

A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump and Biden Administrations' China Policies

ZHI Yongbi, YIN Wenjing

Suzhou University of Science and Technology, Suzhou, China

ZHI Ran

Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

The theory of proximization is an effective discourse strategy to study the speaker's ability to achieve his own legitimacy or reinforce the other's illegitimacy, and its superiority can be maximized by means of quantitative and comparative analysis. In this study, we collected reports on Trump's and Biden's policies on China to build two small corpora, with a total of 11,030 words in the Trump corpus and 17,566 words in the Biden corpus. The critical discourse analysis is combined with proximization theory. With the help of BFSU Qualitative Coder 1.2, Antconc 3.5.7, and Log-Likelihood and Chi-Square Calculator 1.0, a critical cognitive score of the relevant discourse was conducted from the perspective of proximization theory. It has been found that: (1) Both Trump and Biden administrations resort to a large number of spatial proximization strategies to build ODCs converging to IDCs with China as the ODC, posing a threat to internal physical IDCs; (2) in the use of temporal proximization strategy, both administrations use primarily modal verbs and various entities to construct ODCs that extend indefinitely into the present and future, emphasizing the urgency and the threat of the effect and reinforcing the legitimacy of their actions; (3) in terms of axiological proximization strategy, the two administrations differ greatly from each other, indicating that there are still discursive biases.

Keywords: proximization theory, critical discourse analysis, American policies toward China, corpus, the U.S. government documents

Introduction

In recent years, the international situation has remained generally peaceful, moderate, and stable, but localized wars, turmoil, and tensions have intensified. Currently, U.S.-China relations are facing new challenges in politics, economics, and trade issues, and deep-seated contradictions and differences between the two sides

Funding: This paper has been written thanks to support from Postgraduate Innovation and Practice Program of Jiangsu Province, 2022) (2022 年度江苏省研究生科研创新项目, 项目批准号: KYCX22_1477). This paper has also been written thanks to support from Urban Development Think Tanks of Suzhou University of Science, and support from Center for Overseas Think-Tanks' China Studies, Suzhou University of Science and Technology (苏州科技大学城市发展智库; 苏州科技大学国外智库涉华舆情分析研究中心).

ZHI Yongbi, Ph.D., Professor, School of Foreign Languages and Cultures; Center for Overseas Think-Tanks' China Studies, Suzhou University of Science and Technology, Suzhou, China.

YIN Wenjing, B.A., School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Suzhou University of Science and Technology, Suzhou, China.

ZHI Ran, corresponding author, Ph.D. candidate, School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China.

have not been eliminated. There are no eternal friends and no eternal enemies, only supreme national interests, which is the principle of the United States in formulating various foreign policies. We can still clearly see that the U.S. has been using its idealism to try to shape the China in the U.S. mind. The formulation of U.S. policy toward China is the result of a dual consideration based on ideology and realistic interests. About a century of U.S. policy toward China makes China metamorphose painfully and with great difficulty. It has made China suffer hardship, but it has also used its strength to stimulate China's growth, so that China has gradually taken its place on the world stage.

From previous studies, most scholars have studied American policies from different perspectives: (1) the historical perspective (Peng, 2019): These studies dissect the changes in U.S. policy toward China and its social historical and cultural roots, and sort out the evolution of U.S. policy toward China in the historical dimension; (2) the perspective of international politics (Liu & Wei, 2016; Lu, 2010; Huang, 2020): These studies show that U.S. think tanks play a very important role in the analysis and formulation of various countries' foreign policies. The research of U.S. think tank scholars on contemporary Chinese social issues has shown new features; (3) the economic perspective (Song & Si, 2021; Wang & Pan, 2020): These studies reveal that the U.S. has a significance that cannot be ignored, both for the growth of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank and for the development of China. Based on this, it also reveals the influence of U.S. think tanks on U.S. policies related to China from the side, and China should seize the shift gears brought by the U.S. political pendulum to make timely necessary and comprehensive strategic response; (4) the linguistic perspective (Zhi, Wang, & Li, 2016; Zhao, 2010): These studies treat US think tanks' reports on public opinion on China as a research corpus, build their own corpus, and use tools in combination with critical discourse analysis and the research method of three-dimensional frame theory, which enriches the applied research of critical discourse analysis. In order to enrich the applied research of critical discourse analysis, the method of corpus combining and critical discourse analysis are used respectively.

All the above studies have produced some implications for future scholars of the relevant field. However, so far we have seldom found studies focused on American policies from the proximization theory and by means of critical discourse analysis.

In view of this, we have downloaded the discourse from the official website of the White House (<https://www.whitehouse.gov>), the official website of the U.S. Department of Commerce (<https://www.commerce.gov>), and the website of the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (<https://ustr.gov>) to construct two small corpora, and then use Cap's proximization theory to critically analyze Trump's and Biden's China policies, thus examining the subjectivity and ideological biases of American policy discourse on China. After that, the discourse function of the proximization strategy is analyzed, and the ideological and national interest aspirations behind it are explored.

Theoretical Foundations

Proximization Theory

The concept of "proximization (proximize/proximizing)" originates from Chilton's (2004) analysis of political discourse. Chilton uses the theory of referential space to provide a visual model for the study of political discourse, namely, the concepts of time, space, and affect, and works to reveal how human mental representations are placed on these three cognitive levels. Influenced by Fauconnier's (1994) theory of psychospatiality, Chilton (2004, p. 57) argues that people process discourse by emitting temporal, spatial, and affective axes with themselves as the locus of instructions to locate the different external entities associated with them. The term

“proximization” was first introduced to mark the effective use of cognitive-linguistic understanding. In 2013, Cap (2013) argues that Chilton’s model is flawed in that it does not take into account the dynamics of peripheral entities moving toward the center of instructions nor does it account for the time span of political discourse extension. In view of this, Cap (2013) introduced the idea of peripheral entities moving to the indicative center in his study and proposed a comprehensive theory of proximization, including spatial proximization, temporal proximization, and axiological proximization.

