

Discursive Construction of China's Statements at the United Nations General Assembly in British and American Media: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study

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Abstract: The General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly is an important window for international media to interpret China's diplomatic position. This study selects mainstream media reports from Britain and the United States between 2015 and 2024 as the corpus, and relies on Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies and framing theory to explore how the meaning of Chinese diplomatic discourse is constructed. It is found that the node word China frequently occurs in recurrent evaluative patterns associated with confrontation and environmental criticism, contributing to a predominantly negative semantic prosody. Under the influence of these linguistic patterns, the reports mainly generate two frames: the Great-Power Rivalry Frame and the Responsibility Frame, which in turn shape the presentation of China's diplomatic discourse. The research shows that the above frames are built through selective quotation, lexical association and contextual arrangement, and then reshape the external interpretation of China's diplomacy in cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: UNGA general debate; Corpus-assisted discourse studies; Negative semantic prosody; Framing theory; British and American media

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1. Introduction

The General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly is an important multilateral platform for leaders and senior diplomats to articulate their positions on global affairs. China has participated in the General Debate since it resumed its seat at the United Nations in 1971. China's speech in Chinese, interpreted into English, provides the main way for the international community and the media to understand China's diplomatic position.

News discourse rarely presents events neutrally, but is shaped by social and ideological factors ^[1]. Framing theory points out that the media completes problem definition, causal interpretation, and moral evaluation by selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient ^[2]. Therefore, when China's UNGA speech enters the field of news discourse, its original intention may be reconstructed through selection and contextual reconstruction.

Existing research has extensively explored how Western media portray China and construct China's national image in major international events ^[3,4], but there is still a lack of research on the relevant reports of China's UNGA speeches. This study takes the reports of British and American media on China's speeches at the UNGA from 2015 to 2024 as the analysis object, and uses Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies, semantic prosody, and framing theory to explore how British and American media construct and frame Chinese diplomatic discourse at the discourse level.

This paper proposes three research questions:

- (1) What are the significant lexical and collocational features of reports on China's speeches at the UN General Assembly in British and American media?
- (2) What kind of evaluative tendency is reflected in the above lexical collocation patterns?
- (3) How do these evaluative tendencies contribute to the mainstream reporting frames and construct China's diplomatic discourse?

2. Theoretical background

2.1. News framing

Framing theory originates from the study of human beings' way of comprehending and interpreting social experience. Goffman (1974) defined framing as a cognitive structure through which individuals perceive and organize social information ^[5]. Later, Entman (1993) expanded framing into a media analysis tool, emphasizing the media's selection and highlighting of specific aspects of reality ^[2].

In the field of news framing research, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) summarized five generic frames: conflict frame, responsibility attribution frame, economic consequences frame, human interest frame, and morality frame ^[6]. This classification provides a reliable basis for examining how news discourse presents specific issues and actors. This study uses framing theory to establish a correlation between recurrent linguistic features and macro-level evaluative representations of China.

2.2. Corpus-assisted discourse studies

Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) combines corpus linguistics and discourse analysis. By tracking recurring language patterns, this method can reveal meanings that are difficult to identify through close reading of texts alone ^[7,8]. Partington (2003) confirmed that corpus-based analysis is applicable to the exploration of evaluative tendencies and ideological patterns in political discourse ^[9].

In this study, frequency analysis, keyword analysis, collocation analysis and concordance analysis are used to extract recurrent linguistic features from the corpus. Then, based on framing theory, the quantitative results are qualitatively interpreted. This research approach establishes a connection between micro-level lexical patterns and macro-level discourse frames.

3. Research design

3.1. Corpus

The specialized corpus comprises 51 reports on China’s UNGA statements published by major British and American media between 2015 and 2024, including *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, CNN, and the BBC, among other major media outlets. Texts were retrieved using combinations of China, UNGA, and United Nations General Assembly, followed by manual filtering to verify whether the reports directly quoted China’s UNGA statements; only reports containing such direct quotations were included. The NOW (News on the Web) Corpus served as the reference corpus, and the corpus sizes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Corpus size

Corpus	Word Tokens
Specialized corpus	37,864
Reference corpus (NOW)	86,343,826

3.2. Analytical procedures

Data processing was carried out with AntConc 4.3.1^[10]. The Word List and Keyword functions were used to find words that appear frequently and have statistical importance, and the log-likelihood measure was applied in the keyword analysis. China was then chosen as the node word, and T-score values helped to identify significant collocates, that is, words that often appear together with China, and to examine how these words co-occur with it. Concordance analysis was also performed to look at the overall tone or meaning created by the word China in different contexts. The idea of framing was used to explain these language patterns.

