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Engagement Resources in Chinese News Reports on Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea

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ABSTRACT

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Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have escalated geopolitical tensions due to the region's crucial shipping routes. Numerous incidents in this area have garnered international media attention, with various media outlets adopting different stances through their use of language. Thus, this study examines the ideological stance of Chinese news media on the South China Sea issue using appraisal theory, specifically focusing on the engagement subsystem. Using a corpus tool to analyze 20 news reports from China Daily published in March 2024, this study reveals that dialogic contraction is used more frequently than dialogic expansion. Additionally, the categories and subcategories of the engagement resource are distributed unevenly. These distribution patterns reveal how Chinese media employ rhetorical strategies to implicitly convey ideological stances, reflecting the dialogical nature of news discourse as described by Bakhtin (1981). The findings enhance our understanding of the media's role in shaping ideological narratives. By highlighting the interplay between language, power, and ideology, it helps readers critically assess the implicit messages in Chinese news reports.

KEYWORDS

engagement resources, Appraisal Theory, political news reports, critical discourse analysis, territorial disputes in the South China Sea

1. Introduction

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea involve several sovereign states making conflicting claims over islands and maritime areas in the region. Considering geopolitical factors and its important role in the modern shipping system, this territorial issue has been a source of dispute for several years. Tensions remain high, as evidenced by an incident in August 2023, when a Philippine vessel entered the vicinity of the Ren'ai Reef, resulting in a clash with Chinese coast guard ships. In response, the Biden administration publicly supported the Philippines, threatening to launch a "joint patrol operation in the South China Sea." In April 2024, the Biden administration reaffirmed its commitment to the defense of the Philippines, amid growing concerns about China's provocative actions in the disputed areas of the South China Sea. This political issue is also drawing increasing attention from the international community, with various media outlets eager to report on it, conveying different stances and ideologies toward this issue. Studying these different stances and ideologies in news discourse is always a focal area of linguistic research (Van Dijk 2013, Wahl-Jorg 2008). News authors often subtly convey their subjective evaluations and positions regarding certain events or propositions. Therefore, thoroughly examining the origins and impact of media in the creation and dissemination of ideology is essential (Thompson 1990).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) reveals the relation among language, ideology, and power through linguistic analysis. In 2005, J.R. Martin and P.R.R. White introduced the appraisal theory (AT), which was developed from the interpersonal meaning within Halliday's (2014) systemic functional linguistics. This theory predominantly examines the interpersonal meaning of language and discourse, reflects the interaction and negotiation between different perspectives and positions within discourse, and reveals various methods of indicating values and establishing connections with readers, thereby offering a valuable framework for CDA. The AT comprises three subsystems: attitude, graduation, and engagement. Among them, engagement achieves persuasive purposes through various rhetorical strategies or by allowing room for negotiation, serving as an ideal tool for analyzing implicit ideology in discourse. This study thus explores Chinese news discourses on the South China Sea issue through the lens of engagement, aiming to reveal China's ideological stance on the matter.

This research conducted a CDA of 20 news reports on the South China Sea issue published in the authoritative Chinese newspaper China Daily (Liu 2018, Yang 2021) in March 2024. China Daily was chosen as it is the preeminent English-language media outlet in China. It stands out as the sole Chinese news organization fully integrated into the global mainstream media, evinced by its substantial rate of republication by foreign media. Functioning as a significant platform for conveying China's political positions and ideologies, as noted by Liu (2018), China Daily exerts considerable authority and social influence. Using the engagement system as its theoretical framework, the current study performed a thorough analysis of the corpus with the support of linguistic statistical software, UAM Corpus Tool 6.2j. The study aims to address the key issues regarding the specific distribution patterns of engagement resources and how Chinese news media engages in territorial disputes in the South China Sea news reports through both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework of engagement

The AT, developed by J.R. Martin, builds on Halliday's (2014) systemic functional linguistics, expanding the analysis of interpersonal meaning at the lexical–semantic level. Martin and Rose (2008, p. 48) explained that AT

sought to investigate, describe, and expose how authors or speakers use language resources to establish their position, evaluate attitudes, construct roles, and negotiate in communication. This process seeks to align with readers or listeners who share similar views, alienate or exclude those with differing perspectives, and ultimately achieve their communicative goals. Additionally, Martin and White (2005) elucidated that AT comprises three systems: attitude, engagement, and graduation. The current study mainly uses the theoretical framework of engagement.

Stubbs (1996, p. 197) indicated that all utterances can be seen as encoded with different stances. More specifically, Martin and White's (2005) approach to engagement was influenced by Bakhtin's (1981) and Voloshinov's (1995) descriptions of the "dialogic" nature of language and incorporated their concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia into the engagement system. According to this framework, all verbal communication, whether spoken or written, is inherently "dialogic," meaning that speaking or writing always involves acknowledging, referencing, or responding to previous statements or texts while anticipating the reactions of real, potential, or imagined readers or listeners. For Bakhtin, no word or utterance exists in a vacuum; rather, every utterance is shaped by and responds to previous utterances and anticipates future responses. Meaning is created through this interaction of different voices, texts and discourses. The engagement system actually reflects the interplay of various perspectives both within and outside the text and how the author allies themselves with the reader.

Specifically, engagement is divided into monoglossia and heteroglossia: when the text contains only one voice or perspective, it is monoglossia, and when the text invokes or allows for dialogistic alternatives, it is heteroglossia. Heteroglossic resources can be further divided into two broad categories—dialogic expansion and dialogic contraction.

Dialogic contraction refers to compressing or closing the dialogic space and can be further divided into "disclaim" and "proclaim." Disclaim includes "deny," which refers to directly rejecting others' viewpoints, thereby minimizing the dialogic space, and "counter" simply does not accept others' viewpoints, often replacing them with the speaker's own perspective or limiting the proposition or viewpoint through contrastive words (e.g., "although," "yet," "however," and "but") or evaluative words (e.g., "even," "just," and "only"). Proclaim restricts propositions by referencing authoritative discussions, guiding readers to align with the authoritative viewpoint, thereby narrowing the dialogic space. Proclaim is further divided into "concur," "pronounce," and "endorse." Concur presents the current proposition as widely known or indisputable, which includes evaluative words (e.g., "naturally" and "admittedly"), rhetorical questions, and certain sentence structures (e.g., "admittedly… but…"). Pronounce inserts authoritative discourse into the current proposition while indicating the author's involvement, thereby showing the author's agreement with the authoritative discourse. These techniques include parenthetical phrases (e.g., "we can only conclude that…" and "the truth of the matter is that…") and emphatic words (e.g., "really" and "indeed"). Endorse presupposes the truth of the introduced proposition, thereby closing the dialogic space, which is often achieved through reporting verbs such as "show" and "prove." Although endorse and attribute introduce external sources, the former emphasizes the speaker's agreement with the external authoritative discourse, whereas the latter allows for the existence of external discourse without necessarily endorsing its position.

Dialogic expansion allows for the existence of alternative positions and can be divided into "entertain" and "attribute." Entertain implies expressing personal viewpoints while acknowledging that this perspective is just one among several possible positions, thereby creating an open dialogic space. There are six common ways to express this: modal verbs, modal adverbs, possibility constructions (e.g., "it is possible/likely that…"), personal viewpoints (e.g., "I suspect/think/believe that…"), assumptions based on evidence or appearance (e.g., "apparently," "it seems/appears that…," and "the research suggests that…"), and rhetorical questions. Attribute expresses

viewpoints as originating from an external voice, indicating that the speaker is prepared or willing to accept these positions, thereby expanding the dialogic space. Attribute can be divided into "acknowledge" and "distance." The former involves quoting others' words and showing a willingness to align with their stance, thereby increasing the dialogic nature of the discourse. Those expressions do not indicate the author's stance regarding the proposition. Typically, achieving attribute involves using reporting verbs like "say," "report," and "believe." The latter indicates an unwillingness to take responsibility for the quoted content. Thus, although it expands the dialogic space by introducing others' positions, this space is limited. It is most typically realized by the use of the reporting verb "claim."

