

A Discourse Analysis of Reports on COVID-19 Epidemic in People's Daily (2020-2023)

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Abstract

This paper extracted news reports on COVID-19 epidemic from *People's Daily* and built a corpus of more than 160,000 words and used the corpus retrieval tool Antconc (4.0.4). Critical discourse analysis is based on Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis framework. The results showed that *People's Daily* focused on the COVID-19 outbreak itself, the COVID-19 response, the COVID-19 location, the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, the COVID-19 population, the time of the COVID-19 outbreak, and the country's leaders. It has adopted three discourse strategies, namely self-narration and narration by others, intertextuality of genres and styles, and the use of rhetorical devices such as metaphors and parallelism to describe the efforts made by the Chinese government and people in the COVID-19 response station.

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1. Introduction

In December 2019, several cases of pneumonia of unknown cause with a history of exposure to seafood markets in South China were detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. On January 3, 2020, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission (WCHC) issued its first notification of the novel coronavirus outbreak. According to the official announcement, it was confirmed that the new coronavirus outbreak has erupted. On February 22, the National Health Commission issued a notice that the English name of the novel coronavirus pneumonia was revised to "COVID-19", and its name was explained as: CO standing for Corona, VI standing for Virus, D standing for Disease, and 19 because the disease broke out in 2019. On 11 March 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, "COVID-19 has taken on the characteristics of a pandemic." On March 17, 2020, there were more than 100,000 confirmed cases outside China, and at least 140 countries had reported cases of COVID-19. Among those infected were 63 politicians from at least 16 countries – including the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Italy – of whom more than 10 died after being diagnosed. Since then, the novel coronavirus has raged around the world and spread out of control, becoming the biggest international challenge since World War II.

As of July 21, 2024 (Date of collection for this paper), there have been 776 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide. From January 2020 to May 2023, after more than three years, through the joint efforts of all humanity, through the research of the virus strain, isolation control, shutdown, vaccine research, specific drugs and a series of difficult work, on May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization announced that COVID-19 no longer constitutes a 'public health emergency of international concern'.

People's Daily is the most well-known and authoritative newspaper in China and is the main window and important position for the news and public opinion dissemination of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. On

August 1, 1949, the Party Central Committee decided to make *People's Daily* the official newspaper of the Party Central Committee, and in 1992 it was named one of the world's top ten newspapers by UNESCO.

Critical Discourse Analysis originated in the late 1970s and early 1980s and was influenced by various ideological trends such as the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and Foucault's theory of power discourse. Its representative figures include Fairclough, van Dijk and Wodak. Initially, it mainly focused on the discourses in the fields of news and politics, and later gradually expanded to multiple fields such as education, advertising, and law.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary language research method, aiming to reveal the relationship between language, power and ideology. In recent years, academic research on Critical Discourse Analysis has focused on political discourse, news discourse, ecological discourse, literature and art. There are not many studies on the reports of the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of the critical discourse analysis of the corpus. Therefore, this article conducts a discourse analysis of the reports on the COVID-19 pandemic in *People's Daily* from a linguistic perspective.

The outbreak of COVID-19 began in early 2020 and ended in May 2023. Over a period of more than three years, *People's Daily* selected titles in its graphic database and entered the words COVID-19 and COVID-19 into the search bar. There were more than 3,000 related reports. There were very comprehensive real-time reports on the popularization of knowledge about the novel coronavirus, home isolation, shutdown and production, and later vaccination, and the resumption of work and production. Through studying the reports on the novel coronavirus epidemic in *People's Daily*, we can get a glimpse of its discourse focus information and discourse strategies.

1.1 Research Questions

- 1) How is the *People's Daily's* COVID-19 focus information presented?
- 2) What is the discourse strategy of *People's Daily's* COVID-19 coverage?

1.2 Research Objectives

- 1) To understand how news media guide and manage the trend of public opinion.
- 2) To explore the discourse strategies to excavate the implicit ideology of *People's Daily*.

