

# The Construction of Official Discourse System to Deal with Opinions of Public Emergencies

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**Abstract:** With the deepening of reform, a variety of deep-seated contradictions become increasingly prominent, social classes and interest groups begin to divide, and conflicts continue to increase in China. Based on previous studies on how to cope with public emergency in official discourse at home and abroad, this study will make an in-depth analysis of the reports on public emergency in official discourse from the perspective of cognitive framing theory, combined with the macroscopic framework of discourse analysis. Specifically, this study will explore the way metaphors and frames in the official discourse construct the ideology and convey communicative purpose, and the social expectations and warning effects, so as to put forward suggestions on strengthening public opinion guidance, communicating information with the public in the official discourse, thus enhancing the government execution and shaping government image. Moreover, this study attempts to build system of official discourse to cope with opinions on public emergency, which will enrich and promote the research in related fields.

## 1. Introduction

According to the law of the People's Republic of China on Emergency Response, an emergency refers to a natural disaster, an accident, a public health event or a social security event that occurs suddenly and causes or may cause serious social harm and requires emergency response measures. China, in the period of social transformation, is undergoing political, economic, cultural, social and other changes. With the deepening of reform, a variety of deep-seated contradictions become increasingly prominent, social classes and interest groups begin to divide, and conflicts continue to increase. China has entered a period of high incidence of emergencies. Meanwhile, with the enhancement of public awareness of democratic participation, the establishment of citizens' right to know and express in national laws, the marketization of media and the public nature and harmfulness of emergencies themselves, the public has shown strong concern about emergencies.

In recent years, official discourse research coping with public emergency response have been mainly conducted in the field of journalism, communication, sociology and so on, focusing on how the government deal with crisis by employing risk communication, issues formulation and communication strategies [1] [2]. While involving the ideological influence on public opinion in the official discourse [3], most of the studies have not attached great importance to cognitive and thinking factors in interpretation and have not considered how the underlying ideology guide the public opinions from the perspective of audience.

Based on previous studies on how to cope with public emergency in official discourse at home and abroad, this study will make an in-depth analysis of the reports on public emergency in official discourse from the perspective of cognitive framing theory, combined with the macroscopic framework of discourse analysis. Specifically, this study will explore the way metaphors and frames in the official discourse construct the ideology and convey communicative purpose, and the social expectations and warning effects, so as to put forward suggestions on strengthening public opinion guidance, communicating information with the public in the official discourse, thus enhancing the

government execution and shaping government image. Moreover, this study attempts to build system of official discourse to cope with opinions on public emergency, which will enrich and promote the research in related fields.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Lakoff, the founder of cognitive linguistics, establishes Framing Theory on the basis of the concept of frame proposed by American sociologist Goffman and linguist Fillmore. Lakoff[4] believes that audiences always use the frame, metaphor and other thinking blocks based on the body and the interaction between the body and the environment to understand discourse. Frame is usually represented by the main tools of our mental activities, such as metaphor, imagery, cultural stories and their neural connections to the emotional centers of the brain. Frame is also a kind of metaphorical thinking, which starts from narration and provides logic for our thinking and reasoning. It is dynamic, more appealing and more acceptable, and can be used to understand deep social ethical values [5]. Linguistic expressions activate frames and metaphors. Conceptual metaphors are generated when mappings are established between two frames through activated neural connections. Frames can be divided into surface frames and deep frames. The frames activated by linguistic expressions are surface frames, which mainly include metaphorical and non-metaphorical surface frames. The expressions with metaphorical thinking can be classified as the metaphorical surface frames, and the moral system and world outlook activated by the surface frames can be classified as the deep frames. When the surface frames of discourse can activate the deep frames consistent with the values of the audience, the audience will be more likely to accept the discourse.

## **3. The Model of Critical Framing Analysis of Official Discourse to Deal with Opinions of Public Emergencies**

Based on the Chinese and American reports in *China Daily* and CNN on the violent demonstrations in Hong Kong since June this year, which were triggered by opposition to the Amendment of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance, this study analyzes the surface frames and the activated deep frames in the reports and probes into the construction of the official discourse model to deal with opinions of public emergencies, explains the relationship between the reasoning process of discourse understanding and discourse, and the relationship between reasoning process and social process.

### **3.1 The Recognition and Description of the Frames in the Official Discourse to deal with Opinions of Public Emergencies**

Under the guidance of cognitive framing theory, this study attempts to explore the cognitive characteristics and operational mechanism of official discourse in the process of dealing with public emergencies. On this basis, it analyzes the thinking blocks such as frames and metaphors to understand the reasoning mechanism of discourse. This study will analyze the activated surface frames through the language expressions in discourse and the moral system or world view reflected in the deep frames, in order to grasp how official discourse of dealing with opinions on public emergencies make use of such building blocks as metaphors and frames to realize textual cohesion and coherence in that the choice of frames are consistent with the values and emotional needs of the audience to impress people, increase solidarity, reach consensus and strengthen the identity.

What follows is a sentence from a piece of news in China Daily:

E.g. 1 A chameleon can change only its color but never its skin. For an apt example, look no further than the demonstrators in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The expression “chameleons” reflects the metaphorical surface frame of the protesters as chameleons. Just as the chameleon which can change body color to suit the needs of the changing environment, the violent protesters also use various means, including adopting different patterns of behavior or remarks, to hide their real intentions. Even so, like a chameleon which cannot change

its skin, the violent protesters cannot definitely conceal their secret and ignoble ill intentions by their violent extreme actions and irresponsible remarks which has seriously abused the rule of law in Hong Kong, destroyed social order in Hong Kong, damaged the fundamental interests of Hong Kong. It can be seen that the idea of their so-called democracy and freedom is actually the challenge of the bottom line of "one country, two systems". It is, in essence, against the government and against the interests of ordinary people in Hong Kong.