This study does not compare original statements with media reports sentence by sentence; attention is given to contextual arrangement, including selective quotation, adjacent information, and reporting contexts, and diplomatic discourse gets reinterpreted through these arrangements.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Macro-level lexical and semantic patterns

Frequency analysis shows that China and US occur frequently in both corpora, highlighting that China and China–US relations are central to the coverage. Climate-related words, such as coal, climate, carbon, and emissions, also appear frequently.

Table 2. Top 15 Frequent Words in British and American Media Reports

U.S. Media						British Media					
Word	Freq	Word	Freq	Word	Freq	Word	Freq	Word	Freq	Word	Freq
China	411	united	109	countries	91	China	286	Xi	87	Trump	54
UN	166	coal	108	International	86	Said	117	UN	70	carbon	51
Xi	149	US	105	Beijing	84	World	98	Chinese	64	new	49
said	145	global	101	development	84	US	96	President	60	coal	47
world	116	nations	98	new	80	Will	96	climate	54	emissions	47

Keyword analysis further supports the word patterns found through frequency analysis. In the U.S. corpus, China (2870.91) has the highest keyness value, followed by coal (918.93); the high keyness of China

and coal matches their frequent occurrence in the texts, which confirms that China-related vocabulary and climate terms are crucial. In the British corpus, China (2118.08) and UN (744.76) are among the most salient keywords, while coal (363.24), carbon (315.25), emissions (312.22), and climate (258.76) further show the prominence of climate-related terminology.

Collocation analysis also reveals clear links between China and several issue-related terms. In the U.S. corpus, coal (5.16) are notable words that often appear with China, while US (5.34) is the strongest such word in the British corpus. These collocation patterns broadly agree with the frequency and keyword results, and they further highlight the importance of China–US relations, climate-related issues, in the media discourse.

Overall, the three types of analysis point to two main issue areas in the coverage: China–US relations and climate-related issues. The following concordance analysis looks more closely at how these issues are presented in their immediate contexts.

4.2. Micro-level construction of major frames

Semantic prosody refers to the evaluative meaning that develops through the repeated co-occurrence of a node word with particular collocates^[8]. Repeated associations with negative words can result in negative semantic prosody^[11]. In this study, the semantic patterns around key words are examined to identify the linguistic features associated with two major frames.

4.2.1. The great-power rivalry frame: China as a competitor

China–US relations emerge as a major reporting domain. As shown in Table 3, China frequently co-occurs with rebuke, blames, tensions, and rivalry, forming a semantic field of confrontation.

Table 3. Typical Concordance Lines of China in U.S./Trump-Related Contexts

Left Context	Node	Right Context
In another implicit <u>rebuke</u> to the US, Xi sought to portray	China	as the country embracing modernity.(<i>The Guardian</i> , 2020)
<u>Tensions</u> flare at UN General Assembly as Trump <u>blames</u>	China	for coronavirus response(<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> , 2020)
should not be reduced to the <u>rivalry</u> between the US and	China	calling for a “modern new consensus”(BBC, 2020)
Wang told his counterpart that “the current	China	-U.S. relations are facing <u>grave impacts</u> (AP, 2022)
against deploying such missiles in Asia. The US and	China	both <u>blame</u> the other for militarization(CNN, 2019)

A representative example comes from *The Guardian*, where the reference to the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” is presented as a demand for Beijing to have “a greater say” and “an equal footing with the US”:

...looked his typical inscrutable self...vowing to promote ‘the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ – namely that Beijing deserves a greater say... and an equal footing with the US.

Rather than presenting “great rejuvenation” primarily as a domestic development aspiration, the report interprets it through the distribution of international power, linking China’s development discourse to its pursuit of greater international influence and placing it within a competitive China–US relationship.

The Associated Press adopts a more implicit strategy. The call for disputes to be handled through “dialogue and cooperation” is retained, but the statement is introduced against a background in which “tensions with the United States grow”:

Choosing calm language as tensions with the United States grow, Chinese leader...told world leaders...