2. Literature Review

In the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Malaysian government issued a 3-week movement control order in mid-March 2020 to enforce self-isolation and social distancing measures. Joharry and Turiman (2020) built a corpus by collecting 227 letters submitted to *The Star Online* by Malaysian citizens during the quarantine period. They analyzed the language patterns in these letters to study the words and phrases commonly used to discuss issues during that time. The research showed that a majority of Malaysians saw the COVID-19 pandemic as a challenge and associated it with negative expressions, reflecting citizens' attitudes towards the pandemic.

According to Sharma et al. (2020), who collected tweets from March 1, 2020 to June 5, 2020, the study analyzed the themes, sentiments, and new trends of COVID-19 based on objective fact-checking sources. It identified unreliable and misleading news content. Their study found that while ageism was rarely discussed explicitly, ageist bias was evident in implicit reporting patterns. Infection and death rates, as well as institutionalized care, were among the most commonly reported topics, providing a limited portrait of aging during the pandemic. The 'survivor' narrative, which focused on older individuals, offered a positive alternative by suggesting exceptional examples of resilience and grit. However, this narrative may also implicitly place blame on those unable to survive or thrive in later life.

Jen et al. (2020) used a combination of content analysis and critical discourse analysis to analyze 287 stories about the COVID-19 epidemic in the elderly published in four American newspapers from March 11 to April 10, 2020. Research showed that although ageism was rarely discussed explicitly, ageist bias was evident in the invisible reporting model.

According to a study by Mayer et al. (2021), a critical media discourse analysis was conducted on the case of Ischgel, Austria. This study identified crisis-specific media discourse patterns, analyzed the embedding of these dispositions in the current public debate, and discussed the responsibility of media reporting. The study found a scapegoat pattern reinforced by the image of the destination but then replaced by a fundamental discussion about the sustainability of Alpine winter sports. As the crisis has dragged on, Ischgel has become a meta-symbol of the failed COVID-19 response, and media coverage has become increasingly detached from the local context, triggering a geopolitical blame game that highlights the media's responsibility for post-crisis tourism.

Tawai et al. (2021) adopted Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis model and based on the spiral of silence theory, analyzed articles published on Kompas.com from August to December 2020 and concluded that the government provided too much security through non-linguistic language. As a result, people do not comply with the policies and sanctions that should be implemented, and the public is indifferent to the epidemic, which exacerbates the situation of epidemic spread.

Portuguese scholar Castro Seixas (2021) demonstrated the varied strategies used for war metaphors in political discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic by combining critical discourse analysis with a systematic review of crisis communication research. These findings challenged previous criticisms that war metaphors are inherently negative and destructive. The article also discussed the possibility of using critical discourse analysis, especially metaphorical analysis, to inform and expand crisis PR.

Unuabonah and Oyeboode (2021) employed critical discourse analysis to examine 40 pandemic-related WhatsApp buzzwords in Nigeria, uncovering their ideological themes and representations of social actors. In their study, multimodal critical discourse analysis methods were used to qualitatively analyze the data. The analysis showed that the buzzwords were used to protest against corruption, government fraud, insecurity, hunger, inadequate medical facilities, and other social welfare shortcomings. The purpose of this analysis is to challenge anti-welfare ideologies and highlight the negative image of the government.

Through the relevant research, it can be found that scholars have applied the theory of critical discourse analysis to journalism, sociology, political science and other fields, and adopted the theory of discourse analysis as their theoretical basis, making corresponding contributions to both empirical and theoretical research. However, the above studies are all synchronic in nature and lack diachronic research. They typically involve corpus selections ranging from one month to one year, which are insufficient to capture the full timeline of an event. Consequently, there is a need for diachronic corpus selection and collection that covers the entire duration of an event, in order to study the discourse changes or conduct a comprehensive discourse analysis. The outbreak of COVID-19 has brought great impact to people all over the world. Through the study on the news discourse of *People's Daily* on COVID-19, researchers can grasp the news reports during the epidemic period, analyze the hidden ideology in the reports, broaden the scope of discourse research, and comprehensively demonstrate the experience and lessons in the face of public health emergencies.

