

# Critical Discourse Analysis of China in G7 Joint Communiqué: A Proximization Theory Perspective

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**Abstract.** Political discourse contains deep ideological implications and it has become more crucial in the current context to analyze political discourse to reveal political ideologies. In recent years, proximization theory has emerged as a new approach to critical discourse analysis. Based on Proximization theory, this study explores the ideological messages conveyed by three US presidents regarding China in the G7 joint communiqué. By analyzing the joint communiqué issued during the terms of Obama, Trump, and Biden, this study reveals a significant shift in the US government's positioning towards China: from a "partner" during the Obama era to a "competitor" during the Trump and Biden eras. The critical discourse analysis based on Proximization theory reveals the evolution of the US government's attitudes towards China and exposes the ideological factors behind it.

**Keywords:** G7 Joint Communiqué; Discourse Construction; Proximization Theory; Legitimation.

## 1. Introduction

Language and politics are closely intertwined. On the one hand, without political discourse, political actions cannot be implemented. On the other hand, language plays a crucial role in achieving political goals as it contains ideological implications that shape discourse and legitimize the speaker's position (Tian, 2018). As a prominent approach to language analysis, Critical discourse analysis (CDA, henceforth) examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology (Wodak, 2012). It explores how language constructs and reproduces social reality, reflecting the speaker's ideological perspective.

Proximization theory, developed by Cap, is a recent advancement in CDA. It expands on Chilton's Discourse Space Theory and introduces the concept of proximization, which involves manipulating language to legitimize one's actions and make them appear reasonable (Cap, 2014). Proximization theory includes three dimensions, that is, spatial, temporal, and axiological. It provides a framework to analyze how discourse is used strategically to achieve specific goals and influence public opinion, which has been widely applied into CDA.

The G7, consisting of the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Japan, and Canada, is an annual summit of major industrialized nations led by the United States. These countries hold significant economic power and global influence, making their collective stance, external attitudes, and ideological perspectives crucial to understanding global dynamics. While previous studies have analyzed related news reports from linguistic and diplomatic perspectives, there is limited research specifically analyzing the G7 joint communiqué and their longitudinal changes. Therefore, this study aims to analyze three years of G7 joint communiqué using Proximization theory, and examine how the discourse constructed by the issuers of communiqué serves to legitimize their actions. The findings of this research contribute to the further development of Proximization theory, providing insights for in-depth interpretation and analysis of professional discourse. Additionally, it helps to analyze the G7's perception of China and their corresponding attitudes, identifying how the governments of the seven nations, led by the United States, manipulate discourse to shape a negative image of China and influence other neutral countries' understanding.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Proximization Theory

Proximization theory, as the latest research outcome of CDA, builds upon Chilton's Discourse Space Theory. Cap (2006) introduced the term proximization within the framework of cognitive pragmatics. Cap (2008) expanded the theory by considering the movement of external entities towards the internal entities and incorporating the aspect of time. This advancement refined the theory and included three dimensions: temporal proximization, spatial proximization, and axiological proximization, and developed the spatial-temporal-axiological (STA, henceforth) model. Cap (2010) further explored the theory and found that the use of axiological proximization strategies increased as temporal and spatial proximization strategies decreased, suggesting a compensatory mechanism. Axiological conflicts became the main focus of public attention and the primary reason for the practical difference (Cap, 2013).

Spatial proximization refers to the encroachment of external entities, represented by outside-the-deictic-center (ODC, henceforth), into the discourse space of internal entities, represented by inside-the-deictic-center (IDC, henceforth), which includes the speaker and the hearer. This encroachment creates a threat, and the internal entities seek defense to legitimize their actions. Temporal proximization is defined as the necessity and legitimization of immediate action by internal entities due to the imminent threat posed by external entities. It involves the transition from the past and the future to the present through evaluations and predictions. Axiological proximization occurs when positive ideological perspectives represented by internal entities conflict with negative ideological perspectives represented by external entities.