Spatial proximization refers to the recognition process of ODCs gradually invading IDCs in physical space, which is divided into six grammatical lexical items: Noun phrases are recognized as IDC elements, noun phrases are recognized as ODC elements, shift verb phrases and pointing verb phrases are recognized as markers of ODCs moving toward IDCs, action verb phrases are recognized as ODCs applying as markers of the ODC’s impact on the IDC, noun phrases indicate the expectation of the ODC’s impact on the IDC, and noun phrases indicate the result of the ODC’s impact on the IDC (Cap, 2013, pp. 105-109).

Temporal proximization refers to a strong understanding of the “present” as the center of the timeline. Based on the occurrence of past crises or the anticipation of future crises, it highlights the imminence of threats, the urgency of defending against them, and the historical significance of responding and taking measures to prevent them immediately. This understanding is usually achieved by two conceptual transfers, namely past to present and coming to present, and is divided into five lexico-grammatical items: using non-finite noun phrases to construct the impact of ODC in other contexts, and extending the threat of past events indefinitely into the future through discourse forms that use both the general past tense and present perfect tense, using nominalized phrases to anticipate the impact of ODCs at any point in the future, and the use of modal verb phrases to anticipate the impact of ODCs at any point in the future. The use of modal verb phrases constructs the ongoing impact of ODC on the present and future, as well as emphasizing the future as contrary or advantageous through discourse forms that include parallel contrasts (Cap, 2013, pp. 111-116).

Axiological proximization refers to the listener’s recognition of the hostility generated by the discourse IDC and the ODC value system, which operates through a mechanism of intensifying ideological conflict that will lead to actual conflict in the future, forcing the construction of a high likelihood of internal and external conflict, and is divided into three lexico-grammatical items: Noun phrases are recognized as IDC positive values or ideologies, noun phrases are identified as ODC negative values or ideologies and proximization of ODC negative ideologies to practical activities in a discourse form not limited to one or two sentences, and noun phrases are identified by a linear arrangement of lexico-grammatical phrases (Cap, 2013, pp. 119-122).

The three aspects of proximization theory make it possible for the distance between spatial units of discourse to be continually reduced; thus it explains more intuitively that the speaker and the listener negatively influence each other. The refinement of proximization theory and the combination of the STA model with critical discourse analysis will make proximization theory applicable to economic and diplomatic studies, and provide more effective analytical tools and instruments for the broader field of public discourse in the future.

Critical Cognitive Analysis

Critical cognitive discourse analysis is developed from critical discourse analysis (CDA), and is considered to be the cognitive turn of CDA. Critical cognitive linguistics, also known as cognitive critical discourse studies, is one of the most recent research directions in critical discourse studies (Chilton, 2004; Hart & Lukes, 2007; Zhang & Jiang, 2008; Hart, 2010; Hart, 2014). Critical cognitive linguistics explores the cognitive-symbolic

processes that people include in understanding discourse and the role these cognitive-symbolic processes play in constructing knowledge and legitimizing behavior (Hart, 2018). Unlike other critical discourse studies (with the exception of van Dijk's), critical cognitive linguistics emphasizes the conceptual nature of meaning construction and focuses on modeling the conceptual structures and processes that discourse evokes to constitute an ideological understanding of the events and situations described. Critical cognitive linguistics is a blend of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse studies. It is concerned with the use of speech and the associated conceptual structures it evokes, as well as the ideological or legitimizing functions these conceptual structures assume in the context of discourse. The rise of critical cognitive linguistics reflects a "social turn" in cognitive linguistics research on the one hand and a "cognitive turn" in critical discourse research on the other hand.

Research Design

Research Questions

The aim of this study has been to answer the following questions.

1. What are the characteristics of proximization strategies in the Trump administration's and Biden administration's policy discourses on China?
2. What are the purposes of the proximization strategies embodied in the Trump administration's and Biden administration's China policy discourses and what are their attitudes toward China policy?

Research Objects

This study takes the relevant corpus in the official website of the U.S. government as the research object, and uses China and trade policy as keywords in the official website of the White House and the websites of the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, builds a small corpus of their own, and conducts quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis on proximization strategies in the corpus. In this paper, a total of 11,030 words from the Trump corpus and 17,566 words from the Biden corpus were collected.

Research Tools

Annotation tool. The main research tool used in this study was BFSU Qualitative Coder 1.2. This software was used to annotate the self-constructed corpus with different classifications. The spatial proximization, temporal proximization, and axiological proximization were each classified according to Cap (2013) and coded and annotated by themselves. The uses of codes and annotations in this paper are as follows.

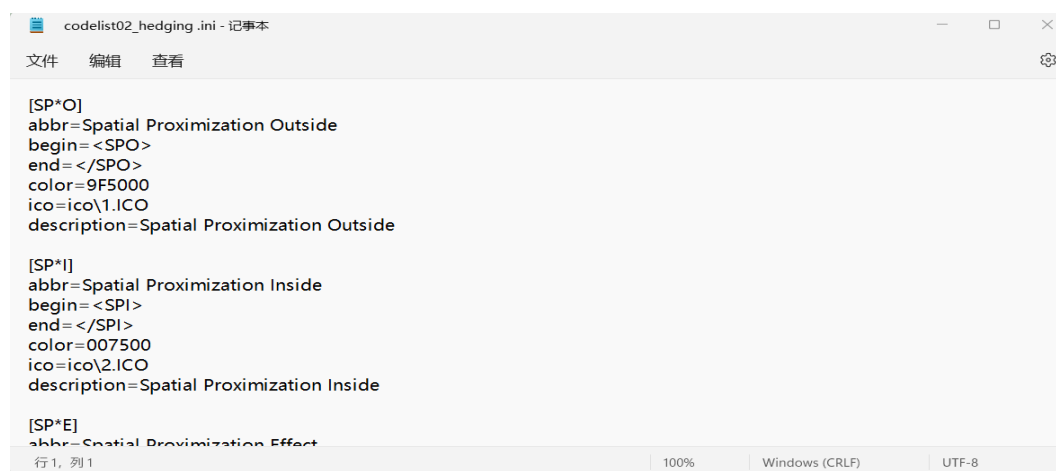


Figure 1. Examples of self-designed code list.

