

A Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis of the Reports on China's Double Reduction in Four Mainstream Media

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Abstract: “Double Reduction Policies”, released by Chinese General Office of the State Council in July 2021, generally refers to the alleviation of students’ burden from heavy homework and off-campus training. The reports from BBC News, the Washington Post, China Daily and Bloomberg on the Double Reduction Policies deserve the attention and research. However, few studies are conducted from the perspective of critical discourse research with in-depth and comprehensive study on the event. Therefore, based on the self-built corpus, this paper analyses the statistics and materials in terms of language features, exploring the difference and attitudes from mainstream media.

Keywords: Corpus, Critical discourse analysis, Double Reduction, Mainstream media.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

“Double Reduction Policies” was released by the General Office of the State Council of (the People’s Republic of) China in July 2021, with its aim at students’ homework and burden relief. Since too much burden on children has great tendencies towards involution, which severely affects education efficacy and development quality. The decision was of great necessity in reconstruction of benign social atmosphere and educational fair competitions.

1.2. Literature Review

With the advent of computational linguistics, especially natural language processing, corpus-assisted/aided discourse analysis/studies have emerged into the field of discourse analysis/studies and therefore enlarged the research subjects and perspectives. Scholars from home and abroad applied this methodology into interpretation of the relationship between media discourse and ideology. For example, Wang Yihuan (2022) searched the relative reports on covid-19 pandemic and China from LexisNexis, and conducted a series analysis on the basic language characteristics of different mainstream media. Hao Shuang (2021) focused on the reports from 1978 to 2020 in New York Times, revealed statistic frequency and settings concerning Peking Opera. The rapid development of corpus-assisted discourse studies enables more scientific researches to gain attention and popularity.

2. Methodology and Intention

2.1. Material Selection

The materials from well-received newspapers are all centered on “Double Reduction Policies”. News from BBC News, the Washington Post, China Daily and Bloomberg are found representative and significant. BBC News, the largest news broadcaster in the United Kingdom, is also one of the largest throughout the world. Washington Post is one of the leading daily American newspapers with a long history. China Daily represents the largest English portal in China.

Bloomberg, whose headquarters are in New York, is a leading global provider of business, financial information and financial information.

2.2. Method and Tool

Wordsmith 8.0 is adopted in the research in the levels of lexicon, sentence and text. The processes are listed as follows: 1) Pre-process the original text. Eliminate the format, related author information, photographs and other detailed unnecessary elements. Keep the headline, body and other useful information. In this way, the original texts are pre-processed for corpus study. 2) Collect the data from Wordsmith 8.0. For example, tokens, types, TTR, mean sentence length, mean word length, word frequencies and so on. 3) Compare the selected texts and data to conclude the attitudes among all the reports selected. 4) Analyse the reasons behind different attitudes.

2.3. Intention

The research intentions are listed as follows: 1) To study the basic language features in different newspapers or reports. 2) To learn about the attitudes of both Chinese and Western media towards “Double Reduction Policies”. 3) To analyse the reasons behind the stands.

3. Results and Discussion

The reports selected were studied in regard to language features, attitudes as well as reasons by means of Wordsmith 8.0 and CorpusWordParser. After analysis, the findings are as follows:

3.1. Language Features

Lexicon variation

As Yang Huizhong(2005) suggests, TTR(Type Token Ratio) can reflect the lexical size and lexical variation of text. According to Baker(2000), the higher TTR is, the more diverse and richer lexicon is. The results from Wordsmith 8.0 are shown in Figure 1.

	Type	Token	Type Token Ratio
BBC News	3494	583	50.17%
Bloomberg	3041	512	59.12%
China Daily	4336	665	47.03%
Washington Post	5911	921	51.83%

Figure 1. Statistical Type, Token and TTR results of the materials selected

The reports from BBC news and Washington Post reveal similar TTR, indicating the lexical variation of both articles are of medium difficulty among the four. While the TTR of the report from China Daily ranks last among the materials selected. Generally speaking, a simpler use of lexicon can contribute to direct understanding with better service to the mass. The main purpose of the report by China Daily is to promote the circulation and spread of its policies, therefore the report focused more on the key words and applied the repetitive figure of speech to enhance the emphasis. In contrast to the article in China Daily, the Washington Post picked flexible words carefully, corresponding to its target audience members-the well-educated class.

