

Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese English News Reports from the Perspective of Ecolinguistics

-- Taking the Reports of the Northward Migration of Asian Elephants as an Example

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Abstract. This study makes a Critical Discourse Analysis of the ecological and non-ecological features of Chinese English news reports and holds that news reports ultimately serves the interest groups it represents and cannot get rid of its ideological influence. To achieve this, with Fairclough's three-dimensional model as the theoretical framework and from the perspective of ecolinguistics, this study, based on 29 English news reports on the northward migration of Asian elephants from China Daily and by building up a small corpus, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, aims to analyze the selected corpus with the help of AntConc 3.5.9 (windows) 2020. Finally, through the analysis of text analysis, discourse interpretation, and social interpretation, it is found that Chinese and English news reports have ecological and non-ecological features. At the same time, English news reports in China also try to express and build a harmonious relationship between man and nature. It reflects that China follows the ecological order concept of "harmonious co-existence between man and nature" and the ecological basis of "man and nature are the community of life".

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; English News Reports; Ecolinguistics.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to explore the ecological and non-ecological features of Chinese English news reports through the reports of the wild Asian elephants migrating northern. This part includes the following three parts: research background, research aims and outline of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent months, a group of wild Asian elephants had migrated northward from Xishuangbanna, which has attracted wide attention. Chinese major mainstream media have reported, and then the matter has also aroused heated discussion across the country.

The media, as an important window for the public to acquire information in time plays a vital role in influencing the attitude and behavior of citizens (Yu, Lu&Hu, 2021). Chinese English news reports, not only have significant effects in China but also is an important part of foreign publicity, which is one of the channels for foreigners to understand China's current affairs. News reporting is a branch of discourse and a hot field of Critical Discourse Analysis (Chen, 2020). As Van Dijk's (1997) news discourse analysis theory holds, news texts of newspapers not only affect the public's social cognition of various things but also shape their cognitive structure. Meanwhile, because of its basic principles of fairness, objectivity, and accuracy, the opinions expressed in news reports could influence the readers imperceptibly. Therefore, it's necessary to explain the subtext behind it through discourse analysis (Huang, 2012; Dong&Wang, 2012). Critical Discourse Analysis originated in the late 1970s and had developed rapidly in the past few decades. Its representatives are Roger Fowler, Van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough. Scholars at home and abroad have also made Critical Discourse Analysis of news reports from different perspectives or using different theoretical methods. Davis & French (2008) selected the news reports about Hurricane Katrina from several newspapers in the United States by using Critical Discourse Analysis. Ding and Qin (2012) analyzed disaster news reporting from the perspective of social cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis. Based on the analysis of intertextuality,

Fu and Shen (2014) revealed the different positions and purposes of the two sides through the analysis of two different news reports. Kelsey et al. (2015) analyzed news reports of financial crisis and austerity and revealed the potential power relations behind the economic crime from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. Pan (2015) made a Critical Discourse Analysis of the news reports about the Chinese Navy on the US “Strategic Page” website from 2013 to 2014, revealed the ideology constructed and implied in them, and then understood how the US media affected the world’s understanding of China’s naval power by exercising their discourse power. Hu and Wei (2019), based on the discourse analysis of AIDS reports in the People’s Daily, studied the media representation and discourse changes of AIDS, arousing people’s concern for vulnerable groups.

Ecolinguistics is a new branch of linguistics, which has developed rapidly in recent 30 years (Huang & Chen, 2016; 2017). The reason why this discipline is highly respected is that it regards human beings and human society as an important part of a larger ecosystem rather than an independent part (Huang 2018). Its task is to reveal the interaction between language and environment by studying the ecological factors of language and the relationship between language and ecology. The analysis of Chinese English news reports from the perspective of ecolinguistics can make the media and people pay more attention to nature. Thus, ecolinguistics provides a new perspective for the research of language. Many scholars analyzed different discourses from the perspective of ecolinguistics. For example, Mao (2020) analyzed microblog language from the perspective of ecolinguistics. Zhang (2020) analyzed high school English teacher talk from the perspective of ecolinguistics. Li & Kan (2019) analyzed English network buzzwords from the perspective of ecolinguistics. In addition, many scholars also studied discourse through different methods from the perspective of ecolinguistics. For instance, from the perspective of transitivity and modality, news reports were analyzed to reveal the ideology hidden behind news reports (Yuan, 2019).

