The Youth's View of Marriage in Chinese Mainstream Media Discourse—A Corpus-assisted Three-dimensional Discourse Analysis

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The rising of aging and the declining of birth rates have forced the public to focus on the youth's view on marriage. Based on critical discourse analysis and combined with Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis model, this paper builds a "Chinese media News Report Corpus on the topic of 'marriage'" whose news are collected from *China Daily*. It is found that the discourses are neutral and objective with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of marriage, but in general, it is still a traditional view of marriage that is inevitable and closely related to fertility. Although this is controlled by the policies and the social reasons including declining fertility rate, it deviates from the current view of the youth towards marriage, resulting in many serious consequences such as young people's rejection. In addition, this research found that male and female have great differences in their views on marriage, and men's resistance to marriage is far greater than that of women, which is departure from the public's cognition. The reasons behind this need to be explored in order to solve the marriage and love problems of young people in today's era and realize the healthy development of young marriage.

Keywords: corpora, Three-dimensional discourse analysis, the youth' view of marriage

Introduction

The frequent occurrence of matrimonial dispute, family violence and fertility decline drives people to focus on the youth's view of marriage. Their fears to get marriage and give birth to babies are revealed with the increasing of the never-married, the Dink and the single parent family. In that case, based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis, and the self-build media corpora of Chinese mainstream media reports on marriage, this research try to analysis the collocations of the word "marriage" and find out the youth's view of marriage constructed by the Chinese mainstream media and the different identification of female and male. This self-building corpus contains the updated 50 articles picked out from *China Daily*, one of the most popular and authoritative medias in China, whose themes are marriage from 28th, September to 2ed, December, 2023, tally 33,907 words. The corpus used here is the AntConc 3.5.8.

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Critical Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is come up with by the Flowler (1986) in his book *Linguistic Criticism*, focusing on the social nature of discourse. Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis model supports that discourse is an organic combination of text, discourse practice and social practice (Fairclough, 1992), which mainly draws on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), according to which language has three major meta-functions, namely, conceptual function, interpersonal function and textual function. The collocates sorted by Stat are singled out and analyzed following based on the Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis model, namely, textual analysis, discursive discourse analysis, and social practice analysis, before which the modal words are also analyzed in the first textual level.

Textual Analysis

Text analysis focuses on the language description of text. Fairclough believes that the analysis of linguistic features of text belongs to the micro level and "can be organized according to four themes: vocabulary, grammar, coherence and text structure" (Fairclough, 1992). In the following text analysis, the words would be further divided into three class, namely mood words, pronouns and other content words.

Modality system

The modality system is one of the most important parts of the interpersonal function. Halliday divides modal words into three values: low level, including *may, could, might, needn't, doesn't/didn't need to*; median level, including *will, should, would, is/was to, wont, wouldn't, shouldn't*; high level, like m*ust, need, have to, mustn't, can't, couldn't, mightn't, hasn't/hadn't to*. The higher the modal value, the more positive the mood expression (Zhu Yongsheng, et al, 2004). The frequency is showed by the AntConc in Table 1.

Table 1
The Distribution of Modality System

Low			Median			High		
word	Frequency	percentage	word	Frequency	percentage	word	Frequency	percentage
Can	63	23.08%	will	78	28.57%	must	11	4.03%
May	15	5.49%	would	29	10.62%	Ought to	1	0.37%
Could	15	5.49%	should	34	12.45%	Need	19	6.96%
might	2	0.73%	shall	0	0.00%	Have to	6	2.20%
Total	95	35%	Total	141	52%	Total	37	14%

In this table, we could find out that median level of modal words accounts for the highest proportion (52%), then the low level of modal words (35%). With the highest frequency (78 times), "*will*" is the future tense, which refers to the expectation that the marriage is the inevitable result of human. However, nowadays, more and more youth prefer to focus on themselves and support that the marriage is not the only result of lives. In that case, the high frequent use of the future tense will make raise the youth's antipathic feelings and rebellion.

Collocates of "Marriage"

When searching the collocates of "*marriage*" sorted by Stat, a list of words would be acquired. There are 76 words with the highest score of Stat which is 8.48216. Among those words, we could classify them into 6 groups.