### 2.2 Empirical Research on Proximization Theory

Cap (2009) applied the theory of proximization to analyze the speeches of the U.S. presidents before their involvement in the Iraq War. This study validated the effectiveness of using the proximization theory to analyze political texts and identified the mechanism of value compensation. The theory has also been applied to analyze other public discourses such as immigration discourse, public health discourse, literary discourse, and energy security discourse. For example, Liao & Wu (2019) used government news releases as their corpus and examined the collocations related to China. They conducted a qualitative study using functional syntactic collocation analysis to analyze the discourse strategies employed by the U.S. government in constructing a negative image of the Chinese government. Wu & Niu (2018) analyzed the discourse features of Trump's immigration policies. The study found that Trump employed a polarizing strategy, emphasizing the invasion of external entities (immigrants) on internal entities (the United States), thereby leading readers to perceive the policies enacted by the Trump administration as legitimate and justified choices. Wang & Zhao (2022) conducted a critical analysis of the discourse on China's energy by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the United States. They discovered that the United States combined proximization strategies with intertextuality, recontextualization, and interdiscursivity to shape a specific discursive order, revealing the essence of U.S. political discourse. Furthermore, comparative research has become a hot topic in recent years. For instance, Yan & Zhang (2018) analyzed the discourse selection in the context of the China-U.S. trade war, using official and authoritative media reports from the United States, the United Kingdom, and China as their corpus. They conducted quantitative data analysis to compare the use of proximization strategies by the media in the three countries.

From the above review, it is observed that various studies have focused on the analysis of proximization strategies in single texts, interpreting established behaviors, and have paid less attention to analyzing the underlying value orientations and the possibility of risky behaviors. There is also a limited amount of research on Chinese discourse construction. Comparative studies have predominantly focused on horizontal comparisons, with less emphasis on longitudinal and temporal comparisons. By conducting a longitudinal study of G7 joint communique from multiple years, it is

possible to analyze the evolution of proximization strategies during the certain period and uncover the shifts in attitudes and policy intentions of the seven developed industrialized countries. Through longitudinal research, it is easier to identify temporal changes and make better predictions about potential threats that may arise in the future, thereby facilitating the adoption of protective measures. Therefore, this study collects the G7 joint communique in 2015, 2016, and 2021 to analyze the variations in proximization strategies over the seven-year period, providing insights into the attitudes and policy intentions of the seven developed industrialized countries toward the whole world.

### 3. Research Corpus

The G7 Summit is a political forum for intergovernmental discussions among the economies of seven developed countries, led by the United States. It convenes annually to address important economic and political issues. Given the complex relationship between China and the G7, it is significant to analyze G7 joint communique to understand the policy positions and attitudes of the seven most developed industrialized countries toward China. This analysis helps the Chinese government assess and understand more accurately the stances of these countries on key issues, providing references for formulating corresponding policies and response strategies. Through the analysis from the perspective of proximization theory, China can gain better insights into the changing priorities and focus areas of G7 countries in global affairs. This assists the Chinese government and decision-makers in adjusting and formulating foreign strategies and policies to better respond to changes and challenges in the international environment, while seeking areas of cooperation and mutual interests.

As the United States holds a core position within the G7 Summit, this study selects joint communique issued during different presidential terms as the corpus for longitudinal analysis. The themes of the G7 joint communique during Obama's presidency in 2015 were *Think Ahead Act Together*, while in 2016, during Trump's presidency, the theme was *Responsible Leadership for a Sustainable Future*. In 2021, the G7 joint communique with the theme of *Build Back Better World* was released under the Biden administration. This communique holds a high reference value as the first one issued since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study selects the G7 joint communique released during the periods of different U.S. presidents, namely 2015, 2016, and 2021. This research corpus helps the Chinese government better understand policy trends and changes, grasp the overall trends, and identify differences and commonalities in attitudes toward China among different governments.

