

Discursive Construction of Chinese Military Image in the British Media

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This study takes the image of China's military as constructed in the British media's military coverage of China as an object of study, and creates two reference corpora for comparative research. It is used to better analyse and compare the ideologies hidden in the British media's coverage of China's military. From the analysis of the corpus, it is concluded that due to China's rapid military and economic development, Western countries have developed a sense of crisis and have used media reports to instigate China's foreign relations and mislead public thinking.

Keywords: discursive construction, Chinese military image, corpus, British media

1. Introduction

In today's world, a country's image is one of the essential factors in establishing its standing. As China's military economy has proliferated in recent years, its military and economic picture has drawn increasing attention from all areas of life, with both positive and negative news appearing in other countries and media. Many domestic scholars have begun to conduct research on China's military image internationally in recent years, such as studies on US-China military relations (e.g. Qian, 2013; Li, 2013; Ma, 2015; Li, 2001) and the refutation of the "China threat theory" (e.g. Li & Xiao, 2013; Beard, 2012; Wang, 2007). These studies all examine the creation of China's military image in specific nations, however, there are few comparative analyses of China's military image based on a corpus of media coverage of China.

Nowadays, corpora are becoming increasingly valuable for language studies, and linguists have begun to create corpora to study language ideology.

This study builds a corpus of British media military reports on China, and studies its transitivity to reveal the ideology behind the language of British media military reports on China.

2. Research Tools and Objects

2.1 Transitivity System

Transitivity refers to the linguistic system used to create experiential meaning. At the rank of a clause, this system looks at a clause as a process. The key elements of this process are the process verb and the participants of the process. The key elements of this process are the process verb, the participants of the process, and the circumstance of the process. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 168)

There are altogether six processes in transitivity system. “Among these six types of process, none of them is prior to another though it has been mentioned that four of them are major types and two of them are minor types. ‘major’ and ‘minor’ are used to refer to the general occurring frequency of some certain types. However, these processes are ordered to form a sphere” (Wang, 2015, pp. 50-53).

2.2. Research Tools

Three main research tools are employed in this paper: BFSU qualitative coder 1.2, Antconc3.4.4w, and Log-likelihood and Chi-Square Calculator1.0.

BFSU qualitative coder is an annotation tool which can be used to annotate the text according to its own research needs and carry out the statistics of word frequency of each subclass in the annotation system. AntConc has three main functions, namely, word retrieval, generating wordlists and keywords. Log-likelihood and Chi-Square Calculator1.0 is a Chi-square test or Log-likelihood test software. In this research, we mainly use the function of the Chi-square test to make a contrastive analysis of news discourses.

In this paper, the Qualitative coder 1.2 will be used to annotate the text, first, the six processes of transitivity should be coded first, then the code list together with the texts should be imported into the annotation software, and the third step is to identify different clauses of the texts to click the tags of the corresponding processes.

2.3 Research Object

This study takes the military image of China as constructed in the British media’s military coverage of China as an object of study and creates two reference corpora for comparative research. It is used to better analyse and compare the ideologies hidden in the British media’s coverage of China’s military.

This study collected 64,328 words of military reports on China from three British media (*The Sun*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*). In addition, a 66,507-word US corpus was created, with reports mainly coming from the top ten US media: CNN, NBC, CBS, *The New York Times*, *Time*, FOX, *Newsweek*, etc. This study creates two corpora to compare and contrast military coverage in the UK and US media from both longitudinal and cross-sectional perspectives, with the aim of providing a reference for researchers in this field.

2.4 Research Questions

This study attempts to address the following questions:

- (1) What are the characteristics of the materiality system of British military reporting on China?
- (2) What kind of military image of China do they construct?
- (3) Why does the UK construct China’s military image in this way?

