the significance of the occasion.

Example 7:

Source Text: 瘦猴道:“晴雨不出门,寒风会伤身。”

Target Text: The monkey replied, “I’m not fond of the sun, rain, or chill wind.”

The translation of “寒风” as “chill wind” adds literary flair while maintaining the original cold connotation. “会伤身” is paraphrased as “I’m not fond of,” softening the directness of the original statement. This translation employs paraphrasing and simplification, rendering the dialogue more conversational and accessible. Functionally, it conveys the monkey’s dislike of the weather without simply describing conditions. Culturally, this approach avoids overly formal or literal translations, making the dialogue more relatable to the target audience.

Example 8:

Source Text: 清虚巷东头的小道观里,住着个道士。他自称得了海上仙方,是个妙手回春的道医。却说城中的陈老太爷,富比王侯,如今花甲之年,染了重疾,显出下世的光景来。

Target Text: At the eastern end of Qingxu Alley stood a modest Daoist temple, home to a solitary Daoist. This Daoist professed to have discovered the ancient formula for an immortality pill from the sea, earning him a reputation as a miraculous healer. In the city, there was an old man named Mr. Chen, whose wealth rivaled that of nobility. Now in his sixties, he had fallen gravely ill, showing signs of being near the end of his life.

The term “海上仙方” is translated as “the ancient formula for an immortality pill from the sea,” emphasizing its mystical quality. “富比王侯” is translated as “whose wealth rivaled that of nobility,” adapting it to fit English expression. The phrase “下世的光景” is rendered as

“showing signs of being near the end of his life,” maintaining the literary tone of the original while providing clarity. The translation uses amplification and structural adjustments to ensure natural flow in English, enhancing narrative immersion and ensuring the cultural context is accessible to readers.

Example 9:

Source Text: 生前吃人，死后人吃。

Target Text: Consume those who have consumed.

The verb “consume” is used here with a dual meaning, encompassing both the literal act of eating and a metaphorical sense of devouring, effectively capturing both the literal and philosophical connotations of the original. The phrase “those who had consumed” targets the group that engaged in such acts, structuring the relationship passively for dramatic effect. This translation omits certain elements for conciseness while preserving the original’s philosophical and cautionary implications. The use of “consume” enhances both the literal and literary depth of the translation, fitting naturally within English expression.

Example 10:

Source Text: 葫芦不少，朋友难找。

Target Text: Rare is not the gourd but the friend to drink with.

The word “rare” emphasizes scarcity, while “gourd” retains its cultural symbolism. “Friend to drink with” is an adaptation of the original “知己难求,” conveying the core idea that true friendship is hard to find. The translation uses cultural substitution to maintain key symbols while adjusting for English aesthetic preferences. Through inversion, the translation enhances the poetic quality, preserving the original’s meaning while making it more resonant with English readers. The translation maintains the symbolic value of the gourd while fitting into a poetic structure that enhances understanding.

In this part, it is proved that communicative translation theory helps balance pragmatic, functional, and cultural equivalences, ensuring that translations remain faithful to the source material while being culturally appropriate. Precise word choices convey character personalities and tones, while narrative texts benefit from amplification and structural adjustments that improve readability. Cultural

adaptation through symbol replacement and structural reorganization ensures that content remains both culturally relevant and aesthetically appealing. Translations should aim to be concise and impactful, facilitating faster comprehension of the plot and fostering deeper player engagement with the game.

5. Conclusion

This study applied Communicative Translation Theory (CTT) to the localization of *Black Myth: Wukong*, focusing on character names, in-game achievements, and dialogues. The findings indicate that CTT effectively balances cultural authenticity and accessibility, ensuring that translated content remains engaging and meaningful for international players. Character names require a combination of transliteration and adaptation to retain cultural significance. In-game achievements benefit from culturally relevant adaptations that enhance player motivation and recognition. Dialogues require dynamic equivalence to maintain emotional resonance and fluency in the target language. Collectively, these findings bridge theoretical insights with practical strategies, providing valuable guidance for future localization efforts.

However, some translations, despite their cultural adaptation and creativity, fail to fully capture the depth of the original cultural context. For instance, certain dialogues were simplified or omitted to achieve fluency in English, resulting in a loss of cultural nuances. The key challenge lies in balancing the cultural symbols of the source text with the target audience’s understanding. Overemphasizing fluency at times leads to the omission of essential cultural elements. Additionally, some translations struggle to convey the emotional depth and subtleties of the original text, especially when dealing with materials deeply rooted in culture. Achieving true dynamic equivalence in such texts is a complex and challenging process.

To tackle these challenges, similar game localization projects should prioritize cultural adaptability to ensure that the translation preserves the original culture while being comprehensible to the target audience. Flexible translation strategies — such as blending literal translation with cultural substitution — can be effective in conveying both meaning and emotion. Furthermore, localization teams should aim to enhance player engagement by designing

character names, achievements, and dialogues that resonate with the cultural identity of the target audience. As the field of localization continues to evolve, translators must stay abreast of new theories and methods to continually improve their craft.

Nevertheless, this study is limited in scope, as it does not cover all the aspects of game localization and obtain feedback from real players. These require future research to explore further.

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Mediating Global and National Narratives: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of Hong Kong's City Image in *China Daily's* Greater Bay Area Coverage

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Abstract

As a globally strategic Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, Hong Kong occupies a critical juncture in regional economic integration and geopolitical narratives. Yet scholarly attention to its mediated city image remains limited. This study employs corpus-based critical discourse analysis (CB-CDA) to examine 35 articles from *China Daily's* Greater Bay Area (GBA) coverage (April 24, 2023, and December 7, 2024), interrogating how Hong Kong's identity is constructed through economic, administrative, and socio-political lenses. The analysis identifies five dominant thematic frameworks: Economic Hub, Governance and Administration, International Connectivity, Regional Cooperation, and Innovation Ecosystem. Through keyword and collocation networks, findings reveal Hong Kong's dual discursive positioning as a global financial gateway and a synergistic partner in regional integration, underscored by its roles in offshore yuan markets, cross-border talent mobility, and technological innovation. By integrating critical discourse analysis (CDA) with corpus linguistics (CL), this research advances a nuanced understanding of media-driven city image formation, offering insights into the interplay between Hong Kong's historical legacies, China's national strategies, and global economic narratives. The study contributes to policymaking, cultural diplomacy, and sustainable urban development discourses in an era of escalating geopolitical complexity.

Keywords: Hong Kong, city image, media discourse, Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

1. Introduction

Hong Kong's identity as a global financial, logistical, and cultural nexus has been shaped by its dual status as a Chinese SAR and a historically internationalized metropolis. Over the past decade, its strategic significance has been further amplified by the Greater Bay Area

(GBA) initiative, a national policy framework integrating nine Guangdong cities (Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Zhaoqing, Jiangmen) with Hong Kong and Macau. Encompassing 56,000 km² and over 70 million residents, the GBA aims to consolidate regional economic synergies,

enhance infrastructural connectivity, and position itself as a global benchmark for innovation-driven growth. Within this constellation, Hong Kong's role as a mediator between mainland China and global markets renders its city image pivotal to both domestic development agendas and international perceptions of China's geopolitical ambitions.

Despite Hong Kong's socio-economic centrality, scholarly investigations into its mediated representation remain sparse. Existing studies on city image construction have predominantly focused on Western metropolises or mainland Chinese cities, neglecting Hong Kong's unique hybrid identity as a global city navigating "one country, two systems." This lacuna obscures critical insights into how media narratives reconcile Hong Kong's colonial heritage with its evolving role in China's national strategies.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis (CB-CDA) approach to analyze *China Daily's* GBA coverage, interrogating two interrelated questions:

- 1) How does state-aligned media frame Hong Kong's economic, administrative, and international identity within the GBA context?
- 2) What socio-political undercurrents shape these discursive constructions?

The findings hold implications for multiple stakeholders: policymakers can leverage insights to refine cross-border governance models; businesses may identify emerging opportunities in finance, technology, and sustainability-related sectors; cultural institutions gain frameworks to navigate identity preservation amid integration. Furthermore, by elucidating the interplay between media discourse and geopolitical realities, this research enriches theoretical debates on urban branding, sovereignty narratives, and the discursive mediation of global cities in an era of shifting power dynamics.

2. Literature Review

Hong Kong has long been an essential gateway between China and the rest of the world. It is a key player in many aspects, such as global finance, trade, and culture. As one of the world's leading financial centers, it facilitates international fundraising and initial public offerings (IPOs) for companies at home and

abroad. It is also a global trading hub and a crucial point in the supply chains of many industries. Having been a former British colony, Hong Kong maintains a distinctive blend of Western and Eastern culture with thriving film, art, and entertainment industries that have influenced global perceptions of Chinese culture. Consequently, research on the construction of Hong Kong's image holds significant importance. The following is a review of a Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis on the construction of city images.

The importance of image is universally recognized. Image is typically defined as the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person holds about a brand (Kotler, 2001). Within the realm of image research, city image is particularly salient. The concept of "city image" originated from American urban planner Kevin Lynch, who identified elements such as roads, landmarks, districts, and edges as components of a city's image, emphasizing the importance of spatial construction in shaping urban identity. Broadly speaking, city image represents individuals' collective impression of a city, shaped by their emotions, perceptions, visual cues and other sensory stimuli (Crompton, 1979). From a more sophisticated perspective, the city's image is expressed through a variety of elements, including its attractions, transit system, architecture, and more. Additionally, city images can be deconstructed into distinct dimensions, each offering a unique measurement perspective (Roxas et al., 2020). This multifaceted approach provides a deeper and more nuanced insight into the intricate dynamics that shape and influence the perception of a city's identity.

Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis (CB-CDA) is an effective methodological approach for studying city image based on the following points. Firstly, Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis allows researchers to systematically analyze the frequency of particular words and phrases related to a city to find recurrent themes and characteristics connected to the city image. This quantitative analysis of linguistic usage establishes a rigorous foundation for unraveling how public discourse shapes and solidifies specific perceptions of a city. Secondly, critical discourse analysis focuses on the power relations and ideologies embedded in language. It examines how dominant groups—such as governments, businesses, and media outlets—shape public

perceptions of cities through their discursive practices. CB-CDA reveals how these portrayals may perpetuate certain ideologies and, in turn, disadvantage particular communities. By exposing these dynamics, CB-CDA offers a critical lens through which to understand the social and political implications of city image construction.

Several studies have explored city image through various approaches. For instance, one study conducts research on the city image of Panam City based on data collected from walls and structures. This study not only provides valuable insights into the city's heritage but also encourages innovative methods of digital preservation, thereby enhancing the understanding and appreciation of Panam City's historical significance. Another study models the city's image of Granada by means of a semi-structured questionnaire. According to the obtained model, the findings reveal that several factors significantly influence the local residents' perception of their city, including the city's architectural and urban appeal, heritage preservation, pollution issues, environmental commitment and respect by individuals and businesses, social issues, the city's commercial and tourism offerings, the potential of the University of Granada, and the residents' self-perception.

However, despite the abundance of research on city image, relatively few studies have employed CB-CDA as a methodological approach.

To the best of our knowledge, one notable exception is a study that conducts a Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis on Harbin's image in Chinese and Western media quantitatively and qualitatively. The study finds that (1) both media primarily portray Harbin as "the city of ice and snow"; (2) domestic media focus more on promoting tourism to boost economic growth, while foreign media exhibit a more diverse and comprehensive coverage; (3) both media types have limitations that need to be addressed.

Generally, the extant literature predominantly employs content analysis as the methodological approach, with corpus-based critical discourse analysis (CB-CDA) being underutilized. Additionally, the application of CB-CDA has predominantly been confined to cities other than Hong Kong. Furthermore, some studies draw upon theoretical frameworks from sociology or

journalism, which may not fully capture the unique nuances of city image construction in the context of Hong Kong. Building on the identified gaps in the literature, this study seeks to address them by utilizing CB-CDA to analyze Hong Kong's city image as represented in the news coverage of *China Daily*. This methodological framework aims to yield a more sophisticated and nuanced comprehension of the construction and dissemination of Hong Kong's image through media discourse, offering significant contributions to the advancement of city image research.

3. The Synergy of Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics

The synergy between Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL) is of paramount importance. The following sections will provide a concise overview of the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, focusing on both CDA and CL.

Numerous prominent theorists have contributed to CDA, widely recognized as a framework for examining the connection between language use and its social context. It specifically examines how "authority, dominance, and social inequality are constructed, sustained, reproduced and resisted in the discourse or written and spoken words" (Amoussou & Allagbe 2018, p. 13). This approach concentrates on analyzing social issues and the interactions between discourse and other social components, such as power relations, ideologies, institutions, and social identities. Historically, critical language research has been primarily concerned with ideology and power. Van Dijk, for example, argued that the foundation of CDA was the study of ideology since "people acquire, express and reproduce their ideologies by text or talk" (Abdulzahra & Almeshmawi 2018, p. 274). Fairclough (2010) further suggests that ideology can extend to power battles in society, where several ideologies compete for supremacy. According to Zhang (2014), language creates a "constructed" reality and represents a world as perceived by the ideological needs of special groups. From this vantage point, CDA is fundamentally a socially oriented approach to discourse analysis. Generally speaking, most CDA models share three major themes: "the concept of power," "the concept of history," and "the concept of ideology" (Hossain 2022, p. 439). In other words, CDA provides a useful opportunity to uncover hidden realities,

including power, ideology, persuasive strategies, and linguistic devices.

CL is the study of natural language through real-world language usage using a corpus—a sizable collection of texts that are representative of a specific variety of languages and in a machine-readable format (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). A corpus offers enough databases of naturally occurring discourse to allow for empirical evaluations of authentic language usage patterns, according to Biber et al. (1994). When paired with computational tools, the corpus-based approach enables analyses of a scope that would not be possible otherwise. According to McEnery and Gabrielatos (2006), the corpus-based approach places more emphasis on quantitative data, such as frequency counts and statistical measurements, which allow for research replication and confirm the statistical validity of analytical conclusions. These advantages highlight how the corpus-based approach leverages real-world language data, performs quantitative analysis, and provides reliable linguistic evidence to identify compelling and recurring linguistic patterns.

However, both CL and CDA have limitations that can be addressed through their integration. One primary criticism of the corpus-based approach is its failure to account for the contextual elements of the text. Corpus data is often isolated from the communicative environment in which it was generated, leaving the background entirely behind, as noted by Widdowson (1998). Conversely, CDA is frequently criticized for its lack of representativeness due to its reliance on small-scale data. According to Stubbs (1997), the carefully selected text samples in CDA studies are insufficiently representative. Therefore, a small-scale CDA investigation can overlook infrequent patterns that indicate minority discourses and fail to detect frequent language patterns that represent powerful discourses (Baker et al., 2008).

Integrating CL and CDA enables researchers to capitalize on their advantages while mitigating their limitations, creating a more solid methodological framework to address issues concerning the discursive representation of social injustices and identify new topics of public discourse for a more methodical examination (Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019). CL processes and methodologies can quantify

discourse phenomena already identified by CDA, while corpus-based CDA can systematically validate analytical results by providing empirical support.

This study aims to reveal a deeper understanding of how Hong Kong's image is constructed and disseminated through media discourse. By leveraging the synergistic methodological approach of CL and CDA, this study has the potential to advance the field of city image studies.

4. Data and Methodology

This study intends to answer two specific questions: (1) What thematic elements are prevalent in the news coverage of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) in *China Daily*? (2) In what social and political contexts is Hong Kong's city image constructed within the news coverage of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) in *China Daily*?

The first stage was to create the research corpus using the search phrase Hong Kong to retrieve relevant news articles from the database Factiva. The time frame for the data is between April 24, 2023 and December 7, 2024, based on the following considerations. Firstly, *Guidelines for Promoting the Development of Standards* in the GBA were released on April 24, 2023, marking a milestone in regional integration, emphasizing Hong Kong's alignment with mainland China and Macao in building a world-class bay area. Meanwhile, December 7, 2024 was selected as the endpoint to capture the most recent data available. After manually removing extraneous metadata (e.g., publication dates, bylines, copyright notices), the Hong Kong Corpus of *China Daily* (HKCCD) was obtained, incorporating 35 articles and 27070 tokens. The GBA was selected for extended analysis due to its prominence in *China Daily's* coverage and its status as one of China's most dynamic regions.

The second stage was to generate a summary of the corpus and to check whether Hong Kong is represented as a keyword in the corpus. By comparing it with the BNC2014 Baby+, a generic corpus in Antconc3.5.9w containing 5,024,072 tokens, a keyword list was produced. #AntConc, a free corpus retrieval tool, was created by Professor Laurence Anthony of Waseda University in Japan to support data-driven learning and corpus linguistics research.

Keywords are words that have a statistically

higher relative frequency of occurrence in one corpus than in another (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013, 72). Three strategies were implemented to ensure their distinctiveness in extracting keywords of the HKCCD: keyness, relative frequency, and contextual diversity (Subtirelu & Baker 2018, 113). Calculating keyness value can be validated through the following procedures: construct a target corpus and a reference corpus and set frequency and coverage thresholds, such as at least 100 occurrences per million words and coverage of no less than 20%. Utilize programs such as AntConc to determine the keyness values, then filter terms with a significance level of $p < 0.001$ (Log-Likelihood > 10.83) using Log-Likelihood or other statistical techniques. Display the keyness, frequency, and coverage numbers in a table and explain the distribution and importance of the keywords in light of the study's goals.

To answer the first question, the third step was to create a Hong Kong collocation network and examine its respective constructions. Collocation network can demonstrate the linguistic construction of specific concepts or topics.

Brezina, McEnery, and Wattam (2015) contend that rather than being studied separately, collocates should be considered as a component of more extensive collocation networks that are accessible and observable with #AntConc once the collocation parameters notation (CPN) is set. Hong Kong was subjected to further collocation and concordance analyses.

To answer the second question, the study analyzes the context, collocation networks, and content of the relevant reports in detail, seeking to reveal how Hong Kong's city image is constructed in social contexts, such as economic and cultural interactions, and political contexts, including the "One Country, Two Systems" framework and policy initiatives. The study aims to illuminate how *China Daily* shapes Hong Kong's city image and provide new perspectives on Hong Kong's positioning within the GBA's development.

Figure 1 presents a critical discourse analysis framework that emphasizes thematic aspects, keyword identification, collocation networks, and macro-contextual analyses to analyze Hong Kong's city image building in *China Daily*'s GBA coverage.

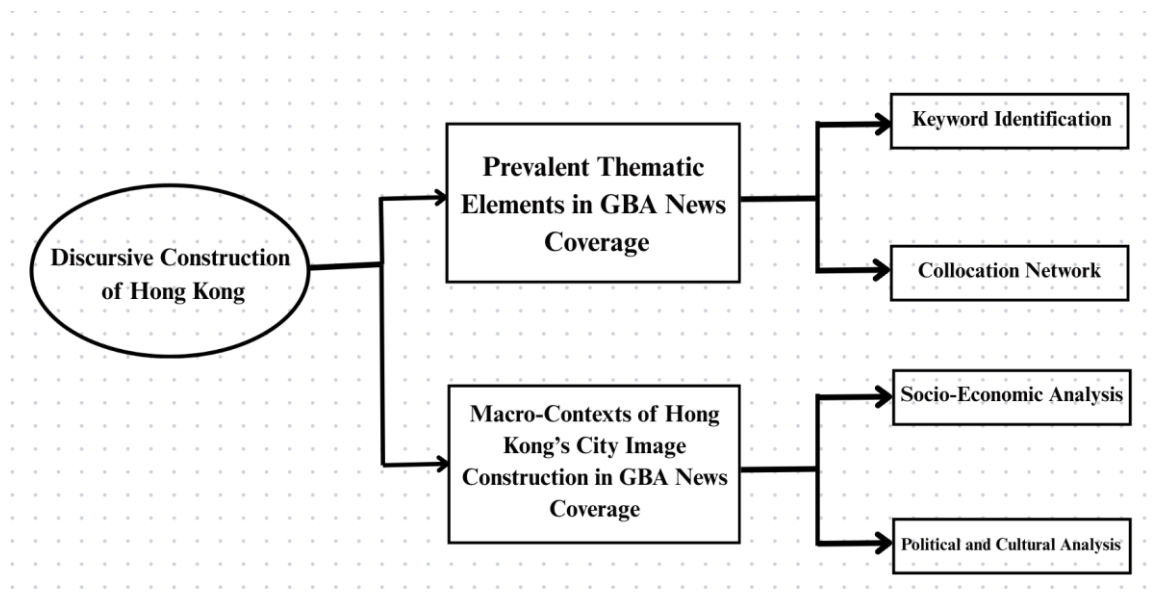


Figure 1.