First of all, there are two groups that shows the advantages and the disadvantages of the marriage. Words like "*picturesque*", "*facilitate*", "*rewards*" and "*colossal*" show the happiness, benefit, convenience and

importance of marriage, while "*unexciting*", "*tolerant*", "*snakebite*", "*locked*" express the opposite view of marriage. Indeed, "*perpetrator*", "*collide*" even "*dies*" are also used showing the increasing of the crime rate.

The third groups words describe the characteristics and the procedure of marriage. "*Optional*", "*comparing*" then "*register*", "*legally*", "*officially*", "*certificate*", "*card*", "*appointment*" are used. After that, these two people are "*relatable*", "*ushered*" and "*dipping*" to each other, have "*appointment*" and proposed about the "afterlife", which is "*resemble*" and "*extensively*". After married, their characters "translate" and "span" from the youth to "adult" because of the appearance of "*children*", "*daughter*", "kindergartens". It seems that the marriage is not like that in dream and the kids is the indispensable end of the marriage, which is not the youth's current cognition. The fourth group of words reveals the attitudes towards marriage. "*Reject*", "*opposes*", "*forbidden*", "*critical*" show the negative attitude of the youth; "*postponement*", "*plunged*", "*flinch*", "*delay*", "*delaying*" show low marriage rate; "*remarried*", "*fast*", "*failure*" express the instability and volatility of the marriage. The fifth group is the metaphor of marriage. "*Ship*" is the most common one, revealing the integration. Another typical one is "*routes*", showing it is one part of life. Corresponding to "*picturesque*", "*scenario*" is also attached to marriage, painting the after-married picture for the youth. The sixth group words show the specific characteristics of Chinses marriages. "*Coronavirus*" reveals the influence of Covid-19. "*Regimes*", "*plank*" shows the current situation of marriage which needs to be changed. "Buddhist" shows the tradition that asking the Buddha about the suitability of the new couple.

Collocates of "He" and "She"

Some scholars believed that the low marriage rate is resulting from the increasing of female education (Kan Maiding) but ignored the influence of the history, family and the public. According to the collocates of "*marriage*", the Stat of "she" is higher than that of "he". Comparing the top 50 words of them, the collocates of female are more related to family, including "aisle", "tailor", "lifestyle". "Write", "wondering", "walks", "stop", "speaking", "shift", "sells", "operates", "observed", "insist" and "quit" shows their after-married lives. Moreover, those kid-related words have higher Stat with female, like "tanghulu", "sophomore". They prefer to "recommending", "recalled", "pursued", "outlook", paying more attention to the past and the future rather than the present. However, those negative words like "unworthiness", "uncertain", "remedy" are used with "she" so the pessimism like "overwhelmed" appears. However, those collocates of male are more connected with their ambitions, including "fairness", "transported", "transplants", "trains", "tenure". Unlike the large amount verbs of pragmatic female, impracticable words are used like "betting", "worries", "wakes", "thinks", "threaten", "swore", "stem", "speak", "slept", "session", "proposing", "portrays", "placing" as well as those commendatory terms "splendor", "reliable". Emotionally, they are more likely to "reject", "refused" and "regretted".

Discursive Discourse Analysis

Discursive discourse analysis focuses on explaining the relationship between text and discourse practice, which is how text is generated, transmitted and received. Only in this way can intertextuality connect discourse practice with social practice, and finally realize the ultimate goal of studying society through language.

Information source

News should be objective. And the source of information should be described detailed, including the speaker's age, gender, possession. There are totally 219 concordances about "said" and just one without the

background information, which is followed. For objectivity, news usually consists of four types of information providers: government, relevant enterprises, ordinary people and elites represented by scholars (Huang Shuyun, 2017). *China Daily* usually marked the information of the speaker to guarantees the reality of the news.

