

# A Discourse Analysis of *the Wall Street Journal's* and *China Daily's* News Reports on the Trade War Between the United States and China

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the trade war between China and the United States (US) has become increasingly intense, attracting the attention of the global news media. Different news reports contain a variety of standpoints and opinions, which often affect readers' thoughts and judgments. This paper intends to analyse and compare the linguistic features between *the Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and *China Daily* (CD) in regard to the US-China trade war. Based on Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory, this paper conducts qualitative and quantitative analysis in respect of the 46 selected news reports from *the WSJ* and *CD*, from the perspective of ideational function. The news reports were divided into 1777 clauses and classified according to transitivity analysis. By analysing the distribution and wording of transitivity processes in 2 news agencies, it is found that both *the WSJ* and *CD* were objective in their coverage of the trade war. However, their bias toward their countries is difficult to hide. The *WSJ* highlighted that the action of the US is legitimate and justifiable. *CD* stressed China's intention to prosper and follow its own development path. One reason for this difference is that news reporting undeniably serves the government. Moreover, in the report of international news events, the cultural factors of each country also play a decisive role. Through the discourse analysis of news reports, this paper seeks to explore the cultural factors behind the language differences and help improve readers' critical reading awareness of news.

**Keywords:** Discourse Analysis, Transitivity Process, the US-China trade war, the Wall Street Journal, China Daily

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly developing modern society, people obtain the news through mass media. However, because of the different subjective consciousness of journalists, the wording and structure used in news reports will be affected by the national stance and cultural background. Systematic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory as one of the text-oriented discourse analysis, not only describes the linguistic structure of discourse, but also analyses the reasons for the emergence of the structure. SFL provides a theoretical framework for discourse analysis. It primarily explains the grammatical patterns of sentences from the perspective of a functional configuration of language, thus providing a theoretical basis for discourse analysis of the whole text [1]. SFL is highly applicable and operable, which is more suitable for discourse

analysis than any other theory [2]. It can be fully applied to the practice of discourse analysis.

Since 2018, the US-China trade war has dominated headlines throughout the world as one of the most important news stories. Reports in the media regarding this trade war are valuable for the study. On March 22, 2018, US President Donald Trump signed a memorandum ordering the US Trade Representative to apply tariffs on Chinese imports under Section 301 of the 1974 Trade Act, claiming that China "steals US intellectual property and trade secrets." The US increased taxes from 10% to 25% on approximately \$200 billion in Chinese products exported to the United States. China has also hiked duties to 25% on \$60 billion worth of US products. Since then, trade tensions between China and the US have erupted into a fully-fledged trade war.

The American and Chinese news media have reacted differently to the trade conflict between the two countries. Different nations' viewpoints and political stances regarding the situation in question are concealed. News stories are affected not just by reporters, but also by political and power interests and guidance. In this approach, an in-depth study of news texts may be performed to increase readers' capacity to appreciate news and provide them with the most accurate and effective international news. Diverse linguistic connotations will result from different cultural backgrounds of news and social environments of language structure. As a result, examining the precise descriptions and language from the two newspapers' trade war coverage is helpful in better understand their points of view. Language's role as a social symbol resource is to express many meanings through systematic selection [3]. Not only may linguistic characteristics of a text be deduced using SFL, but the meaning of the text can also be improved. Furthermore, the comparative analysis may explain the variations in the focus of the two nations' news reports as well as their differing perspectives regarding trade difficulties between China and the US.

Every phrase about the world comes from a certain point of consciousness: language, as a medium, cannot make you see the landscape out the window, but it may reflect and shape it [4]. Comparative analysis, as opposed to evaluating single media may examine the same news event from different viewpoints, which can help news readers enhance their language awareness and media literacy.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics**

Discourse analysis research can be divided generally into three stages: discourse grammar, discourse processing, and social discourse. The representative of text-oriented discourse analysis is Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Halliday's meta-function is the core of SFL, including ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function. An ideational function is for the purpose of expressing various experiences in the subjective and objective world, which can be divided into experiential function and logical function. Among them, experiential function refers to the reflection of language to things and processes occurring in the subjective and objective world. Experiential function refers to people using language to express what happens in the objective world and their inner feelings, as well as using language to describe things, states, and processes. Interpersonal function refers to how people form and sustain interpersonal connections as well as how they use language to affect the conduct of others. And textual

function is the function of using linguistic means to form relevant sentences into coherent articles [5]. This paper makes a comparative study of Chinese and American news texts from the perspective of the transitivity processes of ideational functions.