2.2 Engagement and political news discourse

Ideology is the overall concept and perspective that humans hold when understanding the world and organizing and summarizing their experiences (Fowler and Kress 1979, p. 81). It is a set of ideas that form the basis of public behavior (Sinclair 1995, p. 833). When Fairclough (1989) first proposed the concept of CDA, he explicitly stated that the word "critical" aimed to reveal the underlying relations between language, power, and ideology through surface linguistic forms and make them transparent. From the perspective of CDA, language possesses ideological properties, and human language communication naturally carries specific ideologies, reflecting the values of power structures. Fowler (2013) validated that language is never a neutral medium of communication; it does not simply reflect reality but serves as a constructive mediator, helping shape and disseminate ideas and beliefs required by the power structure. This is especially true for news language. Bell (1991) emphasized that news production transforms mere articles into stories through processes such as writing, editing, and revision. These stories warrant an in-depth analysis of the viewpoints, values, and social structures they encompass. Moreover, Fairclough (1989, p. 49–51) highlighted that news discourse production exhibits one-sidedness. Unlike face-to-face language communication, news producers do not have to switch between the roles of listener and speaker. They consistently assume the role of information sender, unilaterally deciding how to present news events, such as expressing attitudes and guiding readers. These characteristics make news discourse more selective linguistically and more biased in stance, thereby making it one of the primary objects of CDA.

When applying Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to news reports, it can be concluded that news articles often incorporate multiple voices: the journalist's, quoted sources, official statements, expert commentary, and even the implied voice of the audience. These various voices interact within the news text, shaping its ideological content. For example, Van Dijk (2011) argues that the discursive strategies used in news (e.g., framing, selection of quotes) often reflect the dominant ideology, but dialogism allows for these strategies to be contested or subverted. In other words, even though a news outlet might favor one ideological perspective, the dialogism of the text means it is always engaged in a negotiation of meaning among different voices to help the news reports express their relative stance and ideology.

Based on what has been aforementioned, it can be seen that news producers commonly manipulate their views and the ideologies conveyed in news discourse. Engagement is thus frequently used in this process as news authors use it to adjust or negotiate their views or claims to persuade readers. Specifically, in the event of an international hotspot issue, when involved parties want to express positions and protect national interests through their country's news reports, engagement is indispensable in this process. For instance, Xin and Wu (2018) used AT and AntConc software to examine the reports of Chinese and American media on the Belt and Road Initiative (B&R Initiative), exploring how they utilized engagement resources to assert and disseminate their respective attitudes and stances. The study indicated that the reports from both countries preferred using dialogic expansion resources to express

their perspectives, allowing space for other diverse opinions about the B&R Initiative. Overall, all the media outlets investigated favored using modal auxiliaries as a means of dialogic expansion: entertain. Regarding the subsystem of attribution resources, Chinese media frequently cited authoritative sources, whereas American media often quoted ordinary people, both aiming to adjust the range of dialogic possibilities. For dialogic contraction resources, Chinese media used more deny resources, whereas the American media exploited counter resources. Regarding proclaim resources, Chinese media used more pronouncement resources, whereas American media preferred endorse resources. Chinese media aimed to show great positive expectations toward the B&R Initiative and negate negative attitudes, whereas American media sought to cast doubts on it. These purposes also aligned with the national interests and stances of different countries.

Furthermore, it is quite common for researchers to probe into one certain subsystem of engagement and analyze its effects thoroughly and carefully. For instance, Miao and Yang (2021) specifically explored the stance-taking function of deny (one subsystem of dialogic contraction: disclaim) in political speeches, revealing how speakers convey their thoughts and propositions to the audience. That is, how speakers effectively and subtly maintain unequal power and control relationships while making the audience agree with their perspectives. The study found that on one hand, deny resources help speakers introduce and negate other possible voices, thereby excluding other possibilities and further emphasizing their stance. On the other, deny resources also help speakers correct the audience's erroneous views, thereby establishing their authoritative position. In political speeches, by using deny as an engagement strategy, speakers can express evaluative stances such as reminding, dissuading, prohibiting, opposing, questioning, and criticizing.

From the reviewed literature, it is evident that CDA takes news discourse as one of its important objects of study, aiming to reveal the mutual construction relation between discourse and ideology (Fairclough 1995, p. 259). It seeks to uncover the relations between the subjects of verbal communication in macro-social life through micro-level linguistic analysis. This article thus adopts Bakhtin's (1986, p. 67) definition of utterance, considering an utterance as a carrier of consciousness. The differences in the content of utterances, that is, in ideology, lead different voices to use specific vocabulary and grammar to convey their stances. By identifying the communicative subjects behind the utterances (whether they are the reporter's voice or someone else's) and the way these utterances appear and by analyzing the linguistic features of the content carried by each type of voice, we can clarify how the reporter skillfully uses dialog to organize the content of the discourse, convey their intended message, and subtly construct and transmit the ideology they wish to convey (Shang 2011).

Bakhtin (1981) affirmed that dialogicality is ubiquitous in our world; we came to know each other through dialog. Therefore, this study contributes to understanding how news authors engage in dialog with readers by intervening in news discourse and how their assertions are negotiated and conveyed using CDA. Reah (2005, p. 11) highlighted, "CDA method enables massive readers to develop a critical perspective by aiding them in recognizing the disparity between the information they are presented with and the actual reality." The results of this research are expected to help readers critically engage with political news discourse, enabling them to better understand the role of intervention resources in news construction and uncover the ideological significance embedded in language expressions.

3. Research Design

3.1 Data collection

This study utilized news discourses from China Daily as the corpus for CDA. Initially, keywords such as "territorial disputes," "South China Sea issue," "South China Sea," and "Ren'ai Reef" were employed to locate pertinent news reports on the official China Daily website (https://www.chinadaily.com.cn). The temporal scope was defined after January 2024, after the disputes on Ren'ai Reef had caused a new stir on this issue, and 20 relevant documents were selected. The chosen discourses encompassed various genres including news interviews, reports, and editorials. The total word count of the selected corpus is 10,815.

The South China Sea is one of the most contentious geopolitical hotspots in the world because the region is of immense strategic importance, as it is home to key shipping lanes, vast natural resources like oil and gas reserves, and vital fishing grounds. The heart of the dispute lies in sovereignty over various islands, reefs, and maritime zones, which are claimed in part or entirely by the involved nations. China's stance is central to this conflict, as it claims nearly 90% of the South China Sea through the "Nine-Dash Line," a demarcation it argues is based on historical rights. Therefore, this highly controversial issue has been selected as the subject of this study. As stated earlier, China Daily is considered representative and dependable for conducting CDA and gaining insights into China's official national perspectives regarding this issue, as it stands out as authoritative Chinese news media. The language used in China Daily offers valuable insights into how China's ideology is conveyed regarding the South China Sea territorial dispute. By strategically choosing specific words, phrases, and framing techniques, the publication significantly influences both domestic and international perceptions of the South China Sea dispute, aligning with China's broader political and ideological goals. This, in turn, reflects and reinforces China's official position on the matter.

