

A Study of Stance Markers in American News Reports from the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis --Take News on China-U.S. Trade War as an Example

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ABSTRACT

Based on the classification of stance markers proposed by Biber (1999), this research studied the use of stance markers in American news reports on China-U.S trade war from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. The corpus includes 30 news reports, 15 from The Wall Street Journal and 15 from The New York Times, which are two of the top ten most influential newspapers in the world according to UNESCO. The release time of these 30 news reports is six months after Trump stated that America would impose a 25% tariff on more than 1,300 kinds of imported goods originating in China. The study finds that in American news reports on China-U.S trade war, epistemic stance markers are used for 34 times, which are more than style of speaking (N=32) and attitudinal stance markers (N=19). It is concluded that American media hold negative attitudes towards China in China-U.S. trade war, which reflects different ideologies between two countries.

Keywords : stance markers; critical discourse analysis; American news reports; China-U.S. trade war.

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I. INTRODUCTION

China-U.S. trade war, starting in April 2018, is an ongoing trade war between China and the United States. Each country has introduced tariffs on goods with the other. As an important component of mass media, news reports have its own role not only in reporting latest information but also in providing insightful comments on the issue. In recent years, news reports are analyzed from different perspectives. As an important linguistic device used for reflecting authors' positions (Biber,1999), stance markers are adopted for the analysis of news reports in recent years.

This paper analyzed thirty American news reports on China-U.S trade war, which were published after April 2018. The features of stance markers and their implied meanings were explored.

Stance markers, which show speakers' or writers' assessments, attitudes, feelings or judgements towards certain propositional content, are important linguistic devices in that they can help to fully convey speaker's or writers' comments, express their emotions and construct the relationship between the speaker or writer and the audience. Hunston and Thompson (2001) pointed out that "it plays a vital role in constructing the ideologies basis of a text, thereby locating writer and reader in an ideological space; and it plays a vital role in organizing a text". The function of stance markers in news reports can never be underestimated in that they not only serve to express the speaker's or writer's vantage point, but also help to find ideologies beneath the surface information. The study of stance markers has attracted considerable scholarly

attention. In terms of its definition, Biber (1988) and Finegan (1989) defined stance on the general level. Fairclough (1992) studied stance from the perspective of meta-functions of language. Hyland (2005) focused on the writing register and interprets the term from the pragmatic level. Empirical studies are conducted from lexical-grammatical and semantic perspectives. On lexical-grammatical level, Hyland made a comparison between the discourse of hard science and soft science and found that two types of academic materials use different types of stance adverbials. Liu (2012) studied the use of stance verbs in English majors' argumentative writing. From the semantic level, the semantic classification of stance markers proposed by Biber in 1999 laid a solid foundation for practical researches afterwards. For example, Biber (1999) conducted a research on four registers of news, academic prose, conversation and fiction and found that epistemic stance markers are more common than attitudinal and style markers in the study. From the aforementioned literature of stance markers, it can be found that theoretical and empirical studies of stance markers are mainly based on its definitions and classifications. However, the study of stance markers from the perspective of critical discourse analysis has far been scarce. Therefore, based on the classification proposed by Biber (1999) and Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis theory, this research aims to study the frequency of each type of stance markers and find out political views and ideologies hidden in the discourse.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Stance Markers

According to Biber and Finegan (1989), stance presented a writer's attitudes, feelings, judgements on the statement, and these elements are realized by the use of different stance markers. Stance markers can convey many different kinds of personal feelings and assessments including attitudes that a speaker has about certain information, how certain they are about its veracity, how they obtained access to the information, and what perspectives they are taking (Biber, 2006). A similar statement is proposed by Hunston and Tompson (2000), who put forward that stance is a "broad cover term for the expression for the speaker or writer's attitude towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about." Unlike the above two definitions, Fairclough (1992) studied stance markers from the perspective of meta-function and described the stance as "the point of intersection in discourse between the signification of reality and the enactment of social relations-or in terms of the systemic linguistics, between the ideational and interpersonal functions of language." Hyland (2008) restricted stance to writing register, and referred stance to "the ways that authors annotate their texts to comment on the possible accuracy or credibility of a claim."