Based on the SFL theory, the linguistic features of news texts in this paper were studied and compared from the standpoint of transitivity analysis in ideational function. The transitivity system is an important manifestation of the ideational function. The experiential process of objective things in the subjective and objective world can be divided into six different processes: material process, verbal process, relational process, mental process, existential process, and behavioural process.

#### *2.1.1. Material process*

The material process refers to the action of accomplishing something, which is generally described using dynamic verbs. The real circumstances of how objective items happen and evolve are generally described as material processes.

#### *2.1.2. Verbal process*

The process of conveying information is referred to as the verbal process. The verbs that are frequently employed in verbal processes include "say", "tell", "talk", "praise" and so on. Participants in the verbal process include the receiver, the verbiage, and the target. The person who encounters the speech is referred to as the receiver. The function related to the contents, which might be conveyed indirectly or directly, is known as verbiage. Meanwhile, of further importance, the entity indicated by the speech is referred to as the target.

#### *2.1.3. Relational process*

The relational process, which includes the attributive type and the identifying type primarily represents the relationship between objects. This is further split into three types: intensive, circumstantial, and possessive. Attributive types constituent elements that are carrier and attribute, whereas identifying types constituent elements that are identified and identifier.

#### *2.1.4. Mental process*

The mental process is the perceptual process that expresses "feeling", "response", "emotion" and "cognition". Sensor and phenomena are the two primary players in the mental process. The value orientation and emotional attitude of news reporters can be detected through mental processes.

### 2.1.5. *Existential process*

The existence of a material is referred to as an existential process. In general, the “there be...” phrase pattern could be employed to introduce information so that readers can quickly recognize and comprehend the context of the news.

### 2.1.6. *Behavioural process*

Thinking, breathing, smiling, and other physiological activities are examples of behavioural processes. This differs from a material process in that the participant must be a human is known as an actor. It is also not the same as a mental process because it is the process of awareness manifesting as a kind of action [1].

## 2.2. *Previous studies*

Previous research has shown that SFL has a significant outcome. For example, Meyer examined a New Straits Times (NST) piece on Anwar’s role in the Reformasi movement [6]. The author demonstrated how the language employed in media generates social reality by using transitivity analysis to diverse phrases. In the news article on Anwar, for example, NST tries to portray Anwar as a Sensor or Sayer, a powerful participant in the mental and verbal process. In this sense, Anwar seemed to readers as a strong entity whose actions have clear consequences for others. Putting Anwar in such a prominent position, on the other hand, gives readers the impression that he has exploited his position as deputy prime minister.

Mineshima investigated two British newspaper stories’ various topic patterns to see how they differed ideologically [7]. Both articles are about politicians. Text A is a report that criticizes Abdullah Ocalan, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party’s leader (PKK). Ocalan, the Kurdish question, and Italy are the key subjects of text A. Despite the fact that Ocalan was criticized throughout the essay. “It is reprehensible for the Italian government to offer aid and comfort to this killer,” the statement concludes. The final move from the Kurdish to the Ocalan problem is marked by the opening phrase, but the subsequent transition successfully reminds the reader of the author’s second aim - the Italian government. Text B is a report that criticizes Fidel Castro, the Cuban communist revolutionary and politician. Concession clauses are used in Text B to make a point. “Although there are evident linkages between Castro’s leadership in Cuba and the suppression of opposition, analogous claims against Pinochet must be founded on crimes of universal jurisdiction, such as genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes,” according to sentence B of the text. This interrupted subordinate phrase, according to the author, is unneeded and even disturbing. Because, as the initial transitional conjunction “but” indicates, this is the start of the formation of a common ground. The

author of Text B, on the other hand, continues to employ this concession clause to make readers believe that the author genuinely cares about them and is on their side. While both sentences A and B are political criticisms, text A is an outright condemnation of the Italian government and Ocalan, and text B is a nuanced support of Castro.

In conclusion, foreign languages, as indicated in the example above, see discourse as a valuable resource for social communication and place greater emphasis on its role. It covers a wide range of topics and is unusual in that it integrates the three primary views of discourse analysis. As a result, multi-level and multi-objective discourse analysis is better served by using foreign language as the theoretical foundation and approach. This encourages more research into discourse analysis. Since in international news coverage, cultural values play a crucial part in describing news discourse [8]. It’s worthwhile to analyse news discourse from the perspective of cultural differences.