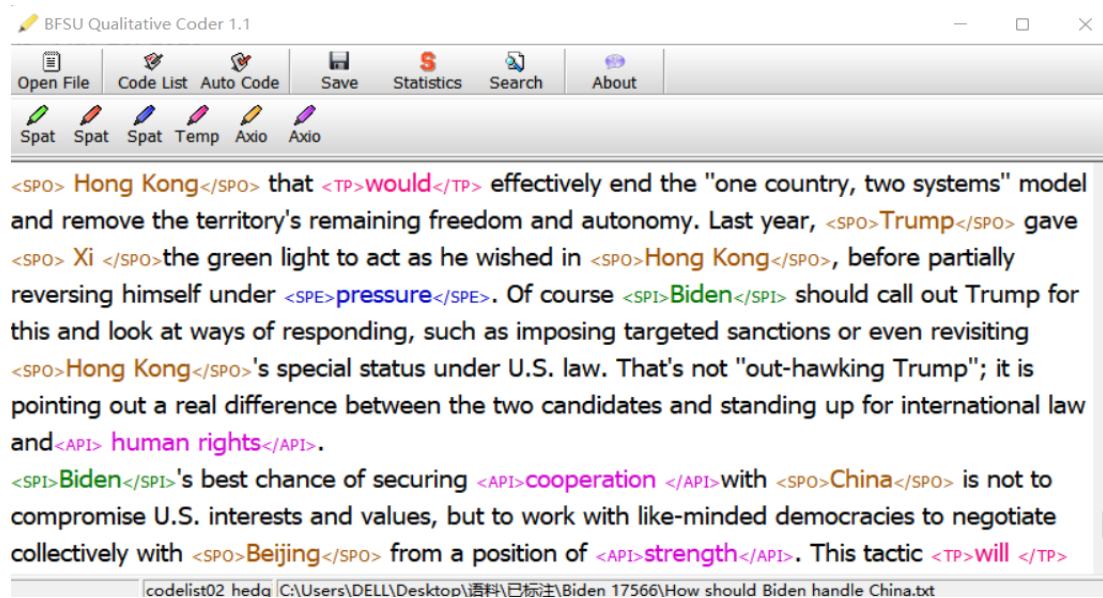


Figure 2. Screenshot of BFSU Qualitative Coder 1.2.

Statistical tool. The corpus retrieval tool used in this study is AntConc 3.5.7 analysis software. AntConc is a corpus retrieval software suitable for research in language and text, and has various functions such as indexing, subject word calculation, word list generation, in order to be easily used to analyze lexical topics in texts.

Chi-square test tool. The LLX2 chi-square test tool is shown in Figure 3, where the data derived from AntConc 3.5.7 software are entered, and the corresponding data are derived with the chi-square test calculator. The chi-square value in the test results is the chi-square value, while the significance value is the p -value.

When $p < 0.01$, it indicates a statistically significant difference between the material processes in the two corpora.

When $0.01 < p < 0.05$, it means that the material processes in the two corpora are different but not significant.

When $p > 0.05$, it means that there is no statistically significant difference between the material processes in the two corpora.

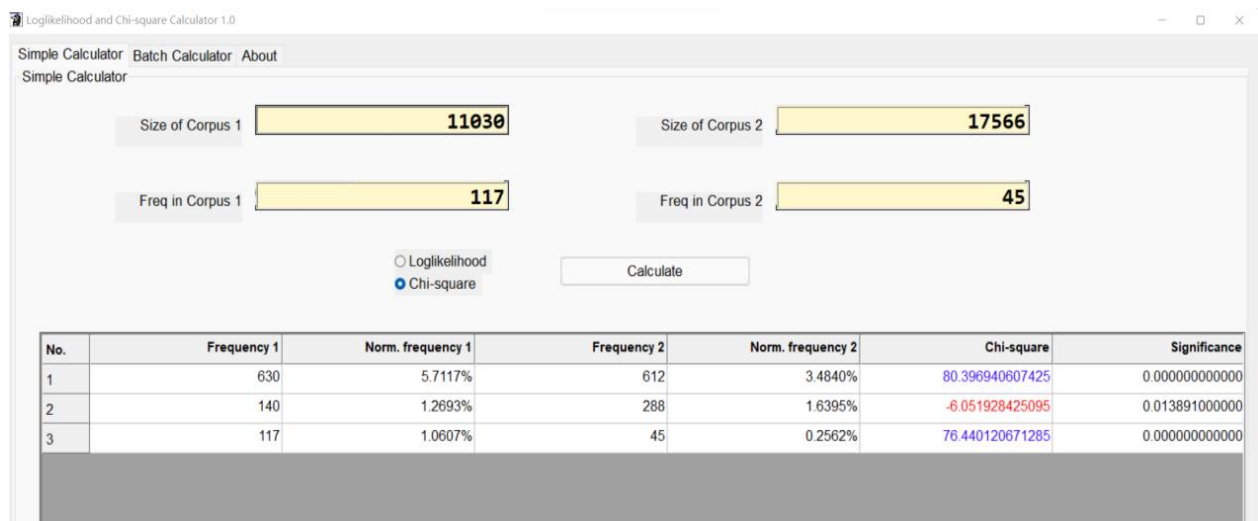


Figure 3. Page screenshot of the LLX2 chi-square test tool.