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Six Processes of British Military Reporting on China

In this study, a 64,328-word UK news corpus was selectively built, while a separate 166,507-word US national news reference corpus was constructed for comparative analysis. Data on the frequency ratios of the six processes in the UK news corpus are as follows (Table 1):

Table 1

Statistics on the Six Processes in the UK News Corpus

	Material Process	Verbal Process	Mental Process	Relational Process	Behavioral Process	Existential Process	Total
Number	3202	716	200	1060	25	118	5321
Ratio	60.18%	13.46%	3.76%	19.92%	0.47%	2.22%	100%

As can be seen from Table 1, there are 5,321 processes in the UK news corpus, of which 3,202 are material processes, accounting for the most at 60.18%, 716 are verbal processes, accounting for 13.46%, 200 are mental processes, accounting for 3.76%, 1,060 are relational processes, accounting for the second most at 19.92%, and fewer are existential processes, accounting for 2.22%. Behavioral processes account for the least, at 0.47%. All six processes have a certain ideology, which we will analyze in the next section.

Next, we imported the data into the Log-likelihood and Chi-Square software for a Chi-square test to more clearly compare whether the six processes in a corpus are statistically different from each other and the relevant data for the following chi-square tests (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

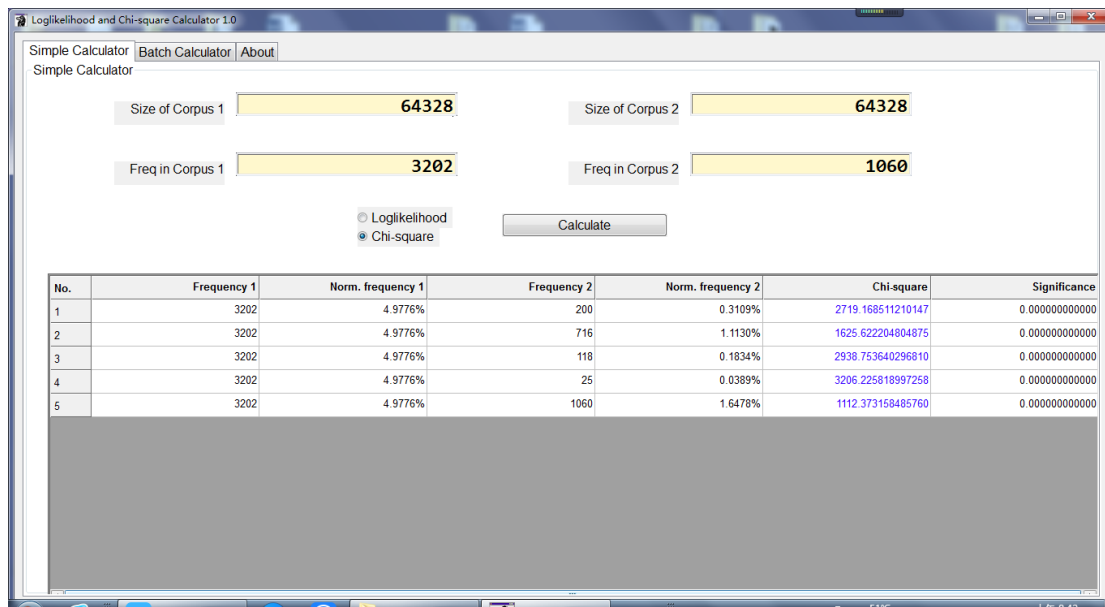


Figure 1. Contrastive Analysis of six processes in British news.