### 4. Research Findings

#### 4.1 Spatial Proximization

According to Table 1, we can observe that in the three-year joint communique, the frequent IDCs include "we" and "the G7 nations". This choice of vocabularies not only signifies identity but also highlights the unity of the G7 member countries as a whole in their external interactions, bridging the gap with the audience. Additionally, partner countries and low-income countries are also included in the IDC camp, emphasizing the G7 member countries, led by the United States, attempting to expand their alliance and gain support from other nations. It also indicates that their actions align with their own interests, thereby explaining the legitimacy of their behavior.

In the joint communique of 2015, the focus was on global economic uncertainties and risks, climate change, and counterterrorism, among other issues. In addition to global challenges, the South China Sea issue was mentioned for the first time, as shown in Example (1). The communique emphasized the maintenance of a rules-based order in the maritime domain, based on international law principles, expressing concerns about the tensions in the East and South China Seas and portraying China's actions to defend its own territory as a challenge to international conventions and maritime order.

We are committed to maintaining a rules-based order in the maritime domain based on the principles of international law, in particular as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. We are concerned by tensions in the East and South China Seas.

**Table 1.** Spatial proximization analysis of the terms in G7 joint communique

Terms	2015	2016	2021
Noun phrases (NPs) are recognized as IDCs	We our The leader of G7 G7 nations G7 economies	We, the leader of G7	the Leaders of the Group of Seven Africa poorest countries fragile countries low income countries a new partnership WHO WTO
	Partner countries	WTO WHO The World Bank	
	WTO FTA ITA EGA UN	Relevant countries	
Noun phrases are recognized as ODC elements	vulnerabilities in our economies tensions in the East and South China Seas Russia Climate change	hunger and malnutrition gender-based violence Russia	Covid-19 China, Russia Climate change
The action verb phrase is interpreted as ODC exerting influence on IDC	Impact global finance crisis	Impact	impact, reverse, cuts, halts and reverses, leading to
Abstract noun phrases are interpreted as ODCs exerting influence on IDC expectations	Threat, effect, risk	threat, challenge, conflict	threats, impact, risks, conflict
The abstract noun phrase is interpreted as the result of ODC exerting influence on IDC	crisis	Crisis disaster	acute shocks, market imbalances and distortions, attacks, global inequalities, challenges, crisis

Unlike 2015, the 2016 G7 joint communique focused on the global economy, establishing an open and transparent trading system, famine in African countries, and safeguarding women's rights, among other issues. Therefore, hunger and malnutrition issues and gender inequality were considered significant development topics. The communique also mentioned the prevention of misuse of entities and arrangements for corruption, tax evasion, terrorist financing, and money laundering, as shown in Example (2). Additionally, the communique continued to address the South China Sea issue, as indicated in Example (3), emphasizing the importance of peaceful management and settlement of disputes, highlighting China's failure to resolve the issues through peaceful means.

(2) We prevent misuse of these entities and arrangements for corruption, tax evasion, terrorist financing and money laundering.

(3) We are concerned about the situation in the East and South China Seas, and emphasize the fundamental importance of peaceful management and settlement of disputes.

In 2021, the first joint communique since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant changes were observed. Due to the global economic downturn and the impact of the pandemic, the global situation became more turbulent and tense. Unlike previous mentions, China was explicitly placed in the ODC camp, with interference in China's internal affairs regarding labor issues, regional qualifications, and COVID-19 origins tracing. China was labeled as a representative that violates human rights and disrespects fundamental freedoms, emphasizing the negative impact of the

pandemic and attributing it to China, thus attempting to rally other countries against China, escalate disputes, and shift blame. Examples (4) and (5) demonstrate these points.

(4) We will promote our values, including by calling on China to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially in relation to Xinjiang and those rights, freedoms and high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

(5) We also call for a timely, transparent, expert led, and science based WHO convened Phase2 COVID 19 Origins study including, as recommended by the experts' report, in China.