Results and Discussion

Vertical Comparison of Three Strategies in the Trump Administration

Table 1

Elements of Spatial Proximization in the Trump Administration's Corpus

Category	Labeled items	Hits	Frequency
NP is labeled as an IDC element	Trump	82	0.74%
	The United States/America/the U.S.	80	0.72%
	Europe/Japan/India/South Korea	7	0.06%
	USTR/American workers/farmers	33	0.30%
Total		202	1.83%
NP is labeled as an ODC element	China/Chinese	303	2.74%
	Xi Jinping/Xi	23	0.20%
	Xinjiang/Beijing/Shanghai/Hong Kong/Taiwan	21	0.19%
Total		347	3.14%
The movement of VP is labeled as the movement of ODC towards IDC	Make/dominate/create/change	25	0.22%
The movement of VP is labeled as ODC exerting influence on IDC	Cause/result in/affect/influence	9	0.08%
NP is labeled as the influence of ODC on IDC	Issue (43)/effect (32)/risk (6)	17	0.15%
NP is labeled as the result of the influence of ODC on IDC	Competition/conflict/challenge	30	0.27%
Total	Concerns/threat/damage/barriers/tensions	81	0.73%
Total spatial proximization elements		630	5.71%

Table 2

Elements of Temporal Proximization in Trump Administration's Corpus

Category	Labeled items	Hits	Frequency
Use modal verb phrases to construct ODC that will have an ongoing effect on the present and future	Will/would	119	1.08%
	Can/could		
	May/might		
	Did...have doing		
	Doing...have done		
A discourse in which various entities are used to extend the threat of past time indefinitely into the future	To do...have done	21	0.19%
	Did, doing...have been doing		
	ODC behaviour changes past stability/does not address past problems/deepens past crises		
	ODC behaviour necessitates a change in past assertions/action at this moment to change the past		
Total temporal proximization elements		140	1.27%

Table 3

Elements of Axiological Proximization in Trump Administration's Corpus

Category	Labeled items	Hits	Frequency
NP labeled as referring to the positive values or ideology of the entity IDC within the centre	Free and fair trade/national security/human rights/intellectual property/technology transfer/innovation/transparency/...	86	0.7%
	Unfair trade/state-owned/monopoly/forced technology transfer/intellectual property theft/cyber intrusions		
NP labeled as referring to the negative values or ideology of the central peripheral entity ODC		31	0.28%
Total axiological proximization elements		117	1.06%

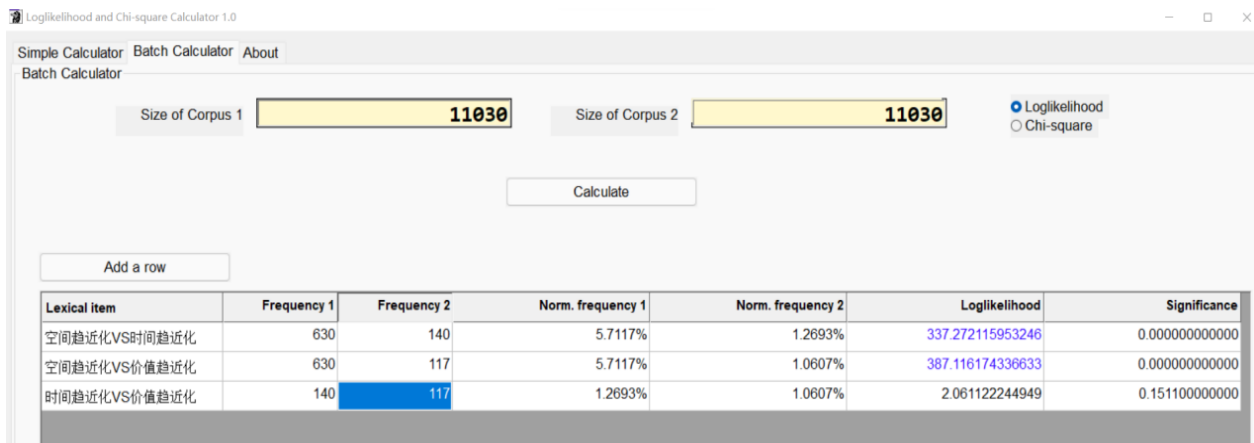


Figure 4. Chi-square test results for vertical comparison of three strategies of the Trump administration's corpus.

Similarities and differences. This study compares the three proximization strategies of the Trump and Biden administrations in a vertical manner, as shown in Figure 4. It can be seen that the p -values (significance) for all three proximization strategies compared with each other (spatial vs. temporal; spatial vs. axiological; and temporal vs. axiological) are less than 0.01. Among them, the frequencies of the spatial proximization strategy, the temporal proximization strategy, and the axiological proximization strategy are 5.71%, 1.27%, and 1.06%, respectively. Since the p -value is less than 0.01, it indicates that the frequencies of the three proximization strategies used in the comparative study of the Trump and Biden administrations' policies toward China are all statistically significant differences. The frequency used for the temporal proximization strategy and the axiological proximization strategy is significantly smaller than that of the spatial proximization strategy.

The possible reasons. First, given the encoding settings of the corpus, most of the annotations of spatial proximization strategies refer to nouns. Noun dictionaries are much more included in corpus annotation than lexical, phonological, semantic, pragmatic, syntactic, part-of-speech, and corpus annotations. Thus, the strategy of spatial proximization prevails.

Secondly, the Trump administration heavily uses the spatial proximization strategy to strengthen its own legitimacy behavior with the Republican Party and also to build up its image by doing so. More so, by referring to the ODC's behavior, it builds up its readers' perceptions of the ODC's delegitimization. At the same time, its article repeatedly refers to the ODCs to reinforce reader's perceptions of their illegitimacy.

Third, the Trump administration uses a temporal proximization strategy to create a sense of immediate crisis that resonates. In this way, the series of policies and guidelines he will implement in the future will seem very reasonable and make the addressees feel that it is the right solution that the U.S. government should take. The proximization in spatial achieves the desired goal. As can be seen, the temporal proximization strategy can effectively stimulate the audience's desire to rebel and rationalize the policies pursued by the speaker.

Finally, the U.S. and Chinese sides belong to two different social system systems, and the values they represent are bound to be different. In order for the Trump administration to emphasize the opposing ideological conflicts between the two sides, the Chinese value system is perceived as the biggest peripheral threat subject to erode the American liberal value system and negatively affect the American practice. This strong unilateralism discourse approach has become the standard mode of current Republican political discourse, and the Trump administration has interpreted it to the fullest.