3.2 Data annotation and analysis

This study employed a corpus tool to support quantitative analysis, specifically targeting the use of engagement resources within the constructed corpus. UAM Corpus Tool 6.2j, an open-access software available for free download at http://www.corpustool.com, is a useful tool specially designed for the linguistic annotation of visual and textual content. Due to its specialized functionality and convenience, this software is used for annotation in the quantitative analysis of news discourse. Developed by computational linguist Mick O'Donnell in 2007 and updated several times ever since, it facilitates the systematic organization of linguistic features within a corpus, significantly reducing the manual effort involved in coding.

The process of statistically calculating the frequency of various engagement resources and the relative proportions of subsystems within the current corpus included three primary steps. First, a new corpus was established within UAM Corpus Tool 6.2j, followed by the importation of the corpus data for subsequent analysis. The second step involved adding a new annotation layer and configuring an analysis scheme to represent specific linguistic features, thereby facilitating the manual annotation process. Researchers could either use the existing scheme provided by the tool or develop and apply a custom annotation scheme suitable to their specific needs. Considering that the tool already incorporated appraisal analysis and each subsystem of AT within its built-in scheme (Figure 1), it was adequate for the current study.

The final step was also the most important one, involving conducting manual annotation to complete the statistical calculation. The tool offered two primary types of annotation processes: document coding and segment coding. Document coding was selected when the user intended to analyze the entire text. According to the definition given by the software, a segment was "one lexical unit that contains one relevant resource." Consequently, segment coding was used when a user wanted to manually define individual words or sentence segments within a file and personally assign specific descriptions to each segment. In this study, segment coding

was applied to count the frequency of various subsystems of engagement resources and their relative proportions. Each segment was marked as "TYPE (expansion or contraction) - category - subcategory." For instance, in the sentence "As a regional organization, ASEAN cannot and does not need to play a central role in disputes between countries," the underlined words "cannot" and "does not" were both marked as "CONTRACT-disclaim-deny," and the entire sentence was counted as two segments because it included two engagement resources. The entire annotation process took two months, with each news discourse being annotated 3–4 times to ensure objectivity and accuracy.
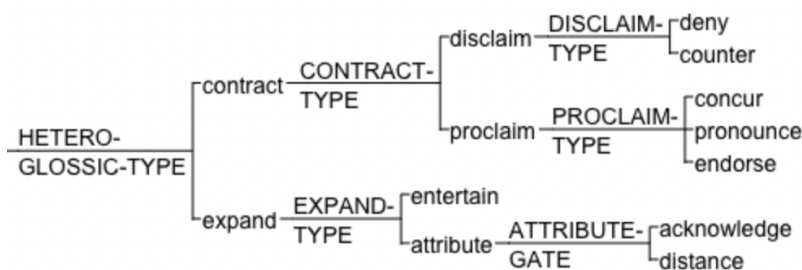

Figure 1. Theoretical Scheme of Engagement

After manual annotation, the study proceeded with data analysis, which began with comprehensively examining lexical features, including segment length and lexical complexity. Following this initial analysis, the statistical capabilities of the tool were utilized for a detailed statistical analysis of engagement resources. The results included the frequency of each category and its relative subcategories, as well as their overall proportions. Each category appearing in the annotation scheme was systematically counted and analyzed. Furthermore, by utilizing the tool's lexis function, it was possible to identify high-frequency words linked to different engagement resources along with their concordances. This investigative process entailed computing the frequency of all words in the corpus, identifying high-frequency attitude words, and presenting example concordance lines to reveal appropriate examples at a detailed level.

The concept of discourse in the present study is grounded in the explanations provided by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 1), where discourse is understood as a specific manner of discussing and interpreting the world. This paper therefore draws on this social constructionist approach to discourse, with particular emphasis on CDA (Fairclough 1992, 1995). A central feature of CDA approach is the assumption that language is not neutral. Therefore, drawing upon Appraisal Theory, particularly the framework of engagement resources, this paper aims to reveal how different subsystems of engagement resources are realized through various CDA strategies. Furthermore, Wodak and Meyer (2001) contend that CDA does not focus on examining linguistic units per se; rather, it seeks to explore complex social phenomena. However, CDA typically commences with textual analysis, namely what Fairclough (1995) terms "description" phase in his famous three-dimensional framework for CDA analysis. Following this, the analysis progresses to establish systematic connections between discourse structures and ideological frameworks (Van Dijk 1995, p. 143). This is also the "interpretation" and "explanation" in Fairclough's (1995) framework regarding the social dimensions of discourse. Consequently, a systematic approach to CDA concerning the engagement resources utilized in the news discourses of China Daily must first involve an examination of linguistic patterns. It also needs to interpret and explain the text from the social perspectives, so as to explore how language resources in news reports are utilized to convey a non-neutral state-affiliated stance and how skilful use of these strategies persuades the audience to align with the media's position.

The major findings of this paper are thus divided into two main parts based on the aforementioned statements: a description of the textual features of the corpus and the case analyses of the different subsystems of engagement resources. On the one hand, the introduction of the overall lexical pattern corresponds to the description phase of Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework, as linguistic features, such as formal properties should be introduced first before the author moves on to the next dimension. As stated by Gee (2014a), discourse analysis should be concerned with not only the words used but also the patterns of those words. On the other hand, the qualitative analyses procedure aligns with the interpretation and explanation phase of the framework. The example analysis part (section 4.2-4.5) will be organized according to the various subsystems of engagement resources in order of frequency, with representative examples of high-frequency vocabulary extracted under each subsystem. Following this, these examples will be interpreted using various CDA theories, such as the Cooperative Principle (Bloor and Bloor 2013), ideological square (Van Dijk 2011) and Halliday's (2014) transitivity. The chosen concepts serve as analytical tools for understanding the underlying structures and ideologies within language use. For instance, the Cooperative Principle (Bloor and Bloor 2013) examines how conversational maxims shape meaning, while Van Dijk's (2011) ideological square explores how power and bias are encoded in discourse through both "self-presentation" and "other presentation". Halliday's (2014) transitivity framework further unpacks how actions and agents are represented in texts, shedding light on ideological positioning. The explanation of the actual effects and intentions of using these different CDA strategies will then be given after the examples are analyzed, so as to further empirically analyze the sociological effect they intend to achieve, as discourses generate representations of the world that both reflect and actively shape reality by assigning meanings to our surroundings, identities, and social relationships.

Taking advantage of both quantitative and qualitative analyses, this paper aims to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the specific distribution patterns of different engagement resources?
2. How does Chinese news media engage in territorial disputes in the South China Sea and express the stances through news reports?

4. Major Findings

4.1 Overall lexical patterns and distribution of engagement resources

According to Fairclough (1995), linguistic features of the text are to be explored in the descriptive stage first before the analyses is carried out, this section thus first introduces the lexical pattern results from UAM Corpus Tool 6.2j as shown in Table 1. According to the table, 521 lexical units contain engagement resources. Regarding the concrete content of segments, tokens and words in segments are calculated accordingly. As defined by the tool, "tokens in segments" refers to the number of tokens in all the segments, counting both words and punctuation marks," whereas "words in segments" refers to the number of words in all the segments, not counting punctuation marks. In the selected corpus, tokens in segments are 1,639, and words in segments are 1,485; this number of words accounts to 13.7% of the entire corpus, which is approximately one-seventh of the corpus. Furthermore, it can be calculated that each news discourse comprises 26.05 (521/20) segments of engagement resources. Regarding the text complexity ("the degree of difficulty or challenge presented by a written text" as given by the tool), the average word length in the current corpus is 4.98. The average number of tokens in each segment is 2.91, ranging from 1 to 16. Text complexity worth paying attention to because it plays a vital role in how meaning is

constructed in discourse. Complex texts often require readers to engage with nuanced arguments and underlying ideologies, making it essential for CDA to consider how complexity shapes reader interpretations (Gee 2014b).