2.2 Underpinning Theories

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), derived from Critical Linguistics, focuses on inequality and power relations in language and aims to explore the ideology implied in discourse. Thus, uncovering injustice, discrimination and prejudice in discourse is an analytical method to study dialogue from the perspective of criticism (Van Dijk, 1993). Two iconic works

of critical discourse analysis are Fairclough's Language and Power and Wodak's Language, Power and Ideology (Fairclough, 2013b; Wodak, 1989).

Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis includes text, discourse practice and social practice. In this framework, text is the analysis of content. Discourse practice involves the process of text generation, dissemination and reception. Social practice emphasizes discourse power relations and the dialectical relationship between discourse practice and social practice (Theng & Robert, 2019). Fairclough believes that text is both the product of a production process and the source of an explanatory process. The analysis of discourse in the text dimension mainly draws on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, focusing on the analysis of vocabulary, grammar, coherence and cohesion, and discourse structure. That is to study the characteristics of the text itself, including vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, genre and expression. Fairclough also provides specific operational methods for text analysis, such as analyzing metaphors, nominalization, sentence patterns, grammatical features, logical connective words, etc. At the same time, Fairclough mentioned that people make use of experience value, relationship value and expression value when interpreting texts, and three aspects are involved in language practice: the author's own experience of natural society, the correlation shown by the text and the author's relevant evaluation of the text (Fairclough, 2013b). In the dimension of discourse practice, Fairclough mainly draws on the discourse order of Foucault and the discourse intertextuality of Michel Byshaw to analyze the intertextuality of discourse. Discourse practice revolves around the production, distribution and consumption of text. In the three-dimensional framework of Fairclough's discourse analysis, the intertextuality of discourse is the most important in discourse practice, which reveals the relationship between discourse and society. In Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis framework, social practice analysis is the most important value of the three dimensions. In this dimension, it mainly draws on Althusser's ideological theory and Gramsci's hegemony theory. Fairclough believes that language is a part of society, language is a social process, and language is a socially defined process. Discourse is constructive. Discourse explains the world, organizes the world and constructs the world. Through the analysis of social practice, it explains the relationship between discourse and society, discourse and rights, discourse and ideology, and discourse's participation in social change (Fairclough, 2013a).

Critical discourse analysis generally selects specific texts for analysis in practical research and lacks comprehensive and systematic analysis. Although the emergence of corpus linguistics cannot solve the problem of methodology in essence, as a tool, corpus can provide a relatively objective explanation of critical discourse analysis at the lexical level (Widdowson, 2008). Therefore, to make up for the shortcomings of critical discourse analysis, some scholars introduce the corpus research method into critical discourse analysis. Quantitative research based on corpora can provide a solid data foundation for discourse analysis, and the richness of corpus also reduces the randomness of researchers' selection of analysis objects and enhances the persuasive power of discourse research (Sengul, 2019).

3. Methodology

This paper selects news reports on COVID-19 in *People's Daily* from February 2020 to May 2023 as the research corpus. In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which lasted 40 months from February 2020 to May 2023, the advanced search function of the *People's Daily* Graphic database, as an authoritative information source, revealed a total of 13,417 related records under the search of the article title keyword "COVID-19". In view of the large number of reports related to COVID-19 and the limited time and ability of researchers, this study adopted a systematic sampling strategy to efficiently and accurately reflect the overall picture of media coverage during this period.

To ensure the balance of samples and the wide distribution of time, this study designed a periodic sampling scheme, that is, one report was selected as the analysis corpus every week, to build a media discourse system spanning the entire period of the COVID-19 epidemic. Specifically, this study took February 5, 2020 (Wednesday) as the starting point, and plans the selection date of subsequent samples, following the principle of changing working days every week (that is, Thursday of the second week, Friday of the third week, Saturday of the fourth week, Sunday of the fifth week, and so on) to ensure that the distribution of samples within the cycle can also reflect a certain diversity.

After the above planning and operation, this study finally determined the sample distribution covering the years from 2020 to 2023: 56 reports in 2020, 52 reports in 2021, 43 reports in 2022, and 15 reports from January to May 2023, totaling 166 reports. This collection not only strictly follows the norms and standards of academic research, but also fully shows the dynamic changes and trends of *People's Daily's* epidemic coverage during the COVID-19 epidemic, laying a solid foundation for subsequent research.