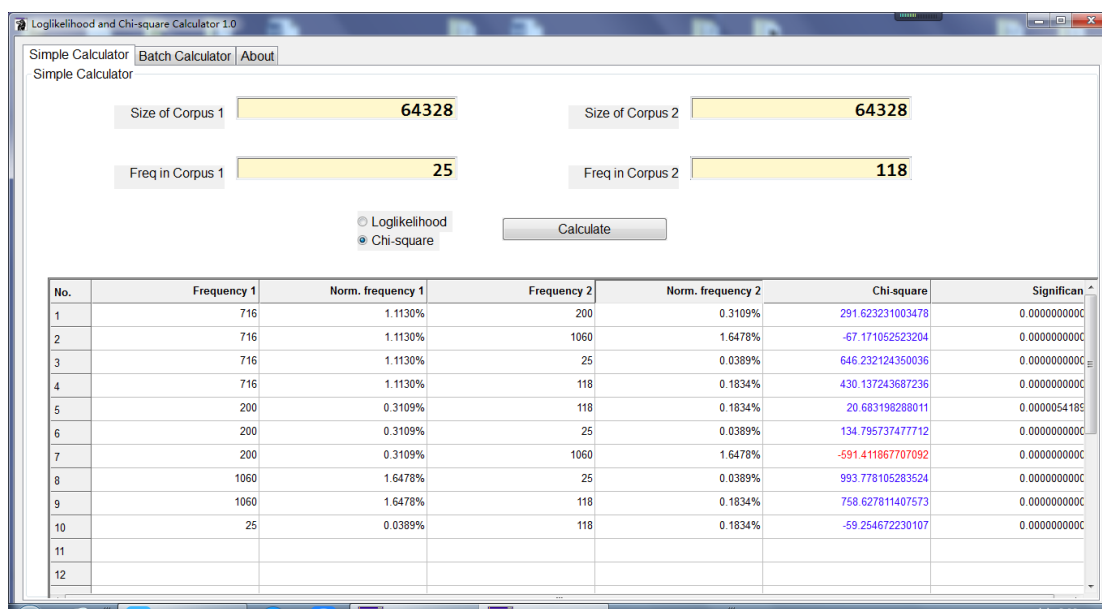


Figure 2. Contrastive Analysis of six processes in British news.

Firstly, as the material processes make up the largest proportion of the corpus, we compare the material processes with the other processes by importing Log-likelihood and Chi-Square (Figure.2) and analyzing whether they are statistically significantly different by looking at the p-value (Significance). Secondly, we then compared the other five processes in the UK news corpus with each other, and the comparison will be carried out in the same way. Finally, a total of 15 data results were obtained, as shown in Figure 2.3. We have tabulated it to give the reader a clearer understanding of Figure 3 and Table 2.

Table 2

Chi-Square Tests for Six Processes in UK News

	Comparison among processes	Chi-square	Significance
1	Material Process and Verbal Process	2719.168511210147	0.000000000
2	Material Process and Mental Process	1625.622204804875	0.000000000
3	Material Process and Relational Process	2938.753640296810	0.000000000
4	Material Process and Behavioral Process	3206.225818997258	0.000000000
5	Material Process and Existential Process	1112.373158485760	0.000000000
6	Verbal Process and Mental Process	291.623231003478	0.000000000
7	Verbal Process and Relational Process	-67.171052523204	0.000000000
8	Verbal Process and Behavioral Process	646.232124350036	0.000000000
9	Verbal Process and Existential Process	430.137243687236	0.000000000
10	Mental Process and Relational Process	20.683198288011	0.0000054189
11	Mental Process and Behavioral Process	134.795737477712	0.000000000
12	Mental Process and Existential Process	-591.411867707092	0.000000000
13	Relational Process and Behavioral Process	993.778105283524	0.000000000
14	Relational Process and Existential Process	758.627811407573	0.000000000
15	Behavioral Process and Existential Process	-59.254672230107	0.000000000

According to Table 2, we can clearly see the p-values (Significance) in each chi-square test, with statistically significant differences between the material processes and all the other processes in the UK news corpus.

Similarly, there are statistically significant differences between verbal processes and the other four processes, i.e., mental processes, relational processes, etc. ($p = 0.000 < 0.01$). There were statistically significant differences between all six processes in the UK news corpus.

What has led to this result?

In news reporting or discourse in general, the choice of language's structural level frequently decides its ideology due to the six processes' significant differences in how they express ideology.

When considered separately, a specific linguistic structure might not have any special social significance. However, once it appears in a particular context, or in connection with other structures, it may have a socially significant meaning. That is, the ideological meaning in language depends on the context in which the linguistic form appears and the communicative intentions of the speaker. (Xinbin, 2004, p. 65)

In the above chart we can find that:

Firstly, the material process accounts for the largest proportion of the report, as military news reports generally have many events to report, the material process in describing the event can highlight the details of the event is more realistic. Verbal process also accounts for a greater proportion of the corpus. In news reports, journalists will quote many statements made by others will make the report more objective and authoritative, in essence, the newspaper selectively draws on these statements and publishes the desired ideology.