Vertical Comparison of Three Strategies in the Biden Administration

Table 4

Elements of Spatial Proximity in Biden Administration's Corpus

Category	Labeled items	Hits	Frequency
NP is labeled as an IDC element	Biden	63	0.35%
	The United States/the U.S./America	69	0.39%
	EU/Europe/India/Japan	35	0.20%
	USTR/American workers/farmers	25	0.14%
Total		192	1.09%
NP is labeled as an ODC element	China /Chinese/PRC	193	1.09%
	Xinjiang/Beijing/Hong Kong/Taiwan	50	0.28%
	Xi Jinping/Xi	38	0.21%
Total		281	1.60%
The movement of VP is labeled as the movement of ODC towards IDC	Make/change/create	46	0.26%
The movement of VP is labeled as ODC exerting influence on IDC	Lead to/cause/affect/influence	5	0.03%
NP is labeled as the influence of ODC on IDC	Crisis/issues/risks/problems	30	0.17%
NP is labeled as the result of the influence of ODC on IDC	Competition/conflict/challenge/concerns/tensions	58	0.33%
Total		139	0.79%
Total spatial proximization elements		612	3.48%

Table 5

Temporal Proximity Elements in Biden Administration's Corpus

Category	Labeled items	Hits	Frequency
Use modal verb phrases to construct ODC that will have an ongoing effect on the present and future	Will/would	221	1.25%
	Can/could		
	May/might		
	Did...have doing		
A discourse in which various entities are used to extend the threat of past time indefinitely into the future	Doing...have done	67	0.38%
	To do...have done		
	Did, doing...have been doing		
	ODC behaviour changes past stability/does not address past problems/deepens past crises		
	ODC behaviour necessitates a change in past assertions/action at this moment to change the past		
Total temporal proximization elements		288	1.63%

Table 6

Elements of Axiological Proximity in Biden Administration's Corpus

Category	Labeled items	Hits	Frequency
NP labeled as referring to the positive values or ideology of the entity IDC within the centre	Bilateral trade/human rights/intellectual property/innovation/democracy/cooperation/security	36	0.20%
NP labeled as referring to the negative values or ideology of the central peripheral entity ODC	Unfair trade/debt/state-owned/weakness	9	0.05%
Total axiological proximization elements		45	0.25%

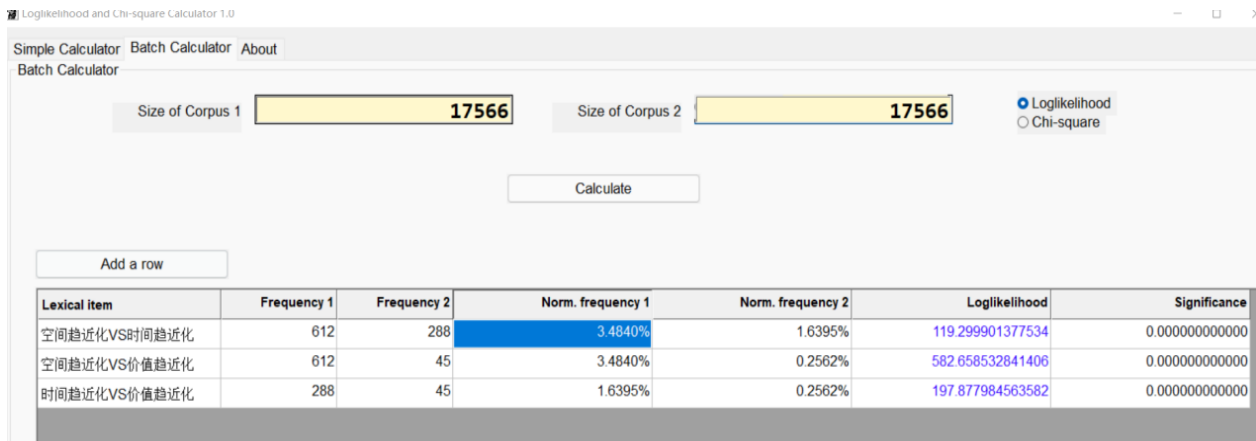


Figure 5. Chi-square test results for vertical comparison of the three strategies of Biden administration's corpus.

Similarities and differences. This study compares the three proximization strategies of the Biden administrations in a vertical manner, as shown in Figure 5, and divided into three groups. It can be seen that the *p*-values (significance) for all three proximization strategies compared with each other (spatial vs. temporal; spatial vs. axiological; and spatial vs. axiological) are less than 0.01. Among them, the frequencies of spatial proximization strategy, temporal proximization strategy, and axiological proximization strategy are 3.48%, 1.63%, and 0.25%, respectively. Since the *p*-value is less than 0.01, it indicates that the frequencies of the three proximization strategies used in the comparative study of the Trump administration and the Biden administration's policies toward China are statistically significantly different. The frequency used by the spatial proximization strategy is significantly greater than that used by the temporal and axiological proximization strategies.

The possible reasons. First, due to the corpus coding settings, most of the annotations for spatial proximization strategies are for noun words. And the settings of noun vocabulary in corpus annotation are significantly larger than lexical, phonological, semantic, pragmatic, syntactic, part-of-speech, and corpora annotation. So the spatial proximization strategy still dominates.

Second, the Biden administration makes extensive use of the spatial proximization strategy to strengthen its own legitimacy behavior with its ODCs, and also to build up its image by doing so. More so, by referring to the ODC's behavior, it builds its readers' perception of the ODC's delegitimization and actively uses the spatial proximization strategy to establish its own legitimate IDC image. At the same time, the ODCs are repeatedly presented and presented in order to strengthen the reader's impression of the ODCs.

Third, the Biden administration uses certain temporal proximization strategies to create a sense of immediate crisis that resonates. In this way, the series of policies and guidelines he is going to implement in the future will seem very reasonable and make the addressees feel that it is the right solution that the U.S. government should take. The proximization in temporal achieves the desired goal. As can be seen, the temporal proximization strategy can effectively stimulate the audience's desire to rebel and rationalize the policies pursued by the speaker.

Finally, the U.S. and Chinese sides belong to two different social system systems, and the values they represent are bound to differ. In order to emphasize the opposing ideological conflicts between the two sides, the Biden administration's Chinese value system is recognized as an ideology of negative values.