‘disputes...need to be handled through dialogue and cooperation.’

Although the cooperative message is preserved, the surrounding context places it within a broader narrative of growing rivalry. Rather than directly distorting China’s statements, the media shape their meaning through selective quotation and contextual configuration, linking cooperative or developmental discourse to tensions and competition. Through this contextualization, China is constructed as a competitor in the international power structure.

4.2.2 The responsibility frame: China as an accountable actor

Climate governance represents another major thematic domain. In this context, China frequently occurs in discourse concerning coal dependence and greenhouse-gas emissions, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Typical Concordance Lines of China in the coal Context

Left Context	Node	Right Context
for one of the biggest backers of coal-fired plants globally. <u>Still</u> ,	China	remains heavily reliant on new coal plants(<i>The New York Times</i> , 2021)
most of its electricity <u>still</u> comes from coal. Some observers urged	China	to <u>build on Mr. Xi’s pledge</u> by also curtailing coal-plant construction(<i>The New York Times</i> , 2021)
<u>Despite</u> pledges to peak coal consumption before 2030,	China	<u>brought 38.4 gigawatts</u> (<i>The Guardian</i> , 2021)
than 60% of which still comes from burning coal. <u>Yet</u>	China	is <u>still building coal-fired</u> (<i>The Economist</i> , 2020)
plants approved <u>but not yet built</u> ? Will	China	also stop financing new coal fired power(BBC, 2021)

A striking feature of these concordance lines is the recurrent presence of concessive and contrastive markers such as still, yet, and despite. These expressions repeatedly follow China’s climate commitments, creating a contrast between commitment and implementation.

The *New York Times* provides a representative example. The report initially describes China’s commitment to stop building coal-fired power plants abroad as “a major shift,” but immediately introduces “Still” and emphasizes its domestic coal dependence:

“It marks a major shift for one of the biggest backers of coal-fired plants globally. Still, China remains heavily reliant on new coal plants at home, and is the world’s top emitter of greenhouse gases...”

The commitment is thus acknowledged but immediately qualified by information on domestic coal use and emissions, shifting the focus from policy commitment to China’s continuing environmental responsibility.

NBC News adopts a similar strategy. After presenting the commitment to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060, the report introduces criticism that the targets are “not ambitious enough”:

...repeated pledges... that China would achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. Some experts have criticized those targets as not ambitious enough... China, the world’s largest greenhouse gas emitter, is still heavily reliant on coal...

Across these reports, China’s climate commitments are first presented, then qualified by criticism, coal dependence, or emissions data. This recurrent discursive pattern shifts attention from policy commitments to their perceived implementation and consequences, constructing China as an accountable actor whose environmental commitments remain subject to external evaluation.

When looking at the relationship between the two specific frames and general news frames, the Great-Power Rivalry Frame mainly follows the underlying logic of the conflict frame, and this logic is specifically

reflected in the issue of China–US strategic competition; the Responsibility Frame corresponds to the responsibility attribution frame, and it is organized around the question of who should take responsibility for climate governance^[12]. The two frames focus on different issue areas; similar discourse construction mechanisms appear in both, as selective quotation, lexical association, and contextual arrangement work together to form both frames, making particular issues and evaluative tendencies more salient.

5. Conclusion

This study looked at how China’s statements at the United Nations General Assembly get reinterpreted in British and American media, with the help of corpus-assisted discourse studies and framing theory; the analysis finds two main reporting frames, the Great-Power Rivalry Frame and the Responsibility Frame, and these frames come from repeated word patterns and contextual arrangements that shape the way China’s diplomatic language is shown.

The findings also show that the repeated language patterns around China create a largely negative evaluative tendency, especially in contexts of confrontation and environmental criticism; these patterns do not work on their own, but the media reconstruct China’s statements by choosing particular quotations, using repeated word associations, and arranging the information around them; in this process, some parts of diplomatic discourse become more noticeable, which helps form different reporting frames.

By connecting corpus-based language evidence with framing analysis, this study offers a more detailed explanation of how China’s UNGA statements are reinterpreted in British and American news coverage; it also adds to earlier research on media representations of China by focusing on the language and contextual processes involved in the recontextualization of diplomatic discourse; future research could include more media outlets and platforms to see whether similar patterns show up in different media contexts.

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