Apart from the lexical patterns, the software can also assist in calculating the overall distribution of different engagement resources. These results are displayed in Table 2, which includes both the occurrence information and relative proportion of each category. Furthermore, each category of the engagement resource contains its relative subcategory or subcategories.

Table 1. Overall Lexical Patterns

Length		Text complexity	
Number of segments	521	Av. word length	4.98
Tokens in segments	1,639	Av. segment length	2.91
Words in segments	1,485	Min/Max. segment length	1/16

Table 2 exhibits that there are 521 segments in the selected news discourses that utilized engagement resources. Of these segments, 162 examples contain disclaim, making it the most frequently used resource, comprising 31.1% of the total. Proclaim is the second most common, appearing in 151 instances, which is 29.0% of the segments. Attribute is found in 124 segments, representing 23.8%. Lastly, entertain appears in 84 segments, accounting for 16.1%. Overall, contract types are used in 313 segments (60.1%), whereas expand types are used in 208 segments (39.9%). The overall distribution pattern clearly indicates that, compared to allowing dialogically alternative voices on the issue of territorial sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea, China Daily tends to significantly narrow, if not entirely close, the space for dialogue in order to assert that the journalists' position align with the nation's position firmly, and to reject the emergence of alternative perspectives.

The significance of the distribution frequency of each subcategory will now be introduced next. Disclaim plays the most crucial role based on the distribution patterns. According to Martin and White (2005), it refers to the process where a dialogic alternative is explicitly denied, replaced, or demonstrated as irrelevant or inapplicable. The highest ratio of disclaim demonstrates that China Daily is very interested in negating the Philippines' actions in the South China Sea and refuses to open a dialogic space for their actions. As opposed to disclaim, proclaim refers to the process where dialogic alternatives are addressed or confronted with authoritative authorial intervention. This often involves asserting a specific viewpoint or position concerning other possible perspectives. Instead of directly rejecting opposing positions as disclaim, proclaim limits the scope of dialog more openly. Based on the distribution results, proclaim occupies a slightly less proportion than disclaim, clearly illustrating that China Daily is also interested in expressing its stance in a comparatively softer manner. Rather than directly and strongly denying the legitimacy of the Philippines' actions in the South China Sea, China Daily also narrows the scope of dialog by expressing its stance, using degree adverbs, and citing external sources, thereby firmly protecting the country's. Regarding expand, Table 2 shows that attribute takes up the third position. This involves attributing China Daily's stance to external sources, such as direct and indirect reported speeches, which is also an important way for news discourse to express its positions. Lastly, certain words in China Daily, though indicating its positions, still allow room for other possibilities, creating space for broader discourse. This is evident in the utilization of entertain resources.

Table 2. Overall Distribution of Engagement Resources

Type	Category	Number	Frequency
Contract	Disclaim	162	31.1%
	Proclaim	151	29.0%
Expand	Attribute	124	23.8%
	Entertain	84	16.1%
	Total	521	100%

4.2 Contract: disclaim

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of disclaim resources, offering insights into how different subsystems of disclaim are choosed in the current dataset.

Table 3. Distribution of Disclaim Resources

Type	Category	Number	Frequency
Contract: Disclaim	Deny	93	57.4%
	Counter	69	42.6%
	Total	162	100%

Disclaim resources account for approximately 30% of all engagement segments, ranking as the most prevalent category. Concerning the frequencies of the two components within disclaim, Table 3 indicates that deny occurs slightly more frequently than counter, comprising 57.4% of the total 162 disclaim resources with 93 instances. Conversely, counter is observed 69 times, representing 42.6% of all disclaim resources. According to Martin and White (2005, p. 97), disclaim occurs when the textual voice positions itself in opposition to or rejects an opposing viewpoint. This pattern suggests that China Daily emphasizes disclaiming measures to firmly reject the actions of the Philippines, thereby narrowing or even closing the space for dialog when expressing its stance. In articulating this position of rejection, China Daily frequently employs absolute negation, directly using the deny resource to refute the actions taken by the Philippines in the South China Sea and to question their legitimacy. Simultaneously, the news reports also tend to use more nuanced forms of negation (counter), which leave minimal room for dialog while invoking a contrary position, all in an effort to safeguard China's international interests. Representative disclaim words sorted out by UAM Corpus Tool 6.2j include not (disclaim: Deny, 55) and however/but (disclaim: Counter, 34). The sentences selected below are typical examples to illustrate how this strategic use of language minimizes alternative viewpoints and reinforces China's narrative dominance.

(1): Therefore, the international community should persuade the Philippines to stop playing the dangerous game and, instead, return to the path of peace, cooperation, and development. The <u>"Sarajevo gunshot"</u> should **not** (disclaim: Deny) be heard in the 21st century — in Asia or elsewhere. (Manila must be warned against horrors of war. 29-03-24)

From a dialogic standpoint, deny acts as a means to present and recognize an alternative position within the dialog, ultimately to reject it (Martin and White 2005, p. 118). In Example 1, the deny resource is conveyed directly through the word "not," along with the metaphor "Sarajevo gunshot" with double quotation marks. Double quotation marks are usually considered a symbol of metaphor because they represent one entity or event in terms related to another entity, without directly stating a comparison or similarity. Here, the news reporter first compares

the action of the Philippines in the South China Sea to the "Sarajevo gunshot," a premeditated attack that triggered World War I. The use of this metaphor also implies that the news author believes that the Philippines' behavior in the South China Sea is as dangerous as the Sarajevo incident. Subsequently, the deny resource "not" and the use of the modal verb "should" fully express the news author's completely negative stance on this behavior, closing the space for further negotiating the danger of the Philippines' actions. Furthermore, according to the head–tail principle (Renkema and Schubert 2018), the closer the information is placed to the left (head) or the right (tail), the more significant, prominent, and foregrounded it becomes. Example 1 is selected from the end of the whole news report, and the head–tail principle is thus used here to help emphasize and foreground the denial stance of the Chinese news report, highlighting the warning of Chinese news media. The news reporter thus indicates a firm misalignment with the view of the Philippines with the help of the deny resource, thereby narrowing the space for dialog and conveying its point of view resolutely.

(2): The top priority is to properly handle and control the current maritime situation. The existing disputes should be resolved through consultation between Beijing and Manila. China has always been committed to that. **However** (disclaim: counter), if the Philippines misjudges the situation, insists on going its own way, or even colludes with malicious external forces to continue causing trouble and chaos in the South China Sea, China will respond resolutely to safeguard its rights in accordance with the law. (The Philippines risks being burned by playing with fire. 25-03-24)

(3): China is willing to properly resolve disputes through dialog and negotiation with the Philippines. **However** (disclaim: counter), the Philippines, acting in bad faith, has attempted to illegally send construction materials to its "grounded" military vessel on Ren'ai Reef to reinforce it into permanent facilities. The spokesman stressed that China will not remain passive. (China urges the Philippines to stop all intrusions at Ren'ai Reef. 25-03-24)

Counter includes formulations where the current proposition is presented in a way that replaces a proposition, thereby "countering" the anticipated alternative (Martin and White 2005, p. 120). Example 2 first illustrates that China has been dedicated to solving the territorial disputes with the Philippines through consultation by mentioning that "China has always been committed to that." Subsequently, counter appears with the word "however," followed by the adverbial clause of condition "if the Philippines misjudges the situation…." Here, the word "insist" is worth paying attention to because it incorporates the presupposition that China Daily considers that the Philippines keeps on going the wrong way and is misjudging the situation now. The word "however" thus helps form a pair of opposite national images between China and the Philippines. The same applies to Example 3, where China is first depicted as "is willing to properly resolve disputes through dialog and negotiation," whereas the Philippines is portrayed as "acting in bad faith" and "attempting to illegally send construction materials." This pair of comparison in the present examples aligns well with what Van Dijk (2011) referred to as an "ideological square," which describes how in-groups and out-groups are depicted in discourse, typically represented by the ideological pronouns "us" and "them." Both the "positive self-presentation" of China and the "negative other presentation" of the Philippines are illustrated in Examples 2 and 3, along with the counter representative "however" to emphasize this comparison. The distinction between Us (China) and Them (the Philippines) is clearly illustrated in this way. The engagement resource is thus used here to help form a more explicit pair of comparisons, thereby creating a better national image of China.