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Keyword Analysis

This study employs corpus-based critical discourse analysis (CB-CDA) to investigate the construction of Hong Kong's city image within *China Daily*'s coverage of the Greater Bay Area

(GBA). Utilizing AntConc for keyword extraction and collocational analysis, five statistically salient thematic categories emerged from the corpus: Economic Hub, Governance and Administration, International Connectivity, Regional Cooperation, and Innovation Ecosystem. These themes, derived through

corpus-driven methods, reflect lexical and semantic patterns that collectively shape Hong Kong's discursive representation. Below, we explicate these findings with attention to corpus

linguistic principles, including keyword keyness, collocational networks, and semantic prosody, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Top 50 Lexical Keywords in the Corpus

Rank	Keyword	Relative frequency in HKCCD	Relative frequency in BNC2014 Baby+	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
1	Hong Kong	494	0	2501.334	0.039
2	GBA	215	0	1086.408	0.017
3	Guangdong	119	0	600.892	0.009
4	Macao	109	0	550.356	0.009
5	Mainland	112	5	525.039	0.009
6	Innovation	93	1	458.606	0.007
7	Bay	101	8	454.078	0.008
8	Development	132	69	419.524	0.010
9	Cooperation	77	0	388.693	0.006
10	China	92	24	350.187	0.007
11	Shenzhen	64	0	323.039	0.005
12	Global	75	10	318.684	0.006
13	Said	143	172	316.826	0.011
14	Region	85	37	285.550	0.007
15	Chinese	64	13	255.288	0.005
16	Greater	84	52	251.788	0.007
17	Area	109	133	239.422	0.009
18	Administrative	50	2	235.728	0.004
19	Cities	76	43	235.119	0.006
20	Financial	73	43	222.703	0.006
21	Opportunities	52	11	205.931	0.004
22	Talent	46	4	204.945	0.004
23	SAR	40	0	201.864	0.003
24	Yuan	39	0	196.816	0.003
25	Government	68	56	181.847	0.005
26	International	64	58	163.887	0.005
27	Province	34	1	162.662	0.003
28	Economic	64	61	160.006	0.005
29	Technology	71	85	157.571	0.006
30	Enterprises	35	3	156.135	0.003
31	Center	30	0	151.387	0.002
32	Ho	30	0	151.387	0.002
33	Cross	45	20	150.204	0.004
34	Promote	32	2	146.603	0.003
35	Hub	29	0	146.340	0.002

36	Logistics	29	0	146.340	0.002
37	City	75	112	145.413	0.006
38	BRI	28	0	141.292	0.002
39	Guangzhou	28	0	141.292	0.002
40	Percent	39	15	135.511	0.003
41	And	1009	7734	134.535	0.060
42	Billion	30	3	131.782	0.002
43	Integration	35	10	130.622	0.003
44	Projects	34	9	128.960	0.003
45	Technological	32	7	125.943	0.003
46	Growth	37	18	120.182	0.003
47	Border	37	19	118.152	0.003
48	Green	43	36	114.126	0.003
49	Collaboration	24	1	112.874	0.002
50	Plan	35	18	111.709	0.003

5.1.1 Economic Hub: Anchoring Global and Regional Financial Networks

The prominence of keywords such as “Financial,” “Opportunities,” “Yuan,” and “Economic” underscores Hong Kong’s depiction as a preeminent global financial center. Positioned at the intersection of international markets and the GBA’s economic corridor, Hong Kong serves as a critical conduit for foreign and domestic capital, particularly in technology, finance, and real estate sectors. Its strategic linkages with Shenzhen and Guangzhou amplify its role in bolstering China’s technological and economic ascendancy. Notably, Hong Kong’s leadership in offshore yuan trading and yuan-denominated financial products aligns with China’s broader agenda to internationalize its currency. This dual function—bridging mainland markets with global financial systems—cements Hong Kong’s indispensability to both regional development and international economic integration.

5.1.2 Governance and Administration: Balancing Autonomy and Integration

Keywords “Government,” “Administrative,” and “SAR” highlight Hong Kong’s unique governance model under the “one country, two systems” framework. As a Special Administrative Region (SAR), Hong Kong maintains a distinct juridical system and administrative autonomy while contributing to national agendas such as the GBA initiative. This

governance structure enables the city to preserve its institutional identity—a cornerstone of its appeal to international investors—while synchronizing policies with mainland counterparts to foster regional cohesion. The SAR government’s role in navigating this equilibrium ensures Hong Kong remains a stable, legally predictable hub for global commerce.

5.1.3 International Connectivity: Bridging Global Networks

Hong Kong’s identity as a global metropolis is reinforced by keywords like “integration,” “Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),” “Global,” and “cross-border.” Its integration into the BRI positions it as a linchpin in China’s infrastructure and trade networks, leveraging its cosmopolitan demographics, multilingual workforce, and logistical infrastructure. The city’s “cross-border” economic dynamics—facilitating seamless flows of capital, talent, and goods between mainland China and global markets—exemplify its role as a transnational intermediary. This duality of local specificity and global integration is central to its portrayal as a node of international exchange.

5.1.4 Regional Cooperation: Synergizing the Greater Bay Area

Hong Kong’s collaborative role within the GBA is emphasized through narratives of cross-border partnership. With a collective GDP exceeding \$1.6 trillion, the GBA harnesses Hong

Kong's financial expertise, Macao's tourism prominence, and Guangdong's manufacturing prowess. Keywords such as "Cooperation" and contextual references to joint ventures in finance, technology, and sustainable development illustrate Hong Kong's function as a unifier, driving regional innovation while mitigating administrative and regulatory barriers. This cooperative paradigm amplifies the GBA's competitiveness on the global stage.

5.1.5 Innovation Ecosystem: Cultivating Talent and Technology

The keywords "innovation," "technology," "enterprises," "development," and "talent" delineate Hong Kong's emergence as an innovation powerhouse. Positioned at the forefront of China's technological strategy, the city attracts global talent through initiatives in fintech, biotechnology, and green energy. Its robust academic institutions, venture capital networks, and policy incentives for startups underscore its capacity to translate research into market-driven solutions. By fostering synergies between mainland industries and international R&D trends, Hong Kong solidifies its role as a crucible of next-generation innovation.

5.2 Collocation and Concordance Analysis

5.2.1 Collocation Patterns: Reinforcing Hong Kong's Multidimensional Identity

The collocation analysis of node words within the *China Daily* corpus elucidates Hong Kong's discursive positioning in relation to the Greater Bay Area (GBA). High frequency collocates such as "Macao" and "Guangdong" underscore the tripartite synergy among these regions, emphasizing Hong Kong's role as a collaborative anchor within the GBA framework. Terms like "greater," "administrative," and "special" accentuate Hong Kong's dual identity as both a distinctive SAR and an integrated contributor to national strategies. Additionally, collocates such as "university" and "polytechnic" foreground the centrality of academic institutions in shaping Hong Kong's socio-economic and intellectual profile, reflecting its interconnectedness with neighboring regions through educational, political, and geographic ties.

5.2.2 Concordance Analysis of "University": Academic Collaboration and Global Prestige

A close examination of concordance lines for "university" reveals four discursive strands that construct Hong Kong's image as a hub of

academic excellence and cross-regional cooperation:

Hong Kong's universities are spearheading cross-border academic integration through strategic establishment of satellite campuses across the GBA. The recurrent mention of institutions such as "City University of Hong Kong (Dongguan)," "University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen)," and "Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Foshan)" highlights the city's proactive engagement in establishing satellite campuses across the GBA. This institutional expansion signifies Hong Kong's strategic role in harmonizing educational resources, fostering interdisciplinary research, and cultivating a unified talent pool for regional innovation. Such partnerships exemplify the city's function as a catalyst for academic integration, bridging pedagogical methodologies between Hong Kong and mainland China.

Hong Kong's higher education institutions assert global academic prestige through their consistent recognition in international university rankings. References to global rankings—such as the "University of Hong Kong at 67th place" and the "Chinese University of Hong Kong at 83rd"—position Hong Kong as a leader in global higher education. These accolades underscore the international competitiveness of its universities, particularly in research output and academic innovation. By emphasizing this recognition, *China Daily* reinforces Hong Kong's credibility as a knowledge economy cornerstone, aligning its scholarly achievements with China's broader ambitions to ascend global innovation indices.

The symbolic relationship between academia and industry positions Hong Kong as nexus for talent development and interdisciplinary innovation. Case studies, such as the collaboration between Stan Ho Ho-ming (academic dean at the University of Hong Kong) and GBA cities in green finance, illustrate Hong Kong's capacity to merge academic expertise with industrial demands. The city's education system is framed as a dynamic ecosystem that attracts global talent, offering flexible curricula and interdisciplinary programs in emerging fields like sustainability, fintech, and business analytics. This narrative positions Hong Kong as an incubator for professionals capable of driving forward both regional development and global trends.

Hong Kong's universities facilitate career pathways that enhance regional mobility and socio-economic integration within the GBA. Examples like "Yip," a graduate of Hong Kong Polytechnic University working in Guangzhou, demonstrate the city's role as a gateway to GBA career opportunities. The discourse emphasizes seamless labor mobility, youth employability, and cross-border professional networks, framing Hong Kong's graduates as key actors in the GBA's socio-economic integration. This aligns with broader narratives of Hong Kong as a conduit for talent circulation, linking local education outcomes to regional economic vitality.

5.3 Synthesis: Constructing a Cohesive Regional and Global Image

The collocation and concordance analyses collectively portray Hong Kong as a multifaceted nexus within *China Daily's* GBA discourse. The city is depicted as: (1) a collaborative academic hub, leveraging cross-border university partnerships to unify regional educational standards; (2) a globally competitive intellectual center, validated by international rankings and research excellence; (3) a talent incubator, bridging academic training with industrial innovation and green development agendas; (4) a career springboard, facilitating youth mobility across the GBA's integrated labor market.

These narratives consistently align with the themes identified in the keyword analysis (e.g., "Innovation," "Cooperation," "International"), reinforcing Hong Kong's dual identity as both a regional unifier and a global intermediary. *China Daily* strategically emphasizes cross-border synergies, talent fluidity, and institutional prestige to frame Hong Kong as indispensable to China's geopolitical vision—a city that harmonizes its own historical global stature with China's contemporary national priorities.

6. Discussion: Socio-Political Underpinnings of Hong Kong's Image Construction

The discursive portrayal of Hong Kong in *China Daily's* GBA coverage—emphasizing its roles as an economic hub, administrative entity, international intermediary, cooperative partner, and innovation engine—is inextricably tied to broader socio-political dynamics. These include regional integration agendas, historical legacies, governance narratives, and China's geopolitical strategies. This section contextualizes the

identified themes within their socio-political frameworks to elucidate why Hong Kong is represented through this multifaceted lens.

6.1 Economic Centrality: Regional Synergy and Institutional Legacies

Hong Kong's depiction as an economic center derives from its dual function as a "super-connector" and "value-added mediator" within the GBA. This role is anchored in three socio-political factors.

GBA's complementary economic model plays a vital role. The "front-end research, back-end production" framework—where Hong Kong leads in financial services while mainland cities like Shenzhen drive technological R&D—reflects China's strategy to leverage comparative regional advantages. This symbiotic relationship amplifies the GBA's global competitiveness, positioning Hong Kong as a gateway for international capital (e.g., offshore RMB trading) while mainland hubs industrialize innovations.

Institutional trust contributes to Hong Kong's global positioning. Specifically, its common-law system, intellectual property protections, and financial regulatory standards—vestiges of its colonial history—remain pivotal in attracting foreign investment. These institutional strengths are strategically preserved under the "one country, two systems" (OCTS) principle, enabling Hong Kong to serve as a globally recognized interface for China's economic liberalization.

6.2 Cooperation and Innovation: Talent Mobility and Policy-Driven Integration

The emphasis on cross-border collaboration and innovation reflects China's broader agenda to harmonize the GBA into a cohesive socio-economic entity. Hong Kong's city image as cooperative and innovative is deeply tied to the cross-border talent mobility, educational collaboration and social integration.

Collaboration and creation are deeply rooted in youth employment schemes and talented circulation. Policies such as the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme institutionalize talent mobility, fostering a shared regional identity among younger generations. By encouraging Hong Kong graduates to work in mainland cities (e.g., Yip's transition to Guangzhou), these initiatives mitigate cultural and institutional disparities, aligning with the central government's vision of "social

integration through economic participation.”

Another central element of Hong Kong's cooperative role is the academic expansion as soft power. The establishment of Hong Kong university campuses in Dongguan, Shenzhen, and Foshan transcends educational collaboration; it serves as a mechanism to disseminate pedagogical norms and cultural values across the GBA. This soft-power strategy not only enhances regional innovation capacity but also subtly integrates Hong Kong's academic institutions into national development narratives.

The employment opportunity is also worth mentioning. The skyrocketing number of Hong Kong graduates choosing to pursue employment opportunities in cities like Guangzhou reflects the evolving discourse on cross-border talent flow within the GBA. This phenomenon contributes to the “Two Systems” differences by offering professionals the opportunity to bridge the gap between Hong Kong's international approach and mainland China's rapidly developing economy. The synergy enhances both regions' competitiveness, creating a constant flow of ideas, skills, and opportunities that contribute to the region's overall innovative capacity.

6.3 International Identity: Historical Legacies and Geopolitical Re-Branding

Hong Kong's city image is shaped by a tension between its colonial past and its recalibrated role under China's geopolitical ambitions.

Hong Kong's representation should be interpreted on the basis of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as recontextualization. Historically framed as a “gateway to Asia,” Hong Kong's colonial-era infrastructure and global networks are repurposed under the BRI to advance China's transcontinental trade and investment goals. *China Daily* discursively transforms Hong Kong's historical ties with the West from a legacy of foreign influence into an asset for China's contemporary global outreach.

The juxtaposition of the image of international finance hub with the “patriot governance” discourse reflects a strategic balancing act. While the city's global connectivity is celebrated, its governance is framed as inseparable from national loyalty, ensuring its internationalism operates within the boundaries of Chinese sovereignty. This narrative reconciles Hong Kong's global identity with the Communist

Party's emphasis on political conformity, mitigating perceptions of ideological dissonance.

6.4 Administrative Framing: Depoliticization and Institutional Harmonization

The portrayal of Hong Kong as an efficient administrative region within the GBA aligns with China's efforts to depoliticize its governance challenges.

While the “One Country, Two Systems” (OCTS) principle originally emphasized Hong Kong's autonomy, the GBA initiative subtly recalibrates this framework by prioritizing institutional harmonization. Infrastructure projects (e.g., Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge), regulatory alignments, and shared market protocols reduce systemic disparities, fostering a de facto integration that complements—rather than contests—centralized governance.

Moreover, the administrative framing of Hong Kong also contributes to the broader objective of portraying the city's governance as pragmatic and efficient, rather than politically charged. By foregrounding administrative efficiency (e.g., streamlined customs procedures, cross-border legal arbitration), *China Daily* shifts focus away from political tensions (e.g., 2019 protests) toward Hong Kong's functional contributions to national development. This depoliticized framing reinforces the perception of Hong Kong as a “problem-solving partner” within the GBA, aligning with Beijing's preference for technocratic governance over democratic deliberation.

7. Conclusion

This study employed CB-CDA to examine how Hong Kong's city image is constructed within *China Daily's* coverage of the GBA. The findings reveal five dominant representations: Economic Hub, Governance and Administration, International Connectivity, Regional Cooperation, and Innovation Ecosystem. The reason behind the image construction lies in Hong Kong's role as a “super-connector” which highlights Hong Kong's financial leadership, talent mobility, and academic expansion. A pragmatic governance narrative reinforces administrative efficiency and depoliticization, positioning Hong Kong as both a globalized city and a key player in China's national development agenda. There are various ramifications for the study's conclusions. The information can be used by policymakers to

improve Hong Kong's participation in international governance and economic integration. Businesses can find investment opportunities in industries like finance, technology, and regional development by analyzing how Hong Kong is portrayed in the media. Cultural organizations and educators can also use these insights to help them navigate Hong Kong's changing identity in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. Additionally, the study adds to broader theoretical debates about media discourse, urban branding, and the sociopolitical mediation of global cities. Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. Its exclusive reliance on *China Daily*—a state-affiliated outlet—may foreground narratives aligned with national policy, potentially marginalizing alternative perspectives from independent Hong Kong or international media. Furthermore, while the corpus-based approach offers quantitative rigor, it does not account for audience interpretation of these narratives. Future studies could address these gaps by integrating cross-media comparisons to capture discursive diversity, as well as qualitative methods such as sentiment analysis or audience interviews to explore reception and perception. Such multidisciplinary approaches would deepen the understanding of how media constructions interact with public discourse, ultimately offering a more nuanced portrayal of Hong Kong's positioning within the GBA and global arenas.

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Cross-Cultural Attitude Analysis in Media Discourse of Trump's Presidential Victory: A Comparative Study of British, American, and Indian Written Reports

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Abstract

In today's globalized media landscape, the representation of political events reflects significant cultural and ideological differences, shaping public perceptions across contexts. While Martin and White's appraisal theory within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has been extensively applied to spoken discourse, its use in analyzing written texts, particularly in cross-cultural comparisons, remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by employing the appraisal framework to analyze attitudinal resources in media reports on Donald Trump's presidential victory. Using UAM CorpusTool, the analysis examines variations in attitude types (affect, judgment, appreciation), polarity, explicitness, appraiser, and appraised elements across reports from *The Economist* (UK), *AP News* (US), and *Colombo Gazette* (India). Attitude resources and chi-square tests reveal significant cross-cultural differences in evaluative strategies: *The Economist* adopts critical judgment reflecting European liberal values, *Colombo Gazette* emphasizes regional priorities with pragmatic optimism, and *AP News* maintains neutrality consistent with American journalistic norms. The findings contribute to understanding how cultural and ideological contexts shape media discourse, offering insights into the interplay of language, ideology, and political narratives.

Keywords: appraisal analysis, attitude resources, written reports, political narratives

1. Introduction

The globalized nature of today's media landscape ensures that political events are not merely disseminated across borders but are also interpreted and framed in ways that reflect underlying cultural and national values (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016). Media representations of political events, such as presidential victories, serve as powerful tools in shaping public perceptions and constructing

ideological narratives (Deka et al., 2023; Kuang & Wang, 2020; Nagai et al., 2022). Despite the critical role of media discourse in influencing political ideologies, its linguistic dimensions, particularly the evaluative resources that underpin these representations, remain insufficiently explored in cross-cultural contexts.

Within the framework of SFL, language is understood as fulfilling both reflective and interpersonal functions, enabling the expression

of attitudes, evaluations, and social relationships (Halliday, 2014). Appraisal theory, a subsystem of SFL developed by Martin and White (2005), provides a robust analytical framework for examining how evaluative meanings are communicated in discourse. This theory foregrounds the linguistic mechanisms through which feelings, attitudes, and values are negotiated, focusing specifically on the subsystem of attitude. The attitude subsystem categorizes evaluative meanings into three domains: affect (emotions), judgement (ethics), and appreciation (aesthetics). These categories map the evaluative stances that speakers and writers adopt toward people, behaviors, and events.