The second most represented process is the relational process. We find that journalists place a lot of emphasis on context and process. In the relational process, which can be defined, the news story captures its own subjective view as a narrator to the public, although there is also a statement of factual attribution.

In addition, mental processes, existential processes, and behavioural processes are all underrepresented in the corpus. We find that mental processes are mostly used to quote other people's ideas or feelings which are more persuasive and objective than expressing one's own feelings. Moreover, the public is very critical of the veracity of events, which makes it necessary for journalists to be extremely certain in their use of existential processes, whereas in fact, absolute judgements about many events are questionable and offensive to readers, so existential processes are used less often.

Finally, behavioural processes accounted for the least amount of news coverage, behavioural processes are not very effective in helping to achieve the desired messaging in news coverage, and are usually, less involved in news coverage.

3.2 The Six-processes in the Corpus of USA News

As shown in Tables 3 and Figure 4, there are 5,077 processes in the US corpus, of which 3,128 are material processes, accounting for the largest share at 61.61%. This is followed by 1,058 relational processes, accounting for 20.84%. In addition, there are 629 verbal processes, 158 mental processes, and 95 existential processes, and the least number of behavioural processes, at 9.

Table 3
The Statistics of Six Processes in the USA New

	Material Process	Verbal Process	Mental Process	Relational Process	Behavioral Process	Existential Process	Total
Number	3128	629	158	1058	9	95	5077
Ratio	61.61%	12.39%	3.11%	20.84%	0.18%	1.87%	100%

As with the analysis of the UK reports, in order to test whether the distribution of the six processes differed in the newly constructed corpus, we also imported the frequencies of the six main processes from the US media's military reports into the Log-likelihood and Chi-Square software for a chi-square test (Figure 3 and Figure 4) and observed the p-values to obtain the following data associated with the chi-square test:

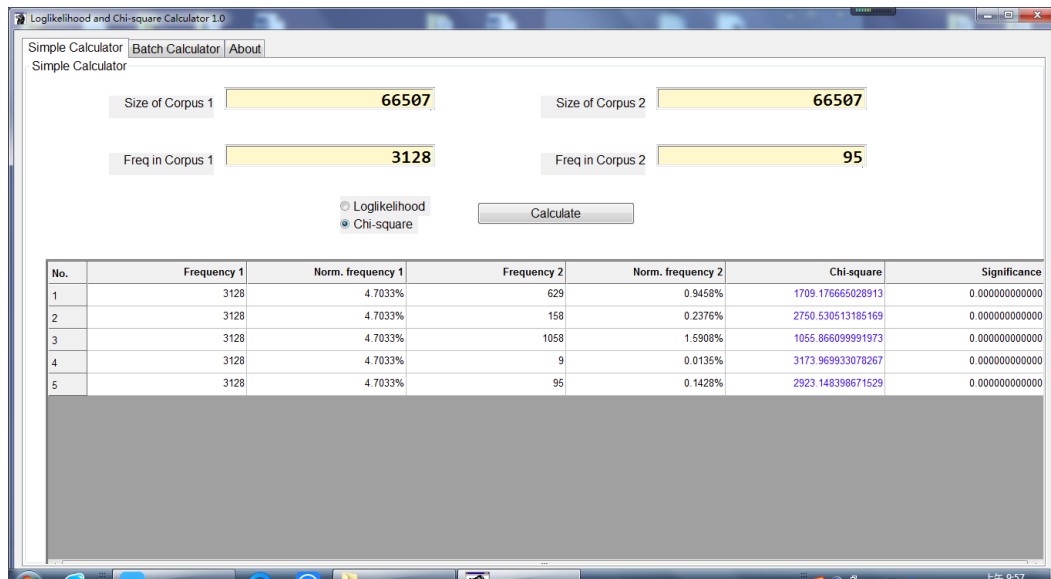


Figure 3. The Chi-square Test of the Six Processes in the USA News.