Due to its different definitions, the classification of stance markers is also various. Precht (2003) classified stance markers into affect, evidential, quantifier and modality. Hyland (2008) proposed that the classification

should include evidentiality, affect and presence. According to Biber (1999), stance markers can be classified into three types on the semantic level, including epistemic, attitudinal and style of speaking. Epistemic stance markers are used to express the speaker's or the writer's comment on a statement or a proposition. Attitudinal stance markers are often used to show the speaker's or the writer's attitude, feeling or judgement towards a statement. Style of speaking stance markers are used to indicate the speaker's or the writer's style of presenting comment, e.g., "to be frankly", which are used most with adverbials or complement clause constructions (Biber, 1999). This classification is widely adopted by many scholars. This paper uses Biber's semantic classification of stance markers, which are described in detail in the following figure.

Table 1 Classification of stance markers

Category		Function	Examples
Epistemic	adverb	Express the speaker's or the writer's comment on a statement or a proposition	Actually/certainly/in fact
	verb		Conclude/determine/know
	adjective		Certain/clear/obvious
	noun		Conclusion/fact/observation
Attitudinal	adverb	Show the speaker's or the writer's attitude, feeling or judgement towards a statement	Amazingly/importantly/surprisingly
	verb		Expect/hope/worry
	adjective		Amazed/shocked/surprised
	noun		Hope/view
Style of speaking	adverb	indicate the speaker's or the writer's style of presenting comment,	According to/generally/typically
	verb		Argue/claim/report
	adjective		Essential/interesting/noteworthy
	noun		Comment/proposal/report

(From Biber, 1999)

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a branch of Critical Linguistics, which aims at the exploration of the relationship among language, ideology, and power (Fairclough, 1995). The roots of CDA lie in classical rhetoric, text linguistics and sociolinguistics, as well as in applied linguistics and pragmatics (Fairclough, 1995). CDA sees "language as social practice" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), and considers the "context of language use" to be crucial (Wodak, 1988). CDA is imposed on a special position as guides for human action, which are aimed at producing "enlightenment and emancipation". Ruth Wodak (1988) defined CDA as "an interdisciplinary approach to language study with a critical point of view" for the purpose of studying "language behavior in natural speech situations of social relevance." The theory is also mentioned in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (Wodak & Meyer, 2001), which refers more specifically to the critical linguistic approach of scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication. In agreement with its critical theory predecessors, CDA emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary understanding of how language functions in constituting and transmitting knowledge, in organizing social institutions or in exercising power (Van Dijk, 1998).

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III. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Data Collection

The corpus used in this study includes 30 news reports with the topic of China-U.S. trade war, 15 from *The Wall Street Journal* and 15 from *The New York Times*. The total words of the corpus is 33948, with an average of 1132 words per news. The release time of these 30 news reports is after Trump stated that America would impose a 25% tariff on more than 1,300 kinds of imported goods originating in China, which is from 4th April to 4th October, 2018. It helps to explore the comments of American media on the issue and analyzes the features of stance markers in these news reports.

3.2 Research questions

Through the analysis of stance markers of American news reports on China-U.S. trade war, this paper aims to answer the following questions: (1) What is the overall distribution of three types of stance markers? Are there any differences of the distribution? (2) What can we infer from these features?

3.3 Research Instrument

In this study, AntConc 3.4.4 was used for data processing. AntConc is a free corpus retrieval tool for researchers in corpus linguistics, translation, foreign language teaching and other fields. The software was developed by Laurence Anthony, a professor at Waseda University in Japan. It has multiple windows to achieve different functions, including: Concordance, Concordance plot, File view, Clusters/N-Grams, Collocates, Words list and Key word List. In this study, the "Advanced search" function was used to search each item of stance markers in the corpus. The "Concordance" tool helps to take the context of each stance marker into consideration. Moreover, Microsoft Office Excel was employed in the calculation of the results.