4.3 Contract: proclaim

To further analyze how proclaiming language is used within the dataset, Table 4 displays the distribution of proclaim resources, highlighting how linguistic patterns serve to constrain the range of dialogic alternatives within the ongoing discourse.

Table 4. Distribution of Proclaim Resources

Type	Category	Number	Frequency
Contract: proclaim	Pronounce	78	51.7%
	Endorse	43	28.5%
	Concur	30	19.8%
	Total	151	100%

According to Table 2, the proclaim resource is the second most frequent resource in China Daily, accounting for 151 (29.0%) items of all engagement resources. Table 4 shows that the distribution of subsystems within engagement resources in China Daily is unbalanced. First, Pronounce accounts for the highest proportion (51.7%), appearing 78 times. Endorse ranks second, accounting for 28.5% with 43 occurrences. Concur has the least proportion (19.8%), appearing 30 times in the selected corpus. By presenting the proposition as highly justifiable, the proclaiming textual voice opposes, suppresses, or excludes alternative perspectives (Martin and White 2005, p. 98). The relatively high ratio of proclaim resources indicates that China Daily also frequently limits the dialogic space through affirmative approaches or emphatic tones. The news reports tend to express their stance by emphasizing the nature of the Philippines' actions and the issue of ultimate sovereignty over the South China Sea. Alternatively, they retrieve the propositions from external sources, such as speeches by Chinese Ministry spokespeople, to underline the indisputable nature of China's position on the South China Sea issue. Additionally, the news authors attempt to build a dialog with readers to reach a consensus, aligning their stance with that of the readers to create a connection effect. Typical words illustrating proclaim include urge (proclaim: Pronounce, 16), based on/in line with (Pronounce: Endorse, 11), and indisputable/inevitable (proclaim: concur, 9). Below are the examples to illustrate how China Daily unequivocally emphasize the sovereignty of the South China Sea and discredit the Philippines' actions. This further reinforces a narrative that leaves little room for counterarguments or alternative interpretations.

(4): Beijing **urges** (proclaim: pronounce) Manila to act with caution (26-03-24)

(5): Defense spokesman **urges** (proclaim: pronounce) the Philippines to stop infringements around the reef (25-03-24).

(6): China **urges** (proclaim: pronounce) the Philippines to stop all intrusions at Ren'ai Reef (24-03-24).

(7): Beijing **urges** (proclaim: pronounce) respect in the South China Sea dispute (13-03-24).

The Pronounce category includes formulations that feature the author's emphases or direct interventions (Martin and White 2005, p. 127). Van Dijk (2013), when elaborating on the framework for analyzing news discourse, elucidated that the headline and subtitle can summarize the news discourse and clarify its macrostructure. This reflects the traditional semantic function view of news headline analysis, which holds that the news headline is the

highest level of the news discourse, representing the macroproposition of the entire discourse and having the strongest semantic relevance to the news discourse (Van Dijk 2013). In addition to semantic functions, Iarovic and Amel (1989) highlighted that news headlines also contain pragmatic functions, the main of which is to draw readers' attention to the content or essence of the news discourse. News headlines also have multiple speech functions, such as urging, warning, and providing information. Consequently, news headlines play an important role in enabling the news media to convey its stances to readers. Examples 4–7 are the news headlines selected from the corpus. In the current corpus, the word "urge" appears six times in the news headlines, accounting for 30% of all 20 pieces of news. In this way, Chinese news media wants to convey its stance to readers, emphasizing that the Philippines' current actions in the South China Sea are incautious. Thus, it argues that the Philippines should stop their improper behavior and respect China's interests. This emphasis is placed at the forefront of the news reports, thereby closing the dialog space and informing readers from the outset that the Philippines' actions are deemed reckless and disrespectful, even before they start reading the main body of the news.

(8): Commenting on the news, Wang said that China's activities in the regions are **in line with** (proclaim: Endorse) both domestic and international laws and are beyond reproach. "By contrast, it is the US that has traveled all the way to China's doorstep to form exclusive circles, flex its muscles, and make provocations," Wang said. (The Philippines urged not to disrupt peace. 14-03-24)

(9): The return of sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao to China is an important part of the post-war international order, and the relevant disputes in the South China Sea involve both territorial and maritime demarcation. The settlement of territorial issues **is mainly based on** (proclaim: endorse) the relevant international laws governing the ownership of land territory. (The way ahead for the construction of rules in the South China Sea. 28-03-24)

The term "endorse" refers to formulations that attribute propositions to external sources that are accurate, valid, and indisputable (Martin and White 2005, p. 126). In Example 8, Wang refers to Wang Wenbin, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, whose statements can be regarded as representative of the official Chinese stance. According to Wang, China's actions in the South China Sea are valid enough by endorsing certain external voices, which are domestic and international laws in the current news. Therefore, the authorial voice establishes a dialogic relationship of alignment with the contents of the law. In Example 9, the settlement of territorial issues is also construed by the author as warrantable by referring to "the relevant international laws governing the ownership of land territory". Furthermore, according to Van Leeuwen (2008), legitimate power can be confirmed in the invocation of specific social customs, laws, or rules, a process called the Authorization discursive legitimate strategy. The legitimate nature of China's actions is thus verified strongly in the current examples, as they align with authoritative law articles, including both Chinese domestic laws and international laws. Consequently, it is evident that, through the use of endorse resources, the news writers aim to construe the proposition "China's actions in the South China Sea are legitimate" as proven by authorities. In this context, the internal voice of China Daily links the proposition mainly to Chinese authoritative form of expression and law regulations in the chosen examples, rather than from any non-Chinese voice. Consequently, the act of endorse functions to create a heteroglossic backdrop that accommodates aligning viewpoints regarding the proposition that China's actions as "beyond reproach" and limits any further questioning of their legitimacy.