In addition, political discourse, as a prominent domain of societal interaction, is intrinsically tied to the strategic use of language. It plays a central role in constructing authority, legitimacy, and consensus (Chilton, 2004). As Ross and Caldwell (2020) note, appraisal resources are particularly prevalent in political discourse, especially during campaigns, debates, and interviews. Van Dijk (1997) emphasizes that political discourse extends beyond the mere exchange of information to encompass the negotiation of political values and attitudes, often reflecting societal concerns such as justice, equality, and solidarity. Political actors strategically deploy evaluative language to legitimize their positions, delegitimize opponents, and sway public opinion (Chilton, 2004).

Although extensive research has examined appraisal resources in Western political discourse, primarily in campaign speeches and debates (e.g., Siyou & Zhongwen, 2018; Ross & Caldwell, 2020; Woods et al., 2023), there remains a notable gap in the cross-cultural analysis of media discourse. Specifically, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how evaluative language is employed by media outlets across different cultural and national contexts to frame significant political events, such as presidential elections. This gap is particularly evident in studies addressing media representations of Donald Trump's presidential victory, which offer a unique lens to examine the intersection of language, ideology, and media narratives.

To address this gap, the present study employs the appraisal framework within SFL to investigate the use of attitude resources in

media coverage of Donald Trump's presidential victory. Drawing on reports from *The Economist* (UK), *AP News* (US), and *Colombo Gazette* (India), this study explores variations in the types of attitude (affect, judgement, appreciation), polarity, explicitness, and appraiser-appraised relationships. UAM CorpusTool is utilized for linguistic analysis, and chi-square tests are employed to identify statistically significant differences in the distribution of linguistic resources among the three media sources.

This study aims to advance the understanding of how evaluative language is strategically employed in written reports to both reflect and construct ideological perspectives. By examining cross-cultural and linguistic variations in the framing of political events, this research contributes to the growing body of work in political discourse analysis, particularly within the theoretical framework of appraisal. Through the lens of attitudinal resources, it reveals how cultural and ideological influences shape media narratives, offering new insights into the complex interplay between language, ideology, and media practices in a globalized context. These findings underscore the importance of adopting integrated linguistic and cultural approaches in media studies, providing a foundation for more nuanced and context-sensitive analyses of political discourse and its sociopolitical implications.

2. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for this study draws on Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory within the broader context of Halliday's (2014) SFL, with a focus on the attitude system. This study seeks to explore the ways in which attitudes, expressed through linguistic resources, reflect cultural and ideological differences across media coverage of Donald Trump's presidential victory. The framework centers on three key components: attitude types, polarity, and explicitness, as well as the relationships between the appraiser and the appraised. These components allow for a nuanced analysis of media discourse across three culturally distinct sources: *The Economist* (UK), *AP News* (US), and *Colombo Gazette* (India).

2.1 Attitude Types

Attitude is a critical element in the appraisal framework, and it is classified into three sub-systems: affect, judgement, and appreciation. These sub-systems capture

different aspects of subjective evaluation. Firstly, affect pertains to emotional responses, including positive and negative feelings such as happiness, security, or satisfaction (Martin & White, 2005). Secondly, judgement reflects ethical evaluations of behavior and character, with dimensions such as normality, capacity, tenacity (social esteem), and veracity, propriety (social sanction) (Martin & White, 2005). Thirdly, appreciation focuses on the aesthetic evaluation of things, including reactions to their composition, value, and social worth (Martin & Rose, 2007).

2.2 Polarity

Attitude polarity refers to the positive or negative orientation expressed within the discourse (Martin & White, 2005). This study classifies attitudes into three categories: positive, negative, and ambiguous. Positive and negative attitudes are indicative of approval or disapproval, while ambiguous attitudes reflect a neutral stance or uncertainty. By analyzing the polarity of attitudes, the study identifies how different media outlets shape the public discourse surrounding Trump's victory through the deployment of either affirming or dissenting evaluations.

2.3 Explicitness

Attitudes are also classified based on how explicitly they are expressed within the text. Inscribed attitudes are those that are directly and overtly realized through attitudinal lexis that convey clear positive or negative evaluations (Caldwell, 2009; Matthiessen et al., 2010). Invoked attitudes, on the other hand, are more subtle and indirect, requiring an understanding of the broader context or the ideological background of the discourse (Martin, 2003). Analyzing invoked attitudes allows for the exploration of how implicit cultural and ideological perspectives are communicated through language.

2.4 Appraiser and Appraised

The analysis also distinguishes between the appraiser and the appraised within the attitude framework. The appraiser is the entity responsible for expressing an attitude, while the appraised is the target of the evaluation (Martin & White, 2005). This study examines whether the attitudes expressed in the media reports are attributed to the writer-appraiser (i.e., the author or media outlet) or to an other-appraiser (external sources or individuals). Additionally, it considers whether the evaluation targets Trump,

Trump's victory, or other-appraised (external entities such as politicians, social groups, or events). This distinction provides insight into how media outlets position themselves in relation to the subjects of their reporting, revealing underlying biases or ideological alignments.

By utilizing this framework, the study aims to explore the complex interplay between language, ideology, and culture in the portrayal of political events, contributing to the broader field of media discourse analysis. The framework not only allows for the examination of the linguistic forms used but also sheds light on the underlying cultural and ideological forces shaping media representations. This approach is informed by contemporary research on cross-cultural discourse analysis (e.g., Ross & Caldwell, 2020; Caldwell, 2009) and ensures that the findings are grounded in a theoretically rigorous and methodologically sound framework.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Appraisal Theory in SFL

Appraisal theory, a central component of SFL, examines how language is employed to express evaluations, attitudes, and emotions within discourse. Developed by Martin and White (2005), appraisal theory has proven instrumental in the analysis of evaluative meanings, particularly in media texts. Recent studies have expanded the application of appraisal theory to complex discourse structures (Liu et al., 2022), showcasing its utility in uncovering implicit meanings embedded within political discourse. Similarly, Liu et al. (2023) highlight the framework's versatility in examining ideological positioning in public narratives, emphasizing its suitability for cross-cultural media studies.

Historically, research utilizing appraisal theory has largely focused on spoken corpora, as evidenced by studies on political speeches (Trnavac & Pöldvere, 2024; Zeng & Zhu, 2024). However, its application to written discourse, particularly in media contexts, has remained relatively underexplored. Given the influential role of written media in shaping public perceptions of political events, this lacuna in research warrants attention. By employing appraisal theory to analyze evaluative mechanisms in diverse cultural settings, the current study seeks to address this gap, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive

understanding of evaluative language in media discourse.

3.2 Media Ideology and Cultural Framing

Media discourse functions as both a reflection of cultural values and a vehicle for reinforcing ideological perspectives, shaping public perceptions and legitimizing dominant narratives. Hall (1997) argued that media representations are culturally mediated, constructing reality through codes and conventions rooted in specific ideological frameworks. These frameworks influence the framing of political events, with variations often aligning with national ideologies and socio-political priorities.

Recent studies have highlighted how media outlets adapt their narratives to resonate with local audiences and cultural expectations. For example, research on media framing and cultural identity (Kuang & Wang, 2020; Lyu & Takikawa, 2022; Xu et al., 2023; Zeng & Zhu, 2024) reveals that the presentation of political events is often tailored to align with regional interests and values. This adaptation underscores the role of media in bridging cultural contexts while maintaining ideological coherence, particularly in politically charged reporting.

3.3 Cross-Cultural Variations in Media Discourse

Cross-cultural studies provide a critical lens for examining how cultural and ideological differences shape linguistic practices in media discourse. Drawing on appraisal theory, research has revealed significant divergences in evaluative strategies used in media coverage of political and global events. For instance, studies comparing Chinese and American media representations (Mohammed, 2024) show how differing cultural paradigms influence the use of evaluative language and narrative structures. Similarly, analyses of environmental crises reveal stark contrasts in linguistic practices between Japanese and American media (Luo et al., 2023), reflecting broader cultural narratives that shape evaluative choices.

While much of the existing literature has focused on thematic areas such as environmental and economic issues (Scammell & Bielsa, 2022), political reporting—especially in the context of high-stakes events like presidential elections—remains underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study applies appraisal theory to examine cross-cultural

media coverage of Donald Trump's presidential victory. By analyzing evaluative resources in reports from *The Economist* (UK), *AP News* (US), and *Colombo Gazette* (India), this research aims to illuminate how linguistic strategies and ideological framings vary across cultural contexts. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and ideology in shaping media narratives.

3.4 Research Gaps and the Significance of the Present Study

Despite the growing body of literature on appraisal theory and cross-cultural media discourse, several critical gaps persist. First, much of the existing research has focused on spoken corpora or single-language contexts, leaving the comparative analysis of written texts in multilingual, cross-cultural settings relatively underexplored. Second, while studies have examined linguistic styles in political discourse (e.g., Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2019; Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2024), they have paid limited attention to the evaluative mechanisms that underlie media narratives. Third, insufficient emphasis has been placed on understanding how cultural and ideological frameworks shape evaluative language in written texts about politics.

By addressing these identified gaps, the present study seeks to make a significant contribution to the fields of political discourse analysis, media discourse, and linguistics. Specifically, the research investigates the variations in attitude resources, polarity, and the relationships between the appraiser and the appraised within cross-cultural media texts. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the differences in the distribution of attitude types (affect, judgment, and appreciation) across the three media sources?
- 2) How do variations in attitude polarity, explicitness, and the relationships between the appraiser and the appraised manifest across these reports?
- 3) In what ways do these differences reflect underlying cultural and ideological perspectives in the media?

4. Method

4.1 Corpus Description

This study examines linguistic and cultural

variations in media coverage of Donald Trump’s presidential victory by analyzing written reports from three prominent media outlets: *The Economist* (UK), *AP News* (US), and *Colombo Gazette* (India). These media sources were purposefully selected to capture diverse national perspectives on the same political event, providing valuable insights into how different cultural and ideological contexts shape the framing of a controversial political figure’s success. The inclusion of these outlets facilitates a comparative understanding of political narratives across cultures, highlighting the media’s role in constructing public opinion and reinforcing political ideologies.

The selection of these three media outlets reflects their distinctive national and cultural orientations. *The Economist*, a British weekly magazine renowned for its analytical depth and

global outlook, represents a predominantly European perspective on international political developments. *AP News*, a major American wire service, is recognized for its adherence to objective reporting and offers a lens into American political discourse surrounding the presidential election. Meanwhile, *Colombo Gazette*, a Sri Lankan publication with significant readership in India, provides a unique regional perspective, reflecting Indian political priorities and cultural attitudes toward the United States and its politics.

The written reports analyzed in this study are outlined in Table 1, ensuring a relatively balanced dataset from each country. Each article offers a comprehensive overview of Trump’s election victory, emphasizing distinct national perspectives and evaluative strategies.

Table 1. Overview of the Dataset

Report Title	Nation	Token
Welcome to Trump’s world	UK	1276
Donald Trump’s comeback	India	1040
Trump wins the White House in a political comeback rooted in appeals to frustrated voters	US	960

4.2 Introduction to UAM CorpusTool

The linguistic analysis of the selected written reports was conducted using UAM CorpusTool (O’Donnell, 2011), an open-source software designed for the annotation and analysis of linguistic data. This tool was selected for its capacity to support both automatic and manual annotation of linguistic features, offering a flexible and comprehensive framework for the purposes of this study. Specifically, UAM CorpusTool provides robust functionality for the application of appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), enabling a systematic examination of attitudinal resources within the texts.

The appraisal framework, grounded in systemic functional linguistics (SFL), offers a detailed system for analyzing evaluative language, with a particular focus on five subsystems: attitude, polarity, explicitness, appraiser and appraised. In this study, manual annotation was employed to identify and classify these attitudinal resources across the three reports, facilitating a nuanced exploration of their distribution and variation within the distinct cultural contexts

represented by the media discourse.

Additionally, the study refined the categorization of appraisers into three segments: Trump, Trump’s victory, and other. This segmentation enabled a more precise investigation into how evaluative language was employed to construct and reflect ideological and cultural perspectives in written reports. By integrating this analytical approach, the study provides nuanced insights into the interplay between linguistic choices, cultural values, and ideological positioning in media representations.

4.3 Annotation Procedure

To ensure the quality and relevance of the data, the articles were first cleaned to exclude irrelevant segments, including jump prompt (e.g., seeing Briefing) and jump link. The analysis was then focused exclusively on the explicit attitudinal expressions within the texts. As recommended by Martin (2003), implicit evaluations were excluded to simplify the analysis and maintain focus on the observable, inscribed attitudes.

The appraisal framework in UAM CorpusTool was adjusted for the specific needs of this study (Figure 1). This included removing the unclear judgement from the original framework, as this was not mentioned in the three research objectives, and refining specific appraisers such as Trump, Trump's victory, and other.

The three primary attitude categories, affect,

judgment, and appreciation, were identified and annotated in each article. Additionally, the polarity of the attitudes (whether positive or negative), the level of explicitness, and the relationship between the appraiser and the appraised were also considered in the annotation.

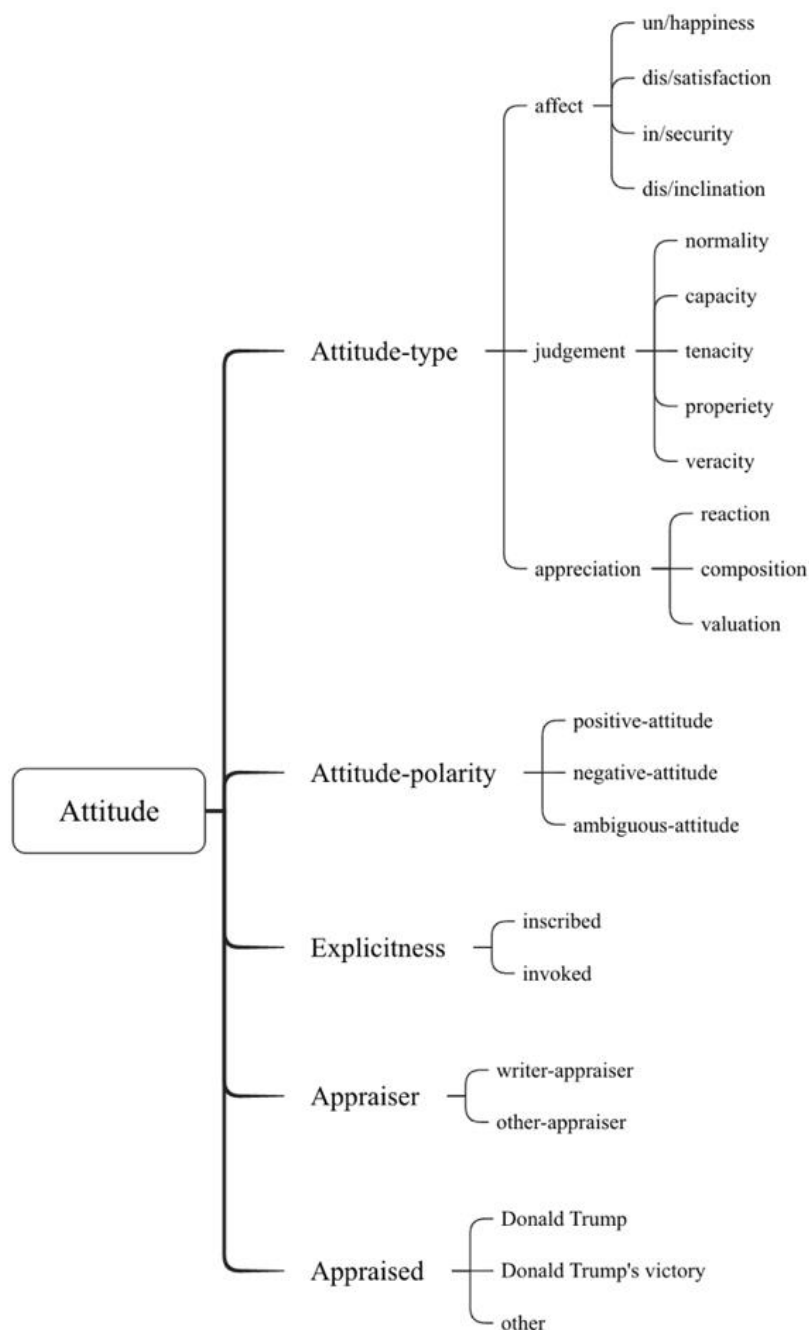


Figure 1. The Framework of the Attitude Annotation in UAM CorpusTool

4.4 Statistical Analysis

To ensure the robustness of the findings, the study employs chi-square tests for statistical

analysis. This method is used to assess the distribution of attitude types across the three media sources and determine whether the observed differences are statistically significant.

By comparing the distribution of linguistic resources across *The Economist*, *AP News*, and *Colombo Gazette*, the study quantitatively analyzes how each source utilizes language to portray Donald Trump's presidential victory, providing a clear understanding of cross-cultural differences in media discourse.

5. Results

This section presents the analysis of the attitude resources in media coverage of Donald Trump's presidential victory, based on the texts from

three distinct sources (Figure 2): *The Economist* (UK), *AP News* (US), and *Colombo Gazette* (India). The aim is to examine how the distribution of attitude types, polarity, and appraiser-appraised relationships differ across these media outlets, revealing the linguistic and cultural nuances embedded in their portrayal of the event. Statistical analyses, including chi-square tests, were conducted to assess the significance of these cross-cultural differences.

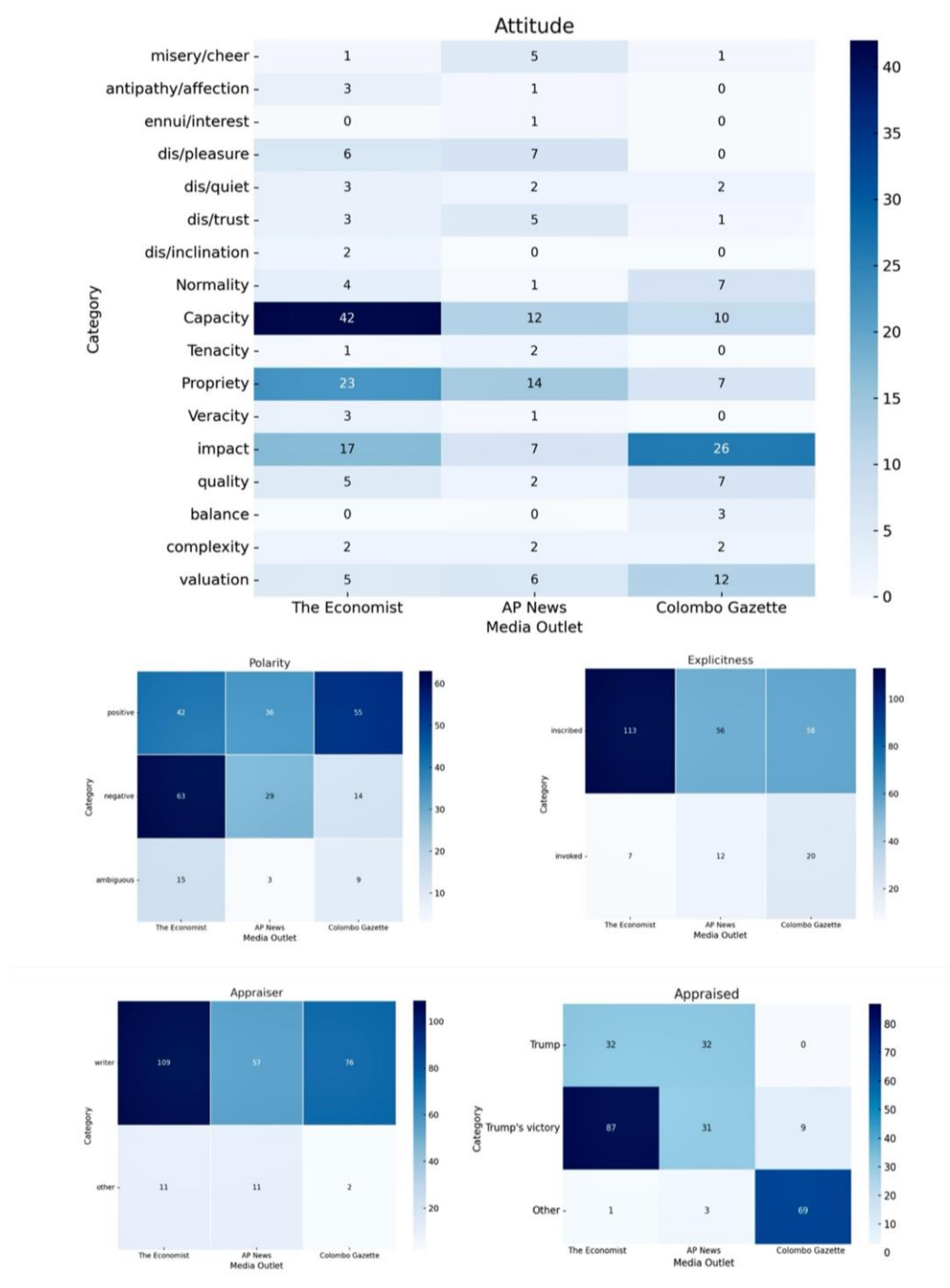


Figure 2. Distribution of Attitude Resources under the Analytical Framework

5.1 Distribution of Attitude Types

The appraisal analysis demonstrates distinct cross-cultural variations in the use of attitude resources across the three media outlets, revealing how different cultural and ideological orientations influence evaluative language in media discourse. Among the attitude types (Table 2), judgment was the most frequently employed, constituting 60.83% in *The Economist*, 44.12% in *AP News*, and 30.77% in *Colombo Gazette*.