3.4 Research Procedure

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis are adopted in the study. Stance markers of 30 news reports are analyzed. The research procedures are as follows: (1) Search epistemic, attitudinal and style of speaking stance markers according to the classification proposed by Biber (1999). For example, the results of the attitudinal verb "worry" is as follows:

(2) Read 30 news reports carefully and select words and expressions that indicate the author's stance but are not included in the searching list. For example, in the process of careful reading, the word "difficult" is found to express the author's stance in some situations, which is shown as follows:

"Some companies may be forced to shift production out of China, but others, such as furniture companies, will find it difficult to find manufacturers elsewhere able to produce at the scale of manufacturers based largely in southern China."

The author uses "difficult" to describe the effects of trade war on some companies, which indicates the author's concern and worry towards the issue.

(3) Calculate the frequency and percentage of these three categories. The total frequency of occurrence instead of number of types is calculated. For example, the attitudinal verb "worry" occur three times in the corpus, then it is accounted as three in the total frequency of stance markers.

(4) Analyze the features and infer the meanings behind the language according to the context.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

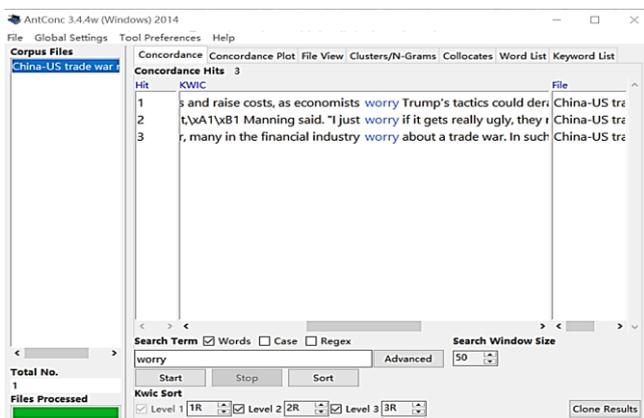
Stance markers include epistemic, attitudinal and style of speaking. Epistemic stances indicate the evaluative meaning. In other words, the author can use epistemic stances to present his comments on the status of information in a proposition. In news reports, epistemic stances can clearly show certainty, actuality, precision or limitation of the given information. Attitudinal stances are used to report the author's personal feelings or attitudes. In news reports, attitudinal stances can clearly show the attitudinal and emotional point of view of the author. The third category of stance devices is style of speaking, which is used to present the author's comments on the communication itself. In news reports, style of speaking tells how the author presents the information and where the is the information from.

Table 2 presents the distribution of stance markers in thirty American news reports on China-U.S. trade war:

Table 2 Frequency of stance markers in thirty news reports

	Frequency	Percentage
Epistemic stance	34	40%
Attitudinal stance	19	22%
Style of speaking	32	38%
Total	85	100%

Table 2 shows the frequency of three types of stance markers and the percentage of each classification in the corpus. In thirty American news reports, stance markers appear 85 times.



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We can see from table 2 that the epistemic stance accounts for the most, with the frequency of 34 times and the percentage of 40%. Moreover, style of speaking is also used a lot in thirty news reports, with frequency of 32 times and percentage of 38%. The least used category is attitudinal stance, which is used for 19 times, and the percentage is 22%.

Table 2 shows that epistemic stance is used the most in thirty American news reports. Adverb, verb, adjective and noun are adopted for the expression of epistemic meaning. Epistemic verbs are used to express the author's comments on the subordinate clauses. For example:

(1) Chinese markets seemed rattled by the news Wednesday, dipping after three days on the upswing, with the Shanghai Composite index dropping 1.8 percent and the blue-chip CSI300 index falling 1.7 percent.