(10): We **have every reason** (proclaim: concur) to believe that with the concerted efforts of regional countries, the South China Sea issue will **surely** (proclaim: concur) be settled. This is the **inevitable** (proclaim: concur) trend of our times. (United States accused of "causing turbulence" in the South China Sea. 29-03-24)

(11): Manila's questioning of the 10-dash line is worth questioning. China's historical rights in the South China Sea are **indisputable** (proclaim: concur). As Beijing has repeatedly reiterated, China was the first country to discover, name, explore, and exploit the islands in the South China Sea, or Nanhai Zhudao, and the relevant waters, as well as the first nation to exercise sovereign rights and jurisdiction over them continuously and effectively. (Manila should respect the historical facts and pursue a reasonable course. 18-03-24)

The "concur" category includes expressions that clearly show the speaker agreeing with or sharing the same understanding as a potential dialogic partner (Martin and White 2005, p. 122). In news reports, dialog is usually conveyed between the news reporters and the readers. Hence, concur is preferred by news reporters to establish consensus with readers, thereby conveying their point of view successfully by describing them as common sense shared by both sides. Furthermore, according to Renkema and Schubert (2018), topic identification can be accomplished through three main linguistic methods, with word frequency being the most effective. That is, the main idea of a given text is likely to be repeated several times and thus becomes foregrounded. In Example 10, concur resources occur thrice in one single paragraph. This high frequency illustrates that one important topic of the news report is to reach a consensus between news writers and readers that the South China Sea issue can be resolved. In Example 11, the key topic, namely, whether Manila's questions about the South China Sea issue are worth questioning, is also foregrounded, but this time by directly placing it at the beginning of the whole paragraph. The concur resource then shows up in the following sentence with the word "indisputable." However, merely mentioning that "Manila is worth questioning" and that China's rights are "indisputable" still seems confusing and less convincing to readers, as there is insufficient information for them to understand the whole picture. It flouts Grice's quantity maxim of the Cooperative Principle (Bloor and Bloor 2013), which clearly mentions that the conversational contribution should be as informative enough as is required. The news reporter thus starts a new series of sentences to introduce the historical relationship between China and the South China Sea, providing enough information to persuade readers and strengthen the agreement between the news writers and their audience. In the selected two examples, information management measures and conversational implicatures are well utilized by the news media to help support the concur resource and make the dialog between the two sides more irrefutable, guiding readers to form the judgments expected by the news media.

4.4 Expand: attribute

Table 5 elaborates on the distribution of attribution resources within the engagement system, providing a detailed examination of how different external voices are utilized by Chinese news media.

Table 5. Distribution of Attribute Resources

Type	Category	Number	Frequency
	Acknowledge	108	87.1%
Expand: Attribute	Distance	16	12.9%
	Total	124	100%

Table 5 exhibits that there are 124 attribute segments. Among them, 108 examples contain Acknowledge, which is the most frequent, and the overwhelming category of attribute. The corresponding proportion for Acknowledge is 87.1%, representing nearly 90% of all segments. Additionally, there is a small section of Distance (16 segments), which accounts for 12.9% of the frequency. By framing the proposition as based on the subjectivity of an external voice, the journalist acknowledges and invokes dialogic alternatives, suggesting that the proposition is merely one among a range of possible positions. (Martin and White 2005, p. 98). Judging from the distribution patterns, it can be concluded that regarding attribute, *China Daily* favors associating propositions within the news discourse with external voices to enhance the authority and credibility of the news, thereby hiding the journalist's own stance (Reisigl and Wodak 2016). Moreover, the news also alienates China, although not so frequently, from the Philippines to draw a clear distinction between different stances. The attribute words that frequently occur are exemplified by *says/said* (Attribute: acknowledge, 37) and *claim* (attribute: distance, 8). Example sentences containing these mentioned terms illustrate how the newspaper balances acknowledgment with occasional distancing, navigating the tension between openness to dialogic alternatives and reinforcing its preferred narrative, a strategy that subtly shapes reader perception by presenting the discourse as both authoritative and critically evaluative.

(13): "For some time, in disregard of the facts, the US provoked confrontation, backed up the Philippines, threatened and exerted pressure on China citing the so-called bilateral treaty, and sent military vessels to the South China Sea to stir up troubles," **he said** (attribute: acknowledge). (The US accused of "causing turbulence" in South China Sea. 29-03-24)

(14): It seriously violates the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the Philippines' own commitments, **Chen said** (attribute: acknowledge), adding that such actions also infringe upon China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests while undermining regional peace and stability. (Beijing urges Manila to act with caution. 26-03-24)

"Acknowledge" refers to those locutions where there is no overt indication as to where the writer's/reporter's voice stands with respect to the proposition. It is the domain of reporting verbs (Martin and White 2005, p. 112). In Example 13, "he" refers to Chinese Senior Colonel Wu Qian. This verbal-process clause (Halliday 2014) thus applies the perspectivization strategy (Reisigl and Wodak 2016) because it quotes the words from certain experts, thereby making the news more convincing. Regarding the quotation form, the news uses direct quotations with double quotation marks to report what Wu said, consisting of four parallel short sentences. In all four sentences, the US is the upper theme that is involved in four parallel material-process clauses, which are clauses containing processes typically construe some kind of unfolding and dynamic physical actions according to Halliday (2014). The US acts as the agent influencing several goals, such as "provoking confrontation," "backing up the Philippines," "threatening China," and "sending vessels to the South China Sea" in these parallel short sentences. All these material-process clauses are in the rheme position; thus, they are treated as "new information" rather than "given information" and are clearly conveyed to the news readers and become foregrounded with the help of this staging strategy (Renkema and Schubert 2018). The same perspectivization strategy (Reisigl and Wodak 2016) also applies to Example 14, where Chen refers to Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong. In this instance, the Acknowledge resource is presented from a third-person perspective. This indirect quotation conceals the journalist's positioning (Reisigl and Wodak 2016), enhancing the objectivity of the news report. Using expert sources is a key transparency strategy that helps journalists present their reports as objective and trustworthy,

thereby reducing potential reporter bias (Vos and Craft 2017). Here, Chen evaluates the Philippines' actions of sending construction materials to Ren'ai Reef as violating certain common senses, thereby utilizing the Authorization discursive delegitimate strategy (Van Leeuwen 2008) to further deny the reasonableness of the Philippines' actions. With the help of Acknowledge resources, the news authors, without showing own stances overtly, can still express views and lead news readers through reporting other people's words.

(15): The Philippines **claims** (attribute: distance) that China "interferes with its navigation rights and endangers the health of personnel on the grounded warship." These all reflect the Philippines' attempt to illegally stay in Chinese territory. The Philippines' activities have not only severely damaged the political mutual trust between the two sides but also destroyed the good atmosphere for China and ASEAN countries to accelerate consultations on the COC. (Construction materials to Ren'ai Reef shows the Philippines' treachery. 23-03-24)

(16): Although the Philippines has continued to carry out maritime provocations, it has not achieved its goal. Under such circumstances, the Philippines has **claimed** (attribute: distance) that it will once again file an international lawsuit against China for damaging the marine environment in the South China Sea. In view of China's position that it "does not accept any claims and actions based on arbitral awards," it is foreseeable that no matter what kind of public opinion and legal packaging the Philippines uses, it will definitely face strong countermeasures. (Provocations at sea: the Philippines' intention and approach. 13-03-24)

"Distance" refers to techniques where the author's voice is deliberately separated from the material being attributed (Martin and White 2005, p. 113). In Example 15, the distance resource "claim" in the first sentence occurs together with the subject "The Philippines" in the theme position, and the rheme is an accusation against China with a direct quotation from what the Philippines has said. The rheme of the first sentence then becomes the theme of the second, and the new rheme is about the Philippines' evil attempt. Again, the rheme of the second sentence becomes the theme of the third, and this time, the rheme is a detailed description of the adverse effects of the Philippines' activities, such as "damaging political trust" and "destroying the good political atmosphere." This thematic progression pattern, according to Renkema and Schubert (2018), is called the simple linear progression, in which the rheme of a sentence becomes the theme of the following sentence. It can help the author to put forward the information in a sequential way and make the whole information flow more naturally. Another thematic progression pattern is used in Example 16. The first sentence comprises two subclauses that have the same theme "the Philippines." The first clause introduces the maritime provocations carried out by it, and the second clause describes the effect of this action. In the context of the information provided in the first sentence, the second sentence uses distance resources to distinguish the Philippines' next actions in the South China Sea from China's own position while also choosing "the Philippines" as the theme. This is another main type of thematic progression pattern according to Renkema and Schubert (2018), which is called the continuous theme pattern. It can bring enough information about the same topic, which is "the Philippines" in the current example. China's stance is conveyed at the end of the whole news paragraph. Distance resources, with the help of different information management measures, are used by the news reporter to clearly differentiate China's actions from those of the Philippines or even put them in opposition. In this way, the news discourses show the harmful and doomed consequences of the Philippines' actions at a distance and demonstrate China's firm stance of opposing the Philippine's illegal actions on the South China Sea issue.