## 3. **METHODOLOGY**

### 3.1. *Research Samples*

For the basic premise of selecting the scope of the research, the feasibility of data collection and the validity of samples must be guaranteed. In addition, due consideration should be given to the status of the selected news media in the global news system, including its social reputation and media strength. Therefore, this study selected two of the most authoritative and influential media in the US and China: *China Daily (CD)* and *the Wall Street Journal (WSJ)*. The data comes from real-time news sources obtained from *the WSJ*’s and *CD*’s official websites. The data were chosen based on Gao’s approach of data collecting [9]. She did a content analysis of the two newspapers to investigate the similarities and contrasts from a framework in her research, which outlined the important time points of the 2018-2019 US-China trade war. The data extraction for this study is based on the main time points of the US-China trade war, and the samples will be real-time reports connected to each trade war topic, because this study demands a deep examination of each news text. The study will choose the most significant news stories of the day from the *CD* and *the WSJ* based on the trade war topic. Hence, 23 news texts were selected from each news agency and 46 news texts in total. There were also 1102 clauses in the news texts of *the WSJ* and 675 clauses in the news texts of *CD*, which were categorized into 5 different transitivity processes.

### 3.2. *Analytical Tools*

In the news text of *the WSJ* and *CD*, the clauses were categorized into 5 processes except for the behavioural

process. Because it is not compatible with the characteristics of news reports, it did not appear in the news texts. Hence, the following were focusing on five transitivity processes that were used in this paper.

In which, material process refers to the procedure in which an entity does something. The process itself is often represented by a dynamic verb. The process has at least one actor for the action, and some do not involve the goal.

**Table 1:** Example of material process.

Example clause	The president	announced	new tariffs.
Participants	Actor	Process	Goal

In Verbal process, the exercise of expressing information language in communication analyses, the process itself is usually embodied by verbs such as expressing and informing. Verbal process can be divided into direct speech and reported speech.

**Table 2:** Examples of verbal process.

Example clause	Mike	said	"It's my shirt".	
Participants	Sayer	Process	Verbiage	
Example clause	Mike	told	Anna	to leave the house.
Participants	Sayer	Process	Receiver	Verbiage

Therefore, the relational process is the exercise of explaining the relationship between things. It can be used to indicate different types of relation: possessive, intensive and circumstantial. Each of them can be formed into two different modes: identifying and attributive. The identified and identifier of the identifying clause can be reversed while the carrier and attribute of the attributive clause are not reversible. In this way, the relational process can express different relations include the expressing of identity, the character of things and the subordination between things. The examples of different types of relational processes are shown in table 3.

**Table 3:** Examples of Relational Process.

Types of relation	Attributive clause	Identifying clause
Possessive	Anna is pretty.	Anna is the model. The model is Anna.
Intensive	Mike has a book.	The book is Mike's. Mike's is the book.
Circumstantial	The meeting is on Friday.	Today is the 17th. The 17th is today.

The mental process is the procedure of expressing mental activities. The process itself is often represented by verbs representing feelings and cognition. The whole process is generally composed of the subject and object of the activity (sensor and phenomenon). This perceived phenomenon can be either a concrete person or object or an abstract thing or phenomenon.

**Table 4:** Examples of mental process.

Example clauses	I	feel	happy. (perception)
	Lily	likes	the dress. (affection)
	Mike	doubts	the result. (cognition)
Participants	Sensor	Process	Phenomenon

Whereas, in the existential process, it refers how an entity exists. Every existential process contains an existent. Common verbs such as "remain", "exist", "arise" placed after "there" can be used in the existential process.

**4. FINDINGS**

As a semantic system, transitivity expresses peoples' understanding of things and processes in the subjective and objective world through language. This study makes a comparative analysis of the same news topic between China and the US to make the research corpus more comparable. A systematic analysis of the transitivity process of the language structure of these two news agencies has been made.

There are 1102 clauses in total in *the WSJ's* 23 news texts (data code W1-W23). The material process is the most commonly utilized process among them, accounting for 45.19% of all clauses. The verbal process is the second most frequent, accounting for 27.77% of the total clauses. The third is the relational process, which accounts for 20.24% of the total. Mental and existential processes account for a very small part of the total clauses when compared to the first three processes. 5.72% of the total is mental processes, whereas 1.09% is existential processes. The actor of the behavioural process is usually human and has a strong subjective consciousness, which runs counter to the objectivity of news. Therefore, this kind of process rarely appears in news reports. The behavioural process did not appear in the texts of *the WSJ* and *CD*.