Through literature review, the Critical Discourse Analysis of news reports from the perspective of ecolinguistics is still rare, that is, Critical Discourse Analysis of language use from the perspective of language ecological environment. Based on this, this study attempts to fill the research gap through the Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese English news reports from the perspective of ecolinguistics and under the guidance of Fairclough’s three-dimensional model through the latest news. Therefore, this study primarily focuses on the ecological features and non-ecological features of Chinese English news reports, and the ecological view behind them.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese English news reports from the perspective of ecolinguistics will be of great significance to the development of the discipline system of ecolinguistics, the word choice of news reports, and the use of research methods. Firstly, as an interdisciplinary subject, the disciplinary system of ecolinguistics needs further development. Ecolinguistics provides a new way to study language and is conducive to the development of ecolinguistics. In addition, the combination of ecolinguistic and Critical Discourse Analysis is also conducive to the development and improvement of ecological discourse analysis. Secondly, as a way of communication with the public, news reports affect the public’s social cognition of various things. Therefore, this study provides a good way for the public to build an ecologically conscious news environment through the study of news reports, and also brings enlightenment to the word choice of news reports in journalism. Finally, this study uses the keyword software Antconc to help analyze Critical Discourse Analysis of news reports. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research makes the research more reliable and scientific, that is, the two complement and strengthen each other. It provides a reference for relevant discourse analysis practice.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the ecological features of Chinese English news reports, as well as the ecological views embodied in the news reports. To achieve these purposes, the paper intends to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the ecological features of Chinese English reports by analyzing the keywords of the Asian elephant's northward migration reported by *China Daily*?
- (2) What are the non-ecological features of Chinese English reports by analyzing the keywords of the Asian elephant's northward migration reported by *China Daily*?
- (3) What kind of ideologies and ecological views were embodied?

2. Theoretical Framework

In the theoretical framework, this study chose Critical Discourse Analysis, which reveals how discourse is affected by ideology and power relations and emphasizes the effects of discourse (Chen, Yan, & Hu, 2019; Ding & Liao, 2001). Among all Critical Discourse Analysis theories, this study adopts the three-dimensional model proposed by Fairclough (1989, 1995). This model regards discourse as a three-dimensional concept involving text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural practice (Fairclough, 1989). Accordingly, discourse analysis needs to follow three steps, namely description, explanation, and explanation (Fairclough, 1995, see Figure 1).