Step 1 involves collecting and classifying text data. After the scraped corpus, the method of reading one by one was used to identify and screen, and the samples that did not meet the standards were eliminated and numbered according to the order of practice. The collected text was saved to TXT text format, and the spaces, special symbols and garbled codes were processed. After completing the basic processing in the early stage, the COVID-19 reporting corpus was officially built. Step 2 involves manually screening the self-built corpus to exclude news reports that did not meet the conditions, leaving only the relevant corpus for this study. Step 3 is to use Antconc (4.0.4) for word segmentation and word frequency statistics. Firstly, the sorted corpus was segmented by Antconc and then imported into Antconc software for corresponding statistics.

In this study, 166 reports selected by *People's Daily* from February 2020 to May 2023 were used as the observation corpus. The corpus contains a total of 166 reports with 164,850 words, and Li Ronglu Corpus of the Natural Language Processing Group of the International Database Center of the Department of Computer Information and Technology of Fudan University was used as the reference corpus.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Text analysis of *People's Daily's* COVID-19 report

Fairclough (2003) proposed a three-dimensional analysis framework for critical discourse, pointing out that the textual analysis of discourse is to explore its vocabulary, grammatical coherence, and textual structure. Word frequency can help researchers understand the linguistic features of the study text in the shortest possible time, and discourse meaning is included in it, so word frequency is one of the more important data types in corpus research (McEnery et al., 2006).

This study first investigated the high-frequency words and theme words in *People's Daily's* report on COVID-19, and counted the top 40 high-frequency words, as shown in the following table. High-frequency words are the words that appear frequently in the text, which can help researchers understand the key information such as the subject matter and theme of the text. Keywords are not simply word frequency statistics, but significantly high-frequency words obtained by comparing the corpus with another reference corpus, which can help researchers distinguish the thematic features of discourse in the corpus, and "thematic" reflects the degree of high frequency (Scott, 2010). The top 40 high-frequency words in *People's Daily's* COVID-19 report are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Top 40 high-frequency words in People's Daily's report on COVID-19

**Due to different language families, sometimes a single Chinese word requires two or more English words to explain.*

NO.	High-frequency Word	Frequency	NO.	High-frequency Word	Frequency
1	疫情 Epidemic	1038	21	治疗 Treatment	214
2	新冠 Novel coronavirus	1003	22	表示 Express	214
3	疫苗 Vaccine	732	23	医疗 Medical care	211
4	病毒 Virus	613	24	卫生 Hygiene	208
5	中国 China	545	25	加强 Enhance	200
6	防控 Prevention and control	425	26	人民 People	193
7	接种 Inoculate	410	27	人群 Group	189
8	感染 Infect	370	28	人员 Personnel	185
9	肺炎 Pneumonia	366	29	风险 Risk	167
10	国家 Country	354	30	国际 International	159
11	工作 Work	302	31	进行 Proceed	155
12	病例 Case	293	32	合作 Cooperation	152
13	美国 US	284	33	社会 Social	152
14	我们 We	256	34	出现 Appear	150
15	患者 Patient	253	35	研究 Research	147
16	医院 Hospital	236	36	确诊 Confirm	143
17	检测 Test	227	37	我国 Our country	142
18	健康 Health	220	38	机构 Organization	141
19	措施 Measure	217	39	相关 Relate	140
20	全球 Global	215	40	世界 World	139

Table 1 shows the top 40 high-frequency words in *People's Daily's* reports on COVID-19 from February 2020 to May 2023. In terms of high-frequency words, including epidemic, COVID-19, vaccine, virus, China, prevention and control, vaccination, infection, pneumonia, country, work, cases, the United States, United States, patients, hospitals, testing, health, measures, and global, these words highly summarize the focus of global public health issues reported by *People's Daily* on the COVID-19 epidemic. They also accurately reflect the widespread concern and in-depth discussion among all walks of life regarding the epidemic and its prevention and control measures. Specifically, "epidemic", "novel coronavirus" and "virus", as the core high-frequency words, directly point to the theme of this study -- the spread and impact of the COVID-19 epidemic; The words "vaccine" and "inoculate" highlight the core position of vaccine research and development and vaccination in the global anti-epidemic action. The frequent use of words such as "China", "United States" and "our country" highlights the leading role of governments and the importance of international cooperation in epidemic prevention and control. Words such as "prevention and control", "case", "infect", "test" and "treatment" cover the whole process of epidemic response from prevention measures to case management and treatment of patients. Words such as "work" and "measures" reveal the efforts and practical actions taken by all sectors of society in epidemic prevention and control work. The references to "we", "people", "group" and "cases" emphasize the fundamental principle of putting people first in epidemic prevention and control work and the need to implement precise prevention and control strategies for different groups of people.