By analyzing the changes in the IDC camp over the three years, we can observe an expansion of the camp. From the Obama administration to the Trump administration and then to the Biden administration, it can be inferred that the IDC camp gradually expanded. In the 2021 communique, developing countries, low-income countries, and African countries were also included in the IDC camp. The G7 alliance aims to unite other neutral countries, infiltrate their ideologies, while placing China and Russia in the ODC camp. This shift in attitude towards China is related to the impact of China's rise on the international status of the seven countries, with the intention to isolate and contain China's development. Through the spatial changes over the three years, it is evident that the attitudes of the G7 countries, led by the United States, towards China have become increasingly negative, ultimately placing China directly in the ODC camp and perceiving China as a threat that requires appropriate preventive measures.

#### 4.2 Temporal Proximization

**Table 2.** Temporal proximization analysis of G7 joint communique

Terms	2015	2016	2021
By using the general past tense and the present perfect tense together, we can construct an infinite extension of the threat of past events to the future.	Has been made Have to remain have committed has affected	Have serious impact Have increased	Has been lost, Has not been felt equally, Have not been
The use of discourses containing parallel contrasts to emphasize that the future is the opposite or superior	will facilitate cross-border freezing requests among G7 countries, We will take further actions to ensure greater transparency of all financial flows.	We commit our support to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people, peaceful pluralism and respect for diversity.	We risk a future of normalized volatility and fragmentation in the global economy, we know that we cannot make true progress towards gender equality without robust data and a way to track it over time
The impact of the noun phrase construct ODC will occur at any time in the future	We stand united with all countries and regions afflicted by the brutal terrorist acts, including Iraq, Tunisia and Nigeria whose leaders participated in our discussions at Schloss Elmau.	We intend to reap the economic benefits of technologically enabled financial innovations while managing their potential impacts on financial stability and market integrity.	We take further tangible steps to improve our collective defence against future threats and to bolster global health and health security.

Temporal proximization refers to the use of specific language strategies by a speaker to represent the influence of past and future events on the present. In the context of G7 joint communique, the application of temporalization mainly involves three strategies: the use of past tense and past perfect verb forms, the use of parallel discourse, and the use of nominalized phrases, all aimed at creating a context that portrays threats to current and future events.

By using past tense and past perfect verb forms, the G7 joint communique convey the potential threats of events to the global outlook. This usage implies that past events have an impact on the current situation and alludes to the risks that may persist until the present. For example, in Example (6), the past tense and past perfect tense are used to emphasize the increased downside risks to the global outlook since the last meeting.

(6) The global recovery continues, but growth remains moderate and uneven, and since we last met downside risks to the global outlook have increased.

The use of parallel discourse is another temporalization strategy employed to express the changes brought about by actions taken through International Development Cooperation (IDC) and to present a positive outlook for the future. This use of sentence structure highlights the importance of international actions in addressing current issues and shaping future prospects. In Example (7), through parallel sentence structures, G7 leaders express their determination to combat COVID-19 and rebuild, while paying tribute to those still striving to overcome the pandemic's impact.

(7) We, the leaders of the Group of Seven, met in Cornwall on 11-13 June 2021 determined to beat COVID-19 and build back better. We remembered everyone who has been lost to the pandemic and paid tribute to those still striving to overcome it.

The use of nominalized phrases is the third temporalization strategy, which transforms events into noun forms, emphasizing their potential impact that can occur at any time. This strategy, through the use of nominalized structures such as "the impact" and "risk," highlights the viewpoint that potential effects may persist into the future. In Example (8), the G7 joint communique states that while the support provided during the pandemic has helped to preserve millions of jobs, the crisis has resulted in job losses, with unequal impact including on young people, women, disadvantaged groups, as well as typical and low-skilled workers.

(8) While our support during the pandemic has helped to keep millions of people in employment, the crisis has meant that many have still lost their jobs, and the impact has not been felt equally, including with respect to young people, women and disadvantaged groups, as well as a typical and low skilled workers.