There is a total of 675 clauses in the *CD's* 23 news texts (data code: C1-C23). The most common process is the material process, which accounts for 34.37% of the total. The proportions of relational and verbal processes are nearly identical. The verbal process contributes

28.00% of the total, while the relational process accounts for 28.74%. Only a small percentage of news clauses are mental and existential processes. 6.52% of the total is mental processes, whereas 2.37% is existential processes. Mental processes are primarily utilized to communicate some of the news subject’s viewpoints and sentiments; nevertheless, because mental processes are incompatible with the features of news reports, they are rarely employed in news articles.

**4.1. Material process**

Material processes are widespread in the collected news texts, which is consistent with the features of news reports, particularly for political and economic news. The coverage of political and economic news is mostly focused on reporting current happenings from around the world [10]. Of further note, the material process symbolizes events that occurred in the world, which is in line with the primary purpose of political and economic news reporting.

There are more provisions in *the WSJ*’s and *CD*’s material processes that take the US as an actor than clauses that take China as an actor. Because the US instigated the trade war, much of the attention was focused on this country. In terms of language characteristics of process, both newspapers employ the words “impose”, “increase”, and “fall” to describe the condition of tariffs and stocks in sentences that include the US as an actor. The words “threaten” in *the WSJ* and “force” in *CD* both emphasize the US’s powerful and forceful stance (example (1)-(2)).

(1) *President Trump has threatened to apply tariffs to all \$505 billion in Chinese goods entering the US if the two are unable to reach a settlement. (Data code: W11)*

(2) *Trump’s administration adopted coercive economic measures to force both its proponents and opponents to reduce their trade surplus with the US. (Data code: C10)*

In terms of the sections that take China as an actor, *the WSJ* used the word “retaliate” while *CD* used the word “against” while reporting on China’s response to the trade war (example (3)-(4)). The word “retaliate” means to strike back when others hurt you, and “against” means to disagree with or oppose something. From the different words used in the same incident, it can be seen that the US has portrayed China as being vengeful, while in China’s position, increasing tariffs is a resistance to the oppressive behaviour of the US.

(3) *On Sunday, China retaliated with its own levies on about \$3 billion of U.S. agricultural goods in that dispute. (Data code: W3)*

(4) *Both China and the EU are against the US’ unilateral policy. (Data code: C10)*

**4.2. Verbal process**

The verbal processes of *the WSJ* and *CD* were recognized, as well as the direct and reported speech (shown in table 6). The distinction between direct and reported speech is the author’s perspective on the speech [11]. In reported speech, authors can paraphrase the quoted person in their own words to add their own point of view, but in direct speech, the quoted person is quoted in their own words. As a result, direct speech has a higher level of objectivity than reported speech. Meanwhile, direct speech might increase the authority of the cited statement, but reported speech diminishes the quoted expression’s authority.

**Table 6:** The Frequency of Direct Speech and Reported Speech in *the WSJ* and *CD*.

	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>		<i>China Daily</i>	
	Frequency	Proportion	Frequency	Proportion
Reported Speech	198	64.70%	119	62.96%
Direct Speech	108	35.29%	70	37.04%
Total	306	100.00%	189	100.00%

As the table above shows, the proportion of direct and reported speech in *the WSJ* and *CD* are roughly the same. Notably, the process “say” appears frequently in news reports of both *the WSJ* and *CD*, since it is the reporter’s job to supply readers with news sources. It can establish the veracity of news reports and protect reporters from being held liable for their content. This is consistent with the basic concept of journalistic objectivity [12]. However, no matter how closely reporters adhere to their professional code of ethics, they are unable to accurately portray the facts. Some words are “colourful,” in the sense that they may be used to create an image or evoke an emotion; while others are “hued”, in the sense that they have a specific meaning [13].

Because of the impartiality of the news, it is apparent that neutral processes account for the bulk of *the WSJ*’s verbal process. According to the sources and material quoted by *the WSJ*, the trade war influencing on various dimensions, including the economy, technology, international order, etc. On the one hand, *the WSJ*, in the small percentage of clauses where bias is used portrayed America’s image as a judge, protesting against things that hurt its interests. On the other hand, it highlighted China’s theft of intellectual property and portrayed China as being resistant to American demands. As a result, a reciprocal, tit-for-tat scenario developed between the two countries (example (5)-(6)).