Gazette. This indicates a strong focus on ethical and moral evaluations, particularly in Western outlets, where *The Economist* and *AP News* emphasized critiquing actions and behaviors of individuals or institutions. In contrast, *Colombo Gazette* exhibited a comparatively lower reliance on judgment, reflecting a more restrained evaluative stance that aligns with its localized narrative priorities.

Table 2. Attitude Types Employed by Three Written Reports

Attitude	The Economist		AP News		Colombo Gazette	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Affect	18	15.00	21	30.88	4	5.13
Judgement	73	60.83	30	44.12	24	30.77
Appreciation	29	24.17	17	25.00	50	64.10
Total	120	100.00	68	100.00	78	100.00

Appreciation emerged as the second most prominent attitude resource, particularly dominant in *Colombo Gazette* (64.10%), compared to *The Economist* (24.17%) and *AP News* (25.00%). This highlights *Colombo Gazette's* tendency to focus on aesthetic and contextual evaluations, potentially as a strategy to resonate with its audience by framing political events in culturally relatable and socially positive terms. The high proportion of appreciation in *Colombo Gazette* suggests a narrative strategy that prioritizes affirming and aesthetically focused descriptions over direct critique.

In contrast, affect, which captures emotional responses, was the least utilized resource across all three outlets, accounting for 15.00% in *The Economist*, 30.88% in *AP News*, and a mere 5.13% in *Colombo Gazette*. *AP News's* relatively higher use of affect reflects its emphasis on engaging the audience emotionally, whereas *Colombo Gazette* displayed minimal affective expressions, adhering to a more neutral and detached tone. This limited reliance on affect in *Colombo Gazette* could indicate cultural preferences for objectivity and moderation in media reporting.

The chi-square test results ($\chi^2 = 48.29$, $p < 0.001$)

confirm that the observed disparities in attitude resource distribution are statistically significant. These findings underscore how cultural and ideological priorities shape media framing practices. Specifically, Western media (*The Economist* and *AP News*) tend to emphasize judgment and emotional engagement as tools for critical analysis, while *Colombo Gazette* employs appreciation to craft narratives that align with local cultural expectations and values. This analysis contributes to broader discussions on cross-cultural media representation, demonstrating how evaluative language reflects underlying ideological and cultural frameworks in global political reporting.

5.1.1 Affect

The analysis of affect resources revealed notable cross-source variations in their frequency and distribution patterns (Table 3). *AP News* demonstrated the highest proportion of affect resources (25.56%), followed by *The Economist* (15.00%), while *Colombo Gazette* exhibited a significantly lower proportion (5.13%). These differences reflect diverse editorial approaches in the use of affective language across the outlets.

Table 3. Affect Resources Employed by Three Written Reports

Affect	The Economist		AP News		Colombo Gazette	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%

Un/happiness	4	22.22	6	28.57	1	25.00
Dis/satisfaction	6	33.33	8	38.10	0	0.00
In/security	6	33.33	7	33.33	3	75.00
Dis/inclination	2	22.22	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	18	100.00	21	100.00	4	100.00

Among the subcategories of affect, in/security was the most consistently observed resource across all three outlets, though its prevalence varied. *Colombo Gazette* displayed the highest proportion of in/security expressions (75.00% of its affect resources), while both *The Economist* and *AP News* each utilized this category in 33.33% of their affective language. In contrast, expressions of dis/satisfaction were prominent in *The Economist* (33.33%) and *AP News* (38.10%), but entirely absent in *Colombo Gazette*.

A distinct pattern emerged in the use of un/happiness, which accounted for over one-fourth of the affect resources in *AP News* (28.57%) and *The Economist* (22.22%). However, it was less frequent in *Colombo Gazette* (25.00%) due to its limited overall use of affective language. Additionally, the subcategory of dis/inclination, reflecting expressions of desire or aversion, was exclusively present in *The Economist* (11.11%), with no instances in either *AP News* or *Colombo Gazette*.

Examples:

- 1) Our *fear* is that during this presidency he will be at his most radical and unrestrained, especially if, as America's oldest-ever president, his powers begin to fail him. (from *The Economist*)
- 2) "I want to thank the American people for

the *extraordinary honor* of being elected your 47th president and your 45th president," Trump told throngs of cheering supporters in Florida even before his victory was confirmed. (from *AP News*)

- 3) India's Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar, highlighted the country's strategic response to this outcome, expressing *optimism* in India's readiness to navigate and leverage the expected geopolitical shifts. (from *Colombo Gazette*)

Statistical analysis confirmed the significance of these variations, with chi-square tests indicating a significant difference in the distribution of affect resources across the three outlets ($\chi^2 = 29.43$, $p < 0.001$). These results underscore the differential deployment of affective resources, shaped by varying editorial and linguistic choices.

5.1.2 Judgement

The distribution of judgment resources, which evaluate ethical and moral behaviors, varied significantly across the three media outlets (Table 4). *The Economist* exhibited the highest proportion of judgment resources, accounting for 60.83% of its attitude resources, followed by *Colombo Gazette* (30.77%) and *AP News* (24.17%). These figures highlight differing emphases on evaluative language among the outlets.

Table 4. Judgement Resources Employed by Three Written Reports

Judgement	The Economist		AP News		Colombo Gazette	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Social Esteem						
Normality	4	5.48	1	3.33	7	29.17
Capacity	42	57.53	12	40.00	10	41.67
Tenacity	1	1.37	2	6.67	0	0.00
Social Sanction						
Propriety	23	31.51	14	46.67	7	29.17
Veracity	3	4.11	1	3.33	0	0.00
Total	73	100.00	30	100.00	24	100.00

Among the subtypes of judgment, social esteem was the dominant category across all three sources, although the specific distribution of its subcategories varied. In *The Economist*, social esteem constituted 79.55% of its judgment resources, with capacity as the most frequently used subcategory (57.53%). *AP News* similarly prioritized capacity within its judgment resources (40.00%), albeit to a lesser extent compared to *The Economist*. In contrast, *Colombo Gazette* distributed its use of social esteem more evenly, with capacity (41.67%) and normality (29.17%) being the most utilized subcategories.

Social sanction, which includes evaluations of ethicality and honesty, was less prominent overall but displayed notable cross-outlet variation. Propriety accounted for 46.67% of judgment resources in *AP News*, marking it as the most significant subtype within the outlet. Meanwhile, *The Economist* allocated 31.51% of its judgment resources to propriety, alongside modest use of veracity (4.11%). In comparison, *Colombo Gazette* employed propriety in 29.17% of its judgment resources but made no use of veracity.

Examples:

- 1) After *defeating* Kamala Harris — and not just narrowly, but by a wide margin — America's 45th president will become its

47th. (from *The Economist*)

- 2) In his second term, Trump has vowed to pursue an agenda centered on *dramatically* reshaping the federal government and pursuing retribution against his perceived enemies. (from *AP News*)
- 3) Trump's administration might enforce *stricter* immigration policies, yet Jaishankar believes economically motivated mobility may be encouraged. (from *Colombo Gazette*)

Statistical analysis confirmed that these differences in the distribution of judgment resources were significant ($\chi^2 = 34.89$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate systematic variations in the deployment of judgment resources across the three media outlets, reflecting distinct editorial and linguistic strategies.

5.1.3 Appreciation

The distribution of judgment resources, which evaluate ethical and moral behaviors, varied significantly across the three media outlets (Table 5). *The Economist* exhibited the highest proportion of judgment resources, accounting for 60.83% of its attitude resources, followed by *Colombo Gazette* (30.77%) and *AP News* (24.17%). These figures highlight differing emphases on evaluative language among the outlets.

Table 5. Appreciation Resources Employed by Three Written Reports

Appreciation	The Economist		AP News		Colombo Gazette	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Reaction	22	75.86	9	52.94	33	66.00
Composition	2	6.90	2	11.76	5	10.00
Valuation	5	17.24	6	35.29	12	24.00
Total	29	100.00	17	100.00	50	100.00

Among the subtypes of judgment, social esteem was the dominant category across all three sources, although the specific distribution of its subcategories varied. In *The Economist*, social esteem constituted 79.55% of its judgment resources, with capacity as the most frequently used subcategory (57.53%). *AP News* similarly prioritized capacity within its judgment resources (40.00%), albeit to a lesser extent compared to *The Economist*. In contrast, *Colombo Gazette* distributed its use of social esteem more evenly, with capacity (41.67%) and normality

(29.17%) being the most utilized subcategories.

Social sanction, which includes evaluations of ethicality and honesty, was less prominent overall but displayed notable cross-outlet variation. Propriety accounted for 46.67% of judgment resources in *AP News*, marking it as the most significant subtype within the outlet. Meanwhile, *The Economist* allocated 31.51% of its judgment resources to propriety, alongside modest use of veracity (4.11%). In comparison, *Colombo Gazette* employed propriety in 29.17% of its judgment resources but made no use of

veracity.

Examples:

- 1) A *stunning* victory has crowned Donald Trump the most consequential American president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. (from *The Economist*)
- 2) Donald Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States on Wednesday, an *extraordinary* comeback for a former president who refused to accept defeat four years ago, sparked a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, was convicted of felony charges and survived two assassination attempts. (from *AP News*)
- 3) “Digital payment platforms, for example, will become much *more valuable*,” Jaishankar said, noting the need to build resilience and secure infrastructure. (from *Colombo Gazette*)

Statistical analysis confirmed that these differences in the distribution of judgment

resources were significant ($\chi^2 = 34.89$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate systematic variations in the deployment of judgment resources across the three media outlets, reflecting distinct editorial and linguistic strategies.

5.2 Polarity of Attitudes

Polarity analysis indicated distinct differences in the evaluative framing of Trump’s victory across the three media outlets (Table 6). *The Economist* exhibited a predominant use of negative polarity (52.50%), which exceeded its positive instances (35.00%), highlighting its critical stance in reporting. In contrast, *AP News* showed a relatively balanced polarity distribution, with a slight preference for positive polarity (52.94%) over negative polarity (42.65%). This balanced approach aligns with its journalistic norm of maintaining neutrality while incorporating evaluative elements. *Colombo Gazette* displayed a notably positive orientation, with 70.51% of its appraisals categorized as positive and only 17.95% as negative.

Table 6. Polarity Employed by Three Written Reports

Polarity	The Economist		AP News		Colombo Gazette	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Positive	42	35.00	36	52.94	55	70.51
Negative	63	52.50	29	42.65	14	17.95
Ambiguous	15	12.50	3	4.41	9	11.54
Total	120	100.00	68	100.00	78	100.00

Instances of ambiguous polarity, although less frequent, also varied across the sources. *The Economist* demonstrated the highest proportion of ambiguous attitudes (12.50%), while *Colombo Gazette* followed with 11.54%. In contrast, *AP News* exhibited the lowest proportion of ambiguous polarity (4.41%), reflecting its preference for clarity in reporting.

Examples:

- 1) A *stunning* victory has crowned Donald Trump the *most consequential* American president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. (positive polarity from *The Economist*)
- 2) While Harris focused much of her initial message around themes of joy, Trump channeled a *powerful* sense of anger and resentment among voters. (positive polarity from *AP News*)

- 3) For India, maintaining strong ties with the U.S., while preserving regional alliances, may prove beneficial in creating a *stable* diplomatic environment that supports India’s economic aspirations. (positive polarity from *Colombo Gazette*)
- 4) It will take time for the *full* significance of Mr. Trump’s victory to sink in. (ambiguous polarity from *The Economist*)
- 5) While India may benefit from increased manufacturing and digital opportunities, Trump’s pro-business agenda has *broader* financial implications. (ambiguous polarity from *Colombo Gazette*)
- 6) Trump will *inherit a range of challenges* when he assumes office on Jan. 20, including heightened political polarization and global crises that are testing America’s influence abroad. (ambiguous polarity from *AP*)

News)

- 7) The party compounded its errors by covering up Mr. Biden's disqualifying frailty until it was *undeniable*. (negative polarity from *The Economist*)
- 8) Donald Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States on Wednesday, an extraordinary comeback for a former president who refused to accept defeat four years ago, sparked a *violent* insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, was convicted of felony charges and survived two assassination attempts. (negative polarity from *AP News*)
- 9) If the U.S. limits outsourcing or imposes tighter regulations on pharmaceuticals, profit margins may *narrow*. (negative polarity from *Colombo Gazette*)

The chi-square test results ($\chi^2 = 32.11$, $p < 0.001$) confirmed that the observed differences in polarity distributions among the three media outlets were statistically significant. These findings provide robust evidence that the

evaluative stances of the outlets are shaped by their respective cultural and ideological orientations, as reflected in their polarity patterns.

5.3 Explicitness

The explicitness of attitudes, measured through the distribution of inscribed and invoked attitudes, exhibited notable variations across the three media outlets (Table 7). *The Economist* demonstrated the highest proportion of inscribed attitudes (42.48%), followed by *AP News* (21.80%) and *Colombo Gazette* (21.05%). These figures indicate a shared preference for explicit evaluative language, particularly among Western outlets.

Invoked attitudes, which require contextual interpretation, were observed more frequently in *Colombo Gazette* (14.29%) compared to *The Economist* (10.64%) and *AP News* (2.63%). This suggests a greater reliance on implicit evaluative strategies in *Colombo Gazette* compared to the other two outlets, which preferred more overt evaluative expressions.

Table 7. Explicitness Employed by Three Written Reports

Explicitness	The Economist		AP News		Colombo Gazette	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Inscribed	113	94.17	56	82.35	58	74.36
Invoked	7	5.83	12	17.65	20	25.64
Total	120	100.00	68	100.00	78	100.00

Examples:

- 1) In the 1920s and 1930s that led to *dark* times. (inscribed attitude from *The Economist*)
- 2) The *coarse* rhetoric, paired with an image of hypermasculinity, resonated with angry voters — particularly men — in a deeply polarized nation. (inscribed attitude from *AP News*)
- 3) Jaishankar also pointed to the *critical* role of digital ecosystems, which have become deeply integrated into both economic and societal frameworks. (inscribed attitude from *Colombo Gazette*)
- 4) His victory will be made complete by Republicans retaking the Senate and, as seems *likely*, holding on to the House. (invoked attitude from *The Economist*)

- 5) The results *cap* a historically tumultuous and competitive election season that included two assassination attempts targeting Trump and a shift to a new Democratic nominee just a month before the party's convention. (invoked attitude from *AP News*)
- 6) Trump's pro-fossil fuel stance could also mean fewer restrictions on oil and natural gas, *pushing up* global prices. (invoked attitude from *Colombo Gazette*)

Statistical analysis confirmed that the differences in the distribution of explicitness across the three outlets were significant ($\chi^2 = 21.47$, $p < 0.01$). These results highlight the varied linguistic strategies employed by the outlets in their evaluative framing of Trump's victory, reflecting distinct editorial conventions and audience expectations.

5.4 Appraiser-Appraised Relationships

The appraiser was predominantly the writer across all three media outlets (Table 8), with *The Economist* exhibiting the highest proportion (90.83%), followed closely by *Colombo Gazette* (97.44%) and *AP News* (83.82%). These figures

indicate that media narratives across all sources were largely constructed through the writer's evaluative stance, highlighting the centrality of the writer's voice in shaping the evaluative framing of the coverage.

Table 8. Appraiser Employed by Three Written Reports

Appraiser	The Economist		AP News		Colombo Gazette	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Writer	109	90.83	57	83.82	76	97.44
Other	11	9.17	11	16.18	2	2.56
Total	120	100.00	68	100.00	78	100.00

In terms of appraised entities, *The Economist* and *AP News* predominantly focused on Trump and his victory, albeit with varying emphasis (Table 9). *The Economist* directed the majority of its appraisals toward Trump's victory (72.50%), whereas *AP News* distributed its attention more evenly between Trump (47.06%) and his victory

(45.59%). In contrast, *Colombo Gazette* demonstrated a markedly different pattern, with the majority of appraisals targeting other entities (88.46%), and only a minimal proportion focused on Trump's victory (11.54%). Notably, *Colombo Gazette* did not directly appraise Trump himself.

Table 9. Appraised Employed by Three Written Reports

Appraised	The Economist		AP News		Colombo Gazette	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Trump	32	26.67	32	47.06	0	0.00
Trump's victory	87	72.50	31	45.59	9	11.54
Other	1	0.83	3	4.41	69	88.46
Total	120	100.00	68	100.00	78	100.00

Examples:

- 1) Our *fear* is that during this presidency he will be at his most radical and unrestrained, especially if, as America's oldest-ever president, his powers begin to fail him. (writer as appraiser from *The Economist*)
- 2) There will be time for recriminations among Democrats about what went *wrong*, but the early answer is: almost everything. (other as appraiser from *The Economist*)
- 3) He had attacked Harris in deeply personal — often misogynistic and racist — terms as he pushed an apocalyptic picture of a country overrun by violent migrants. (writer as appraiser from *AP News*)
- 4) The results cap a *historically tumultuous and*

competitive election season that included two assassination attempts targeting Trump and a shift to a new Democratic nominee just a month before the party's convention. (other as appraiser from *AP News*)

- 5) Jaishankar also pointed to the *critical* role of digital ecosystems, which have become deeply integrated into both economic and societal frameworks. (writer as appraiser from *Colombo Gazette*)
- 6) India's Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar, highlighted the country's strategic response to this outcome, expressing *optimism* in India's readiness to navigate and leverage the expected geopolitical shifts. (other as appraiser from *Colombo Gazette*)
- 7) As the polls predicted, he *enjoyed* a big

surge in support from Latino men. (Trump as appraised from *The Economist*)

- 8) A stunning victory has crowned Donald Trump the most consequential American president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. (Trump's victory as appraised from *The Economist*)
- 9) What was *remarkable* was not that they sometimes broke the rules, but how much they stuck by them. (other as appraised from *The Economist*)
- 10) He is the first person convicted of a felony to be elected president and, at 78, is the *oldest* person elected to the office. (Trump as appraised from *AP News*)
- 11) The victory validates Trump's *bare-knuckles* approach to politics. (Trump's victory as appraised from *AP News*)
- 12) I want to thank the American people for the *extraordinary* honor of being elected your 47th president and your 45th president. (other as appraised from *AP News*)
- 13) After a four-year absence from political office, Donald Trump has returned as the 47th President of the United States, a comeback that's expected to *reverberate globally*. (Trump's victory as appraised from *Colombo Gazette*)
- 14) Jaishankar also pointed to the *critical* role of digital ecosystems, which have become deeply integrated into both economic and societal frameworks. (other as appraised from *Colombo Gazette*)

It is important to note that the chi-square test was not conducted, as some cell frequencies in the dataset did not meet the assumptions required for such analyses. Specifically, the chi-square test requires that no more than 20% of expected frequencies fall below 5, and that all expected frequencies are greater than 1. In this case, certain appraised categories, particularly those with minimal occurrences (e.g., the absence of direct appraisal of Trump by *Colombo Gazette*), violated these conditions, rendering the test unsuitable. Consequently, the analysis presented here focuses on descriptive patterns to capture the observed distribution of appraiser-appraised relationships across the three media outlets.