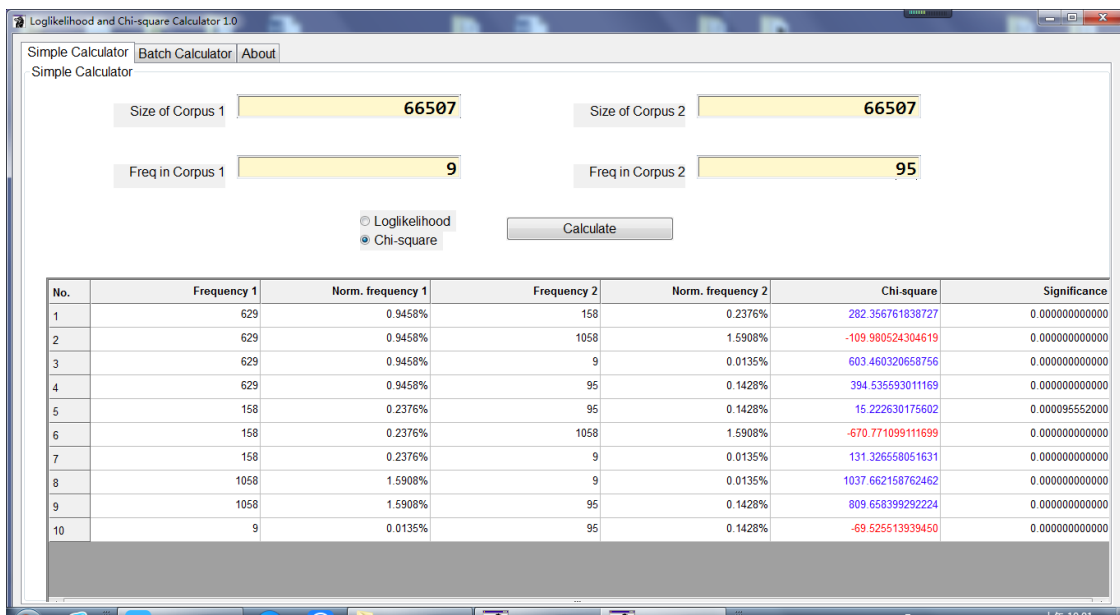


Figure 4. The Chi-square Test of the Six Processes in the USA News.

As mentioned in 2.1 of this chapter, to help readers better understand the Chi-square test, we will rewrite the 15 results in Table 4 for detailed analysis and comparison.

Table 4
The Chi-square Test of the Six Processes in the USA News

	Comparison among processes	Chi-square	Significance
1	Material Process and Verbal Process	1709.176665028913	0.000000000
2	Material Process and Mental Process	2750.530513185169	0.000000000
3	Material Process and Relational Process	1055.866099991973	0.000000000
4	Material Process and Behavioral Process	3173.969933078267	0.000000000
5	Material Process and Existential Process	2923.148398671529	0.000000000
6	Verbal Process and Mental Process	282.356761838727	0.000000000
7	Verbal Process and Relational Process	-109.980524304619	0.000000000
8	Verbal Process and Behavioral Process	603.460320658756	0.000000000
9	Verbal Process and Existential Process	394.535593011169	0.000000000
10	Mental Process and Relational Process	15.222630175602	0.0000955520
11	Mental Process and Behavioral Process	-670.771099111699	0.000000000
12	Mental Process and Existential Process	131.326558051631	0.000000000
13	Relational Process and Behavioral Process	1037.662158762462	0.000000000
14	Relational Process and Existential Process	809.658399292224	0.000000000
15	Behavioral Process and Existential Process	-69.525513939450	0.000000000

As we can see from Table 4, the p-values for all six processes are less than 0.01 ($p = 0.000 < 0.01$), indicating that there are statistically significant differences between each of the two processes within the six.

The reasons for the distribution of the share of the six processes in the US media are probably the same as those discussed in 2.1.