(5) *In a response hours later, China's Commerce Ministry **pledged** to defend its "core national interests," issuing a statement calling the U.S. action both "unexpected" and "within expectations."* (Data code: W6)

(6) *The U.S. **says** the new tariffs are a response to Chinese intellectual property theft and "other unfair trade practices".* (Data code: W7)

In *CD*'s reported speech, also utilized a lot of neutral processes including "say", "according to" and "add", which are all used to address the quoted speaker. The samples' content also discusses the development and the detrimental impact of the trade war on the global economy, implying that *CD* opposes the trade war and wants a peaceful resolution. *CD*, like *the WSJ*, has a lower proportion of direct speech than reported speech. *CD* used the terms "claim" and "warn" in the US-related clauses that take "colourful" words as a process (example (7)-(8)).

(7) *Although the US has **claimed** its products are far superior than Chinese products, and **accused** China of violating intellectual property rights and forcing US businesses to part with their trade secrets in exchange for being allowed to do business in China, many Americans **argue** a trade war would only compel China to scout for alternative markets.* (Data code: C14)

(8) *Japanese Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko also **warned** that Washington's latest move towards unilateral protectionism would "plunge the global market into turmoil."* (Data code: C6)

#### 4.3. Relational process

In the relational process, *the WSJ* points out that China's breach of WTO regulations is one of the primary causes of the large bilateral trade deficit between the two countries. The identifiers "what is needed" and "the most essential problem" are used by *the WSJ* to stress the importance of it, adding to the notion that China is to blame for the trade deficit. Meanwhile, it positioned the US as a protagonist in the trade war (example (9)).

(9) *What is needed is a change in Chinese behavior to conform to the rules Beijing accepted when it joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. **The most important issue is the demand** that U.S. companies transfer their technology to Chinese counterparts as a condition of doing business in China.* (Data code: W4)

In aspects of *CD*, it denounced and condemned the US' efforts to impose tariffs and launch the trade war as being wrong and likely to inflict severe losses to the global economy and even its economic development in its relational processes. In terms of the Chinese side, the *CD* concentrates on constructing China's economic power and its attitude toward the trade war: China does

not welcome the trade war but does not fear it (example (10)).

(10) *The White House's tariff decision is a stark violation of the core spirit of consensus reached in recent China-US trade talks and is set to backfire if Washington does not back off from its dangerous adventurism.* (Data code: C8)

In contrast to the relational process between *the WSJ* and *CD*, *the WSJ* described a powerful and just national image of the US based on reporting news facts, and by reporting on the principles of China's control over market access, it offers the reasons for the US to begin a trade war. Meanwhile, peace negotiations, rather than a trade war, are advocated in *CD*'s relational process. In the relational process of *CD*, China is shown as being a strong and responsible country. Therefore, these two news agencies present different national images and take opposing positions.

#### 4.4. Mental process

Mental processes do not feature in much news coverage in *the WSJ* and *CD*. In *the WSJ*'s mental processes (example (11)), the US has largely revealed its demands on China and expressed its doubts regarding China's pledges.

(11) *A second group, though, led by U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, is **skeptical** of Chinese purchase promises.* (Data code: W9)

In the clauses that took China and third parties as sensors, they both voiced concerns regarding the possible consequences of a trade war, as well as an attitude that they did not want it to happen. Regarding *CD*, it stated that both nations are conscious of the harmful effects of the trade war and are eager to work out a solution through negotiations (example (12)).

(12) *China **hopes to** address the trade dispute with the United States through dialogue and consultation.* (Data code: C3)

#### 4.5. Existential process

*The WSJ*'s existential processes mainly explicated some background information regarding the two nations' financial systems and the progress of the trade war between them, whereas *CD* presented information about the great potential of the Chinese market, American dissatisfaction with China, and the damage of the trade war between the two nations (example (13)-(14)).

(13) *There have been some olive branches offered by the U.S. and China to each other, though no signs of an imminent breakthrough.* (Data code: W9)

(14) *In effect, the head-on confrontation and sentimental approach toward economic issues will be*

counterproductive and **there will be no winner at all.** (Data code: C10)

After the analysis of samples from *the WSJ* and *CD* from the perspective of transitivity process, the findings were summarized in the table 7.

**Table 7:** The Frequencies of Transitivity Process of the *WSJ* and *CD* in the News Reports of the U.S.-China Trade War.

	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>China Daily</i>		
Process types	Frequencies	Proportion (%)	Frequencies	Proportion (%)
Material Process	498	45.19	232	34.37
Verbal Process	306	27.77	189	28.00
Relational Process	223	20.24	194	28.74
Mental Process	63	5.72	44	6.52
Existential Process	12	1.09	16	2.37
Total	1102	100.00	675	100.00

The transitivity analysis reveals that both *the WSJ* and *CD* adhere to the idea of impartiality in news reporting. *CD*, in particular, outperforms *the WSJ* in terms of objective reporting, since it employs more relational processes that are frequently utilized to convey universal truths. However, the two news agencies' slanted viewpoints are exposed by their emphasis on the reactions to the trade war in the nation where the newspapers operate.