Horizontal Comparison of Three Strategies Between Two Administrations

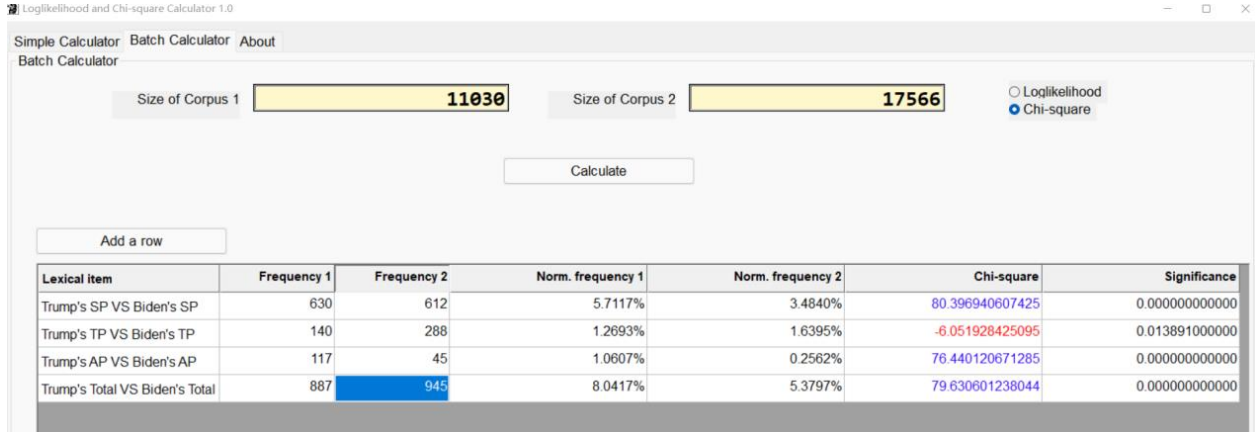


Figure 6. Horizontal comparison of three major strategies of Trump and Biden administrations' corpus.

The data are summarized in Table 7, based on the chi-square test charts comparing horizontally the three proximization strategies of the Trump and Biden administrations' corpus.

Table 7

Comparison of the Frequency of the Three Proximization Strategies of Trump and Biden Administrations' Corpus

Strategies tag	Trump administration's frequency	Biden administration's frequency	Chi-square value	p-value (significance)
Spatial proximization	612	612	80.39	$p < 0.01$
Temporal proximization	140	288	-6.05	$0.01 < p < 0.05$
Axiological proximization	117	45	76.44	$p < 0.01$
Total	887	945	79.63	$p < 0.01$

Similarities and differences. The total word count of the Trump administration corpus is 11,030 and the total word count of the Biden corpus is 17,566. In the above table we compare the spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization of the two into three groups and one total proximization strategy item. As shown in Table 7, this paper compares the spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization of the Trump and Biden administrations corpus. From the above graphs, it can be seen that the p -values (significance) of both spatial proximization and axiological proximization are less than 0.01, indicating that there are statistically significant differences between Trump and Biden administrations in the use of both strategies. While the p -value (significance) for temporal proximization is between 0.01 and 0.05, indicating that there is a difference between the Trump and Biden administrations in the use of this strategy, but it is not significant. Finally, the total proximization strategies used by the Trump and Biden administrations are then compared, resulting in a p -value (significance) of less than 0.01, indicating a statistically significant difference in the use of the proximization strategy by both administrations.

The possible reasons. First, spatial proximization is the most basic proximization strategy. Both the Trump and Biden administrations have used a large number of spatial proximization strategies to reflect the impact on the ODC. That is, the Trump and Biden administrations' policies toward China will have a lasting impact, and the threat will continue to emerge. The term "Trump" accounts for 0.74% of the Trump administration's nomenclature, an individualized term that underscores that his personal advocacy serves his personal purposes.

Similarly, the term “Trump Administration” and “White House” are also represented, highlighting that the trade measures against China are the actions of the current administration, as opposed to the free trade policies of previous administrations with China. This reduces the number of hostile members for IDC members and weakens the legitimacy of the other side.

Second, temporal proximization is a forced interpretation of the “now” at the center of the timeline. Based on the occurrence of past crises or the anticipation of future crises, it highlights the imminence of the threat, the urgency of defending against it, and the historical significance of responding to it immediately and taking measures to prevent it. This chronological proximization strategy deepens the crisis of past events through the construction of narrative forms in different tenses. In the use of temporal approximation, modal verbs can convey the identity and position of the speaker, and this subjective emotion is persuasive and provocative, leading the listener to join the “self” perspective position to form a consensus. In the Trump administration’s temporal approximation strategy, modal verbs contribute most of the weight to this dimension. Among them, “will” and “would” are used most frequently, followed by “can” and “could”. All of these counted modal verbs meet the criteria for the category indicating that ODC actions have far-reaching effects on the future. And in the Biden administration’s temporal proximization strategy, modal verbs reflect the ongoing impact of ODC actions on the future while containing a high degree of certainty, reflecting the authority of the discourse. Therefore, there are differences in the use of temporal proximization strategies between Trump and Biden administrations, but they are not significant.

Third, axiological proximization refers to the hostility generated by the hearer’s recognition of the discourse IDC and the ODC value system, which operates by a mechanism of increasing ideological conflict that will lead to actual conflict in the future, forcing the construction of a high likelihood of internal and external conflict. In the use of the Trump administration’s axiological proximization strategy, “intellectual property” and “technology transfer” have the largest share in the positive value system. These terms were used in response to the U.S. charge that China was stealing intellectual property rights, showing a tough attitude to defend the facts. In the Biden administration’s axiological proximization strategy, “bilateral relations” accounts for the largest share, which is in contrast to China’s “multilateralism” and “free trade” values. Therefore, the differences between the Trump and Biden administrations in the use of axiological proximization strategies are significant.