4.5 Expand: entertain

The term "entertain" refers to expressions where the author's voice suggests that their position is just one among many possible viewpoints, thereby creating a dialogic space for a range of possibilities (Martin and White 2005, p. 104). Table 2 exhibits that entertain resources, although not so frequent, still account for 16.1% of all the engagement resources, occurring 84 times. Seeing from the concrete concordances, it can be concluded that the entertain resources are used overwhelmingly to describe the fact that if the Philippines continues to take illegal actions in the South China Sea, the current situation may deteriorate further. However, Chinese media only highlights the possibility of such deterioration, leaving the corresponding dialogic space for the judgment of the future situation. Typical examples containing high-frequency words *may/seem/believe* (attribute: entertain, 18) are given below. By highlighting the possibility of negative consequences without asserting them as certainties, the use of entertain resources shifts the burden of judgment onto the reader. This tactic encourages the reader to internalize the implied risks, reinforcing China's stance without overtly imposing it.

(17): "We warn the Philippines to cease making any statements that **may** (attribute: entertain) escalate tensions and stop all acts of encroachment. If the Philippines continues to challenge China's bottom line, China will continue to take resolute measures to firmly defend its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests," the spokesman said. (China urges the Philippines to stop all intrusions at Ren'ai Reef. 24-03-24)

Example 17 is a direct quotation from a Chinese Ministry spokesman, which can well represent the stance of the Chinese government. The spokesman, in his speech, chooses the inclusive pronoun "we" instead of exclusive pronouns, such as "I," to express the warning to the Philippine government. According to Van Dijk (2011), the pronoun "we" serves a special function in creating a social and political space where the speaker, the audience, and others are positioned. It is also one of the principal ways in which politicians position themselves together with their listeners. The spokesman, taking advantage of this linguistic technique, places himself together with every listener of his speech by using the pronoun "we" and assumes an internal consensus that his warning is Chinese people's warning. At the same time, he still leaves room for his assumptions of the Philippines' behavior with the entertain resource in that it "may" escalate tensions, rather than certainly escalating tensions. Thus, there is still room for future negotiations. Furthermore, according to the attitude resource framework, which is also one important component of Martin and White's (2005) AT, the attitudes of an entity can be conveyed through Tenacity, one subcategory of attitude resources showing how dependable or resolute people are. The spokesman, in the latter part of his speech, gives an example of one of the worst assumptions and indicates with Tenacity resource words "resolute" and "firmly," strongly showing China's stance in defending its maritime rights and interests, as well as territorial sovereignty. In this way, different possibilities for the future are reserved for the South Sea disputes. At the same time, the Chinese government has also firmly stated its position if things choose to get worse.

(18): There is a saying that "listen to his words and watch his deeds." If the Philippines continues to disregard its national reputation, saying one thing and doing another, then not only China but also regional countries and the international community have reason to **believe** (attribute: entertain) that "political commitment" is no longer a credible option among Philippine diplomatic tools. (Provocations at sea: the Philippines' intention and approach, 13-03-24)

In Example 18, the news reporter first uses one well-known fixed expression, namely, the saying "listen to his words and watch his deeds." Aristotle examined the use of stock phrases as crucial in oratory. These are concise, established expressions that become familiar to an audience and typically evoke specific emotional responses through association (Bloor and Bloor 2013). The news reporter, by using this well-known stock phrase, also wants to evoke the association between the Philippines' behaviors and the saying, thereby portraying the conflicting image of the Philippines' inconsistency between words and actions. Then, the entertain resource word "believe" creates a certain dialogic space for the news reporter to depict the Philippines' national image as one that does not keep political promises. However, the news reporter, by adding more linguistic contexts to the description, still wants to guide news readers to make the judgments they want. As mentioned in Example 17, pronouns, especially "we," are one important linguistic technique for the speaker to align himself or herself with the listeners. This alignment can also be described more directly with a wider range of people, which is shown in Example 18. Here, the Philippines is described by the reporter as one country that ignores political commitment because it is currently "saying one thing and doing another." This consensus also extends to the nation of China as a whole, even regional countries and the whole international community. In this way, the news reporter wants to directly put the stance of the news media together with the larger-scope international community, making the news more provocative and encouraging more readers to empathize with, and possibly agree with, the portrayal of the Philippines' national image in the report.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As Bakhtin (1981, p. 426) stated, we understand the world through dialog. Broadly speaking, dialog is not just direct face-to-face verbal exchanges between people but also includes any form of verbal communication. It is a response to or assertion about things, made with the expectation of possible replies or opposition, and it seeks support (Voloshinov 1995, p. 139). Therefore, dialog is ubiquitous. When speakers or authors express their viewpoints, they are always agreeing or disagreeing, responding or suggesting, and accepting or challenging others' words. They engage with differing viewpoints by using various adjustment strategies (White 2002). The present study thus aims to explore the engagement function of linguistics resources in political news discourse, revealing how news reporters convey ideas and propositions to readers, gaining their agreement and trust while effectively and subtly maintaining this inherently unequal control relationship.

Research Question 1 is what the specific distribution patterns of different engagement resources are in the current corpus. According to the statistical analysis of the distribution pattern produced by UAM Corpus Tool 6.2j, it could be concluded that China Daily collaboratively adopted both expand and contract resources, with contract being used slightly more frequently than expand. The categories and subcategories of engagement resources could also all be found in the news discourses. Regarding the detailed distribution pattern, Contract: Disclaim is the most used resource. It occurs 162 times, taking up approximately one-third (31.1%) of all the engagement resources. As for the subcategories of disclaim, deny (57.4%) is slightly more used than counter (42.6%), with occurrences of 93 times and 69 times, respectively. The second most frequent engagement resource is contract: Proclaim, which accounts for 29.1% of the corpus, occurring 151 times. Similar to Contract: Disclaim, each subcategory of proclaim also has an unbalanced distribution pattern. Pronounce is the most used subcategory in China Daily, and it takes up slightly more than half of all the proclaim resources (78 out of 151 instances, 51.7%). Endorse ranks second (43 instances, 28.5%), and concur is the least (30 instances, 19.8%). Expand: attribute is the third preferred one, appearing 124 times and taking up 23.8% of all the engagement resources. It contains two subcategories, namely,

Acknowledge and distance. Acknowledge is overwhelmingly preferred by Chinese news media, occupying the most proportion (108 out of 124 instances, 87.1%), whereas distance constitutes a small portion with only 16 segments. Lastly, there is a tiny fraction of expand: Entertain, with only 60 segments, constituting 16.1%. The specific patterns reflect cultural and institutional priorities. The preference for contract: disclaim and proclaim aligns with a top-down, authoritative communication style often associated with state-controlled media. The overwhelming reliance on acknowledge over distance under attribute may reflect a strategic effort to balance apparent objectivity with controlled messaging. The relatively low use of entertain resources suggests limited openness to uncertainty or reader interpretation.