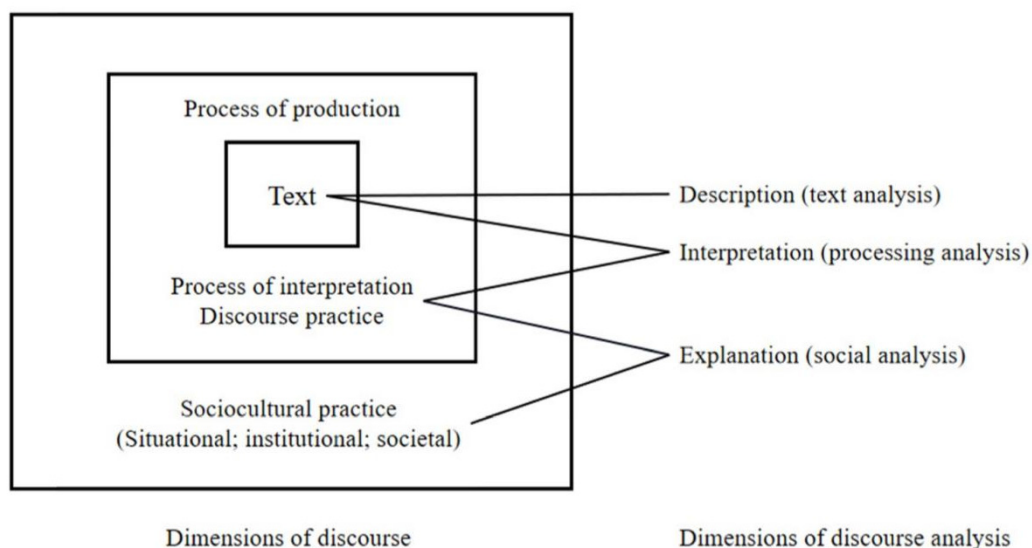


Figure 1. The three-dimensional model proposed by Fairclough (Fairclough, 1995: 133)

The first stage is description, namely the text practice level, mainly focuses on a series of language features of the text, including lexical choice, grammar use, text structure, and so on. This study focuses on the lexical choice of news reports. According to the connotation of specific words and the frequency of lexical occurrence, this study focuses on the analysis of lexical choice in discourse and reveals the ideology and power relations hidden in discourse. Therefore, in the first stage, the lexical choice is a tool to analyze news reports.

Interpretation is the second stage of the three-dimensional model, which focuses on the relationship between text and discourse practice. The analysis of reporting modes in the specific intertextuality analysis would be carried out in this study. According to Fairclough, discourse practice includes the production, distribution, and consumption of texts. In the interpretation stage, Fairclough pointed out that intertextuality is a key concept that can best explain the interpretation of the discourse process. Through intertextuality analysis, it is not difficult for researchers to find how speakers and authors implicitly express their thoughts and beliefs, and how ideological factors and power domination are embedded in discourse. At this stage, this study focuses the two basic levels of reporting modes, namely direct speech (DS) and indirect speech (IS) in *China Daily*. The distribution of two types is presented in the following table:

The third stage is the explanation stage, which focuses on the relationship between social practice and social background. Because the social system and social and cultural background to a large extent affect the journalist's articles which conceal their thoughts and attitudes. Finally, this study analyzes the influence of news discourse and its implied rights and ideologies from the perspectives of politics, economy, and culture.

3. Methodology

This section aims to present a detailed research methodology, which is a vital part of the study. This part includes research design, research instrument, data collection procedures, and data analysis approaches.

3.1 Research Methods

In the study, the author adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, using Fairclough's three-dimensional model to study Chinese English news reports from the perspective of ecolinguistics.

For the quantitative method, this paper uses the corpus-based analysis method to statistic the keywords and concordance lines in the free corpus software AntConc3.5.9 (windows) 2020 designed by Japanese scholar Laurence Anthony. And then create a keywords list table for further analysis based on statistics generated by AntConc 3.5.9 (windows) 2020.

The qualitative method is the main research method of this paper. According to Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis method, a three-dimensional model is used to reveal concealed ideologies by analyzing keywords, concordance lines, and reporting methods. Finally, the social factors affecting ideology are expounded. In short, this study is based on qualitative research, complemented by quantitative research, to achieve Fairclough's three-dimensional model specified three steps.

3.2 Research Instrument/s

As for the research instrument, this study uses a freeware corpus analysis toolkit AntConc to obtain keywords. It is developed by Japanese scholar Laurence Anthony and has three functions: word retrieval, word list generation, and subject words extraction. AntConc has the advantages of a simple interface and convenient operation (Wang 2009). In this paper, the author uses the three functions of AntConc to extract the keywords of news reports, generate a word list, and analyze them.

3.3 Data Collection and Corpus Building

Above all, several factors should be considered in the selection of corpus. First of all, the reason for choosing *China Daily* is that as the most authoritative English newspaper in China, its wording will be more cautious. The second is the period of the selected data, News reports of *China Daily* are from May 28 to June 15, 2021. Because May 28 is the earliest report of this event. Thirdly, considering the length of reports, the number of reports is sufficient for this study.