Table 2

Top 40 key words in People's Daily's report on COVID-19

**Due to different language families, sometimes a single Chinese word requires two or more English words to explain.*

NO.	Key-words	Likelihood	NO.	Key-words	Likelihood
1	疫情 Epidemic	11354	21	救治 Rescue and treat	1279.877
2	新冠 Novel Coronavirus	10971	22	检测 Test	1078.186
3	疫苗 Vaccine	7454.8	23	控 Control	1006.742
4	病毒 Virus	5848.2	24	临床 Clinical	1003.69
5	防控 Prevention and Control	4645.6	25	日 Day	1000.848
6	肺炎 Pneumonia	3965.6	26	症状 Symptom	926.483
7	接种 Inoculate	3647.6	27	抗击 Resist	897.502
8	感染 Infect	3264.7	28	口罩 Mask	885.075
9	病例 Case	3022.3	29	应对 Response	834.436
10	患者 Patient	2185.7	30	药品 Drug	833.741
11	医院 Hospital	1881	31	诊疗 Therapy	787.067
12	治疗 Treatment	1689.5	32	健康 Health	774.248
13	确诊 Confirm	1550.7	33	研发 Research and development	759.454
14	卫生 Hygiene	1488.7	34	公共卫生 Public health	758.419
15	医疗 Medical care	1488.7	35	毒株 Strain	736.669
16	核酸 Nucleic Acid Test	1449.8	36	免疫 Immune	735.255
17	世卫组织 WHO	1409.6	37	乙类 Category B	712.153
18	抗疫 Anti-epidemic	1354.3	38	传染病 Contagious diseases	704.385
19	重症 Seriously ill	1330.3	39	习近平 Xi Jinping	699.305
20	人群 Group	1299.5	40	全球 Global	676.645

Key words are words that are significantly higher than normal compared to the reference corpus (Scott, 2010). Key words and high-frequency words are not the same concept. Key words are words with a higher recurrence rate than reference corpora. The more topical the Keywords are, the more helpful they are to reflect the focus information of the text. The likelihood value is the topic value of the keywords, that is, likelihood, the greater the value, the stronger the subject value of the word. In the actual analysis, it is found that the top 40 words with significant theme are listed in Table 2.

The 40 keywords in Table 2 are significantly different from those in the reference corpus. The 40 keywords are divided into 7 categories. 1. The COVID-19 epidemic itself has 12 key-words: epidemic, novel coronavirus, virus, pneumonia, infect, seriously ill, confirm, clinical, symptoms, strain, Category B, contagious diseases; 2. The COVID-19 response has 17 themes: vaccine, prevention and control, inoculate, treatment, nucleic acid test, anti-epidemic, medical care, therapy, test, control, resist, mask, response, drug, rescue and treat, research and development, and immune; 3. The COVID-19 location key-word is 1, hospital; 4. The impact of COVID-19 has six key-words: WHO, group, hygiene, health, public health and global; 5. There are two key-words for COVID-19: case and patient; 6. The key-words of time has 1: day; 7. The key-words of state leaders has 1: Xi Jinping.