The use of "seemed" in this example indicates that the author is uncertain about his statement. The fact is that Chinese markets drops, but the reason is unclear. The writer offers a possible explanation, at the same time, in order to insure the veracity of the news report, the word "seem" is used.

(2) The Chinese economy performed strongly last year, growing 6.9%, according to government figures.

The use of "according to" in this example clarifies the source of information, which can add authority and accountability of the news.

In a word, American news media are cautious in reporting China-U.S. trade war. Epistemic stances are used to indicate the level of certainty of information and also clarify the source of the information.

In thirty American news reports, attitudinal stances appear 19 times.

Among four parts of speech, verb and noun account for the most in the category of attitudinal stance.

For example:

(3) Business leaders are warning the high-stakes strategy could upend their supply chains and raise costs, as economists worry Trump's tactics could derail the broadest global upswing in years.

In this example, the attitudinal verb "worry" is used to describe the negative feeling of economists on Trump's strategies, which corresponds to previous warning of business leaders. From the example, it can be found that people from various fields hold negative attitudes towards the action taken by the U.S. in China-U.S. trade war.

(3) But he expressed hope that a solution could be reached as a trade war would "hurt everybody".

In this example, the attitudinal noun "hope" is used by a Chinese entrepreneur to express his positive attitude on the solution of the problem. The voice from the Chinese business field indicates the positive attitudes of Chinese non-governmental groups on the issue.

The third category of stance devices is style of speaking, which is used to present the author's comments

on the communication itself. The stance of style of speaking can be achieved through the use of adverb, verb, adjective and noun. In news reports, style of speaking tells how the author presents the information and where the is the information from.

In thirty American news reports, style of speaking stances appear 32 times.

To express the meaning of style of speaking, the author usually used adverbs and verbs. The function and usage of style of speaking adverbs and verbs can be seen from the following examples.

For example:

(3) The global counterfeit trade for all items, from purses to electronics to software, is worth \$461 billion, according to the latest estimate by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

In this example, the adverb "according to" is used to indicate that the information comes from the estimate by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

(3) It argues that its decision to buy Russian military hardware last year was an arrangement between two sovereign countries, and none of America's business. China released a white paper Monday, cited by the state-run New China news agency, saying that since the Trump administration's "America First" policy came in, Washington has abandoned fundamental norms of mutual respect and equal consultation that guide international relations.

In this example, two stance devices are adopted to indicate style of speaking. The stance verb "argue" is used to mark the author's manner of speaking. The stance verb "cited" is used to reveal the source of the information. And these style of speaking devices can help increase the reliability and authenticity of the news reports.

V. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of stance markers in thirty American news reports about China-U.S. trade war, it is found that epistemic stance markers appear 34 times, which accounts for 40% of the total. Attitudinal and style of speaking stance markers appear 19 and 32 times respectively, and the percentage are 22% and 38%.

When reporting China-U.S. trade war, American media use attitudinal markers for 19 times, with the percentage of 22%, which shows that America media state their opinions and attitudes about the issue. Moreover, American media tend to use attitudinal markers with negative meanings, which reflects that they focus more on the adverse effects of the issue. In terms of the category of style of speaking, American media pay attention to the source of the information, such as the use of "according to" in example five, which reflects their authentic and objective attitudes towards the news reports and corresponds with the nature of the news. On the other hand, according to Qiu's (2011) research on Chinese media's reports on China-

U.S. trade war, Chinese media tend to highlight severity and toughness of trade issues, and imply destructive consequences that follow a breakout of a trade dispute. Therefore, it can be found that both American and Chinese media pay attention to the topic, and the study of stance markers can help readers develop a higher understanding of the issue.

There are some limitations of this study. Only 30 pieces of news are selected for the analysis. More news reports should be included in the future to make the result more comprehensive and persuasive. Moreover, news reports in the corpus are only concerned with the issue of China-US. trade war, various topics should be included to analyze the use of stance markers in news reports. In a word, there is still much room for further studies of stance markers in the future.

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