Secondly, due to the limitation of time and energy, the requirement for data is the type of article, excluding picture commentary and videos. Although the official website of *China Daily* has an advanced search function, the retrieved content still needs to be selected manually. Therefore, it is necessary to collect data manually to select news reports that meet the requirements. Finally, a total of 29 news reports were collected, with a corpus length of 11457 tokens. After that, these reports formed a small self-built corpus.

In this study, the self-built corpus is set as the target corpus, and the reference corpus is the Brown Corpus. Using the software AntConc, the keyword list function is used to generate the keyword list.

3.4 Data Analysis Approaches

Regarding the data analysis approaches, this study designed the following steps.

Step 1: Collect news reports from *China Daily* from May 28 to June 15, 2021, and then build a small corpus.

Step 2: Use AntConc to retrieve keywords and generate the Keywords list and Concordance lines.

Step 3: According to the statistical data of AntConc and Fairclough's three-dimensional model, that is, "description", "interpretation", and finally "explanation", mixed research of data is realized.

Step 4: Discuss in detail its ecological features and non-ecological features of language. Then, the ecological ideologies and views reflected in the language of news reports on this event will be discussed.

4. Results and Discussion

News report, as a mass media, strives to be objective and fair, but ultimately serves the interest groups it represents, so it cannot get rid of the influence of its ideology. The Critical Discourse Analysis in news reports from the perspective of ecolinguistics is helpful to understand the ecological and non ecological features reflected in the language of news reports, and to explore the ideology behind them.

Based on this, this study will discuss the ecological and non ecological features from three aspects: text analysis, discourse practice and social practice.

4.1 Text Analysis of the Northward Migration of Asian Elephants News Reports in China Daily

Text analysis is the central part of three-dimensional model, which is the analysis of text itself. In the following part of keyword analysis and concordance analysis will reveal the ecological and non-ecological features of news reports .

4.1.1 Keywords Analysis

According to Fairclough's three-dimensional model, lexical features in the corpus need to be described in the description phase. Therefore, with the help of AntConc3.5.9 (windows) 2020, by comparing the target corpus and the reference corpus(Brown Corpus), the keyword list can be generated by using the keyword list function in AntConc. The words in the corpus are listed from top to bottom according to the frequency of occurrence, which is also called "Keyness" in AntConc.

Keywords are words whose standardized frequency in one corpus (target corpus) is significantly higher or lower than that in another reference corpus. In the keyword list, the words irrelevant to Asian elephant migration (such as "say" and "think") and function words (such as "it" and "the") are deleted, because these function words have little significance for analysis. Firth (1957) believes that connections between keywords and social aspects can mirror certain social meanings. Therefore, keywords can largely reflect the position or attitude of news producers or news agencies.

Finally, by comparing with the reference corpus, the following gives the quantitative analysis results of the keyword list of the corpus (see Table 1), and then uses the functions of "Concordance" and "File View" for qualitative analysis.

These keywords are roughly divided into the following two categories. First, there are regional words. China, Yunnan, Xishuangbanna, Kunming, province, forestry, authorities, city, provincial, country, population, national, precision, autonomy, capital, village, District, administration, township, etc. these words describe the affected areas in China and the administrative level to deal with this incident. With the migration of Asian elephants, great attention has been paid from low to high levels of government. Secondly, it is the description of the measures taken by China in this event. From the keywords list, the words of protection, drones, monitoring, efforts, reserves, experts indicate that the Chinese government adopts a protective attitude towards the Asian elephants, and uses modern technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles to escort the migration, rather than human interference.