As can be seen from Table 2, the focus information reported during the 40 months period from February 2020 to May 2023 is concentrated in seven aspects. The key words of the COVID-19 epidemic itself include "epidemic", "virus", "infect", "confirm", "strain", "contagious diseases", etc. These key words put forward the harm and infectivity of the epidemic. In the early stage of the epidemic, to meet the needs of public information, it also played the role of public

opinion guidance and reminded the people to prepare for protection while spreading the knowledge of the epidemic. There are 17 key words on COVID-19 response, ranking first among seven categories, indicating the efforts made in the process of epidemic response, focusing on the detection of the virus, epidemic prevention and control, vaccination, treatment of confirmed patients and research and development of corresponding drugs. Key words such as "WHO", "public health", "global" and "group" indicate the global impact and scope of the COVID-19 pandemic. The key words of COVID-19 population and location include cases, patients and hospitals, indicating the high importance attached to confirmed patients. The key words "day" indicate a focus on daily updates on the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on every situation every day since the outbreak began.

4.2 Analysis on the discourse practice of *People's Daily's* reporting on COVID-19

Fairclough (1992) believes that discourse not only shapes society but also is shaped by society. It is an element of social practice and is in a dialectical and internalized relationship with other elements of social practice (behavior and communication, social relations, etc.). Text is the product of discourse practice, so the process of discourse practice involves three processes of text production, distribution and consumption, and is the interpretation of the process of discourse generation and understanding (Xin Bin & Gao Xiaoli, 2013). Corpus research shows that in discourse practice, specific words tend to habitually attract words with similar semantic characteristics, and the high-frequency co-occurrence of such words will create a specific semantic atmosphere, forming positive, neutral or negative semantic rhymes around node words (Wei Naixing, 2002). In Sinclair's discourse analysis, studying collocation is an effective means of analysis, because it can not only reveal the pattern of word association, but also show how a word gains meaning in context (Biber & Reppen, 2015).

Table 3

Top 20 epidemic collocation words

No.	Collocate	FreqLR	No.	Collocate	FreqLR
1	防控 prevention and control	303	11	疫情 epidemic	56
2	抗击 resist	93	12	当前 now	32
3	肺炎 pneumonia	146	13	遏制 restraint	24
4	应对 response	75	14	工作 work	86
5	战胜 defeat	46	15	反弹 rebound	20
6	形势 situation	40	16	患者 patient	4
7	发生 happen	60	17	接种 inoculate	14
8	疫苗 vaccinate	21	18	扩散 diffusion	19
9	蔓延 spread	30	19	爆发 breakout	19
10	以来 since	41	20	发展 development	35

4.2.1 Using a combination of self-statement and other statements of expression

1) Direct quotation

Direct quotation refers to the content directly marked by quotation marks, which is completely faithful to the original words. Direct quotation is one of the most frequently used forms in news reporting. Van Dijk (1988) pointed out that the news will cite the opinions or opinions of others, when necessary, which will not only affect the truth of the story

but also change the perception and attitude of readers. In the context of news reports, quotes can be divided into two categories depending on their source.

The first is to quote the words of the reported doctors and patients, in the 7th edition of the news on February 5, 2020, titled "Fight with all our strength, Fight bravely, Fight together":

Example 1: “现在，我们医院正在收治的新型冠状病毒感染的肺炎患者有 530 多名，接诊压力很大。但是，几乎所有同事都坚守岗位，全力以赴救治病人。” “先查房，把重症监护区的病人挨个看一遍，详细了解他们的基本情况，比如血压、体温、心跳、肝肾功能等，然后对症调整治疗方案。” “调整完还要专人实时观察，仔细记录临床反应；如果有问题，需要医生再调整。”

Here, the quoted words are said by Wang Liangchao, a doctor who has worked in the respiratory and critical care medicine department of Wuhan Central Hospital for 13 years. Quoting the people on the front line of the epidemic can enhance the authenticity and credibility of the news. Quoting the doctors, using colloquial expressions, makes it easy to understand and increases the sense of familiarity.

The second is to quote the third person, such as the colleague, leader or relevant person in charge of the unit, to highlight the image or quality of the reported through the evaluation and affirmation of others. In a report titled "Zimbabwe's first 'Chinese Standard' COVID-19 Treatment hospital Opens - 'Chinese aid boosts confidence in our fight against the epidemic'" on July 25, 2020,

Example 2: “中国援助增强了我们战胜疫情的信心。” “现在我们的医护人员信心很足，中国专家的宝贵经验功不可没。希望医院采用的‘中国标准’诊疗模式能为津其他医疗机构提供借鉴。”

Shangdong Hospital directors of Zimbabwe Peter Annesley told reporters. In the report, the president of Shangdong Hospital, Peter Annesley, was quoted, expressing Zimbabwe's recognition of China's medical assistance, and through the mouth of others, it reflected the objectivity of the news to a certain extent, enhanced the persuasive power of the report, and highlighted China's responsibility and responsibility as a major country in the global fight against the epidemic.

