

The Communication Power of Chinese Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia (COVID-19) News Reports in Light of the Framing Theory

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Abstract—This paper attempts to use the Framing Theory and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory to explain the surface frames and deep frames often used by Chinese state media in face of the COVID-19. It discusses how the official discourse achieves its purpose of inspiring based on the audience emotion, and enables the audience to be more determined and courageous to overcome the epidemic, which best displays the communication power news reports with regard to COVID-19. It is found that Chinese official media mainly use metaphorical frames such as WAR, COMPETITION, and BARRIERS, and non-metaphorical frames such as SOLIDARITY, CONFIDENCE, and VICTORY. News reports of Chinese state media fully highlights the unity of the Chinese people in fighting against the epidemic, which helps persuade the audience to understand and trust the Chinese government and to become more determined and courageous in the battle.

Index Terms—surface frame, deep frames, conceptual metaphor, communication power

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of cognitive linguistics has made language research no longer limited to the analysis and description of language phenomena (speech). On the basis of the Conceptual Metaphor theory, analyzing the underlying ideology of a language can enrich the social dimension of the language. Lakoff & Johnson (2003) proposed that metaphor is an important mindset of humans to interpret the world, and such conceptualized cognition approach is conceptual metaphor. As George Lakoff indicates, “the lotus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another”(Lakoff,1992,p.4). Thus conceptual metaphors link two conceptual domains, the “source” domain and the “target” domain. We use our knowledge about source conceptual domain to reason about target conceptual domain. In this way, conceptual metaphors are constituted not by words or linguistic units, but by ontological mapping across conceptual domains. Lakoff (2004) pointed out that frame exists in the human brain in the form of a neural circuit, which is a deep-rooted psychological structure that determines how we view the world. That is, when a person hears or reads a word, it activates the cognitive network of this term.

Based on the Framing Theory proposed by Lakoff, the news discourse has been analyzed as the corpus. The words in the reports can activate a certain mental structure, namely the surface frames, which can activate the corresponding values, namely the deep frames (Lakoff, 2006). Frame is usually expressed as metaphors, images, and cultural stories, which are connected to the emotional center of the human brain (Wang & Zhang, 2018). People think and reason by means of frames which affect our behavior and mentality (Lakoff, 2004). The framing effect one question exerts varies with the framing methods, guiding target audience to make different decisions. In the face of the sudden Novel Coronavirus pandemic around the world, the Chinese government delivers relevant messages through state media, provides timely explanation and counsel, and enhances the communication power of the news discourse in a positive way. Otherwise, against the backdrop of COVID-19, negative opinions might have been piled up and caused public panic.

II. FRAMING ANALYSIS BASED ON THE PANDEMIC REPORT

Frame is the psychological structure related to the real world. We use this kind of thinking to understand reality and construct our own world. Frames can be classified into surface frames and deep frames (Lakoff, 2006). Frame is also a metaphorical mindset with which to make people think and reason in a more logical manner (Ji & Wang, 2019). Frame shapes and influences the way we reason and behave (ibid). Frame can be viewed as a neural circuit of a synapse in the brain. When a word or phrase is often repeated, the neural circuit responsible for inferring the meaning will be activated in the brain of the audience, and become more solid (Wang & Liang, 2017). Therefore, if the government wants the general public to accept some view of point, the relevant frame must be activated by the repetition of certain words that also fit with the values of the audience (Wang & Zhang, 2018).

This paper selects 11 relevant reports as corpus from China Daily by using “Coronavirus” as the key word. Based on the Framing Theory and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, it tries to retrieve the metaphorical vocabulary and explain its framing method and ideology of the language.

A. Metaphorical Frames

TABLE 1
A SUMMARY OF METAPHORICAL FRAMES

Frame	Metaphorical Vocabulary	Number	Percentage
War framing	抗疫 (39) 抗击 (16) 一线 (14) 打赢 (9) 阻击战 (8) 支援 (7) 战胜 (6) 牺牲 (6) 冲锋 (6) 战役 (5) 战士 (4) 奋战 (4) 战斗 (4) 英雄 (4) 战场 (3) 前线 (2) 攻坚 (2) 硬仗 (1) 保卫战 (1)	141	74.6%
Competition framing	赛跑 (6) 大考 (4) 争分夺秒 (3)	13	6.9%
Solidarity framing	人类命运共同体 (35)	35	18.5%
Total		189	100%

First of all, in the 11 news reports on COVID-19, words such as anti-epidemic(抗疫), fight (抗击) and front line (一线) are used as high-frequency words which activate the war framing. As the fight against the COVID-19 continues, other relevant words such as combat (阻击), fight (抗击) and defeat (战胜) are activated. These reports reveal that the Chinese fight against the COVID-19 around the country, and medical workers fight on the front line without fear of death. Thus the Chinese people have been motivated to work as a team and make enormous efforts to defeat COVID-19, a common threat to humankind.