Example (A)

> *"Some of them said they were encouraged by the TV series and would think of how they can help their family change their fate, while some said they have new dreams after watching it," Wang said.*

Reporting mode

Reporting mode is one of the most vital parts of the discursive discourse analysis, relating to the methods of quoting the discourses from others. From this perspective, discourse could be further classified into two groups, namely, direct discourse and indirect discourse. In these 50 articles about marriage, there are totally 219 concordances there about "said". Among them, there are 107 (48.86%) concordances using the direct discourse and 112 (51.14%) using the indirect discourse. Direct discourse could improve the reliability and objectivity of the news. As the Example (B), it is more reliable and persuasive to tell that marriage would be a joyful trip for the human to persuade the youth to accept the marriage rather than reject and afraid.

Example (B)

> *"Marriage is a lifelong commitment, and I want to celebrate it every day of my life," Xu said, adding that the Yunnan trip was just the beginning.*

Example (C)

> *Efforts should be made to strengthen guidance on young people's views toward marriage, childbirth and family, Xi said.*

Retelling is a reconstructed language produced by the narrator according to his needs. Indirect discourse is less formal than direct discourse. However, in this corpus, the usage of indirect discourse is more than that of direct discourse, as the Example (C), which is an example said by Xi, the general secretary. So, here indirect discourse is used because everyone knows him and it is the truth. There are still have some other key words like "added", which contains 17 concordances (10 indirect discourses; 5 direct discourses; 2 other usages) and "reported" which contains only 3 concordances (all indirect discourses), showing the objectivity of *China Daily*.

Social Practice Analysis

Language is a social practice, and they tie up. By social practice analysis, we could find out that the youth's rejection to get married is resulted from the conflict with the society.

With the improvement of economy, people chase for the higher-level present especially the spirit level. In that case, the essence of the marriage is the love and responsibility rather than the delivering kids to carry on the family lineage. With the appearance of Dink families, the researchers should realize that people no longer submit to their eldership but focus more on themselves. Moreover, the rapid developing of technology, especially the media, has led to the emergence of fast-food love and declined the necessity of marriage, which shows the youth would chase more excited thing rather than complacent and conservative. It is easier for the youth to meet new people which not only assist to the high married rate but also lead to the high divorce rate, which scares the youth to get married and query the truth and fidelity of marriage.

The politicians do not take the development of the youth into consideration. After more than 30 years of one-child policy, the two- child policy is announced in 2015, and 5 years later, three-child policy is following. We could not deny that with the policy leading to the increasing of birth rate but not by the youth. It is not the policy that impede the forthcoming of the marriage and fertility but the social condition where they could hard to survive. What the politicians should do is to deal with the formidable job market. Moreover, the cooling-off period before divorce, 30 days announced in 2020, could not only decline the divorce rate but also request all the unmarried youth to think twice before marriage, which exactly decline the marriage rate, too.

The outdated identification of society to male and female derives the sexism. When searching "marriage" in CNKI, many of articles study the female's view of marriage (Zhan Maiding, 2022), or focus on the influence of education (Xu Mohan, Song Yang, 2021), but no research trying to find out the responsibility of the male. Comparing the collocates of "she" and "he", it is obviously that the females are more connected with family, kids, with more verbs related to labor, while the male are more related to the enterprise, but with less labor verbs and more discourse verbs. The high frequency of rejection words shows that the male should take responsibility of the decline of the marriage rate. The tradition identification of female is taking care of family while that of the male is earning the living outside, which is no longer suitable to the current society. In that case, researchers should update their identification to female and male and pay more attention to the shift.

Conclusion

In his important speech commemorating the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, General Secretary Xi mentioned that the issue of youth marriage should be integrated into the cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. The youth is the main body of marriage, and the youth's view of marriage can best represent the current trend of marriage in society. It is found that Chinese believe that the kids is the essential result of the marriage and that the man runs the outside and the woman runs the inside, which is not suit the current society. Moreover, different from many researchers (Zhan Maiding, 2022; Ma Yuanyuan, 2023) who believe that it is because of the female who have increase their education and talents that the marriage rate has declined, it is the male's willing to reject to get married according to the contrast of the collocates of male and female, during which the conflict between the quick development of the society and the outdated concepts and cognitions of people. It is a pity that in the research the reasons of the male' rejection towards marriages would not be found out. Therefore, in the future, more researches could be done focusing on the phenomenon of the male's rejection and seek the solution to that.

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