2) Indirect quotation

News reports are committed to presenting detailed and accurate information content. In the process of detailed description of the discourse, the clever use of indirect quotation can skillfully integrate the fact statement or personal opinion into the article seamlessly, so as to ensure that readers feel smooth and natural when reading, as if they have experienced the experience, so as to better understand and accept the information conveyed. For example, in the 3rd edition of the news on August 29, 2021, titled "Chinese Military AIDS Sri Lankan military COVID-19 vaccine delivery to Colombo",

Example 3: 斯里兰卡总理马欣达也通过社交媒体表示，非常感谢来自中国军队的大量抗疫援助，这将会确保斯里兰卡疫苗接种工作取得成功。

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda also said through social media that he is very grateful for the massive anti-epidemic assistance from the Chinese military, which will ensure the success of Sri Lanka's vaccination work.

Here, the author clearly points out the quoting source of Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda and integrates the words of Sri Lankan Prime Minister into it, which provides sufficient evidence for the article and reflects the authority.

4.2.2 Intertextuality

1) Intertextuality of style

In addition to the differences in genre styles, there are also specific language styles such as the intertext of official discourse and popular discourse.

Example 4: “我国现职党和国家领导人都已完成了新冠疫苗接种，而且接种的都是我国国产疫苗。”曾益新介绍……

Example 5: 这充分说明了我国领导人对疫情防控工作的高度重视、对我国生产的新冠疫苗的高度信任。

The above two paragraphs are from the same report, published on July 24, 2022, titled 'China's COVID-19 Vaccine is Safe and Effective: Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of the State Council Conference.' The report, which focuses on vaccination, quotes Zeng Yixin, Vice Minister of China's National Health Commission, who introduces the vaccination status of state leaders to demonstrate the vaccine's safety. By combining official and public discourse, the report better explains politicized topics and avoids the pitfalls of relying solely on official discourse. Expert descriptions enhance credibility and scientific rigor, thereby improving the report's communication effectiveness.

2) Intertextuality of genre

On January 29, 2021, the 7th edition of the commentary article "China's COVID-19 vaccine builds immunity line (New Review)" commented on the COVID-19 vaccine produced in China. In the past half month, newspapers have published several news articles on COVID-19 vaccines, mainly in the form of communications and news. In communications and news, the situation of COVID-19 vaccine was mainly presented through the description of objective facts. For example, the 13th edition of January 21, 2021, published a report titled "China's COVID-19 vaccine exceeded 15 million people (Press Conference of the Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of The State Council)":

Example 6: 目前，我国新冠疫苗接种工作按照城乡分开、口岸优先、区分轻重缓急稳妥有序的原则来逐步推进。边境口岸、从事国际国内交通运输以及向社会提供公共服务的重点人群给予优先接种，逐渐扩大到儿童、老年人以及一般人群，让预防接种发挥更大的效果，为疫情防控工作助力。截至目前，我国新冠疫苗接种量已经超过 1500 万人次。

Through comments, the opinions and attitudes implied in news reports can be refined and highlighted, thus playing a significant role in guiding public opinion. When *People's Daily* published an investigation report on vaccination on the same day, the commentary formed a direct "discourse interaction" with it, fully demonstrating the timeliness of the news, quickly responding to the public's concerns, and clearly stating its stance and views. This series of continuous vaccination-related reports has issued a firm and powerful voice on the issue of vaccination and has played a positive role in promoting the improvement of the reality.

4.2.3 Using rhetorical devices to express

Example 7: 如果说，新冠肺炎疫情是一只突如其来的“黑天鹅”，那么从今往后，重大传染病疫情就是一头随时可能一跃而起的“灰犀牛”，需要我们时刻警惕、严加防范，再不能麻痹大意。

In Example 7, the image of "black swan" is used as a metaphor for the suddenness and unpredictability of the COVID-19 outbreak, because "black swan" is often used in fields such as economics to refer to events that are very rare and difficult to predict but have a huge impact. Through this analogy, the characteristics and impact of the COVID-19 epidemic can be expressed more vividly.