Eg.1 在大考面前, 党始终把人民群众的身体健康和生命安全放在第一位, 举全国之力救治患者, 实现应收尽收、应治尽治, 不惜代价、不计成本打赢疫情防控阻击战, 为人民的生命安全和身体健康筑起坚固的“长城”。这场史诗级的伟大抗疫实践正是中国共产党初心使命的最好阐释, 彰显了党把人民放在第一位的赤子之心。

Example 1 illustrates the courage and determination of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to lead people to curb the epidemic at any cost. There is still a long way to go before the COVID-19 is rooted out all over the country. Yet since the establishment of CPC in 1921, there have been ups and downs but the Party has confronted and overcome the challenges every time. It takes people as the top priority and be committed to serving them. In this fight against the pandemic, the Communist Party of China never gives up anyone, striving to confront the challenge so as to ensure people's well-being.

Eg.2 在全球疫情暴发的危机时刻, 中国选择毫无保留地将抗疫经验分享给世界, 同世界一起同舟共济、共抗疫情, 为在全世界范围内早日战胜疫情贡献中国智慧。

Example 2 illustrates that China shares its experience in epidemic control with other countries and makes joint efforts to overcome the epidemic. In fighting the epidemic, China fulfills its solemn commitment to building a community with a shared future for mankind. China seeks closer international cooperation on medicine and vaccine development, and does its utmost as a responsible global player to assist countries and regions affected by the virus

Repeating the war framing closely related to the cognitive perception can resonate with the audience. War means cruelty and sacrifice in essence. As the hundreds of millions of Chinese fighting against the global pandemic, the audience need to be motivated and guided to respond to the governmental anti-epidemic appeal. Thus this framing can serve as more persuasive vehicles in the press communication.

B. Non-metaphorical Frames

TABLE 2
A SUMMARY OF NON-METAPHORICAL FRAMES

Frame	Non-metaphorical Vocabulary	Number	Percentage
Cooperation framing	共同 (81) 合作 (20) 一起 (10) 分享 (10) 共产党人 (8) 众志成城 (6) 使命 (6) 万众一心 (2) 共赢 (2)	145	47.5%
Belief framing	精神 (45) 力量 (34) 担当 (20) 生命 (12) 信心 (11) 动力 (11) 团结 (8) 坚守 (6) 初心 (5) 希望 (3) 加油 (2) 守护 (2) 必胜 (1)	160	52.5%
Total		305	100%

The non-metaphorical frames are mainly classified into categories of 'cooperation' and 'faith'. In news reports, words such as joint(共同), cooperation (合作) and together (一起) activate the frames of COOPERATION and SOLIDAIRTY, which inspires people to work together to overcome the difficulties.

Eg.3 中国非凡而果断的决策得到了中国人民非凡而积极的响应, 这是政府与人民上下一心、通力合作的经典案例。

Eg.4 因此, 要以家国情怀凝聚起巨大行动力量, 把自己的理想同祖国的前途、民族的命运紧密联系在一起, 做到胸中有全局、脑中有方法、肩上有责任, 把爱国情、强国志、报国行自觉融入到建设中国特色社会主义事业和实现中国梦的奋斗之中, 汇聚起勇敢追梦的磅礴之力, 向着中华民族伟大复兴的宏伟目标不断迈进。

The above two examples illustrate that fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic remains a long and uphill journey

which cannot be fulfilled on one's own. Throughout history, the Chinese nation has cherished the belief that many hands make light work. That's why since the outbreak of the pandemic, people across the country has followed the leadership of CPC and demonstrated the great solidarity and mutual help. Rescue teams from every corner of the country as well as resources provided by different groups came to Wuhan's aid. The national concerted efforts have given this fight more golden time and epitomized the initial success.

Eg.5 战胜关乎各国人民安危的疫病，团结合作是最有力的武器。

Eg.6 当疫情在全球多点暴发和扩散时，中国展现担当，在做好国内防控工作同时，积极开展合作、分享经验、提供帮助，与世界各国并肩战斗、筑牢抗疫防线，以实际行动诠释人类命运共同体理念的价值，向全球传递信心和力量。

Example 5 and 6 show that under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, mutual beneficial cooperation between countries is dispensable. At the crossroads, China has volunteered to share its experience in fighting the pandemic with countries and regions concerned, actively coordinated and communicated with the rest of the world, and injected confidence and courage into the global society. The activated frame of COOPERATION can arouse the sense of identity from people abroad, including Chinese students abroad, and overseas Chinese. By doing so, audience both at home and abroad will be motivated to be part of the fight against the pandemic. The Chinese government persuades people into working together to combat the COVID-19 and safeguard the physical welfare of the general public. Thus, in the spirit of building a community with a shared future for mankind, China has provided the 'China Solution' for the well-being of everyone.

In Chinese news reports about COVID-19, words such as spirit(精神), power (力量), confidence (信心), and contribution(贡献) activate frames of FAITH and CONTRIBUTION. They highlight the determination and confidence of the Communist Party of China to win the fight against COVID-19, and encourage the audience to be firm in belief and to overcome the difficulties involved.