Table 1. Keyword List from Self-build Corpus

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Keyword
1	249	754.15	elephants
2	141	421.68	herd
3	116	345.08	wild
4	92	271.71	elephant
5	91	268.66	asian
6	90	276.13	yunnan
7	65	199.32	xishuangbanna
8	62	190.11	kunming
9	59	171.21	china
10	57	165.14	animals
11	54	156.04	habitat
12	51	146.94	local
13	50	143.91	province
14	45	128.78	nature
15	43	122.73	food
16	42	119.71	forestry
17	41	116.69	protection
18	40	113.67	reserve
19	39	110.66	authorities
20	37	104.62	city
21	36	101.61	provincial
22	33	92.58	county
23	32	89.58	forest
24	31	86.57	population
25	29	80.57	areas
26	28	77.58	national
27	28	77.58	residents
28	27	74.58	north
29	27	74.58	prefecture
30	25	68.6	left
31	23	62.63	autonomous
32	23	62.63	efforts
33	23	62.63	monitoring
34	21	56.68	area
35	21	56.68	capital
36	21	56.68	drones
37	21	56.68	people
38	21	56.68	roaming
39	20	53.71	million
40	20	53.71	species
41	19	50.75	village
42	19	50.75	wednesday
43	18	47.79	migration
44	17	44.84	caused
45	17	45.84	district
46	17	46.84	level
47	16	48.89	administration

48	16	42.89	reserves
49	16	43.89	township
50	15	38.95	experts

At the beginning of this event, there were some incidents of Asian elephants attacking people. In the reports of *China Daily*, especially in the headlines, there were descriptions like “wreak havoc”. For example, there is such a headline: “Roaming elephants wreak havoc”. According to the dictionary, “havoc” means great disorder and confusion, which is a wide and general destruction. Using such words in news reports will give readers the impression that elephant attacks on people are a national event. It not only increases the panic and pressure for people living around Yunnan, but also scares people all over the country.

4.1.2 Concordance Analysis

Although keywords can clearly show the focus of the text, paying attention to the environment of keywords is more conducive to the in-depth understanding of the text. It is a difficult problem to select representative keywords from the keyword list for retrieval. Therefore, this paper selects three words closely related to the subject, namely “habitat” and “roaming”, and uses the consistency function to retrieve and analyze the corpus. The detailed analysis of the concordance lines will be shown in the following part.

Table 2. Concordance lines of the Word “habitat”

N	Concordance lines	
1	marching north, remains far from their usual	habitat. A male elephant that left the group
2	human activities or changes in the animals'	habitat, an expert said. The herd, which left
3	unusual for the elephants to leave their	habitat and head north at this time of
4	-protected forest is not the most favorable	habitat for elephants.” Last year, Wang and his
5	of land was also transformed into new	habitat for the animals. However, the growing elephant
6	keep the elephants safe, create a new	habitat for them or take them home, Sukumar
7	that sometimes the elephants get lost, the	habitat was not safe, or the baby elephant
8	to guide wandering elephant herd to suitable	habitat KUNMING - China's wildlife authorities said Sunda

From the search results of “habitat”, *China Daily* mainly focused on the reflection of the reasons for the migration of Asian elephants. One is that human activities have changed the habitat of animals, and the other is that the original habitat is lacking food. The third is to ensure the safety of the elephant group, and the urgent need for a new suitable habitat for elephants to live in. Fourth, the habitat is not safe.

4.2 Discourse Practice of the Northward Migration of Asian Elephants News Reports in China Daily

Interpretation is the second step in Fairclough’s three-dimensional model. The report mode helps reporters manipulate readers’ views with their own voice according to their own interests and value orientation. Through the analysis of direct speech and indirect speech, this part studies the discourse practice of news reports.

4.2.1 Reporting Modes Analysis

The analysis of reporting modes in the specific intertextuality analysis would be carried out in this part.

Among the two types, direct speech is the most frequently used in news reports. Direct speech is the most objective because there is no change in the original information directly quoted by reporters. However, after observation, there are many combinations of direct speech and indirect speech. As shown below.