3.3 Contrastive Analysis Between the Two Corpora

The above is a longitudinal analysis of the military coverage of China by the UK and the US, and then we will move on to a horizontal comparison. In order to clearly compare the frequency differences between the six major processes in the UK and US coverage, this paper makes a table of their proportions for comparison. (Table 5)

Table 5
Ratio of the Six Processes in the American and British News

	Material process	Verbal process	Mental process	Relational process	Behavioral process	Existential process
Ratio in the UK	60.18%	13.46%	3.76%	19.92%	0.47%	2.22%
Ratio in USA	61.61%	12.39%	3.11%	20.84%	0.18%	1.87%

To understand more clearly the differences and similarities in Chinese and American media coverage of China, we imported the data from Table 5 into the Log-likelihood and Chi-square Calculator¹ (Figure 5) to obtain the following results (Table 6):

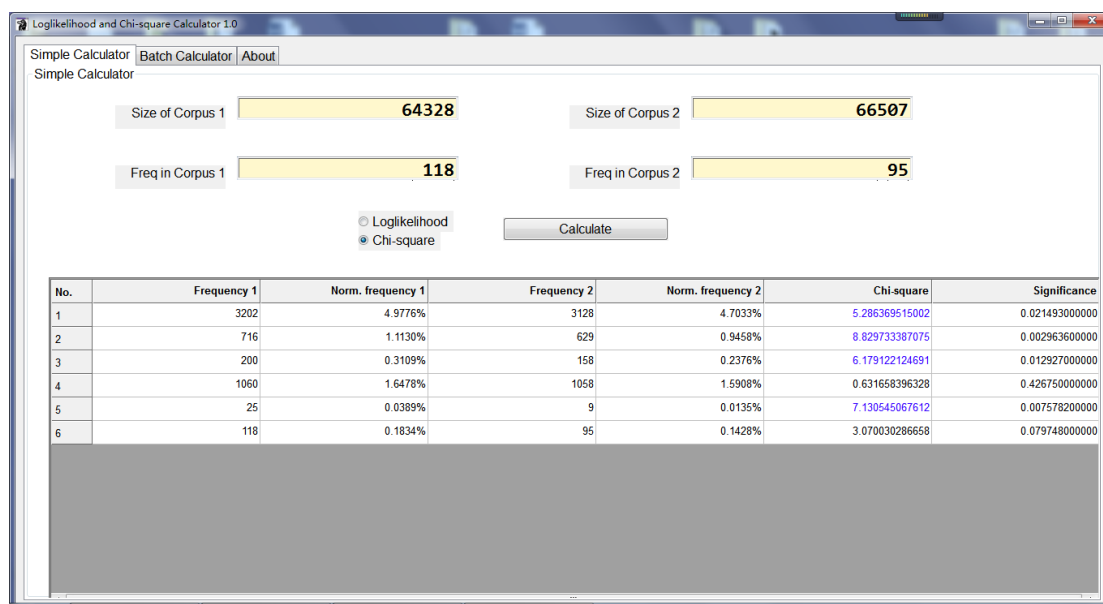


Figure 5. The Chi-square Test of the Six Processes in the Two Corpora.

Table 6

The Chi-square Test of Six Processes in British and American News

Types of process	Chi-square	Significance
Material Process	5.286369515002	0.021493000000
Verbal Process	8.829733387075	0.002963600000
Mental Process	6.179122124691	0.012927000000
Relational Process	0.631658396328	0.426750000000
Behavioral Process	7.130545067612	0.007578200000
Existential Process	3.070030286658	0.079748000000

According to this, we can easily see that

- (1) There is no statistically significant difference in the material process between the two corpora ($p=0.021493>0.01$).
- (2) There is a statistically significant difference in the verbal process between the two corpora ($p=0.0029636<0.01$).
- (3) There is no statistically significant difference in the mental process between the two corpora ($p=0.012927000000>0.01$).
- (4) There is no statistically significant difference in the relational process between the two corpora ($p=0.42675>0.01$).
- (5) There is a statistically significant difference in the behavioural process between the two corpora ($p=0.0075782<0.01$).
- (6) There is no statistically significant difference in the existential process between the two corpora ($p=0.079748>0.01$).