6. Discussion

6.1 Distribution of Attitudinal Resources Across the

Three Media Sources

This study revealed significant cross-cultural differences in the distribution of attitudinal resources, specifically in the categories of affect, judgment, and appreciation, across the three media outlets. Each outlet exhibited distinct patterns in the deployment of these attitudinal resources, reflecting cultural and ideological priorities.

6.1.1 Judgment and Its Cultural Significance

Judgment, the predominant attitudinal resource across all three outlets, serves as a key reflection of ethical and cultural norms in media discourse. *The Economist*, in line with its liberal European orientation, emphasized leadership competence and moral evaluations, portraying Trump through a critical lens. Conversely, *Colombo Gazette*, with its regional and pragmatic focus, highlighted governance evaluations that were more aligned with India's geopolitical interests, showcasing a more cautious approach. *AP News*, representing an American journalistic norm of impartiality, adopted a balanced stance in its evaluation of Trump's leadership qualities, reflecting a neutral approach to political reporting.

These findings resonate with previous studies, such as those by Liu et al. (2022), which highlight the ideological positioning of Western media outlets, but also reveal new patterns, such as the more balanced and action-focused approach of *AP News*, which diverges from typical Western media portrayals.

6.1.2 Emotional Engagement and Its Implications

The study also explored the use of affect resources, revealing divergent strategies in emotional engagement. Western media outlets, particularly *AP News*, displayed a higher frequency of affective language, aiming to evoke emotional responses from their audience. This trend is consistent with previous research by Zhu and Shi (2022), which notes the emotional expressivity typical of Western media.

In contrast, *Colombo Gazette* demonstrated a much more restrained use of affect, reflecting South Asian cultural norms of indirectness and measured communication. This finding provides an important nuance to existing studies on emotional engagement in Asian media, offering a fresh perspective on the varying emotional tones employed in different

geopolitical contexts.

6.1.3 Aesthetic Evaluations and Ideological Biases

Appreciation, particularly in the form of aesthetic evaluations, also differed across the media sources. *The Economist's* frequent use of appreciation to critique policy and governance aligns with its role as an analytical and critical outlet. *Colombo Gazette*, on the other hand, emphasized social valuations, consistent with the region's more pragmatic approach to political reporting. *AP News*, in contrast, showed a reduced emphasis on aesthetic evaluations, focusing more on facts and actions rather than on evaluative judgments.

This contrast in the use of appreciation aligns with Sun & Liu's (2023) assertion that Western media frequently employ aesthetic evaluations to shape narratives, but also suggests that American media may be evolving, as seen in the de-emphasis of appreciation in *AP News'* coverage.

6.2 The Role of Polarity, Explicitness, and Appraiser-Appraised Relationships

Polarity, explicitness, and appraiser-appraised relationships played a crucial role in shaping the evaluative framing of Trump's victory. These elements further underscored the ideological and cultural differences across the media sources.

6.2.1 Polarity: Ideological Significance and Cultural Influence

The study's polarity analysis revealed notable differences between the three outlets. *The Economist* and *AP News* employed a relatively balanced approach, with both positive and negative evaluations reflecting nuanced critical stances. This aligns with Hall's (1997) findings on critical Western media coverage, which often balances multiple viewpoints to maintain credibility and objectivity.

Colombo Gazette, in contrast, exhibited a strong positive bias, with an overwhelming focus on Trump's victory and its potential benefits. This approach likely reflects the outlet's alignment with national interests and its cautious optimism about India's position in the global geopolitical landscape. Such a trend echoes Lin and Xu's (2023) observations on media alignment with national priorities.

6.2.2 Explicitness and the Cultural Norms of Communication

The distribution of explicit and invoked attitudes further highlights the cultural dimensions of media reporting. *The Economist* favored explicit, inscribed attitudes, indicating a preference for direct, clear communication. *Colombo Gazette*, by contrast, relied more on invoked attitudes, reflecting a cultural preference for indirectness and subtlety, a pattern consistent with Li and Feng's (2020) findings on South Asian media's communication styles.

AP News demonstrated a middle ground, using a mix of inscribed and invoked attitudes. This balanced approach aligns with Western media's adaptation to diverse audience expectations, as seen in recent research by Luo et al. (2023), which highlights the trend of balancing directness and subtlety in contemporary American journalism.

6.2.3 Appraiser-Appraised Dynamics and Media Agency

The appraiser-appraised dynamics revealed important cultural differences in the construction of media narratives. In all three outlets, the writer predominantly assumed the role of the appraiser, underscoring the centrality of the writer's voice in shaping the evaluative stance of the coverage. However, *Colombo Gazette* displayed a higher frequency of self-referential appraisals, a pattern that deviates from the Western emphasis on external evaluations. This finding suggests a shift in the Indian media's approach to asserting agency in global political narratives, as also noted by Li and Feng (2020).

6.3 Cultural and Ideological Underpinnings in Media Framing

The differences observed in the distribution of attitudinal resources, polarity, explicitness, and appraiser-appraised relationships are deeply reflective of the cultural and ideological contexts within which these media outlets operate. *The Economist's* critical stance, *AP News'* neutrality, and *Colombo Gazette's* optimistic framing all speak to the distinct cultural and political environments that shape these narratives.

Incorporating insights from previous studies, this research highlights how media outlets' linguistic choices are influenced by their cultural, ideological, and geopolitical contexts. The variations in the use of attitudinal resources, polarity, and explicitness underscore the complex interplay between language and ideology, offering new perspectives on how

media outlets construct political narratives.

6.4 Implications and Research Contributions

The observed patterns demonstrate how media outlets, shaped by cultural, ideological, and geopolitical factors, construct narratives that resonate with their audiences. The critical tone of *The Economist*, the pragmatic framing of *Colombo Gazette*, and the objective reporting of *AP News* reflect broader cultural values and journalistic practices. While many findings align with existing studies, this research introduces new insights into the evolving dynamics of media discourse, particularly in the nuanced framing and strategic appraisals observed across diverse contexts.

This study highlights the linguistic and cultural variations in media coverage of Donald Trump's presidential victory, revealing the interplay between language, ideology, and culture. By integrating insights from prior studies, such as Martin and White's (2005) foundational work on appraisal theory and recent cross-cultural analyses (e.g., Luo et al., 2023; Mohammed, 2024), this research underscores the evolving nature of media narratives in political discourse. The findings contribute to cross-cultural media studies, offering both confirmations of existing theories and novel perspectives on linguistic analysis in ideological framing.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore cross-cultural variations in the use of attitudinal resources within media coverage of Donald Trump's presidential victory. Anchored in appraisal theory, it addressed three key research questions: (1) How do the distribution and types of attitudinal resources differ across media outlets? (2) What role does polarity play in shaping the evaluative stance of the texts? (3) How are appraiser-appraised relationships constructed in the coverage, and what cultural and ideological factors influence these patterns?

Through a comparative analysis of texts from *The Economist* (UK), *AP News* (US), and *Colombo Gazette* (India), the study uncovered significant linguistic and cultural differences in framing the event. The analysis demonstrated that judgment resources—focused on ethical and moral evaluations—predominated across all sources, highlighting a universal emphasis on leadership and governance in political reporting. However, the specific framing of these judgments revealed substantial cross-cultural and ideological

distinctions.

Firstly, *The Economist* adopted a critical stance, prioritizing leadership competence and global ramifications in line with its European liberal values. *Colombo Gazette*, by contrast, centered its pragmatic evaluations on regional interests, balancing cautious optimism with considerations of India's geopolitical priorities. *AP News* upheld a neutral stance, reflecting the American journalistic norm of impartiality through a balanced evaluation of actions and outcomes.

Secondly, affect resources illuminated cultural differences in emotional engagement. Western media, particularly *AP News*, employed affect more frequently to establish emotional resonance with their audience, while *Colombo Gazette* maintained a restrained tone, consistent with South Asian norms of measured expression. Appreciation resources further underscored ideological differences, with *The Economist* favoring analytical critiques, *Colombo Gazette* emphasizing societal implications, and *AP News* de-emphasizing aesthetic considerations.

Thirdly, polarity analysis underscored divergent evaluative tendencies. Both *The Economist* and *AP News* employed a nuanced balance of positive and negative attitudes, indicative of critical and complex stances. Conversely, *Colombo Gazette* leaned predominantly toward positive portrayals, likely reflecting national interests and diplomatic optimism. Variations in explicitness also emerged, with Western outlets favoring inscribed attitudes and Indian media employing invoked evaluations, reflecting cultural preferences in communication styles. Moreover, appraiser-appraised relationships highlighted strategic differences: Western outlets predominantly evaluated external entities, while *Colombo Gazette* incorporated self-referential appraisals, signaling a shift toward asserting agency within global discourse.

These findings make significant contributions to cross-cultural media studies by illustrating how linguistic strategies are shaped by cultural and ideological contexts. The critical framing of *The Economist*, the neutral objectivity of *AP News*, and the pragmatic optimism of *Colombo Gazette* reflect the intersection of language, culture, and socio-political dynamics in media narratives. Furthermore, the study identifies emerging trends, such as the implicit ideological framing

in Western media and the strategic self-appraisals in Indian media, offering new insights into the role of media in political discourse.

Looking forward, several promising directions for future research emerge from this study. Firstly, expanding the analysis to include additional geopolitical contexts could provide a broader understanding of how linguistic and cultural factors influence media discourse across diverse regions. Secondly, a more detailed exploration of underexamined dimensions of appraisal theory, such as engagement and graduation, could uncover nuanced patterns in evaluative language and their ideological implications. Finally, longitudinal studies tracing changes in written reports over time would offer valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of linguistic practices, cultural ideologies, and political narratives, contributing to a deeper comprehension of global media systems in an increasingly interconnected world. In conclusion, this study enhances the understanding of the intersection between language, culture, and ideology in media discourse. By highlighting how attitude resources shape cross-cultural narratives, it underscores the value of integrating linguistic and cultural frameworks in media analysis. These insights not only advance the field of cross-cultural media studies but also provide practical implications for fostering more nuanced and context-sensitive media reporting in an increasingly globalized world.

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Competition, or Cooperation? Ernie Bot — ChatGPT Relations Represented in *China Daily's* Coverage of AIGC (2022-2024)

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Abstract

This study combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and corpus linguistics to examine how *China Daily* communicated the development of Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) technology to international audiences between 2022 and 2024. Adopting Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach as the theoretical framework, the study analyzes the representation of two key AIGC entities, ChatGPT and Ernie Bot, and investigates how their depiction reflects the broader dynamics of the China-US relationship in the context of AIGC development. The corpus consists of 120 news articles from *China Daily*, which were analyzed using keyword analysis, collocation analysis, and concordance analysis to identify linguistic patterns and discursive strategies. The findings reveal that *China Daily* strategically employs specific modalities and collocations to construct distinct representations of ChatGPT and Ernie Bot. ChatGPT is portrayed as a symbol of global AI advancement, while Ernie Bot is framed as a representative of China's independent innovation and technological self-reliance. Through these representations, *China Daily* positions China as a nation emphasizing mutual understanding and cooperative development, in contrast to the United States, which is depicted as prioritizing competition despite limited collaboration in certain areas. Furthermore, the discourse highlights the importance of China-US cooperation in addressing global challenges, such as climate change and the alignment of advanced AI systems, even amidst tensions over high-performance computing chips and semiconductors. These findings underscore the alignment of *China Daily's* discourse with China's broader strategic goals, including promoting shared development in AIGC technology and advancing the vision of a community with a shared future in cyberspace. By grounding macro-level interpretations in micro-level linguistic analysis, this study demonstrates how discourse shapes perceptions of technological development and international relations, offering insights into the interplay between language, power, and ideology in media representations of AIGC.

Keywords: *China Daily*, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis, AIGC, ChatGPT, Ernie Bot

1. Introduction

AI technology has entered a new era after

OpenAI, a US-based artificial intelligence company, released the AI model exclusively for

text generation apps — ChatGPT. Since then, numerous types of AI software coming from other nations have been emerging on the market: Sorai that generates video content, Ernie Bot released by Baidu, and Gemini released by Google. This study focuses on Ernie Bot and ChatGPT, the most representative AI language models in China and the U.S., respectively, and prominent subjects in media discourse. Developed by OpenAI, ChatGPT is a generative AI model that employs deep learning to process vast datasets and generate coherent, contextually appropriate language. Ernie Bot, developed by Baidu, functions as a chatbot capable of engaging in dialogue, answering inquiries, and co-creating content. Given their centrality in media narratives on China-U.S. technological competition, ChatGPT and Ernie Bot occupy a pivotal position in public and academic discussions on AI development and geopolitical dynamics, making them the primary focus of this study. According to an article published in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2021, China will soon lead the U.S. in tech. This assertion has been reflected in international media discourse over the past two years, with various perspectives on AI technologies from China and the US shaping public narratives. As a key state-affiliated media outlet, *China Daily* has played a significant role in constructing China's position in this discourse, particularly in its portrayal of AIGC development and its implications for global technological competition.

On the other hand, despite China's rapid progress in AIGC technology, studies on how Chinese media portray the development of AIGC technologies between nations remain limited, especially in terms of how media in

foreign languages engage with these matters for an international audience. Based on current research, only one study has investigated the development of AI technologies in China and Germany. The study, conducted by Qiu (2024), titled "Decoding AI Discourse: Analyzing German & Chinese Media (2018-2023) Using Machine Learning Methods", revealed that Chinese media adopt a strategic perspective in their discourse on AI, frequently quoting political leaders and maintaining a consistently positive stance while German media, following the release of ChatGPT, have frequently cited statements from Western tech experts, adopting a more critical and cautious attitude toward AI (Qiu, 2024). Most other related studies focus on AI development within a single country, analyzing their own national media as samples (e.g., Wei, M., Scifo, S, & Xu, Y., 2022; Comfort, Tandoc, & Gruszczyński, 2019; Pandey & Kurian, 2017). Methodologically, these studies predominantly employ content analysis, frame analysis, or qualitative analysis.

As illustrated in Figure 1, given the limited attention paid to how Chinese foreign-language media address the intricacies of emerging AIGC technologies, and the scarcity of studies examining linguistic patterns in this context, this research seeks to explore how *China Daily* illustrates the growth of AIGC technology and relays the Chinese government's position to a global audience by utilizing critical discourse analysis (CDA) and corpus linguistics (CL). The divergence between Chinese-language media for local audiences and English-language media for international audiences is evident in their objectives, content, stylistic approaches, and lexical preferences.

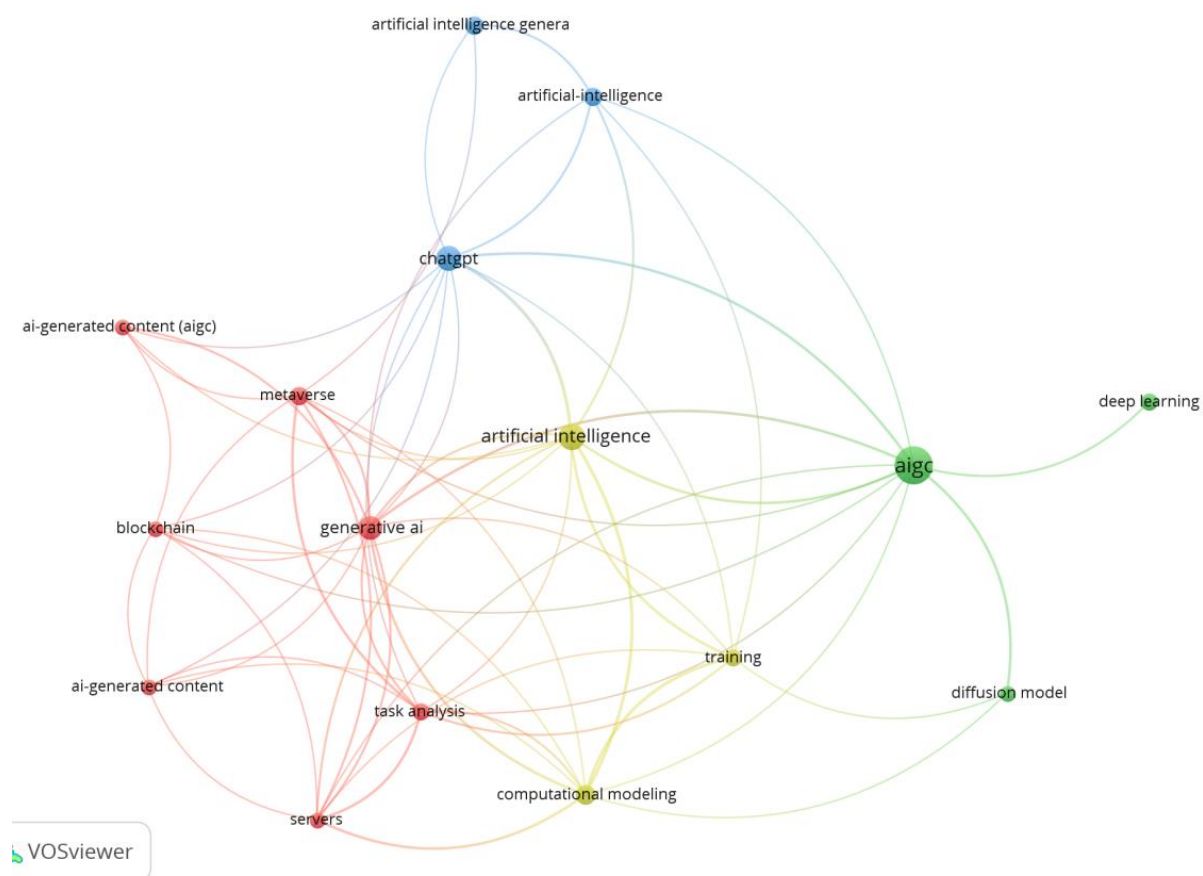


Figure 1. The research about AIGC

2. The Synergy of Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a socially-oriented approach to discourse analysis that examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology. While CDA encompasses a wide range of theoretical frameworks, this study adopts Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, which emphasizes the interplay between discourse, cognition, and society. Van Dijk's framework posits that discourse is not only shaped by social structures but also mediates social cognition, thereby influencing power relations and ideological reproduction. To operationalize this approach, the study integrates corpus linguistics, which provides quantitative tools to identify and analyze linguistic patterns that reflect underlying ideologies and power dynamics.

The integration of corpus linguistics with CDA, first proposed by Hardt-Mautner (1995), bridges the gap between quantitative and qualitative research. Corpora enable the systematic identification of recurring linguistic features, such as lexical choices, collocations, and

semantic prosodies, which are crucial for uncovering implicit meanings and ideological biases in discourse (Hunston, 2002: 123). By combining Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework with corpus linguistic methods, this study aims to analyze how specific linguistic patterns in large-scale discursive materials reflect and reinforce social power and ideology. For instance, the study employs corpus tools to examine keywords, concordances, and collocations, which are then interpreted through the socio-cognitive lens to reveal how discourse producers construct and perpetuate particular ideological positions.

Internationally, corpus-based CDA research has been applied to topics such as gender (Al-Hejin, 2015; Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig, 2017), refugees (Baker & McNery, 2005; Baker et al., 2008), and religion (Krishnamurthy, 1996; Salama, 2011). In the Chinese context, studies have focused on Western media representations of China's development, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Chinese economy (Shao Bin & Hui Zhiming, 2014; Qian Yufang & Huang Xiaoqin, 2016; Hou, 2019). Building on these

precedents, this study leverages the synergy of CDA and corpus linguistics to enhance the objectivity, depth, and validity of discourse analysis, offering a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between language, power, and ideology.