Temporal proximization strategies are widely used in G7 joint communique, creating a context that portrays the threats and influences of events on the present and future through the past tense and past perfect verb forms, parallel discourse, and nominalized phrases. This expression helps to emphasize the continuity of events and the potentiality of their impact.

### 4.3 Axiological Proximization

**Table 3.** Axiological proximization analysis of G7 joint communique

Terms	2015	2016	2021
Noun phrase identified as IDC positive value or ideology	the values of freedom and democracy respect for human rights boost women's entrepreneurship fairness and prosperity	freedom, democracy the rule of law and respect for human rights	Collaboration and determination free open societies and democracies democracy, freedom, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights
Noun phrase identified as ODC negative values or ideology	the complex international economic and political challenges unemployment vulnerabilities in our economies	Escalated geo- political conflicts terrorism refugee flows	beating COVID-19 inequalities conflict instability and climate change

Through a longitudinal comparison, it can be observed that the frequency of using positive values outweighs the use of negative values over the three years. By contrasting with negative values, G7 countries aim to showcase a positive image of themselves, as shown in Examples (9) and (10).

(9) We remain bound together as a group guided by our common values and principles, including freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

(10) Inspired by their example of collaboration and determination, we gathered united by the principle that brought us together originally, that shared beliefs and shared responsibilities are the bedrock of leadership and prosperity. Guided by this, our enduring ideals as free open societies and democracies, and by our commitment to multilateralism.

When addressing the connection between China and negative values, particularly concerning issues such as the pandemic, intellectual property rights, and forced labor, G7 countries clearly position China as a typical representative of negative values in their communique. This is aimed at diminishing China's international image and highlighting its lack of respect for human rights and basic freedoms, especially regarding the situation in Xinjiang and the rights, freedoms, and high degree of autonomy enjoyed by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, as established in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

Furthermore, the 2021 communique points out that G7 countries will continue to consult on collective approaches to challenging non-market policies and practices that undermine the fair and transparent operation of the global economy, specifically referencing China and competition in the global economy. In this formulation, China is perceived as a country that disrupts market rules and transparent operations. By overemphasizing the differences in values, G7 countries aim to focus the contradictions on China, as seen in Examples (11) and (12).

(11) We will promote our values, including by calling on China to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially in relation to Xinjiang and those rights, freedoms, and high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

(12) With regard to China, and competition in the global economy, we will continue to consult on collective approaches to challenging non-market policies and practices which undermine the fair and transparent operation of the global economy.

## 5. Conclusion

This study employed the theory of temporalization as a research method and analyzed the G7 joint communique in 2015, 2016, and 2021. By conducting a longitudinal analysis of these communiqués, the study investigated the similarities and differences in the attitudes of different U.S. administrations towards China in the joint communique. The study found that in the 2015 communique, G7 countries focused on global economic uncertainty, climate change, terrorism, and mentioned the South China Sea issue for the first time, calling for peaceful resolution of disputes. In the 2016 communique, they continued to address the South China Sea issue and emphasized the importance of peaceful dispute resolution. These communiqués did not explicitly categorize China into the negative values camp. However, in the 2021 communique, there was a significant shift in the attitude of the U.S. government towards China under the leadership of President Biden. The communique explicitly categorizes China into the negative values camp and calls for other neutral countries to isolate China. This indicates that the U.S. government perceives China's values as inconsistent with the interests of G7 countries and seeks to contain China's influence through cooperation with other countries. This study provides a new perspective for the analysis of national discourse, enabling China to better identify its discourse strategies and construct its own discourse system. The innovation of this study is reflected in several aspects: firstly, the adoption of temporalization theory as an analytical framework, which focuses on the dissemination and impact of discourse, enabling a deeper exploration of the ideology behind the discourse. Secondly, through a comparative analysis of the national security strategy reports released by three U.S. presidents during different terms, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the evolution of U.S. policy towards China. Thirdly, this study highlights the significant role of ideology in international relations, revealing the influence mechanism of national ideology on diplomatic decision-making and public opinion guidance.

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