Pragmatic Functions of Proximization Strategies

Constructing a Negative Image of China

Through proximization strategies, the Trump and Biden administrations have intensified the ideological conflict in trade policy with China, materialized the ideological threat, and shaped a negative image of China. The U.S. side’s political discourse communication profoundly affects the American public’s negative sentiment toward China. Through strategic communication, the U.S. side strongly shapes and maintains a discursive environment that is in line with U.S. national interests and constructs a negative Chinese national image. For example:

Example (1): <SPO>China</SPO>uses foreign ownership restrictions, including joint venture requirements, equity limitations, and other investment restrictions, to require or <SPE>pressure</SPE><API>technology transfer</API>from U.S. companies to Chinese entities.<SPO>China</SPO>also uses administrative review and licensing procedures to require or pressure<API>technology transfer</API>, which, inter alia, undermines the value of U.S. investments and technology and weakens the global competitiveness of U.S. firms. (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018a)

In Example (1), The Trump administration describes China's use of foreign ownership restrictions to require or force U.S. companies to transfer U.S. technological achievements to China, with the aim of finding excuses for its behavior in waging trade wars and constructing the harm produced by these imaginary facts in discourse using behavioral verbs that mark the impact in an attempt to create fear among the public. The Trump administration focuses on portraying the process of IDC invasion and demonizing China to bring more intuitive feelings to the public, which is conducive to inciting their negative emotions toward China, shaping and maintaining a discursive environment in line with U.S. national interests, and constructing a negative Chinese national image.

Hiding the Real Intentions

The news media are very important in modern social communication, and seemingly unbiased and objective reports may harbor ulterior motives. The powerful interpretive power of proximization theory can be very effective in helping readers dissect the real hidden agenda of the discourse maker. Proximization theory employs different metaphors to construct different concepts, and the Trump and Biden administrations employ different types of lexical and grammatical forms, i.e., different proximization strategies, to decipher the ODC's imminent threat to the IDC and to hide the real intentions behind the discourse. For example:

Example (2): On May 29, 2018, <SPI>President Trump</SPI>stated that<SPI>USTR</SPI>shall announce by June 15 the imposition of an additional duty of 25 percent on approximately \$50 billion worth of <SPO>Chinese</SPO> imports containing industrially significant technologies, including those related to <SPO>China's</SPO> "Made in China 2025" industrial policy. Today's action comes after an exhaustive Section 301 investigation in which<SPI>USTR</SPI>found that<SPO>China's acts</SPO>, policies and practices related to<API>technology transfer</API>,<API>intellectual property</API>, and<API>innovation</API>are unreasonable and discriminatory, and burden U.S. commerce. (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018b)

In Example (2), The Trump administration used the noun phrase "Trump" and the auxiliary term "USTR" to highlight the fact that the Trump administration is pursuing policies that are different from those of previous administrations, claiming that they are more in line with the interests of the American people, trying to enhance Trump's popularity, and to satisfy his personal purposes. Thus, "the American people" and "USTR" have become important elements of the IDC, in an effort to build a pro-people image of Trump. The plural nouns "farmers" and "workers" refer to the American people through the mechanism of metonymy, but the discursive advantage of making them concrete is to lead people to believe that the president is giving genuine humanistic care to the people and hiding his real intention, which is to maintain his social status and control over the direction of public opinion.

Exaggerating the Facts

In addition to the role of spatial and temporal in the construction of worldviews, our values, i.e., our judgments of good and bad, also play an important role (Cap, 2010, pp. 392-407). Reflected in discursive constructions are the subjective judgments we make about the events we describe, i.e., our attitudes or subjective judgments about an event. In the Trump and Biden administrations' constructions of ideologies, there are both positive IDC images of themselves and negative values of the ODC. For example:

Example (3): The investigation of <SPO>China's Acts</SPO>, Policies, and Practices Related to <API>Technology Transfer</API>,<API>Intellectual Property</API>, and<API>Innovation</API>addresses four categories of acts, policies, and practices of the Government of <SPO>China </SPO>that unfairly <SPE>result in </SPE>the<API>transfer of technologies</API>and<API>intellectual property</API> from U.S. companies to <SPO>China</SPO>. These policies

harm U.S. businesses and workers and threaten the long-term competitiveness of <SPI>the United States</SPI>. (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018a)

In Example (3), the terms “technology transfer” and “intellectual property” appear several times. In its construction of positive values, the Trump administration describes four types of acts, policies, and practices of the Chinese government that unfairly result in technology and intellectual property transfers from U.S. companies to China as part of its investigation of Chinese behavior, policies, and practices related to technology transfer, intellectual property and innovation. These policies harm U.S. businesses and workers and threaten the long-term competitiveness of the United States. Overall, the Trump administration has gone to great lengths to convey the negative ideology of the ODC, smearing the Chinese government by placing the blame for the current situation on the Chinese side of the equation, arguing that it is Chinese policies that harm American workers and businesses. Different cultural ethics form a conflict in Chinese and American values, leading to differences in the axiological proximization strategies of both sides in the discourse.

Conclusion

Proximization theory is an effective discursive strategy to study speakers' efforts to achieve their own legitimacy or reinforce the illegitimacy of the other side, and its superiority can be maximized through quantitative and comparative analysis. This study introduces proximization theory to deconstruct the linguistic entity constructs of the Trump and Biden administrations' policies toward China in three proximization dimensions: spatial, temporal, and axiological, and reveals the U.S. discourse strategies that serve deep political motives. We find that both the Trump and Biden administrations have made extensive use of spatial proximization strategies to strengthen their own legitimizing behavior and to establish their own image, which outlaws the legality of Chinese behavior.