3. Data and Methodology

This study combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL) to address three targeted questions: (1) How does *China Daily* generally report on AI-generated content (AIGC)? (2) How are the two entities, *ChatGPT* and *Ernie Bot*, depicted in the context of AIGC reporting? (3) Does the development of AIGC technology reflect the relationship between China and the United States? If so, what kind of relationship is reflected?

Firstly, the study extracted relevant reports from *China Daily*'s electronic database Factiva using *AIGC* and *AI* as a keyword, thereby constructing the research corpus. The data covers the period from January 1, 2022, to August 20, 2024. This span was chosen because since the introduction of *ChatGPT* by OpenAI in 2022, AIGC technology has received widespread media attention, with 2023 and beyond marking a period of rapid development for AIGC technologies. After manually filtering out unnecessary information such as publication dates, authors, and copyright details, the *China Daily* AI Corpus (CDAIC) was formed, comprising 188 articles and 139,396 lexical units. Based on a reading of the corpus and pilot studies, *ChatGPT* and *Ernie Bot* were selected for further analysis, as they represent the two main entities in *China Daily*'s coverage of AIGC technology.

Secondly, an overview analysis of the corpus was conducted to observe whether *ChatGPT* and *Ernie Bot* are depicted as two keywords within the corpus. The study generated a keyword list by comparing CDAIC with the BNC2014 Baby+ general corpus (which contains 5,024,072 lexical units) in #LancsBox 6.0. #LancsBox 6.0 is a next-generation corpus analysis tool developed by Lancaster University, featuring visualized collocation networks and statistical functions (Brezina, McEnery & Wattam, 2015). Keywords are defined as words whose relative frequency is significantly higher

in one corpus compared to another (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013: 72). To ensure the keywords are representative of CDAIC, the study employed three criteria: keyness, relative frequency, and contextual diversity (Subtirelu & Baker, 2018: 113). In calculating keyness values, Kilgariff's Simple Maths Parameters (SMP) were used, with a constant of 1000, as SMP values are easier to interpret than log-likelihood statistics (Brezina, 2018: 85). Additionally, contextual diversity (i.e., range %) measures the dispersion of a word across the corpus (Brezina, 2018: 48). Given the size of CDAIC, the analysis was limited to words that appear at least 500 times per million words in at least 20% of the texts.

To address the second research question, the study's third phase involved creating collocation networks for *ChatGPT* and *Ernie Bot* to analyze their representation in media reports. According to Brezina, McEnery & Wattam (2015), collocates should be analyzed within broader collocational networks rather than in isolation. These networks can be visualized using #LancsBox after configuring the Collocation Parameter Notation (CPN). Following this, additional collocation and co-occurrence analyses were performed for both entities.

As for the third question, the study conducted a detailed analysis of the collocates associated with the phrases *ChatGPT* and *Ernie Bot*, as well as the sentences containing these phrases and their collocates.

4. Findings

4.1 Representations of *ChatGPT* and *Ernie Bot*

The keyword analysis reveals significant patterns in how *China Daily* reports on AIGC technology and its implications for the China-US relationship. **Table 1** lists the 30 highest-ranking keywords based on their Statistical Measure of Prominence (abbreviated as SMP) values. Notably, *ChatGPT* ranks third, highlighting its prominence in the corpus as a symbol of global AI advancement. In contrast, *Ernie Bot* does not appear among the top keywords, but its association with Baidu (ranked 18th) suggests an implicit link to China's domestic AI efforts. This indicates that while *ChatGPT* is foregrounded as a leading global technology, *Ernie Bot* is positioned as a representative of China's independent innovation in AI.

Table 1. The 30 highest-ranking lexical keywords in the corpus

Rank	Keyword	Relative frequency in CDAIC frequency in CDAIC	Relative frequency in BNC2014 Baby+	Range %	SMP
1	ai	134.65	0.02	89.89	13.25
2	China	50.22	0.60	79.26	3.19
3	ChatGPT	29.20	0.00	68.09	3.02
4	Chinese	42.97	0.50	74.47	2.90
5	technology	46.20	0.88	85.64	2.50
6	generative	21.31	0.03	46.81	2.10
7	computing	23.17	0.24	38.30	1.94
8	artificial	17.86	0.14	87.23	1.66
9	technologies	19.23	0.35	56.91	1.50
10	companies	23.67	0.70	61.17	1.45
11	models	23.67	0.79	53.72	1.38
12	industry	23.10	0.75	61.70	1.38
13	intelligence	17.93	0.38	77.66	1.37
14	digital	26.04	1.02	52.13	1.34
15	development	34.94	1.76	73.94	1.30
16	innovation	12.77	0.14	40.96	1.21
17	global	22.67	0.97	49.47	1.20
18	Baidu	10.76	0.00	32.98	1.17
19	content	18.29	0.83	48.94	1.06
20	chatbot	9.47	0.00	43.62	1.05
21	language	18.87	0.98	52.66	1.00
22	market	22.74	1.53	52.13	0.94
23	ai-generated	8.25	0.00	31.91	0.92
24	Beijing	8.82	0.08	30.85	0.91
25	OpenAI	7.68	0.00	43.09	0.87
26	products	12.20	0.52	38.30	0.87
27	company	20.52	1.57	59.57	0.84
28	efforts	10.83	0.48	44.68	0.80
29	applications	9.54	0.32	39.89	0.80

The term development occupies the 15th position in Table 1 with 289 occurrences, underscoring its centrality in the discourse on AIGC. To explore its semantic associations and the underlying China-US dynamics, we analyzed its collocates using CPN (Collocation Profile Norms) settings: 3-MI (4), L5-R5, and

C15-NC15. **Table 2** and **Figure 2** display the 18 most salient collocates of development, ranked by Mutual Information (MI) values. MI, a statistical metric, quantifies the strength of collocation by examining the co-occurrences of words across the corpus (Baker, 2006: 101).

Table 2. Collocates of development in the corpus

Rank	Collocate	MI	Freq (coll.)	Freq (corpus)
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1	healthy	7.70	19	26
2	rapid	7.43	26	43
3	high-quality	6.57	17	51
4	promote	6.00	18	80
5	economy	5.20	15	116
6	innovation	5.20	23	178
7	research	5.05	37	318
8	China's	4.76	26	273
9	application	4.68	15	167
10	generative	4.53	24	297
11	models	4.49	26	330
12	industry	4.47	25	322
13	ai	4.44	143	1877
14	technology	4.41	48	644
15	of	4.38	321	4411
16	large	4.10	16	266
17	and	4.09	287	4818

The collocation analysis reveals that development is closely linked to technology, quality, and China's role, reflecting a focus on technological progress and China's contributions to AIGC. However, the discourse predominantly emphasizes the speed of development (e.g., rapid development, with an MI of 6.57 and 17 occurrences) rather than its qualitative impact on industries. For instance, Example (1) illustrates how AIGC is framed as a driver of

progress in specific sectors, such as gaming, but does not explicitly address its broader industrial applications:

(1) Citing the new report, Wang Xu of Gamma Data said AI-generated content will significantly boost the high-quality development of gaming content, adding that over 60 percent of leading Chinese gaming firms have already tapped into AIGC fields. (*China Daily*, 2023)

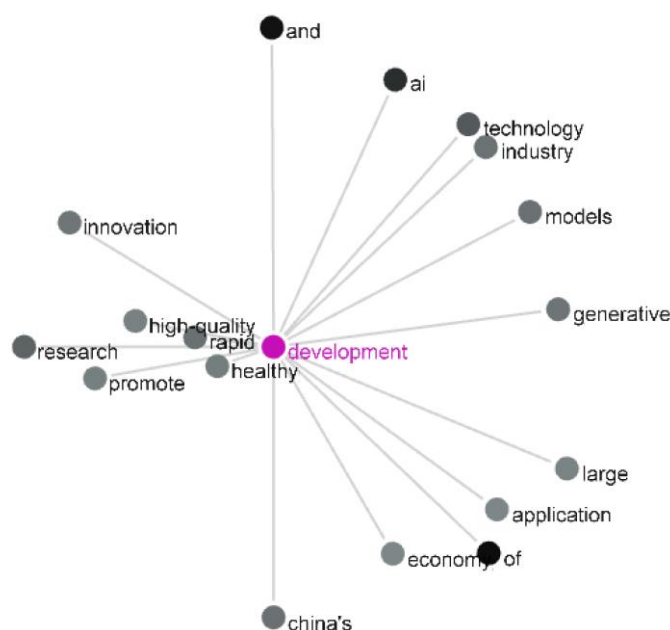


Figure 2. Collocates of development in the corpus

To comprehensively illustrate *China Daily's* representation of ChatGPT and Ernie Bot, **Figure 3** presents their respective collocation networks. To ensure the operational validity and analytical relevance of the generated networks,

the parameters for Ernie Bot's collocation network were configured as 03-MI (6), L5-R5, and C7-NC7, while those for ChatGPT were set to 03-MI (6), L4-R4, and C7-NC7.

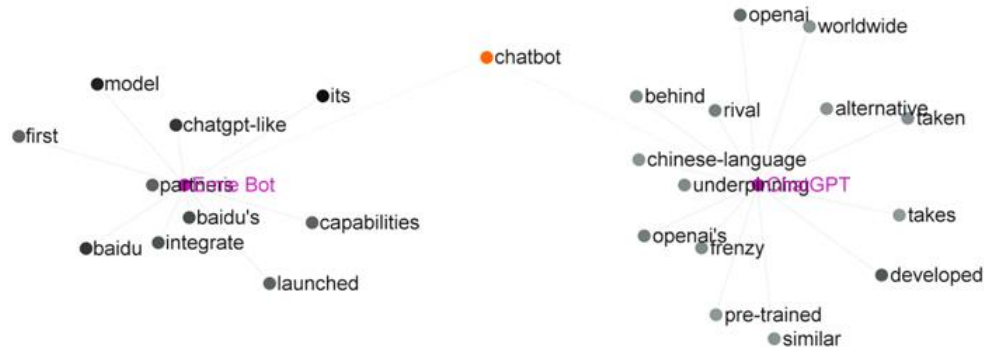


Figure 3. The collocation networks of Ernie Bot and ChatGPT in the corpus

Figure 3 illustrates that Ernie Bot possesses 11 first-order collocates and one shared collocate, whereas ChatGPT exhibits 15 first-order collocates and one shared collocate. These collocates can be broadly categorized into four groups according to the themes of the sentences in which they appear (as presented in **Table 3**): the first category is relation, the second is status, the third is popularity, and the fourth is mode.

As illustrated in **Figure 3** and **Table 3**, the content related to Ernie Bot emphasizes the cooperation mode of Chinese companies in the development of key technologies globally, China's willingness and preparedness in

exploring AIGC technology (as indicated by *partner*), and China's international relations with the desire to collaborate with the world. Specifically, regarding the United States, the content highlights China's eagerness to work together in governing AI, jointly creating a favorable AI environment for the world, demonstrating China's responsibility in the development of AIGC (as indicated by *integrate*). Furthermore, Ernie Bot and ChatGPT are also presented as symbols of the cooperative relationship between China and the United States in the development of AIGC technology.

Table 3. Categorization of first-order collocates of China and the US

Categories	Ernie Bot	Collocates	ChatGPT
relation	Partner, integrate		
status	first		alternative
popularity			frenzy
Mode	ChatGPT-like		Pre-trained, chatbot

Relation: *Partner* emerges as the first-order collocates for Ernie Bot (MI=9.42). By emphasizing the close connection between Ernie Bot and partner, *China Daily* conveys the attitude of Chinese technology companies that seek cooperation and mutual benefit in the global technology competition. This narrative approach not only demonstrates China's confidence and

openness in technological innovation but also reflects the vision of Chinese enterprises committed to achieving common progress through partnerships in the context of globalization. A deep analysis of these seven data points reveals that Ernie Bot's role in various collaborations extends beyond technical support, encompassing ecosystem development,

cross-industry collaboration, and resource sharing. This multi-layered and multi-dimensional framework of cooperation highlights Baidu's significance in promoting the application of AI technology and reflects *China Daily's* high recognition of the spirit of cooperation in its reporting, further strengthening the positive image of Ernie Bot in the global AI competition. In summary, the frequent co-occurrence of Ernie Bot and partner reflects China's strategic thinking of emphasizing cooperation in technological development. This not only showcases the global perspective of Chinese technology enterprises but also provides valuable insights into how China balances competition and cooperation in the international technology competition. Example (2) and (3) are selected as an illustration.

(2) Midea Group, a Chinese home appliance maker based in Foshan, Guangdong province, is among the **first** team of partners for Ernie Bot, an AI chatbot launched in March by tech heavyweight Baidu Inc.

In Example (2), AI and ChatGPT-related technologies are anticipated to alleviate individuals from monotonous tasks, thereby enabling a greater focus on creative endeavors. These technologies demonstrate substantial application potential across diverse sectors including culture, retail, finance, healthcare, and education. The collaboration between home appliance manufacturers and developers of conversational chatbots is expected to catalyze the intelligent transformation of China's home appliance industry. The principle of "responsible AI," as articulated by China's New Generation Artificial Intelligence Governance Committee, provides a framework for stakeholders in shaping regulatory guidelines for generative AI (Dai Jinping; Qin Yangyang, 2023). Specifically, companies across various sectors are actively pursuing partnerships with leading technology firms to harness cutting-edge AI technologies. This collaborative dynamic highlight that enterprises from different industries are progressing in the realm of intelligent technology through alliances with technology giants, thereby enhancing their market competitiveness. This prevalent trend of cooperation underscores a common practice within the technology supply chain, where industries establish partnerships to advance technology application and drive business

development.

(3) AIBANK, a Beijing-based digital bank, said it has become one of the **first** ecological partners of Ernie Bot, an AI chatbot project developed by Baidu Inc. (*China Daily*, 2023)

From Example (3), it is apparent that Ernie Bot's collaboration model extends beyond the furniture sector and is progressively infiltrating the financial domain, representing a significant achievement in the continuous advancement of AI technology. AIBANK's designation as the first ecological partner of Baidu's AI chatbot project, Ernie Bot, signifies the bank's proactive engagement and establishment of a close partnership from the project's inception. This reflects AIBANK's leading position and foresight in digital transformation and AI applications. As an early adopter, AIBANK's collaboration with Ernie Bot is expected to become increasingly profound and integrated, jointly exploring and developing novel application scenarios and business models. This partnership not only enhances AIBANK's competitive edge and innovative capacity within the financial industry but also provides substantial support for the promotion and deployment of the Ernie Bot project. Furthermore, the term *first* underscores the close, timely, and innovative nature of the collaboration between AIBANK and Ernie Bot, highlighting the extensive prospects and considerable potential of their partnership in the field of artificial intelligence. This collaborative model is poised to inject new vitality and momentum into the development of various industries and the AI sector.

Regarding ChatGPT, *rival* is its third most frequent collocate (MI=8.12). In the instances where *rival* and *ChatGPT* co-occur in the corpus, the term appears 13 times (93%), which reflects the newspaper's emphasis on ChatGPT and its competitive dynamics within the market. By identifying *rival* as the third most frequent collocate of ChatGPT and noting their frequent co-occurrence in the corpus, the report accentuates ChatGPT's significant market position and the competitive environment it navigates. This, in turn, stimulates public interest in ChatGPT's technology, its market applications, and its competitive standing within the industry. Furthermore, by highlighting the association between ChatGPT and its competitors, the report suggests that ChatGPT's technological innovation and market impact are central to its extensive scrutiny and

comparison, as demonstrated in Example (4).

(4) Chinese tech heavyweight Baidu Inc will roll out the latest version of its large language model, Ernie 4.0 seen as a potential **rival** to ChatGPT — by the end of this year, and further intensify its efforts in generative artificial intelligence technology, said the company's top executive.

In this example, the phrase *a potential rival* shows that *China Daily* frames Ernie Bot, developed by Baidu, as a potential competitor to ChatGPT, thereby underscoring Baidu's technological advancements and specific achievements in artificial intelligence. Furthermore, Baidu is set to intensify its investment in generative AI technologies, aiming to secure a larger market share and enhance its brand competitiveness. In the context of both international collaboration and competition, Baidu intends to sustain its capacity for independent innovation while actively seeking partnerships and exchanges with global counterparts to bolster its position in the international market.

Status. In relation to Ernie Bot, as illustrated in Figure 3, the term *first* predominantly collocates with “Ernie Bot” through the word “partner.” According to systemic functional grammar, ordinal numbers are employed to denote sequence (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 147). Among the seven instances where *first* and *Ernie Bot* co-occur, the collocating phrase is “first [noun] of partner for Ernie Bot.” The analysis reveals that the subjects preceding this phrase originate from various industries, signifying that Ernie Bot's extensive cross-industry applications not only reflect its technical prowess and versatility but also indicate that Ernie Bot is progressively constructing a diversified ecosystem of application scenarios. This development is driving the deeper integration and innovative advancement of AI technology across multiple domains. Example (5) has been selected as an illustrative example.

(5) Midea is also among the **first** batch of partners for Ernie Bot. The company said its smart home products and family service robots will have access to Ernie Bot, which has shown its capabilities in fields including literary creation, business writing, mathematical calculations and Chinese language understanding. (*China Daily Global*, 2023)

In example (5), the phrase *the first batch of partners for Ernie Bot* conveys that Ernie Bot is being explored and applied as a preferred or

initial partner across multiple industries. The expression *has access to* indicates Ernie Bot's willingness to collaborate and share with various sectors. This wording underscores the collaborative and open approach of the Chinese AI industry towards the development of AIGC.

Concerning ChatGPT, *alternative* ranks as its fourth most frequent collocate (MI = 7.72). Among the eight instances where *alternative* and *ChatGPT* co-occur, the phrase *ChatGPT alternative* appears five times (57%). In these five instances, Ernie Bot is consistently positioned as an appositive to *ChatGPT alternative*. This suggests that *China Daily* acknowledges ChatGPT's leading status in both technological advancement and development timeline, while simultaneously emphasizing that Ernie Bot's AIGC technological capabilities are nearly on par with those of ChatGPT. This also subtly reflects China's proactive and strategic engagement in the global AI technology competition. Example (6) illustrates this point:

(6) Last month, Baidu unveiled its large language model and Chinese-language **ChatGPT alternative**, Ernie Bot, which could be implemented in a variety of functions including searches, autonomous driving and smart devices. (*China Daily*, 2023)

Example (6) illustrates the newspaper's portrayal of Chinese companies' ambition and capabilities within the global technology market, emphasizing their anticipated progress and advancement. Simultaneously, it implies that Ernie Bot, as a Chinese alternative to ChatGPT, reflects the competitive dynamics between China and the US in the domain of artificial intelligence technology.

Popularity. *Frenzy* frequently collocates with ChatGPT in **Table 3**, highlighting the global excitement surrounding this technology. Analysis of these collocations reveals that such patterns are used to illustrate the differences between ChatGPT and Ernie Bot, and to provide guidance for the technological advancement of Ernie Bot. This analysis underscores ChatGPT's leading position in both technology and market, while also identifying potential areas for further development of Ernie Bot. Excerpt (7) is provided as an example.

(7) Ouyang Minggao, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and a professor at Tsinghua University, said the worldwide frenzy surrounding ChatGPT will have a far-reaching

impact on intelligent driving this year, making the programming of self-driving technology simpler, and leading to a new AI revolution. (*China Daily Global*, 2023)

Example (7) underscores the term *frenzy* to highlight the extensive global interest and intense attention that ChatGPT has generated. This reflects that the technology has elicited considerable excitement and anticipation not only within the technological domain but also across a wider range of societal and industrial contexts. *Far-reaching* further implies a long-term impact, suggesting that the resultant changes and effects are not ephemeral but will endure and progressively reveal their significance. This indicates that ChatGPT is poised to exert a substantial influence on technological development and industry trends over an extended period. An analysis of the co-occurrence of *ChatGPT* and *frenzy* shows that this collocation frequently appears in contexts that describe the worldwide (The co-occurrence of *worldwide* and *frenzy* in six instances) attention and reactions to ChatGPT. Specifically, *frenzy* denotes the heightened interest from both public and industry sectors regarding ChatGPT's technology, as well as the elevated expectations and sense of urgency concerning its potential impact. This usage highlights ChatGPT's prominence in the global technology market and the broad discussions it has engendered. The

collocates emphasizes ChatGPT's role as a disruptive technology and its considerable potential to drive advancements in artificial intelligence technology and its applications.