Eg.7 讲好“中国抗疫故事”，展示中国精神的强大力量。

Eg.8 火神山、雷神山从无到有的横空出世，防护物资从严重紧缺到库存充足，中国人民以智慧与汗水书写着改天换地的伟大创造精神；一封封炙热的请战书，一个个逆行的身影，抒发着中国人民越是艰险越向前的伟大奋斗精神；一批批白衣战士、一台台装满防护物资与生活物资的车辆飞驰湖北武汉，结对帮扶、共同抗疫，彰显着中国人民万众一心、众志成城的伟大团结精神；我们不仅能打赢疫情防控阻击战，我们还要打赢脱贫攻坚战，全面建成小康社会，实现第一个百年奋斗目标，展现着为实现中国梦而奋勇前行的伟大梦想精神。

The frame of FAITH can evoke positive emotion. Example 7&8 illustrate that spiritual support empowers the Chinese people to go forward despite great difficulties in the fight against the COVID-19. This kind of expressions can arouse people's potential through emotional motivation, and inspire the audience to firmly fight against the epidemic. These news reports communicate positive messages to the general public, and the Chinese spirits guide people to fight the battle with firm belief. As China achieves some good results in the current stage in fighting against COVID-19, the entire country is more motivated to control the pandemic in the coming future..

This paper analyzes the metaphorical and non-metaphorical frames of the 11 news reports on the fight against the COVID-19 in Chinese official media. Limited in number, these reports analyze the deep frames beneath the surface frame, of WAR, such as SOLIDARITY, COOPERATION and FAITH. These frames are in line with the current cognition of the audience and meet their emotional needs. In this way, the news reports are appealing enough to remove public anxiety in face of challenges brought by the pandemic and persuade the public to accept the views of the media, so that people will be deeply touched and jointly support governmental measures.

III. COMMUNICATION POWER BASED ON THE FRAMING THEORY

In the face of the unexpected Coronavirus pandemic, news reports from the Chinese state media have become the major ground for the government to deliver messages concerning the prevention of the epidemic. They have been useful vehicles for talking to the public, removing their doubt and worries, and getting closer to them. Activating the deep frames of news language can guide the public opinion and increase public confidence. Thus, communication power is enhanced based on audience-targeted action.

Communication Effect

Communication, originated in the United States, is a new social science in the 20th century. Harold Dwight Lasswell, an American scholar, was the first to come up with the model of communication process. In 1948 in *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*, he put forward a theory of communication process, which focuses on "Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with) What Effect", "5W" briefly. Communication effect is the ultimate goal and tests the effectiveness of the communication procedure (Zhou & Xie, 2018). In the field of communication studies, communication effect refers to how much the communication with the intention of persuasion leads the audience to change their concepts and behavior, or to exert some influence on a society, whether these influences are intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect, obvious or potential.

In this battle against the COVID-19, news communication has given full play to its power. In addition to the 11 news discourses selected in this study, news reports have been released by the Chinese state media and networks, and spread

on the platforms such as Weibo and WeChat. Thus, they have delivered powerful messages, such as the danger and transmission of the virus, to every corner of the country, which immediately enabled the general public to be mentally and physically prepared for the fight against the pandemic and become more aware of hygienic habits. The entire society at once deployed personnel and resources to combat the pandemic, with groups from all walks of life coming to Wuhan's rescue. Every Chinese has made their own contribution to fighting against the pandemic. Thus, I strongly feel the significance of news communication and its meaningful role in the battle. Though once ignored in our daily life, the power of news communication in reality has been deeply felt in this fight against COVID-19.

IV. CONCLUSION

By analyzing the language frames of news reports from the Chinese state media, this paper concludes that both conceptual metaphors and frames are strong in cognitive abilities, and good use of framing and metaphors can breathe new life into the news languages. These news reports not only positively guide the public opinion in China and motivate the collective combat against the pandemic, but also appeal to the international audience, thus forming consensus and gaining international recognition. The concerted efforts made by the general public to overcome challenges have inspired the audience and aroused their sense of collectivistic values. In this way, the unified recognition system of combating the pandemic has been established and the great communication power of news realized.

APPENDIX

- [1] <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/25/WS5e7ad840a3107bb6b57a89c2.html>
- [2] <https://hain.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/25/WS5e7ad06ba3107bb6b57a89aa.html>
- [3] <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/25/WS5e7ab940a3107bb6b57a8941.html>
- [4] <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/24/WS5e79af38a3107bb6b57a8709.html>
- [5] <https://china.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/24/WS5e795986a3107bb6b57a8545.html>
- [6] <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/23/WS5e78a855a3107bb6b57a84b5.html>
- [7] <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/23/WS5e78a84ba3107bb6b57a84b0.html>
- [8] <https://china.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/23/WS5e7819bca3107bb6b57a822a.html>
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