It is worth pointing out that the study of the discourse on the Trump and Biden administrations' policies toward China needs to fully consider the historical and cultural factors that shaped the U.S. political ecology and comprehensively grasp the development of U.S.-China relations in order to accurately understand the real intentions and potential behaviors behind the discourse and effectively respond to the U.S. actions. In fact, there is a growing awareness in the U.S. strategic community that a new trade policy and strategic framework to contain China's power must be established, and that the goal of the shift in trade policy is to better confront China. The essence of the new U.S. trade policy is to maintain a state of pressure on China while seeking dialogue, and to focus on pursuing competition or even confrontation with China in core areas. In terms of positioning relations with China, the Biden administration proposes to make managing relations with China the greatest geopolitical test of the 21st century, highlighting even more the primacy and uniqueness of the Chinese challenge. In terms of approach and means, it not only continues the Trump administration's policy tone of containment toward China, but also shifts from the unilateral isolationism of the Trump administration to a strategy of promoting the formation of a multilateral alliance system. Unlike the Trump era, the Biden administration has shifted from “carpet bombing” to “precision strikes” through a “small yard and high wall” technology control strategy coupled with a “lock and key” strategy. The Biden administration has shifted from “carpet bombing” to “precision strikes” and maintained a high pressure posture toward China through a “small yard and high wall” technology control strategy coupled with a “regulation lock” strategy.

Although the research starts with specific issues, it is necessary to “see the big with the small” and “move from many to one”, which requires not only specific case studies but also sufficient corpus support. Thus, future

research can focus on numerous “small issues” and present the dynamic process of the construction of American political discourse through comparative analysis of ephemeral and co-occurring corpus.

This study demonstrates the power of proximization theory, and we hope that it will attract more scholars to focus on this area of research and provide a deeper interpretation of cognitive critical discourse analysis.

References

- Cap, P. (2006). *Legitimization in political discourse: A cross-disciplinary perspective on the modern US war rhetoric*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Cap, P. (2008). Towards the proximization model of the analysis of legitimization in political discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40(1), 17-41.
- Cap, P. (2010). Axiological aspects of pragmatics. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42, 392-407.
- Cap, P. (2013). *Proximization: The pragmatics of symbolic distance crossing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Cap, P. (2014). Applying cognitive pragmatics to critical discourse studies: A proximization analysis of three public space discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 70, 16-30.
- Cap, P. (2017). Studying ideological worldviews in political discourse space: Critical-cognitive advances in the analysis of conflict and coercion. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 108, 17-27.
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Chilton, P. (2005). Discourse space theory: Geometry, brain and shifting viewpoints. *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 3, 78-116.
- Fauconnier, G. (1994). *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hart, C. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science: New Perspectives on Immigration Discourse*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hart, C. (2014). *Discourse, Grammar and Ideology: Functional and Cognitive Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Hart, C. (2018). Event-frames affect blame assignment and perception of aggression in discourse on political protests: an experimental case study in Critical Discourse Analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(3), 400-421.
- Hart, C., & Lukes, D. (2007). Introduction: Cognitive Linguistics critical discourse Analysis. In Hart & D. Lukes (eds.). *Cognitive Linguistics in Critical Discourse Analysis: Application and Theory*. New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- He, X. K., & Li, Z. F. (2020). An analysis of the US policy of “Cold Cooperation” with China—Based on an investigation of US think tanks. *Journal of Jiangnan Social College*, 22(2), 20-25.
- Huang, T. T. (2020). The Role of Think Tanks in Shaping the British Policy Towards China's Belt and Road Initiative: Chatham House, IISS, and RUSL as Test Cases. (Master Dissertation, Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2020).
- Kubler, S., & Zinsmeister, H. (2015). *Corpus linguistics and linguistically annotated corpora*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Liu, Y., & Wei, L. (2016). Studies on China's social issues by American think tanks in recent years. *American Studies*, 30(6), 121-132+8.
- Lu, J. (2010). A summary of the evaluation and analysis of current China US relations by US think tanks. *Contemporary International Relations*, 30(7), 41-49.
- Office of the United States Trade Representative. (2018a.03.22). President Trump announces strong actions to address China's unfair trade. Retrieved from <https://ustr.gov>
- Office of the United States Trade Representative. (2018b.06.15). USTR issues tariffs on Chinese products in response to unfair trade practices. Retrieved from <https://ustr.gov>
- Pan, D. (2017). A new method of critical discourse analysis—Approaching analysis. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, 38(4), 9-16.
- PENG, J. C. (2019). A Study on the Evolution of U.S. Trade Policy Towards China (2008-2018). (Master Dissertation of Liaoning University, 2019).
- Ruhlemann, C. (2010). *The Routledge handbook of corpus linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Song, J., & Si, L. R. (2021). The trend of Biden administration's China policy under the influence of American think tanks. *Forum of World Economics & Politics*, 41(1), 56-79.
- Wang, J. S. (2019). The Trump administration's China policy from the perspective of the US think tanks. *Social Sciences Digest*, 17(5), 118-120.

- Wang, L. H., & Pan, C. Y. (2020). Multiple perceptions and policy propositions of major US think tanks on the AIIB. *World Economy Studies*, 39(11), 127-134+137.
- Wang, M. X., & Zhi, Y. B. (2017). A corpus-based study on the metaphorical construction of Chinese related discourse in American think tanks. *Journal of Jilin University of Education*, 33(10), 149-156.
- Wu, J. G., Lin, J. R., & LI, Y. (2016). A new approach to critical discourse analysis—The proximization theory. *Foreign Languages*, 39(5), 75-82.
- Wu, J. G., & Niu, Z. J. (2018). Analysis on the legalization of political discourse from the perspective of approaching theory—Take Trump's immigration policy as an example. *Chinese Foreign Language*, 15(6), 48-53.
- Xu, Y. J. (2017). Critical discourse analysis from the perspective of proximization: Take for example the comments on the 2016 US presidential election TV debate (Doctoral dissertation, Hangzhou Normal University, 2017).
- Yan, B., & Zhang, H. (2018). A critical cognitive linguistic study based on the discourse of Sino-US trade war: The perspective of proximization theory. *Foreign Language Studies*, 35(6), 16-22.
- Zhang, H., & Jiang, L. (2008). Integration of Cognitive linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. *Foreign Language Research*, 144(5), 12-19.
- Zhang, T. W. (2016). Research on the construction of discourse system of political leaders' speeches—A case study based on the theory of proximization. *Foreign Languages in China*, 13(5), 28-35.