In contrast, the analysis of Ernie Bot's collocates reveals a lack of prominent intensity modifiers, which may be attributed to the constraints of the corpus size. Nevertheless, the examination of the corpus indicates that the *China Daily* includes nouns such as *capability* and *access* in its coverage of Ernie Bot, suggesting a high level of acceptance and popularity of Ernie Bot within the domain of AIGC.

4.2 Representations of China-US Relations

As established earlier, Ernie Bot and ChatGPT are products of Chinese and American companies, respectively. A comprehensive analysis of the corpus indicates that the terms *China* and *the US* appear with notable frequency, suggesting that the relationship between Ernie Bot and ChatGPT may indirectly reflect the dynamics between China and the United States. Within the CDAIC corpus, the phrase *China and the US* occurs 17 times. Subsequently, we computed the log-likelihood value using BNC2014 Baby+ as the reference corpus ($p < 0.0001$), resulting in a value of 1060.23. Under the settings CPN=03-MI (4), L5-R5, and C6-NC6, six collocates were identified, as illustrated in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Collocates of China and the US in the corpus

Rank	Collocate	Stat	Freq(coll.)	Freq(corpus)
1	ZGAP	10.42	6	36
2	between	9.07	8	122
3	development	6.66	6	487
4	ai	5.45	10	1877
5	to	4.29	9	3776
6	in	4.17	7	3189

The collocates of *China and the US* include terms indicating the relationship between China and the United States, such as *development* and *gap*. Among these, the strongest collocate, *Gap* (MI = 10.42), co-occurs with *China and the US* six times. Analysis of the corpus reveals that *China Daily* emphasizes the gap between China and the US in specific technological domains or directions, as illustrated by the following two excerpts:

(8) The gap between **China and the US** in AI mainly lies in (tech) direction. (*China Daily*, 2024)

(9) Considering that transformer, Sora or Sora-like products are all fundamentally 'software', such an AI gap between **China and the US** can be bridged within one to two years. (*China Daily*, 2024)

(10) There is a gap between **China and the US** in terms of AI development. But the gap is not as

big as the one in semiconductor lithography machines. (*China Daily*, 2024)

In Example (8), the gap between China and the United States in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) primarily lies in the technological direction. This indicates that the two countries differ in their strategic approaches and priorities regarding AI development. *China Daily* uses the adverb *mainly* to emphasize that the most evident disparities at the current stage are technological, while other, more nuanced but significant differences may still be present and require further exploration. In Example (9), *China Daily* notes that the AI gap between China and the United States, particularly in video generation AIGC technologies based on Transformer, Sora, or similar products, which are fundamentally software, could be narrowed within one to two years. This suggests that although a gap exists, it is not insurmountable due to the replicable and software-driven nature of these technologies. Similarly, Example (10) acknowledges the gap between China and the United States in AI development but observes that this gap is not as pronounced as the one in semiconductor lithography machines. This indicates that while there is a gap in AI between the two countries, it is relatively smaller compared to other advanced technological fields, such as semiconductor manufacturing.

The preposition *between* exhibits a strong association with *China and the US* (MI=9.07). In the five instances where *China and the US* co-occurs with *between*, the phrase *between China and the US* appears eight times (57%). Of these occurrences, six instances are preceded by the noun *gap*, as demonstrated in Example (11).

(11) Why weren't groundbreaking technologies such as Sora and ChatGPT created in China? How long will it be before China's equivalent of Sora comes out? Is the AI gap between China and the US widening? (*China Daily*, 2024)

Example (11) illustrates the anxiety experienced by Chinese netizens following the release of Sora, a video content generation AI developed by OpenAI, as well as their expectations and focus on domestic technological innovation capabilities. This also underscores the rapid advancement and increasingly competitive nature of AI technology on a global scale.

Furthermore, in the analysis of prepositional collocations, *in* appears in conjunction with *China and the US* in five instances, with the

phrase *China and the US in [noun]* occurring three times. An examination of these three instances reveals that *China Daily* may be using the preposition *in* to construct a shared framework encompassing both China and the US — specifically within the context of AIGC development. This approach appears to explore how the two nations interact, either through cooperation or competition, within this framework and how such interactions influence the broader international landscape. This reporting strategy facilitates a more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of the complexities in China and the US relations for the readers. The following is an example:

(12) "The main **gap** between China and the US in AI lies in the original direction for AI technology," Zhou said on the sidelines of the annual session of the National Committee of the CPPCC, which opened on Monday.

In Example (12), the phrase *original direction* pertains to the originality and innovation in AI technology research and development between the two countries. This highlights the diverse gaps and underlying reasons for these differences in AIGC between China and the US, while also suggesting that such disparities are potentially bridgeable. The excerpt, sourced from an interview with Zhou Hongyi, founder and chairman of 360 Security Technology and a national political advisor, conducted on February 23, 2024, states: "ChatGPT's strength lies in its extensive knowledge, yet it lacks specialization. The year 2024 is anticipated to be the Year of Application for Chinese AI, with large models expected to exhibit significant potential across numerous vertical sectors within enterprises. Consequently, China is well-positioned to surpass GPT-4.0 in certain vertical domains." By quoting the remarks of a leading technology professional, *China Daily* adopts a positive and objective tone, which underscores the newspaper's definitive and impartial perspective on China-US relations.

5. Discussion

The results of the study suggest that *China Daily's* reporting on the development of international AIGC not only addresses the relationship between Baidu's Ernie Bot and OpenAI's ChatGPT but also reflects the intricate dynamics between China and the United States. Despite the competition between the two countries in areas such as technology and

semiconductor development, *China Daily* places greater emphasis on the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation. The newspaper employs a binary opposition of positive and negative, portraying China as a nation that prioritizes the pursuit of common ground while respecting differences, and is committed to fostering collaborative, win-win relationships, particularly amid intensifying global competition in the advancement of large language models and AI technologies.

Conversely, while acknowledging the importance of cooperation, *China Daily* depicts the United States as a country that, while valuing collaboration, leans more towards competition, seeking to secure a leading position in this field to gain economic and strategic advantages. The newspaper further emphasizes that technological cooperation between China and the United States is essential for the progress of the global AI sector, even though competition persists in areas such as semiconductor development.

Additionally, *China Daily* contends that the ongoing competition between China and the United States may impede the development of global AI technology and the advancement of human society, underscoring the need to avert such a scenario.

Within the analytical framework of systemic functional linguistics, the relationship between Ernie Bot and ChatGPT, along with the broader China-US relations they symbolize, are discursively constructed. As Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) observe, “language is a resource for meaning-making, and meaning is realized through patterns of systemic choice.” This study reveals that the selection of modal verbs, such as the frequent use of “will” in association with Ernie Bot, suggests its portrayal as a positive agent. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the recurrent collocation patterns between Ernie Bot and ChatGPT within the corpus enables a clear delineation of the relationship between these two AI systems, which, in turn, reflects the international relations between China and the United States. The shared collocates of Ernie Bot and ChatGPT indicate not only a technological equivalence but also underscore *China Daily*’s emphasis on the intricate connections and marked differences between the two nations in AI development. The linguistic variations encapsulate distinct ideological meanings, leading to significant

divergences in their discursive representations.

Objectively, since the introduction of ChatGPT, there has been a rapid increase in global investment in AI-generated content (AIGC) technology. In response, China has developed Ernie Bot, continually enhancing and optimizing its algorithms and database, thus achieving notable advancements and a significant position in the international AI technology domain. Following the release of the *Guidance on Actively Promoting Internet Plus Action Plan* by the State Council in July 2015, which prioritized artificial intelligence as a key task, China’s AI sector has entered a new developmental stage. This was furthered by the issuance of several related policies. Notably, in July 2017, the State Council published the *Development Planning for a New Generation of Artificial Intelligence*, which established a three-phase strategic framework for AI development, elevating it to a national strategic priority. The plan set forth objectives for AI to achieve world-leading standards in theory, technology, and application by 2030, and to become a major center for AI innovation. During the 13th Five-Year Plan period, the National Plan for Science and Innovation and the Plan for National Strategic Emerging Industries outlined the objectives of advancing AI, fostering an AI industry ecosystem, and promoting the comprehensive integration of AI technologies across various sectors. Key tasks included achieving significant breakthroughs in human-like intelligent methods driven by big data analysis. In the 14th Five-Year Plan period, the focus is on continuing advancements in research and development, iterative application, and deepening the penetration of AI technologies across multiple scenarios.

According to data published by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, China’s core AI industry reached a scale of 578.4 billion RMB in 2023, reflecting a growth rate of 13.9%. A report by McKinsey projects that by 2030, generative AI is expected to contribute approximately \$7 trillion to the global economy, with China anticipated to contribute approximately \$2 trillion, accounting for nearly one-third of the global total.

The development of the AI industry in China is guided by two key national-level policies: *Development Planning for a New Generation of Artificial Intelligence* and *Three-Year Action Plan (2018-2020) for Promoting the Development of a New Generation of Artificial Intelligence*. The

implementation of these policies has significantly advanced AI technology and facilitated its practical application within China. Notably, the *Development Planning for a New Generation of Artificial Intelligence* represents the first comprehensive national strategy in the AI domain, serving as a foundational document aimed at establishing China's early advantages in this field. This policy provides a systematic framework and strategic guidance for the development of new AI technologies by 2030, outlining the overall strategic approach, key objectives, major tasks, and support measures necessary for achieving these goals. The *Development Planning for a New Generation of Artificial Intelligence* sets forth a "three-step" target: by 2020, China's AI technology and applications should be on par with the world's advanced levels; by 2025, significant breakthroughs in fundamental AI theories should be achieved, with certain technologies and applications reaching a globally leading standard; and by 2030, China's AI theories, technologies, and applications are expected to attain overall global leadership, establishing the country as a major center for AI innovation.

The *China Daily's* reporting on China's cooperative principles is, to a considerable extent, shaped by the concept of a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind," introduced at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2017. This concept embodies not only a value system but also China's proposed framework for global governance, advocating for nations to jointly address global challenges within the context of increasing interdependence and interaction in a globalized world, thereby promoting the sustainable development of human society. Consequently, the *China Daily* emphasizes the positive dimensions of the Community of Shared Future for Mankind, focusing on constructing an image of China as a proud and proactive global actor. At the same time, this concept underscores the creation of a new form of international relations centered on multilateralism, cooperation rather than confrontation, and collective responses to global issues, thereby portraying China as a responsible and cooperative participant in global affairs.

Furthermore, the *China Daily's* focus on China-US collaboration in the AIGC sector is indicative of the Community of Shared Future in

Cyberspace concept, as outlined by President Xi Jinping in his address to the 2022 World Internet Conference in Wuzhen. This concept underscores China's contribution to global peace, development, and the progress of human civilization. The successful realization of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind requires a stable and conducive international environment, making the cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship between China and the United States essential for addressing critical global challenges, including advancements in key AIGC technologies.

6. Conclusion

This study investigates how *China Daily* communicates climate change issues to international audiences during the period from 2022 to 2024. By focusing on this specific domain of China's official English-language newspaper, the research addresses a gap in the existing literature and contributes to the field of climate change media communication through an analysis of the discourse surrounding China's and the US's AIGC (Artificial Intelligence Generated Content) software, their relationship, and China-US relations. Utilizing methods from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL), the study identifies that *China Daily* employs specific modal verbs and collocates associated with Ernie Bot and ChatGPT to indirectly construct China as a cooperative and win-win major power, while characterizing the US, where ChatGPT is based, as a highly competitive nation. The study underscores the importance of collaboration between Chinese and American AI companies in the development of AIGC. The reporting style of *China Daily* on AIGC advancements and technological innovations aligns with the broader vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, a principle actively promoted by the Chinese government. According to *China Daily*, China boasts some of the world's leading AI talent. However, addressing the challenges of aligning advanced AI systems necessitates collaboration among the brightest minds globally. This is particularly critical as high-performance computer chips, or semiconductors, have become a focal point of geopolitical tensions.

Finally, this study has limitations. The corpus data used for comparison between #LancsBox and the self-constructed CDAI corpus is only updated until 2014, and the database does not

include newer terms such as ChatGPT and AIGC. Consequently, future research should consider utilizing more recent and comprehensive corpora to explore potential new findings in Chinese media coverage of AIGC.

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Applications and Limitations of Corpus Linguistics: A Corpus-Based Study on Nuclear Wastewater Discharge Coverage in *Asahi Shimbun*

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Abstract

This study investigates the strengths and Weaknesses of Corpus Linguistics (CL) in analyzing media discourse, using a case study of *Asahi Shimbun's* coverage of Japan's nuclear wastewater discharge from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. The research objective is to evaluate CL's effectiveness in uncovering linguistic strategies and ideological framing within Japanese media narratives. Employing keyword, collocation, and concordance analyses, the study analyzes a corpus of 34 articles published between August 22, 2023, and March 1, 2025, comprising 17,072 tokens. Key findings reveal a geopolitical emphasis, with "China" (177 occurrences) surpassing "Japan" (161 occurrences) in frequency, reflecting tensions exacerbated by China's seafood import ban, and a strategic framing of "treated water" (73 occurrences) over "contaminated water" (16 occurrences) to suggest safety and control. CL demonstrates strengths in efficiently processing large datasets and providing objective, quantitative insights into linguistic patterns. However, it does not fully reflect emotional details or how social roles are represented, such as Japan being seen as responsible and China as a critic. To improve this, the study uses the Social Actors Framework (SAF) to analyze agency and hidden ideologies more effectively. By applying CL to non-English media, this research shows the need to combine quantitative and qualitative methods for a clearer understanding of media framing in complex environmental and geopolitical issues.

Keywords: Corpus Linguistics, discourse analysis, nuclear wastewater discharge, ideological framing, Social Actors Framework

1. Introduction

Japan's 2023 decision caused widespread international concern. Environmental warnings clashed with trade bans, and media reports heightened the controversy. This study aims to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Corpus Linguistics (CL) in analyzing ideologies in Japanese newspapers regarding the coverage

of Japan's nuclear wastewater discharge (Bednarek & Caple, 2017).

Unlike traditional linguistic methods, CL is an approach that uses computational tools to study language. It allows researchers to analyze large text collections, identifying patterns and structures in discourse (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). This study takes place in the ongoing

debate on handling Fukushima's nuclear wastewater release into the Pacific. The policy has sparked domestic and international controversy. Global reactions range from environmental concerns to diplomatic tensions, especially with neighboring countries like China. The media plays an important role in shaping public opinion on such complex issues (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). Given its influence, studying news language helps reveal how narratives are constructed and ideologies communicated. These ideas can improve public communication and help manage international disputes.

While CL has been widely applied to English-language media, few studies have explored its use in analyzing Japanese media discourse on environmental controversies, a gap this study addresses. Thus, articles from the *Asahi Shimbun* are employed as a case study to uncover how language strategies may influence public perceptions of the issue. This study uses functions of CL tools to explain how CL can be used to examine the language construction of social narratives. The findings stress how media language presents controversial issues and influences ideology.

The paper first introduces the nuclear wastewater issue and outlines its methodology. It then analyzes how keywords and collocations shape public awareness. It also discusses CL's limitations, such as its inability to capture emotional and rhetorical details. To address this, the study uses the Social Actors Framework, which qualitatively analyzes how social entities like nations and organizations are represented in media discourse.

2. Research Context

Concerns are rising over Japan's release of nuclear wastewater, as it has global impacts on environmental safety and public health (Behrens et al., 2012). Radioactive elements like cesium and tritium remain in the water, causing long-term dangers. Once enter the food chain, these elements could cause genetic mutations and other human health issues. The environmental impact also affects Pacific ecosystems, potentially harming marine life and biodiversity (Liu, 2023). On August 24, 2023, the Japanese government started discharging the wastewater into the Pacific Ocean. This move quickly triggered opposition from local protesters, neighboring countries, and global

environmental groups. For instance, China's negative response, including a ban on seafood imports, clearly indicates political rivalry.

The impact of this decision reverberates beyond immediate environmental concerns; it has led to broader geopolitical tensions, particularly between Japan and China (Sora, 2022). These tensions underscore the complex intersection of national policy, public health, and international relations. Considering the power of mass media in shaping societal views, a careful analysis of the language in news reports on significant topics is necessary (Fackler, 2016).

Japan's historical experience and sensitivity to nuclear concerns make it essential to explore how Japanese newspapers report on this subject. Founded in 1879, *Asahi Shimbun* is among one of the most prominent national newspapers in Japan, receiving an average of 140 million page views and more than 34.5 million unique visitors each month, thus it is a key indicator of public opinion (Asahi Shimbun Media Business Division, 2024). The newspaper's dual-language publications in Japanese and English ensure that it reaches both domestic and international audiences. The media is important in reflecting government ideologies and shaping public perceptions. Its impact is significant. Therefore, analyzing the language used in covering this controversial issue provides important ideas. It helps people understand how the media handles environmental crises and political tensions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The study collected data from the official website of *Asahi Shimbun*, focusing on articles published between August 22, 2023, and March 1, 2025. This period was chosen because it includes Japan's announcement on August 22, 2023, about releasing nuclear wastewater, which began on August 24, 2023. This timeframe gives ideas for how the media and the public responded to the announcement. It shows both the immediate reactions and the evolving media coverage, while also including the latest development on this issue.

The corpus was built based on this timeframe. Thirty-four articles were selected using search terms like "Fukushima water" and "radioactive water," ranging from 400 to 600 words, each article was chosen for its suitability. This word count gives enough space to discuss the topic in detail without being too complicated, as longer

articles might be. It also avoids the shallowness of shorter articles, ensuring a balanced and clear perspective on the issue.

3.2 Research Instrument

For data processing, the corpus tool AntConc was used to compile and analyze the collected data. Known for the user-friendly interface, AntConc is a free tool designed for linguistic research and text analysis (Froehlich, 2015). This tool was chosen for its ability to handle large text datasets and provide quantitative insights into word frequency and relationships.

Before the analysis, all collected articles were cleaned by removing images, extra spaces, and symbols. The text was then converted to a standard plain text format. This step ensured the corpus was clean and ready for analysis, which is essential for obtaining accurate results. The corpus “*Asahi Shimbun*-Nuclear Wastewater” was created using AntConc. It contains 17,072 tokens, representing distinct words and symbols in the text. The corpus was carefully assembled from articles about nuclear wastewater in the *Asahi Shimbun*, a major Japanese newspaper. This corpus is the main linguistic resource for this study and will be analyzed to study how topics like nuclear wastewater are presented in the media.

3.3 Data Analysis

When the corpus was prepared, the analysis began. A multi-dimensional approach was used to study the language in the *Asahi Shimbun* articles, focusing on keyword analysis, collocation analysis, and concordance analysis. For keyword analysis, the “*Asahi Shimbun*-Nuclear Wastewater” corpus was compared with the “British English 2006 Press Reportage” corpus. This reference corpus contains 88,187 tokens and is publicly available. It is well-organized and validated, making it reliable for analysis. Both corpora are derived

from news reports, and a comparison between them can identify the unique expressions specific to the topic of the target corpus. However, only the analysis of keywords is far from enough, word collocation and concordance can provide additional insights for a more comprehensive analysis. To achieve this, the study employed collocation analysis to identify words that commonly appear alongside keywords such as “water” and “China,” enabling a deeper exploration of framing and affective patterns (Biber, Reppen, & Conrad, 1998). Further analysis of these terms through concordance analysis provided a better understanding of the ideological context within the texts. This multifaceted approach showed the effectiveness of Corpus Linguistics in analyzing media discourse.

