



Critical Instance Analysis of News English Discourse

Hongmei Pang

College of Medical Humanities, Binzhou Medical University

Binzhou 256603, China

E-mail: hongmeipang2006@126.com

Sijun Wu

International Cooperation & Exchange Office, Binzhou University

Binzhou 256603, China

E-mail: bzuwsj@163.com

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Abstract

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) thought that the discourse was concrete social practice, and the language served for the potency, and the discourse embodied the ideology. Two presses about the case that the US Mattel Toy Company recalled toys “Made in China” in Washington Post (newspaper) and New York Times (newspaper) were taken as the language materials and critically analyzed from language environment and discourse structure, and new view and argumentation were attempted to dig the relationships among language, potency and ideology, which could help students to establish the critical thinking, flexibly utilize the discourse analysis tool, enhance the judgment and appreciation ability, directly review the motives concealed in the medias, and understand the media discourses from deeper layer.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis (CDA), News English discourse, Instance analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is also called as the critical linguistics. It begun from the late of 1970s and the beginning of 1980s, and it associates the discourse form, generation process, reading process and the social potency structure through critical opinion analysis and discourse explanation to disclose the complex mutual function relationships among language, ideology and rights.

CDA adopts M.A.K. Halliday’s system function grammar as the tool of discourse analysis, and it thought that the language had three functions, i.e. the ideational function, the interpersonal function and the textual function, and its intention is to “explain discourse”, i.e. reveal how the discourse expresses the meanings. The ideational function reflects the experiences in the subjective world, and the transitivity is one part of them. The transitivity system takes the minor sentence as the basic unit of language, and expresses human behaviors and information in the real world as many processes, and it points out participators and environment, and explains various processes, relative participators and environment components (Zhang, 2005). These processes include material process, psychological process, relationship process, speech process, behavior process and existence process. The process, the function component (such as actor, object and perceiver) and the form class (such as noun phrase and VP to embody these functions) selected by the author will decided by his opinion and ideology to large extent (Dai, 2002). The interpersonal function reflects the relationships among people, such as the degree, status and attitude of the author, and these relationships are represented by the mood structure and the modality system. Different minor sentence types such as the declarative sentence, imperative sentence and interrogative sentence will endow different roles and status for the talker. For example, in the declarative sentence, talker is the possessor and transfer of information, but in the interrogative sentence, talker is seeking and checking existing information, and it will be a response strategy to express the opposite opinion. In addition, the use of the modal structure or the evaluated adjective also can help us to judge talker’s opinion and attitude to some extent. The textual function mainly include the wording and phrasing and organizing the discourse. The study of the textual function will help to understand talker or author’s start, and grasp the distribution of the central content in the discourse. CDA emphasizes the conversion process of the sentence type including the nominalization, i.e. the whole

sentence or the sentence component, and the process that the descriptive component about the behavior or the participator is converted into the noun or the noun phrase (Zhang, 2005). The mutual conversions in different sentence structures will induce the generation of different meanings.

Two presses about the case that the US Mattel Toy Company recalled toys “Made in China” in Washington Post (newspaper) and New York Times (newspaper) were taken as the language materials and critically analyzed from language environment and discourse structure. In the part of the language environment analysis, the background and environment of the language materials are introduced, and the critical analysis of discourse structure will concretely review the discourse respectively from the views of the style and the function.

1. Analysis of language environment

Critical linguistics thought that the discourse was a sort of social space which included two basic social processes, i.e. the cognition of the world and the social communication interaction, so the analysis of discourse can not leave the analysis of the talk practice process and the social language environment, i.e. the generated, diffused and accepted living language environment of the discourse, and the reviews of social and historical background must contact with the language environment.

The international press from Washington Post (newspaper) and New York Times (newspaper) can basically reflect the diplomatic policies and direction of the US Administration. Two selected presses all aimed at the event that the US largest toy company Mattel secondly recalled the toys “made in China” at 14 Aug, 2007. The background that the mainstream media reported this event was that 80% of products in the Europe and American toy market all came from China, so the relative reports certainly would include the component pushing “made in China” aside, and intentionally magnified individual problems, and use the safety problem of toy making to kindle some consensus harming Chinese export commerce. In fact, Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine definitely pointed out that in recalled toys “made in China”, 85% of them accorded with US design requirements and US import requirements in the new release conference at 27 Aug, 2007, so the relative reports were inclined to intentionally damage the image of Chinese products, mislead consumers and set up obstacles for normal trade.