Language complexity

Taking account of both mean word length and mean sentence length, the research therefore concluded the degrees of language complexity. The results are shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Reports source	Mean word length
BBC News	4.77
Bloomberg	4.65
China Daily	5.38
Washington Post	5.13

Figure 2. Mean word length of the materials selected

The mean word length of the materials selected is within 4 to 6 characters each word. The average word length of each newspaper, compared to the general text, indicated simple and clear expressions, which enables readers to get information

BBC News		Bloomberg		China Daily		Washington Post	
industry	0.22%	training	0.78%	tutoring	1.65%	tutoring	1.09%
interest	0.15%	vocational	0.59%	passion	0.45%	company	1.09%
vocational	0.11%	job	0.78%	quality	0.45%	technology	0.22%

Figure 4. Word frequencies of the materials selected

BBC News showed great concern about the future employment of Chinese students as well as criticized the rigidity of the Chinese gaokao system. E.g. “China's education system has often been criticized as being too rigid and reliant on tests such as the infamously gruelling Gaokao national exam.” Britain has another form of education, namely a relatively balanced development of vocational skills training and academic further study. Due to the precipitate decline of the employment rate in the 1970s, the British government has long laid strong emphasis on job training. Thus, in BBC News, the inclination is obvious.

Bloomberg and Washington Post had something in common: on the one hand, they indicated the possible reasons for the release of “Double Reduction Policies”-“employment and social discontent”; on the other hand, they pointed out the

with comprehensible access.

Reports source	Sentence numbers	Mean sentence length
BBC News	29	20.10
Bloomberg	28	18.29
China Daily	30	22.17
Washington Post	49	18.80

Figure 3. Mean sentence length of the materials selected

The total number of words divides the sentence numbers equals to mean sentence length. According to Yang Huizhong (2002), mean sentence length, to some extent, can reflect the language complexity. Sentence containing 1-9 words is classified as short, those with 10-25 words as medium, while the ones with over 26 words can be referred as long sentences (Butler, 1985). As listed in Figure 3, the mainstream media selected expatiated the “Double Reduction Policies” in medium sentences, providing both aesthetic function and information function within and beyond language.

3.2. Attitudes and reasons

The attitudes and underlying reasons from different media were collected and summarized through the word frequencies and sentence comparison. Word frequencies results are listed in Figure 4.

According to the statistics shown above, BBC News and Bloomberg are inclined to lay emphasis on employment related influence on the matter of “Double Reduction Policies”. While China Daily gave thorough and detailed information about the general aspects of “Double Reduction Policies”, including its education efficacy, the students’ feedback, pedagogic methods and so on. Besides, in addition to the influence on jobs, special attention to technology was paid by the report from the Washington Post.

Generally, the four media showed great concern about the Chinese “Double Reduction Policies”. Detailed speaking, there are still a few differences in their attitudes considering the syntactic level:

future benefits of the change, that is to say, the social order and incentives in place. The American education system focuses on the cultivation of students’ interests and independent and critical thinking mode. The positive evaluation reflects an expectation and curiosity from them in regards to the Chinese education system.

China Daily illustrated the general purpose, measures, potential benefits and effects from different perspectives. E.g. “to reduce students' learning burden”, “help promote equality in the education sector”, “get new business opportunities” and “help China build an inclusive and quality learning society”. As will be readily seen, the future of the new policies is filled with great promises and possibilities.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, based on self-built corpus, this paper

analyzed the language features, attitudes and reasons from four mainstream media, namely BBC News, the Washington Post, China Daily and Bloomberg on the reports of Double Reduction Policies. As for language features, it is found that the lexicon variation differs from each other, but the language complexities are similar, which is the results of target readers' demands. As for attitudes and reasons, based on national conditions and historic reforms, BBC News showed concern about job training after the policies took place and critical questioning on the Gaokao system, while Bloomberg and Washington Post gave positive feedback on the measures and effects. China Daily left readers with expectations for the future education system and social employment.

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