In *the WSJ*'s news reports, the processes "threaten", "argue", "criticize", "worry", "impose" and "skeptical" are commonly used for actors on the US side, such as the US, Mr. Trump, and the Trump administration. These processes demonstrate that the US is legitimate and justifiable, leading to popular support for the US' trade war activities. As for those who take China as being the actor, such as Beijing and the Chinese government, the processes used by *the WSJ* include "retaliate", "deny", "react", "pledge", "argue", and "willing to". China may be viewed to be on the passive and reactive side of these dynamics. The *WSJ* also used the phrases "was caught"

and "theft" to give a hostile picture of China in the minds of its readers (example (15)-(16)).

(15) *Behind the U.S. action is a growing concern the Chinese are using industrial policy, government subsidies, theft and subterfuge to obtain U.S. technology.* (Data code: W3)

(16) *ZTE was caught in April for selling equipment with U.S. components to Iran and North Korea.* (Data code: W7)

In *CD*'s news reports, the terms "force", "accuse", "argue", "concern" and "warn" are frequently employed in US-related phrases. *CD*'s phrasing, like that of *the WSJ*, symbolizes American initiative and hegemony. Concerning clauses that involve China as the actor, *CD* commonly employs the terms "against", "willing to", "warn", "decided" and "wish". The processes *CD* utilized in the China-related clauses mostly stressed China's intention to prosper and follow its development path. It also expressed China's commitment to peace instead of a trade war.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Most of the clauses in the news reports selected for this study are material and verbal processes, while the number of relational, mental, and existential processes is small, but they also reproduce news events from different perspectives and report objective news facts. Through the material process, *the WSJ* and *CD* both report the progress of the US-China trade war from the beginning to the trade negotiations between the two nations, including the reasons, purposes, and effects of the trade war. The verbal process mainly quotes government officials from China, the US, and other relevant countries, which increases the authority and credibility of the news. The relational processes of *the WSJ* and *CD* convey the attribution and understanding of the US-China trade war by the American and Chinese sides, and to some extent express their views on the emergence of the US-China trade war. The mental process and the existential process of two news agencies mainly emphasized the danger of the trade war and their concern about the prospect of an escalating conflict.

Generally speaking, both *the WSJ* and *CD* have objectively reported the US-China trade war. However, the focus of their news coverage is different. The *WSJ* emphasizes the economic and trade impact of the trade war on the US, and its strong sense of crisis. While *CD*'s news reports also described the perilous atmosphere of the trade war, it focused on China's attitude and response to the conflict, with China portrayed as being committed to developing relations based on the non-conflict, seeking mutual respect and win-win cooperation, and aiming to firmly safeguard its national sovereignty, security and development interests.

Based on the theoretical basis of SFL, this paper conducted a comparative analysis of news reports concerning the US-China trade war from the perspective of the transitive process in ideational function. The results showed that: properties and processes on the distribution of *the WSJ* and *CD* in the news discourse is generally the same, but there are some differences in the specific distribution and use. The reason for this is that the different cultural values and thinking patterns of China and the West are reflected in the language structure of news discourse.

The wording in *the WSJ* is direct and more intense in the verbal process. It reflects the American culture of being direct, and coming straight to the point, expressing their views in a forthright manner and explaining their requirements. However, the Chinese culture in *CD* emphasizes the cultural view above the collective and the countries, and its writing is more euphemistic. This corresponds to the statement that cultural variables have a crucial influence on the portrayal of news discourse when it comes to international news coverage [8].

Each aspect of the analysis for the transitivity process can be used by journalists, who use words to convey different opinions and standpoints. This paper selected news reports related to the U.S.-China trade war, and analysed it with the transitivity processes analysis to explore how journalists use these processes to make readers receive objective information and viewpoints not revealed directly in the text. Based on this analysis, this paper proposes to make full use of mass media to cultivate the intercultural competence of foreign language learners. Teachers can teach students intercultural knowledge by leading them to read news content intensively, analyse and explain discourse strategies of intercultural expression by means of discourse analysis, strengthen intercultural knowledge and strategic awareness as well as develop students' intercultural abilities through the practice of transitivity analysis and interpretation

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