

Examining Russian News Coverages of Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: This study researches what national images of China are presented by the news coverages of two mainstream Russian media: Russia Today and TASS regarding the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic issue within 2021. The two self-built corpora are comprised of 14,725 words and AntConc is used as the main analysis tool. The study draws on a corpus-based critical discourse analysis approach to examine how discursive practices of news media contribute to the shaping of social structures. After the respective analysis of the two sub-corpora following the steps of word frequency, collocations, and concordance, three types of China's national images regarding hosting the Olympics, bilateral relationship with Russia, and facing the boycott, are gradually unveiled.

Keywords: National Image; Chinese & Russian News Media; Corpus-Based Research

1. Introduction

In June of 2021, the extension of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation has been announced and new common understanding has been reached. The China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era boasts strong momentum and broad prospects.

Meanwhile, Beijing is the host country of the 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics. The global sports event is also the best opportunity to express China's national image and convey the Olympic spirit to the international world, though faced with uncertain challenges from public health and public opinion. In view of that, the study would focus on the images of China from Russia's perspective and explore the possible way out for the comprehensive establishment of the national image in the following session of the Winter Olympics.

Boulding (1959) defines "image" as "the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavioral unit, or its internal view of itself and its universe". Similarly, the national image can be seen as a kind of "psychological cognition" (Jarvis, 1971). Boulding further points out that the perception and impression of a country held by another country tend to influence its policy and behavior towards the other and thus influences the overall relationship between the two countries (1959).

This study would assist in recognizing China's image in Russian media's perspective and their attitude toward China, and then put forward some of the practical suggestions for China to better tackle the challenge in the upcoming Winter Olympics and adjust the international communication strategy. Moreover, the study draws on a corpus-based critical discourse analysis approach to understand the national images of China from Russia's stands.

2. Theoretical framework and corpora building

The study would employ a corpus-based critical discourse analysis in combining the advantages of quantitative corpus linguistics and qualitative critical discourse analysis to scrutinize specific stretches of text at various levels. Hardt Mautner (1995) used the corpus to do the critical discourse analysis in her work *Only Connect: Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics*, believing that the corpus indexing function effectively broke the boundary between quantitative and qualitative research, and corpus provided people a basis for powerful quantitative analysis. Meanwhile, critical discourse analysis (CDA)

would provide a general framework for problem-oriented social research. Every text is conceived as a semiotic entity, embedded in an immediate, text-internal co-text as well as intertextual and sociopolitical context (Wodak, 2001).

The two corpora built for this study consist of 74 texts totally, with 7044 English tokens for TASS and 7681 for Russian Today (hereafter RT) respectively. They were collected from the News section of the LexisNexis database and include the words ‘Beijing Winter Olympics’ and were published between 2020 and 2021, the 1 year before the opening of 2022 Winter Olympic which proved to be an early-stage broadcasting summit for international media.

Therefore, with the help of corpus-based critical discourse analysis and the AntConc tool, the study would analyze the two Russian mainstream news media’s underlying ideologies hidden in discourses when presenting the national image of China.

3. Discussion

3.1 Word frequency

Analyzing the word frequency by the wordlist tool would assist in drawing a brief sketch of the Olympic-related reports as it could quantitatively display the meaningful items in a given discourse on the lexical level.

The high frequency of words related to the Winter Olympics is common across the two corpora. Besides the lemma centering on the “Beijing Winter Olympic games” the high frequent occurrence of “Russian” and “boycott” suggests the focusing point of TASS is also on Russia’s attitude and the boycott-related issues.

*Table 1 Word List of TASS (top15 by frequency)

In the RT corpus, “China” ranks the highest while the lemma of “boycott” ranks the third. And the “human right” suggests the more detailed mentioning of the “boycott”-related coverages compared with TASS.

3.2 Collocation

To some extent, high-frequent collocations can be a mirror of the contents of these news reports. A collocation analysis of “China” was conducted for the two media respectively to detect the direct reflection of their attitudes towards the image of China, by which we can see how Chinese national image is constructed through specific collocations. The result table shows the top 10 collocates with the highest frequency with MI values (content words only, span from 5L to 5R).

Rank	Freq.	MI	Collocate
1	17	4.52341	Russia
2	17	1.98009	Games
3	15	2.17682	Winter
4	15	2.82151	Olympics
5	13	1.75922	Beijing
6	12	4.5711	Visit
7	12	5.47157	Alleged
8	11	1.31041	Olympic
9	11	3.44557	Boycott
10	9	5.79349	Repressions

It is clear that nouns are the high-frequency collocations of “China”. Besides the “Beijing Winter Olympic games” indicating China as a host country for Winter Olympics, the collocations of “China” and “Russia/Russian” are prominent as Russia ranks the top with 17 occurrences. This collocation’s usual expression patterns are “Russia and China” (11 times) or “China-Russia friendship” (2 times).