Table 3. Distribution of Reporting Modes

Corpus Modes	Direct Speech	Indirect Speech	Total
<i>China Daily</i>	42(56%)	33(44%)	75(100%)

(1) Zhang Jinshuo, a PhD from the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, told China National Radio that the habitats of Asian elephants have been shrinking so they are migrating long distances. “The lead elephant of the 15 may be inexperienced and did not find a suitable habitat in the beginning. As a result, the farther they go, the more nervous they are because they can’t find a good habitat,” he said

(2) “In Thailand, what we found is that sometimes the elephants get lost, the habitat was not safe, or the baby elephant is captured,” Sangduen said, adding that a lack of food and water and pregnancy can all be among the reasons.

(3) Chen Shengyao, a forestry firefighter, said: “They’ve entered deep forest and it is hard for drones to record them. We are now monitoring them with infrared drones used by the military.” He added that nine members of his team are taking shifts to monitor the herd day and night and that roads entering the forest have been blocked for safety reasons.

(4) The rights and responsibilities on managing elephant protection should also be clearly stated, Wang said. “Although the wild elephants only live in Yunnan, it is a State-protected animal and should gain more financial support from the central government,” he said.

(5) “We need to be fully prepared for the elephant herd entering downtown Kunming. Be sure to minimize the damage caused by the herd and reduce the risk of conflicts between crowds and the herd,” Cheng said. He added that authorities should put sufficient personnel and materials into the case, and draw on experiences of other cities that have dealt with such emergencies.

According to the analysis of the combination of direct speech and indirect speech, it is found that the use of direct speech can make the report more vivid and authentic, and indirect speech is an objective report of the interviewee’s point of view. In example (1), by quoting Dr. Zhang Jinshuo from the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, this paper shows that China can find the reasons for the migration of Asian elephants through the scientific analysis of Asian elephant groups by experts. The quotation in example (4) shows that the allocation of responsibilities and rights, finance, and other aspects of the project still need further support from China.

4.3 Social Practice of the Northward Migration of Asian Elephants News Reports in China Daily

Political, economic, and cultural contexts are significant factors that influence news reports and ideology. This study focuses on the social practice of Chinese news reports from political and cultural perspectives. The policy provides guidance and restraint. China maintains that wild animals are the heritage of natural history, an important part of the biosphere, and the precious material wealth of mankind. The Asian elephant of this event, which is included on the International Union for conservation of nature red list of threaded specifications as “endangered”, interests Class-A protection in China, the same level affected to the giant panda. Culture and language are interrelated, so the study of news discourse is inseparable from the study of cultural context. Confucianism is the mainstream and a vital part of Chinese traditional culture, and also plays an important role in contemporary society. Influenced by Confucianism, China follows the ecological order of “harmonious co-existence between man and nature” and the theoretical basis of “human and nature are the community of life”. Therefore, China’s news reports fully reflect the harmony between man and nature.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Major Findings

Based on the analysis of Chinese news reports on the northward migration of Asian elephants, this study finds that Chinese news reports have both ecological and non-ecological characteristics. The ecological features of Chinese news reports are mainly shown in the following aspects: firstly, neutral and positive words are often used in news reports. The second is the combination of direct speech and indirect speech, which can make the reports more vivid and authentic. The third is to put the creatures in nature and people in the same position in the expression, such as the use of “roaming” and other words. The non-ecological features of Chinese news reports are mainly manifested in the overuse and exaggeration of words, which is easy to cause people’s panic. For example, the use of “havoc”.

These ecological and non-ecological features embody the following ideology and ecological view. First, China maintains that wild animals are the heritage of natural history, an important part of the biosphere, and the precious material wealth of mankind. Second, China follows the ecological order of “harmonious co-existence between man and nature” and the ecological basis of “human and nature are the community of life”.

5.2 Limitations

There are still limitations of the method in this study. The first is data collection. The news reports on the northward migration of Asian elephants have not reached an end, so the data collected in this study are insufficient, and thus can not fully reveal the discourse characteristics. Secondly, the analysis is subjective. Although the research is supported by scientific theoretical analysis methods, the process of analysis can not avoid the author’s subjective ideas. Finally, the use of research tools is not skilled enough. Because it was the first time to use this software, its function was not fully utilized, this study included only the function of “keywords”, “Concordance” and “File View”.

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