Example 8: 他们是感动中国也感动世界的白衣天使，是闻令即动、勇挑重担的人民解放军指战员，是不惧风雨、坚守一线的广大社区工作者、公安干警、基层干部、下沉干部、志愿者，是加班加点生产医疗物资的工人，是火速建成各地应急医院的农民工，是每天穿梭于大街小巷的快递小哥，也是一户户宅在家里的普通民众……

The use of three or more identical sentence patterns not only creates a smooth, melodious and rhythmic reading sense at the language level, but also makes a comprehensive and profound evaluation of the medical staff fighting the epidemic from the four dimensions of professionalism, technical excellence, responsibility and life value. Such a parallel structure not only greatly enriches the semantic level and depth, but also strongly conveys the positive emotion of their

selfless dedication and heroic struggle, making the whole evaluation both vivid and powerful, but also full of respect and gratitude.

4.3 Social practice analysis of *People's Daily's* report on COVID-19

Fairclough (1989) pointed out that discourse as social practice is determined by social structure. *People's Daily's* coverage of the COVID-19 epidemic reflects two aspects in terms of social practice:

1) China's responsibility as a major country in the fight against the epidemic

The *People's Daily* reported on the spirit of solidarity and mutual help shown by the Chinese people during the epidemic. China has taken an active part in international cooperation on epidemic prevention and control, sharing its experience and diagnosis and treatment plans with the international community through *People's Daily* and other channels, and conducting technical exchanges and cooperation with many countries and regions around the world. Such international cooperation not only helped improve the global capacity for epidemic prevention and control but also demonstrated China's willingness to collaborate with other countries in addressing global challenges as a responsible major country. These measures not only highlighted the Chinese government's sense of responsibility as a major country during the global COVID-19 pandemic but also reflected China's broad-mindedness and profound commitment as an essential member of the community with a shared future for mankind.

2) China's determination to fight against the epidemic

This demonstrates the CPC's leadership and decisiveness at a critical moment, Scientific prevention and control, along with precise policy implementation, are essential components of the strategy. The Party Central Committee has scientifically adjusted the prevention and control strategy in response to changes in the epidemic situation. From the initial emergency containment to normalized epidemic prevention and control, and further to the subsequent twenty optimization measures and ten new measures, each step reflects the principles of scientific prevention and targeted policies. The report stressed that while fighting the epidemic, China has always put people's life safety and health first and made every effort to treat patients and reduce the death rate. This reflects the value of putting people first.

5. Conclusion

Based on the self-built *People's Daily* novel coronavirus corpus, this paper adopted Antconc (4.0.4) software to conduct critical discourse analysis and carried out quantitative and qualitative analysis from three dimensions: text, discourse practice, and social practice. From the text dimension, it was found that the focus information of *People's Daily* on COVID-19 was concentrated on COVID-19 itself, COVID-19 response, COVID-19 location, COVID-19 impact, COVID-19 population, time, and national leaders. In terms of discourse practice, *People's Daily's* report on the COVID-19 epidemic adopted three discourse strategies, namely self-narrative and other narration, intertext of genre and style, and rhetorical devices such as metaphor and parallelism, to describe the efforts made by the Chinese government and people in the COVID-19 response. In terms of social practice, the focus was on China's responsibility as a major country and its firm determination to fight the epidemic.

This study focused on a self-built corpus of COVID-19 related reports from *People's Daily*, a Chinese official media outlet, and examined the discourse expressions of Chinese official media during the pandemic. Unlike previous studies, which focused on different data sources and research objects, this study broadened the scope of discourse research by analyzing the news discourse about COVID-19 in *People's Daily*. It comprehensively demonstrated the experiences and lessons learned in the face of public health emergencies, thereby filling the gap in previous research on

Chinese official media. Additionally, by adopting a diachronic perspective in analyzing the reports of People's Daily, this study provided a new perspective for research in this field.

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