Research Question 2 is about how Chinese news media engages in territorial disputes in the South China Sea and expresses their stances. From the example analysis session of each category and subcategory, it could be concluded that both dialogic contraction and dialogic expansion are often used by Chinese news media to express China's firm position on the South China Sea issue. At the same time, it also denies the rationality of the actions taken by the Philippines in the South China Sea and reminds the Philippines to pay attention to its own military actions in this highly disputable region. To explain in detail, the relatively high proportion of disclaim shows the fact that China Daily, on behalf of the stance of the Chinese government, has an opposite attitude to the Philippines' actions in the South China Sea as it tends to adopt denouncing voices. This is also the most preferred stance of China regarding this issue. Specifically speaking, the largest proportion of linguistic resources is used to deny the rationality of the Philippines' actions (disclaim: Deny). At the same time, China Daily is keen to portray China and the Philippines as different, even opposed to each other in the South China Sea dispute (disclaim: Counter). Contrarily, proclaim resources are always used by Chinese news media to protect China's own national interests. First, China Daily often uses its reports to express the Chinese government's firm position on the South China Sea issue, that is, to urge the Philippines to confront and actively resolve the dispute through peaceful means (proclaim: Pronounce). Additionally, China Daily often quotes international legal provisions (proclaim: Endorse) to legitimize the actions of the Chinese government and increase the authority and credibility of the legitimate actions of the Chinese government to show that China has indisputable sovereignty over the territory under its jurisdiction in the South China Sea. Chinese news also uses degree adverbs or adjectives that express a firm position to directly clarify one's position (proclaim: Concur), narrowing the space for dialog and thus leading news readers to follow its thoughts. However, China Daily has not completely closed the space for dialog. Certain possibilities are still retained for the future resolution of this disputable issue. On the one hand, news reporters use the quotes of certain Chinese experts (attribute: Acknowledge) to convey their own thoughts to make the positioning of the journalist invisible to arouse readers' imagination about this issue. The main connection to dialogic theory can be listed in the following two facets. First, dialogic theory values the exchange of diverse voices to promote understanding and reflection (Bakhtin 1981). By using expert quotes, journalists attribute specific perspectives to authoritative sources, which aligns with the dialogic principle of creating space for different voices in a conversation. Second, the journalist's effort to make their stance "invisible" enables readers to engage more actively with the material, fostering a sense of dialogue. This aligns with dialogic theory's emphasis on decentralizing control over the conversation (Bakhtin 1981, 1986), allowing the audience to interpret and imagine freely. However, in conveying the Philippine side's position, Chinese media chooses to keep a distance by using verbs such as "claim" (attribute: Distance). News readers can thus infer more information related to the expression of Chinese stances using different verbs, thus expanding the space for dialog in a more linguistically intricate way. Lastly, China Daily also uses euphemistic means, such as the use of modal verbs (Entertain), to remind the Philippines not to further worsen the situation, while also leaving open the possibility of an expected improvement in the future.

The selection of dialogic content is not merely an indication of knowledge regarding reported events, but more

significantly, it reflects journalists' dialogical positioning relative to the sources presented in news texts. Broadly, the research findings suggest that China Daily tends to align its stance with official sources, while limiting the representation of alternative perspectives to some degree. According to Esarey (2006), state-controlled media in China play a significant role in shaping public perception by limiting exposure to critical viewpoints. This creates a one-dimensional understanding of domestic and international issues, making it harder for citizens to access balanced or diverse information. Public opinion, in turn, becomes more aligned with the government's narrative due to a lack of exposure to alternative sources. Furthermore, this journalistic stance is shaped by both the socio-political values of Chinese society and the professional beliefs surrounding news reporting in the Chinese context. On the one hand, the primary objective of news production, particularly for Party-affiliated newspapers, is to disseminate the socio-political values endorsed by the government (Tong 2009). As a result, China Daily must prioritize topics deemed newsworthy by the government. This necessitates that Chinese journalists adhere to distinct criteria for news values in news production, namely political propaganda for China Daily, in order to emphasize socio-political values promoted by the Chinese government (Zhao 2008). On the other hand, the professional beliefs of journalists, which are heavily shaped by the relationship between news institutions and the government, have also significantly influenced their journalistic stance toward official sources. Chinese journalists working for Party-affiliated papers, such as China Daily, enjoy privileged access to official sources and events. In their interactions with these official sources, the latter seeks to promote state-affiliated political ideology. The negotiation of relationships between power elites and the press is central to the expression of professional beliefs and the development of journalistic stances. Throughout this process, Chinese journalists have tended to align themselves with the interests of the power elites. This dynamic partly explains why Chinese journalists view official sources as less open to negotiation and more contractive in dialogue.

In summary, the present research examines the engagement resources employed by China Daily concerning the issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea. By adopting Martin and White's (2005) theoretical framework of engagement resources from AT, this research explores both typical engagement methods conveyed in China Daily's news discourses and the distribution pattern of different kinds of engagement resources. The overall information is that what the Philippines is doing on the South China Sea issue is wrong, whereas what China is doing is a reasonable and lawful measure to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The expression of this position also mainly uses dialogic contraction to express the steadfastness of China's position and close the space for negotiating other potential stances. Furthermore, China Daily tends to remind the Philippines that its actions may have serious consequences to maintain a different position from the Philippines on the South China Sea dispute. In conveying this message, Chinese news media chooses to preserve the space for dialog and adopts a positive attitude toward the solution of this problem in the future through dialogic expansion. China Daily comprehensively uses various means of engagement when discussing the controversial issue of the South China Sea. It firmly expresses China's position, reminds the Philippines of the seriousness of the issue, and reserves various possibilities for future development to comprehensively convey various messages and better serve China's national interests. This journalistic stance and selection of engagement methods are also closely related to the social-political values of Chinese government and the profession beliefs of the journalists that are deeply influenced by the relationship between news media and Chinese government. By addressing the ideological aspects of news, the author also shows a clear positioning in relation to how political discourse should be analyzed—highlighting an active, critical role for readers rather than a passive acceptance of presented information. This suggests that the author believes in empowering readers to recognize the potential for political manipulation in media, a belief likely shaped by their own experiences and worldview.

Dialogicality is an essential attribute of news discourse. The objectivity of news discourse does not depend on

the traditional sense of factual objectivity but mainly on the abundance of heterogeneous voices in the discourse and the dialogical relationship between them (Shang 2011). By introducing as many heteroglossic voices as possible, news discourse is constructed as a venue for negotiation and struggle among multiple stakeholders, highlighting the status of news media as objective and authoritative information disseminators. At the same time, through manipulating the way and order in which voices appear and using lexical and grammatical resources, especially various verbs, adverbs, and modal verbs, news discourse also subtly constructs and conveys the ideology it upholds. Therefore, the critical reading awareness of news readers must be strengthened so that they can maintain independent judgment ability when reading. As Reah (2005:11) suggested, the CDA method converts ordinary readers into critical readers by helping them identify the gap between the information they receive and the actual reality. This ability to critically analyze and question media content rather than passively consuming it (Van Dijk 2017), namely what Kellner and Share (2007) has called "critical media literacy", is actually essential and necessary for news readers. Without such critical engagement, audiences risk accepting biased representations of reality that serve to reinforce existing power structures. It is hoped that the findings of the current research will more effectively demonstrate engagement methods within news discourse, thereby assisting readers in understanding and analyzing information more effectively. By adopting a critical stance towards media, individuals can become more aware of the ways in which media bias influences their perceptions of political and social realities, and how this bias serves to maintain the power of elites.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Level: Secondary