3.3.1 Similarities and possible reasons

Firstly, from Table 5 we can see that the overall distribution of each of the six processes in both the UK and US corpora is the same proportion: material processes account for the most, followed by relational processes,

verbal processes also account for more, mental, and existential processes both account for less, and the least used is behavioural processes. In the longitudinal comparison between chapters 2.2 and 2.1, by looking at the p-values in Table 2 and Table 4, we also find that there is a significant difference between the two processes in both countries ($p < 0.01$), and from the p-values in the chi-square test in Table 6 we can see that there is no statistically significant difference between the material process, the mental process, the existential process, and the relational process in the British and American media reports on China. We have briefly analyzed this set of commonalities for the following reasons:

First, there may be subjective errors of judgement in the process of labelling the corpus, resulting in errors that affect the data and statistics.

Second, because all of the military reports in the corpus chosen for this research are about China and most military reports in the news are event reports, there may be overlaps in the languages used.

Thirdly, because both Britain and the US are Western nations with comparable cultural views and viewpoints on China's military modernization, similar ideologies are expressed in similar ways.

3.3.2 Differences and possible reasons

In terms of word count, the US corpus has more total words than the UK, but the UK has more total processes than the US, and more of all six processes as a percentage of the total number of words. This suggests that the UK will use more small sentences in descriptive reporting, "small sentences express the meaning of the whole process of action, event, feeling, thinking, being and speaking, and so on" (Webster, 2002, p. 6). It suggests that the UK will be more accurate and detailed in its reports. This phenomenon can be brought on by the cultural and expressive preferences that differ between the two nations.

4. A Case Study of UK Reporting Concerning China's Military

This paper will cite two specific examples from the corpus to analyze and compare the construction of China's military image using objectivity in British and American media reports on China. Due to the behavioural process, it has less influence on China's military image, so this paper will not analyze it, but focus on comparing the ideologies embodied in the other five major processes in British and American news reports to help readers better judge the orientation of news discourse.

4.1 Transitivity Systems and Ideology

4.1.1 Material processes and ideologies

(1) China was "stealing" the oil and gas-rich South China Sea region and it was too late for Trump and the US to stop them. (The Sun: 7th February 2018, 3:45 pm)

There are two processes in this sentence, the material process connected by 'and' and the relational process. The material process is the most direct and detailed process of reporting the event. In this material process, 'China' is the actor, the action verb is 'steal' and the target is 'oil and gas-rich South China Sea region'. In this sentence, although the British media put 'steal' in inverted commas, it is more ironic, distorting China's legitimate behavior into ugly tactics and misleading the public's perception of China. The second process in this sentence is a relational process, in which "it" is the formal subject, "Trump and the US to stop them" is the real carrier, and "too late" as its attribute. The sentence seems to be stating an objective fact, but in fact it expresses the UK's support for the US's actions and its regret at the US's failure. By linking the two processes, we can see

that the British journalist is essentially conveying to the reader the idea that China is cunning, and the US is sometimes powerless.

4.1.2 Verbal processes and ideology

(2) Lu Kang, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, said: “China always maintains that military options shall never be considered to resolve the Korean Peninsula issue, because force will in no way settle disputes, but will only bring greater suffering, unbearable to all.” (Daily Telegraph - 3 October 2017 - 8:03 pm; 2017 - 8:03 pm)

Verbal process is generally a paraphrase of another person’s words. In this speech process, the speaker is a “Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman” who is quoted directly by the British media as expressing the Chinese position in this respect. In this process, three material processes are used, in which the words “never be” and “in no way” are used in a categorical negative way, expressing China’s position against force very firmly. This shows that the journalist’s choice of speech communication still favors the establishment of a peaceful and friendly image of China, and this speech relay is more objective.

Conclusion

The above analysis reveals that the British media use a lot of material processes in their coverage of China’s military materiality and use a large number of small sentences in the discourse to make the coverage more direct and specific. However, the discourse analysis reveals that these brief sentences do not increase the objectivity of the reports, as most British military reports on China discuss the military situation between China and the United States and even make comments on Taiwan’s and China’s internal affairs.

This has created a very unfriendly, aggressive, and ambitious image of China’s military. Considering recent changes in the international scene, we contend that Western nations have used media reports to provoke China’s diplomatic relations and deceive the general public into believing that China’s development must be restrained. This is due to China’s expanding size, swift military and economic development, and the competitive relationship between Western nations and China.

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