2. Critical analysis of discourse structure

2.1 Stylistic analysis

In the fast changing information times, presses have been one indivisible part in human living, and one important channel to acquire information for people.

2.1.1 Glossary

The glossary can make contribution to construct the mansion of meaning. The English glossary is very abundant, and one general meaning can be expressed by numerous near synonyms, but the selection of synonyms with different degrees and emotional colors must accord with different ideologies and concepts (Ding, 2006). Therefore, it is advisable to use “classification” to review the discourse from the stylistic glossary. The classification means to use the language to endow orders for the external world. The classification system of the discourse means the naming and description of characters and events in the discourse, and it is mainly realized by the selection of glossary. The thing classification by the glossary is the usual measure used by mass media and it is the main approach to create or produce discrimination. The description of the core object in express could fully embody reporter’s attitude and position for the event.

When describing Chinese manufacturers, the express (1) used many words and expressions such as “subverted (its safety standards)” and the express (2) also used “intentionally (added cheap or illegal substances to save money)” publicly. From the explanations of two words by “Oxford Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary” and “Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English”, the former is too grand, and “subvert” is the normal vocabulary which means “overthrowing or destroying ‘a government or existing system’ in secrete”, but the usage of the word in the express obviously aggrandized the severity of the event, and the later possesses obvious misguidance, and “intentionally” means “(for bad things) of purpose, advisedly”, and its usage in the express would certainly harm the image of Chinese businessmen in US consumers, even suspect Chinese manufacturers’ moral quality, and extend to become the misapprehension for Chinese. Different from the description of Chinese toy, the expresses used “one of the most conscientious toymakers (in the express (2))” to describe the toy company Mattel. The manufacturer should assume responsibility for the brand company which should answer for consumers, and both parties all should assume compelling obligations for the event, but the expresses obviously leaned to one party in the language description.

2.1.2 Syntactic structure

The length of the express (1) and (2) was large and the used sentence structures were complex. As the mainstream media of US, Washington Post (newspaper) and New York Times (newspaper) used large length to report the event that the Mattel Company recalled toys “made in China” just for rising US people’s attention. And the complex clauses used in two expresses occupied above 60% of the whole sentences. The main body, time and place of the event were

described in one clause could make the report more “objective” and make readers doubt the orientation and accept the “directional” information unconsciously.

In addition, the titles of two expresses respectively were “Mattel Recalls More Chinese-made Toys” and “Mattel Issues New Recall of Toys Made in China”, and both of them used the simple present tense. This tense could reduce the distance between the readers with the event described in the news, make readers feel that the event or status will last a period of time, and increase the reading value. The titles of two expresses just utilized this point to extend the news attention and make readers leave the adverse crisis sense from the products “made in China”. The occurrence of passive construction in the news discourse could “make the finishing point”, and the passive construction is one of measures of “thematization”. The passive construction is used to emphasize and give prominence to the passive object, and put it in the head of the sentence as the marked theme in the system function linguistics. The use of passive construction weakens the behaviors and actions, and the actor becomes the subordinate information, for example, in the “Mattel said the hazards were found...” of the express (1) the “Mattel said the hazard in the products, made between May and July, was discovered...” of the express (2), the emphasized information is “the hazards”, and the processes of “were found” and “were discovered” were weakened, by contraries, the process of “were made” which was not described by the words was concealed. The obligations of the product safety problem should be assumed by the brand company and the manufacturer together, but the expresses indicated that the Mattel Company was also the casualty of the event, and the product manufacturer should assume the main responsibility.

Furthermore, the verb structure or sentence could express certain meaning, but the author selects the noun phrase, i.e. the phrase nominalization. The examples of nominalization were also embodied in two selected discourses, for example, in express (1), “discussions with the \$22 billion toy industry, establishment of a third-party testing system, etc.” and in express (2), “an investigation of all its toy manufacturing, its inspection of toys, etc.” The nominalization could create a sort of impersonal effect through deleting the modal component, blurring time concept and concealing the participants in the process, i.e. the causality. Obviously, the examples in express (1) and (2) presented the “actions” in the status for readers, and these “actions” were all adopted by the US enterprise or official department in the sensitive term aiming at the toy event. The nominalization measure could weaken the action sense of the measures and reduce readers’ sensitive reaction to “actions”. The actions should be weakened, so the US party would not be the concerned focus of the event as soon as possible, and readers could not run US party’s responsibility naturally.