4. Findings

4.1 Keyword Analysis

Using AntConc, the Keyword List (Table 1) has been obtained. Given that the newspaper articles focus on Japan’s nuclear wastewater discharge, terms like “water,” “Japan,” and “Japanese” are expected to be used repeatedly. These keywords contribute to a better understanding of the articles’ ideological framework. However, “China” emerged as the most frequent keyword (177 occurrences, keyness = 624.211), surpassing even “Japan” (161 occurrences). This may reflect the geopolitical tensions surrounding the wastewater issue. Meanwhile, the term “water” ranked third in the keyword list (Table 1), appearing 167 times with a keyness value of 520.109. This high frequency underscores its centrality in the discourse on nuclear wastewater discharge. These keywords partially reflect the report’s theme, but a deeper understanding requires collocation and concordance analysis.

Table 1. Top 5 words from Keyword List

Type	Rank	Freq_Tar	Range_Tar	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
China	1	177	24	624.211	0.021
Japan	2	161	29	566.114	0.019
water	3	167	34	520.109	0.019
Japanese	4	128	26	466.466	0.015
Chinese	5	119	20	433.615	0.014

4.2 Analysis of the Keyword “China”

4.2.1 Collocate Analysis

Through AntConc, collocates of “China” can be obtained (Table 2). Here, the “s” is a possessive, so it is not included in the discussion. “Japan”

and “ban” will be analyzed further through concordance analysis. This begins with exploring Japan-China relations in the concordance data.

Table 2. Collocates with five-word span surrounding “China”

Collocate	Rank	Freq (Scaled)	FreqLR	FreqL	FreqR	Range	Likelihood	Effect
s	1	1370	46	12	34	17	47.396	1.729
Japan	2	1610	47	34	13	16	39.277	1.527
ban	3	440	20	2	18	14	29.673	2.166
in	4	3840	72	52	20	22	23.422	0.889
nationals	5	90	7	7	0	6	16.811	2.941

4.2.2 Concordance Analysis

The way “China” is depicted in the *Asahi Shimbun* articles goes beyond just economic ties, also shedding light on the diplomatic relations between the two nations. By analyzing how “Japan” is referred to, we can better understand the multifaceted nature of the China-Japan relationship. This examination uncovers not only the economic aspects but also the diplomatic ones, offering a deeper understanding of the complexities that define their bilateral interactions. As a result, it presents a more comprehensive view of the evolving dynamics between these two countries.

- 1) After the meeting, Kishida told reporters, “Japan and China agreed to work together to resolve the issue through discussions and dialogue while holding a constructive attitude.” (AS, 17/11/2023)
- 2) Japan and China have been coordinating a meeting between Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Chinese Premier Li Qiang on the sidelines of ASEAN-related summits scheduled in Indonesia in early September. (AS, 28/08/2023)
- 3) As nations with a significant responsibility for regional stability, Japan and China must engage in continued and meaningful dialogue to explore avenues of effective and fruitful cooperation. (AS, 18/11/2023)
- 4) “Japan and China must establish stable and smooth relations that run like a local train (instead of a roller coaster),” Tarumi said. (AS, 18/11/2023)

- 5) SAN FRANCISCO — The leaders of Japan and China drew on the past to move fraught bilateral relations forward during talks here aimed at leveraging the two countries’ common interests. (AS, 18/11/2023)
- 6) We welcome the emerging willingness among policymakers in both Japan and China to expand bilateral dialogue as a first step toward improving relations between the two nations. (AS, 16/12/2024)
- 7) They are also expected to confirm that Japan and China will maintain the principles and shared awareness included in the four basic documents concluded between the two countries and will build a relationship that allows for candid conversations. (AS, 15/11/2024)
- 8) “I want to create a bright future for Japan-China ties and look forward to a frank exchange of views from a larger perspective,” Kishida said. (AS, 17/11/2023)
- 9) The policy to comprehensively advance the strategic and mutually beneficial relationship, in which the two countries will cooperate over their common interests, has been a pillar of Japan’s China policy since it was first laid out in 2006. (AS, 15/11/2024)
- 10) Leaders of China and Japan agree to ‘mutually beneficial’ ties. (AS, 11/10/2024)

Using expressions such as “work together,” “establish stable and smooth relations,” and “create a bright future,” the 10 examples from

news texts demonstrate that Japan and China are actively advancing dialogue and cooperation to build a stable bilateral relationship.

While diplomatic efforts typically promote dialogue and cooperation, the “ban” reflects the presence of tensions, as will be explored further in the following discussion. Analyzing the concordance of “ban” demonstrates that this term is consistently associated with Japan’s seafood imports, indicating that the restrictions play an important role in the ongoing dispute.

- 11) The meeting also addressed China’s import ban on Japanese seafood, which was imposed shortly after Japan began releasing treated radioactive water into the ocean from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in August last year. (AS, 11/10/2024)
- 12) A priority issue for Japan is China’s blanket ban on seafood imports over the release since August of treated radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean. (AS, 18/11/2023)
- 13) China also imposed a blanket ban on seafood imports from Japan in August to protest the release of treated radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean. (AS, 05/12/2023)
- 14) Kishida called on Li to immediately lift an import ban that China slapped on Japanese marine products when Japan began releasing treated water into the Pacific Ocean in August last year, sources said. (AS, 27/05/2024)

Examples 11) to 14) illustrate that China’s import ban on Japanese seafood was implemented following Japan’s commencement of discharging treated radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean. This incident is regarded as the direct trigger for the ban, imbued with a political connotation of “protest.”

- 15) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida pledged an additional 20.7 billion yen (\$141 million) to help the fishing industry cope with China’s blanket ban on Japanese seafood imports, but the plan was immediately met with skepticism. (AS, 25/09/2023)
- 16) The government plans to establish a fund to help the fisheries industry cope with

China’s import ban on all Japanese seafood over the release of treated radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear plant. (AS, 31/08/2023)

- 17) Prices of scallops in Hokkaido and three other prefectures plunged 11 to 27 percent since China imposed the ban, according to a survey by the Fisheries Agency. (AS, 03/10/2023)
- 18) According to a survey by the Fisheries Agency, prices of scallops in Hokkaido and three other prefectures have plunged 11 to 27 percent since China imposed its ban. (AS, 25/09/2023)
- 19) Companies seek new market for scallops after China ban. (AS, 25/09/2023)

China’s blanket ban on the import of Japanese seafood has had a direct and multifaceted impact on Japan’s fishing industry. Examples 17) to 19) illustrate that the price of scallops has significantly decreased after the ban was imposed, prompting some companies to explore new markets for scallop exports. Examples 15) and 16) show the Japanese government announced financial assistance and set up a special fund to support the fishing industry.

4.3 Analysis of the Keyword “Water”

4.3.1 Collocate Analysis

Through AntConc, a list of collocates of “water” can be obtained easily (Table 3). In the context of Japan’s nuclear wastewater discharge, an analysis of the top collocates of the word “water”, including “treated”, “release”, “radioactive”, and “discharge”, reveals critical insights into the surrounding discourse. The prominence of “treated” suggests that discussions heavily focus on the treatment or purification processes applied to nuclear wastewater prior to its release, stressing efforts to mitigate its hazards. Meanwhile, “release” and “discharge” indicate that much of the conversation centers on the act of releasing or discharging the water, particularly into the ocean or broader environment, a pivotal aspect of Japan’s wastewater management strategy. Additionally, the frequent collocation with “radioactive” underscores widespread concern about the water’s radioactivity, a key factor in debates over the safety and environmental impact of its discharge. Collectively, these collocates illuminate the core themes dominating discussions about Japan’s nuclear

wastewater: the treatment process, the mechanics of release, and the persistent risks posed by radioactivity.

Table 3. Top 10 Collocates with five-word span surrounding “water”

Collocate	Rank	Freq (Scaled)	FreqLR	FreqL	FreqR	Range	Likelihood	Effect
treated	1	760	73	70	3	33	212.221	3.309
release	2	620	53	24	29	24	141.876	3.141
radioactive	3	480	33	33	0	31	74.851	2.827
discharge	4	500	33	17	16	15	72.445	2.768
the	5	12900	214	124	90	33	58.107	0.776
into	6	550	30	3	27	18	55.853	2.493
contaminated	7	160	16	13	3	10	47.284	3.368
Fukushima	8	910	34	11	23	22	42.517	1.947
ocean	9	400	22	2	20	15	41.197	2.505

4.3.2 Concordance Analysis

Word choice plays an important role in shaping how we think and feel about a topic. It affects readers’ emotions, attitudes, and can influence public opinion (Zhou, 2022). Looking at Table 3, we see the words “treated” and “contaminated” used differently. The word “treated” appears 73 times, suggesting that the water has been processed properly and is safe to release. On the other hand, “contaminated” is used much less, which shows an effort to avoid stressing any negative side. This choice seems to aim at presenting the water positively, focusing on its

safety and readiness. The message reassures the public and reduces worries by using “treated” more often and avoiding “contaminated”. This difference in word choice helps shape how people see the situation. Both words carry emotional meaning and can strongly influence how the public feels about the release of nuclear wastewater.

By looking at how “treated” (Table 4) and “contaminated” (Table 5) are used, we can better understand their meaning in different situations. The way these words are used in context helps shape the message of the discourse.

Table 4. Sample concordance lines for “treated”

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
of water. For Japan’s planned discharge of	treated	radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1
from 30 tanks this fiscal year. The release of	treated	radioactive water from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear
expressed concerns and outrage over plans to release	treated	radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear
China amid the backlash surrounding the discharge of	treated	radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear plant.
on all Japanese seafood over the release of	treated	radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear plant.
Beijing’s harsh reaction to the release of	treated	radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear
government and Tokyo Electric Power Co.	treated	radioactive water from the stricken

began releasing		Fukushima No. 1
seafood imports in response to the discharge of	treated	radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1
South Korean respondents were “against” the release of	treated	radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1
seafood imports that started after the discharge of	treated	radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1

Table 5. Sample concordance lines for “contaminated”

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
make a dent in the massive amount of	contaminated	water accumulating there. Plant operator Tokyo Electric
or “slurry,” produced in the process of treating	contaminated	water continues to increase, but no effective
buildings, increasing the volume of contaminated water. The	contaminated	water has been filtered to remove radioactive
only radioactive element that cannot be removed from	contaminated	water using the Advanced Liquid Processing System
fuel debris, which is the source of the	contaminated	water, has been extremely difficult. The first
effort A splashing sound was heard as treated	contaminated	water, mixed with seawater pumped in for
discharge of what it calls “the Fukushima nuclear-	contaminated	water” and immediately banned imports of Japanese
catching fish in what Beijing calls “Fukushima nuclear-	contaminated	water” for distribution in China, while the
plant, the Chinese government said the water was “	contaminated”	and imposed a blanket ban on Japanese
discharge of what it calls “the Fukushima nuclear-	contaminated	water” and immediately banned imports of Japanese

To investigate the emotional inclination of news reports in their portrayal of nuclear wastewater, a comprehensive analysis of the data was conducted (Figure 1). A closer analysis of the data shows that 86% of the words typically linked to “nuclear wastewater” carry positive meanings, while only 14% are associated with negative implications. The rare mention of the term “contaminated” suggests an effort to minimize or avoid stressing the negative aspects of the nuclear wastewater issue. On the other hand, the repeated use of the word “treated” is

important in promoting the idea that the wastewater is safe and properly managed. This choice of words shows a clear effort to present nuclear wastewater in a positive way, showing its careful treatment and avoiding mention of any possible dangers. The goal is to reassure the public by focusing on good management and reducing concerns. These language choices also show Japan’s attempt to position itself as a responsible actor both in the country and on the global stage.

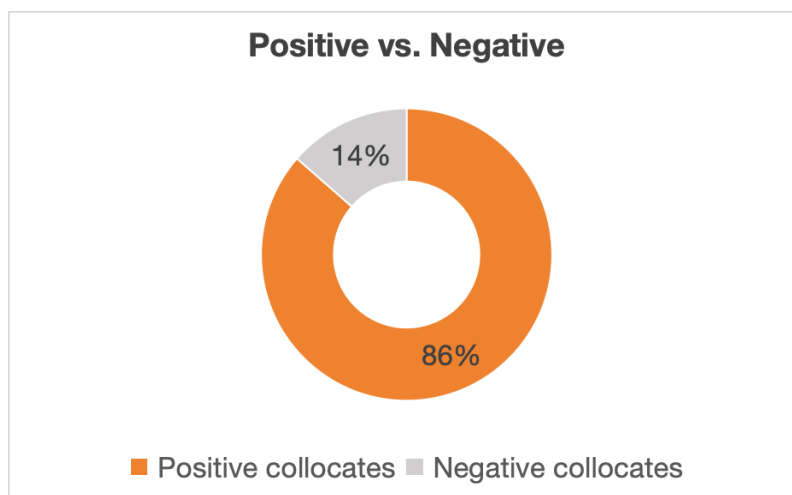


Figure 1. Emotional Tendencies for “water”

5. Strengths and Weaknesses of Corpus Linguistics

5.1 Strengths of CL

Corpus Linguistics (CL) is very useful for analyzing media discourse, especially because it can handle large datasets and provide objective, quantitative insights into how language is used. In this study, CL was used to analyze 34 articles from the *Asahi Shimbun* on the coverage of nuclear wastewater discharge, published from August 2023 to March 2025. The study used AntConc to process over 17,000 tokens, finding important patterns that would be hard to notice manually. This shows the strength of CL to cope with huge amounts of data effectively (Baker, 2006). For example, keyword analysis showed that “China” was mentioned 177 times with a keyness value of 624.211, more than “Japan” (161 mentions), showing the geopolitical focus of the articles. Also, “water” appeared 167 times with a keyness value of 520.109, showing how central water is to the story.

CL also provides a solid quantitative foundation, it improves the credibility and reliability of the findings through exact numerical data (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). The study used AntConc’s keyword and collocation tools to analyze terms and their relationships. For instance, the collocation analysis showed that “treated” appeared with “water” 73 times, compared to “contaminated” with only 16 mentions. This difference is shown in phrases like “release of treated radioactive water” versus the less common “contaminated water.” It clearly shows how the wastewater is framed as safe, reflecting Japan’s effort to manage public

perception. This kind of statistical evidence helps minimize researcher bias and provides an objective view of how media creates narratives.

CL can also reveal small patterns that traditional methods can miss. For example, the collocation of “China” and “ban” (20 times), as in “China imposed a blanket ban,” shows China as an active opponent, showing ideological tensions in the discourse. These ideas show CL’s ability to uncover language strategies that shape public understanding.

5.2 Weaknesses of CL

While CL’s quantitative strengths are evident in this study, its weaknesses in showing qualitative details need more consideration. CL has problems in showing the emotive and metaphorical significations conveyed in rhetorical devices and metaphors. (O’Halloran, 2007). CL can quantify the frequency of terms such as “treated water” (appearing 73 times) versus “contaminated water” (appearing only 16 times), but it cannot fully show the implications of these choices—such as how “treated” means safety and control, while “contaminated” shows danger and negligence. This emotional and rhetorical gap restricts CL’s ability to fully understand how language influences public perception. In other words, the lack of attention to the emotional tone and rhetorical strategies in language makes it difficult for CL to grasp the deeper impact language has on how people view certain issues or events. Without addressing these aspects, CL’s analysis remains limited in capturing the true effect of language on public opinion.

Moreover, CL falls short in analyzing how social

entities—countries like Japan and China, organizations like the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, or groups like the fishing industry—are portrayed in discourse. Although it can stress that “China” (177 occurrences) and “Japan” (161 occurrences) are key terms, it does not reveal whether these actors are framed as active agents driving events, passive recipients affected by them, or assigned specific roles such as problem solvers or problem causers. This lack of qualitative insight restricts CL’s capacity to explore the ideological underpinnings of the text. The constraint of CL shows the necessity of combining it with different qualitative approaches to ensure a more comprehensive and balanced examination of issues (Widdowson, 2000).

5.3 Mitigations of the Weakness

Given these weaknesses, integrating qualitative approaches like the Social Actors Framework offers a promising solution to enhance CL’s analytical depth (Partington, 2010). This approach analyzes how subjects, groups, and entities are distinguished in language. Readers can gain a richer understanding of the social, cultural, and ideological interpretations of figurative language and rhetorical techniques (van Leeuwen, 2008). A more extensive analysis can result from merging both CL and the Social Actors Framework.

CL shows important entities, such as “China” and “Japan,” as central to the discourse. However, it does not provide the means to explore the roles or actions these entities play within the context. SAF, on the other hand, fills this gap by analyzing whether social actors are portrayed as active participants (carrying out actions) or passive recipients (being affected by actions). In addition, SAF looks into the specific roles these actors are given, such as being seen as the cause of problems, the solution providers, or the victims of circumstances. In the *Asahi Shimbun* data, SAF reveals that Japan is often activated as a proactive actor in phrases like “Japan began releasing treated water,” positioning it as a problem solver managing the Fukushima crisis. Conversely, China is activated in contexts like “China imposed a blanket ban on Japanese seafood” (20 co-occurrences with “ban”), framing it as a resistant or antagonistic actor protesting Japan’s policy. CL quantifies these terms’ frequency, but SAF uncovers how such portrayals reflect ideological tensions, such as Japan’s efforts to legitimize its actions versus

China’s role as a critic, enriching the analysis beyond mere word counts.

CL’s focus on surface-level patterns, such as the collocation of “China” and “ban” (20 times), overlooks rhetorical devices like de-agentialization or metaphor that obscure responsibility or bias. SAF excels at identifying these strategies by analyzing how actions are attributed to social actors (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). For example, the passive construction “Nuclear wastewater will be discharged into the sea” (noted in the news text) omits the responsible party, diffusing accountability away from Japan or the Fukushima plant. In contrast, explicit agency in “China imposed a blanket ban” assigns clear responsibility, potentially amplifying China’s image as a disruptor. SAF’s ability to dissect such rhetoric—whether Japan’s use of “treated water” minimizes risk or China’s “nuclear-contaminated water” heightens it—complements CL’s data, exposing hidden biases and ideological framing that quantitative analysis alone cannot detect.

6. Conclusion

This study shows how effective Corpus Linguistics (CL) is in analyzing language and ideologies in the *Asahi Shimbun*’s coverage of Japan’s nuclear wastewater discharge. The research used keyword, collocation, and concordance analysis to find that “treated water” (73 times) was used much more than “contaminated water” (16 times), creating a narrative of safety and control. This supports the study’s goal to show how CL uncovers ideological views in media discourse and stresses its strength in identifying language patterns. However, the study also shows that CL struggles to show qualitative aspects like emotional tone or how social actors (such as Japan and China) are portrayed, which points to the need for more methods.

To address these gaps, the study used the Social Actors Framework (SAF) to add more depth, showing how Japan is shown as a responsible actor and China as a critic. This combination of methods not only confirms CL’s value in analyzing non-English media but also shows its strengths and limitations.

The findings have practical value. The study can help Japan improve its environmental communication and respond better to international criticism and public concerns by understanding how the *Asahi Shimbun* shapes

public views on environmental risks. In addition, it offers ideas for the impact of China's seafood ban on Japan's fishing industry, and it guides policymakers in creating solutions for affected sectors.

For future research, it would be useful to compare the *Asahi Shimbun's* coverage with that of Chinese media like Xinhua to study cultural differences in framing. Also, including environmental science data could provide a clearer picture of how linguistic patterns relate to ecological facts.

In conclusion, this study stresses CL's ability to detect ideological framing in media, as shown by the *Asahi Shimbun's* focus on "treated water" to reduce controversy. Its full potential, however, is realized when combined with qualitative methods like SAF, which gives a more detailed understanding of language and perception. Future research can expand on this, using more media sources and exploring interdisciplinary approaches to better understand how language shapes environmental and geopolitical issues.

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