Also, the collocations of “China” and “visit” are special. The generalized pattern is “pay/on a visit to China” which appears in 12 articles, suggesting Putin’s visit to China during the Winter Olympics.

The third group “alleged”, “boycott” and “repressions” often appear together as “boycott regards China’s alleged mass

repressions” which indicates the boycott event. The accompanied word alleged sheds an unsubstantiated color on the whole accusation.

To conclude, the difference lies in the TASS’s emphasis on the collocations of “China and Russia” and “visit to China”, signifying the friendship ally between these two countries. Meanwhile in RT, the “human rights”-related collocations with “China” rank higher, indicating its coverages on the “boycott” are more detailed.

3.3 Concordance

In this section, the analysis of concordance lines associated with China will be carried out in more depth. And the three types of common collocations concluded in the above section, including “China and Russia”, “China and Winter Olympics”, and “China and the boycott”, are placed in the concordance lines to recognize their meanings and China’s national images concretely.

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1	ation between the people of Russia and China, a high-ranking Chinese politician
2	Russia and China are confident that the 2018 FIFA
3	tain forces don't want to see Russia and China develop together, doing their best
4	Russia and China have been constantly supporting each
5	close coordination between Russia and China on the global stage and
6	values of relations between Russia and China. "We are looking forward the
7	esent-day relations between Russia and China will help in providing organization
8	or of the Chinese Embassy in Russia and Director of the China Cultural Center
9	period," he said, adding that China and Russia are strategic pillars for each
10	g. The diplomat recalled that China and Russia are "great sports nations". "We
11	ighest level. "The peoples of China and Russia have great expectations about the
12	hat the Foreign Ministries of China and Russia worked on details of a
13	ao Lijian reported on Friday. "China highly appreciates Russia's stance in favor
14	ganization bringing together Russia, India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and
15	sidelines of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summit in Brasilia
16	nt of the Chinese side of the China-Russia Friendship Committee for Peace and Development,
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*Table 3 Concordance of “China” and “Russia” in TASS

Firstly, among the “Russian”-related contexts, ranking the highest in the TASS’s collocates chart, the most prevailing pattern is “Russian and China”, which is expressed as an alliance term followed by joint actions or modifies of the bilateral relationship. For example,

1)Russia and China have been constantly supporting each other in regard to sports cooperation, including the inadmissibility of any attempts of its politicization, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday. --TASS

2)The sphere of sports will serve as a new bridge of friendship and cooperation between the people of Russia and China, a high-ranking Chinese politician said on Tuesday. --TASS

Most of the concordances are located in the senior leadership’s statements which renders the close ties more credibility and sincerity. Therefore, the image of mutual friendships between the two countries is presented.

Secondly, the common topics of the two media, concordances of “China” and “Winter Olympics” are tracked. The most common patterns in the context are adverbial modifiers, for example, “Winter Olympics in Beijing/ China” and there are several sentences that put “China” and the “Olympics” into the positions of subjects and objects respectively, which is of greater importance in identifying the construction of the national image. For instance,

3)"As China has experience in preventing and controlling the coronavirus, I fully believe that China will be able to host the Winter Olympics as scheduled, smoothly and successfully," said Zhao. --RT

This is an extract from China’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian’s statement, expressing China’s resolution and commitment to host the Olympics successfully, which reveals a responsible national image despite facing the challenge of Omicron.

Responding to America's public announcement of the boycott on Beijing Olympics, the RT commentary explicates the perceived reason for America's boycott is to thwart China's rise as China tried to display its national image with rapid development in the Olympics.

4. Conclusion and Implication

In a nutshell, after the brief sketch of the top 10 frequent content words by word list, the focusing points of the two media's coverages regarding the Beijing Winter Olympics are revealed: the Olympics itself and the "boycott" are the common high-frequent topics. Also, the most frequent occurrence of Russia in TASS is salient. Then, the second step of collocation analysis identifies the three most frequent topics collocating with "China", including "China and Beijing Olympics", "China and Russia", and "China and the boycott". Lastly, to gain a deeper understanding of the discursive structuring, the concordance analysis put these collocations into contexts. Three kinds of China's national images are identified, ranging from the neighboring friend of Russia, the responsible host of the Olympics, and the target of the western countries' boycott.

During the sub-corpora analysis, TASS is found to prioritize the China and Russia official friendly bilateral interactions in broadcast and to employ more brief and concise language styles. The difference in broadcast styles is possibly relevant to their self-positioning in the media industry. Generally, the national images of China from the perspective of Russian mainstream media are objective and positive in accord with the neighboring relationship at high level which verifies the China-Russia bilateral relationship as a "model of major country relationship".

One inspiring lesson is that the active agenda-setting is still insufficient. These preparing activities for the Olympics are in full swing domestically. But in the international media, they are still rarely known by people. By narrating more vivid stories to international audiences, the China-related topics in global media could be diversified so as China's national images.

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