2.1.3 Discourse structure

One main character of the press style about the discourse structure is that most end quotes others’ words to conceal the author’s attitude and position for the whole event as the conclusion. The last paragraphs, “Asked whether the company would consider moving its production from China, Eckert said that was being considered. “We are always reviewing where the optimal place is to make our products,” he said.” of express (1), and “High levels of lead have also been found in Chinese made jewelry and trinkets, posing serious health hazards, according to American officials.” of express (2), all would produce large negative psychological influence to consumers who would naturally be in panic and distrust for the products “made in China”. Two seemingly “objective” ends actually intentionally reflected Chinese manufacturers, which went against the consensuses for the products “made in China”.

2.2 Function analysis

The initiator of the system function linguistics definitely pointed out that the intention of establishing the function grammar was to offer a theoretical frame for the discourse analysis. The integrality and the coherence identifying the social language environment based on the system function linguistics theory are regarded as the main theoretical base and methodology source by the critical linguistics. The transitivity and the mood respectively are the core composing of “ideational function” and “interpersonal function” in Halliday’s three language functions. Next, from the transitivity and the mood, two selected news discourses were reviewed comprehensively.

2.2.1 Transitivity

Halliday (1994) thought that people could classify human experiences into 6 different processes through the transitivity system, i.e. the material process, the psychological process, relation process, behavior process, diction process and existence process. “The process which is selected to express a real process will possess important cultural, political or ideological meanings.” In 42 verb components in express (1), 19 of them expressed the communication diction process (about 45%), and in 64 verb components in express (2), 31 of them belonged to diction process (about 48%), and in the diction process in two expresses, the “talkers” were all Mattel Company or US official department. The coherence on this layer reflected both Washington Post (newspaper) and New York Times (newspaper) all adopted the language of the “third party” to prove their own opinions, and the so-called “third party” language was not neutral and objective but leaned to Mattel Company itself. The positions of two expresses were basically consistent, i.e. pointing the event to “made in China”, and advocating the distrustful emotion for Chinese products. In US-China trade, to construct the trade barrier by means of the sensationalization of mainstream media has already been a measure used by US party.

2.2.2 Mood

Halliday (1994) pointed out that except for modal verb, modal adjective and modal adverb, personal pronoun, notional verb, tense and direct/indirect oration all could express the modal meanings in English. In express (1), “If people had followed the rules in place, we wouldn’t have this problem today”, Eckert said, and Eckert was the board chairman and CEO of Mattel Company. And in express (2), “The message was very clear,” he said. “If you cannot do these things, please let us know. No problem, but you won’t be doing business with us”, and he was Jim Walter, senior vice president for worldwide quality assurance at Mattel. Because the direct/indirect orations generally come from party, knower or authority, and they have strong persuasion for the hearers, so the use of them can effectively increase the authority of the discourse. The dictions in the example all came from the superior layer of the Mattel Company, so they could be regarded as the opinions of the Mattel Company. The company thought that the occurrence of the toy quality problem was the result that Chinese manufacturers breached the quality byelaws. Two expresses just used large numbers of similar direct/indirect orations to further express the position and opinion of the newspapers, and they adopted the mode taking a part for the whole to puzzle readers, and smeared “made in China” from the whole opinion. In short, the discourse structure analysis is the basic measure for the critical linguistics (CDA). Through analyzing the selected expresses from the stylistic and functional views, the relationship of selection and embodiment between meaning and form could be found, and combining with the concrete language environment, the analysis could break the meaning layer, and go up to the ideology study and dig the natural deep ideology.

3. Conclusions

The analysis of two expresses indicated that the form embodied the meaning, and to express the meaning of ideology, the language system offered various measures, and the form was always selected, and CDA which was to review the linear process among discourse, ideology, human, ideological meaning, language, and discourse form structure on the higher layer such as the ideological layer was further demonstrated in the news discourse analysis, so the ideological meaning concealed in the news discourse should be rescanned. With the globalization of the economy, in the usual English teaching, the students’ ability of critical reading and English discourse analysis should be strengthened, their sensitivity for the ideology concealed in the discourse should be further enhanced, and their language consciousness should be further improved.

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