E.g.2 In another piece of news Man charged with insulting the national flag, denied bail in Hong Kong, there is a picture of a burning flag with the sentence "Fires rage on a road in Tung Chung on Sept 1, 2019 as rioters sought to paralyze Hong Kong International Airport".

The word "paralyze" here embodies the conceptual metaphor that Hong Kong is a person. In combination with the human body's experience of diseases, we know that if a person's body organs are paralyzed due to diseases and other problems, it will affect the normal functioning of the body. This will lead to physical and psychological sufferings. The violent resistance in Hong Kong has plunged the society into crisis, just like the paralysis caused by disease, which has led to social unrest and greatly affected the economy, society and people's livelihood. Therefore, the use of this expression can easily arouse the audience's psychological rejection of violent actions, so as to guide public opinion and construct the public psychology. At the same time, the expression activates the deep frame of fear and anger. There is a neurotransmitter in the brain called the norepinephrine circuit, which governs negative emotions such as fear, anxiety and anger. These emotions are recorded by the somatic cortex, which produces somatic markers. [6] Therefore, the Public would be likely to establish a cognitive link between the extreme aggressive protests with fear and anger, thereby psychological rejection and resistance.

E.g. 3 The following is a report from *China Daily*:

This provides strong grounds to combat any anti-"one country, two systems" actions - especially the movement advocating Hong Kong independence.

The use of the word "combat" can make the public bring the scenes of war to the mind, so as to establish a series of mappings, including the Hong Kong violent protesters and the agitators and the enemies in the war, the government, the media, the public and the Hong Kong citizens and fighters in the war, Hong Kong and the battlefield, outstanding patriots contributing to stopping violent protests and heroes. The underlying deep frames activated by the war metaphor are collectivism, cooperation and responsibility, which are consistent with the core values in the public's mind. It shows that the central government, the SAR government, the Hong Kong people and all peace-loving Chinese and international people who uphold justice will work together to fight against lawbreakers selflessly and courageously, adhere to the basic principle of "one country, two systems" and the basic law of Hong Kong, and safeguard social stability and prosperity in Hong Kong.

In contrast, the following sentences are extracted from a report entitled *From an extradition bill to a political crisis: A guide to the Hong Kong protests* on CNN website.

E.g. 4 Hong Kong has been rocked by pro-democracy, anti-government protests for more than six months now, with escalating violence and anger on all sides. What began as peaceful mass marches has exploded into the city's biggest political crisis in modern times.

Words like "rock" and "limit" embody the metaphorical surface frame: the protests in Hong Kong are explosives. The destructive power of explosives shows that the protests in Hong Kong, like explosives, have shaken the foundation of Hong Kong society and plunged Hong Kong into a huge political crisis. Meanwhile, the word "pro-democracy" activates the deep frame of democracy and anti- democracy, in which various democratic movements in modern times and its democracy will consciously be activated in the public's brain. Therefore, the public are likely to conjure up the fact that citizens have rights of democratic decision-making, democratic supervision and other fundamental rights, which are recommended values and ideology of the modern civilized society.

Similarly, in this report, there is also the sentence:

E.g. 5 Unlike other cities in China, which are tightly governed by the authoritarian central government, Hong Kong is a semi-autonomous city with its own legal and political systems.

The words “tightly governed”, “authoritarian” activates the metaphor *China’s central government is a dictator*. According to the long-term publicity and experience of public, dictators often hold the rights in their hands, and citizens’ basic rights and interests are deprived without reason, so that the fundamental interests are completely not guaranteed, thus causing the public to have psychological aversion and rejection of the Central government.

### **3.2 The Construction of the Official Discourse Framing Model to Deal with Opinions of Public Emergencies**

This study will explain and interpret the relationship between reasoning process and discourse, and introduce a more operational metaphorical framing model. In the interpretation of the relationship between discourse and the generation, transmission and reception process, the social relationship between discourse and audience, this study qualitatively analyzes the underlying intentions and meanings from the perspective of language analysis, cognitive understanding and social context, inducing the understanding and thinking mode which form or restrict people’s belief and behavior, thus formulating the framing model of “moral values - basic principles - the conceptual metaphors and deep frames in the events- metaphorical expressions and surface frames - inference-narrative role”.

Firstly, when constructing the official discourse framing model to deal with opinions of public emergencies, it is advisable to start from the moral values, such as the traditional Chinese culture of “harmony”, socialist core values; Next, it is expected to follow its basic principles, such as harmonious coexistence and inclusive symbiosis to dig into the deep frames hidden in discourse, such as collectivism and sense of responsibility, and the corresponding conceptual metaphors. Then they are expressed through the concrete surface frames and metaphorical expressions. All the expressions are in conformity with a certain inference that the Chinese government, as a democratic government under the rule of law, has always been in line with the principle of seeking the welfare of the people and the development of the country to enhance the capacity of national governance. All the expressions also meet a certain narrative role that the Chinese Central Government has always focused on Hong Kong’s political stability, economic development, prosperous culture, and has been concerned about the well-being of the people’s livelihood by seeking positive constructive solutions to the problems existing in the development process. This model constructed in response to official discourse system to deal with public emergency helps to broaden the field of research of the cognitive framing theory, enhance the credibility and appeal of the official discourse through employing stories and metaphors conforming with the traditional moral concepts and ideology of the Chinese nation to create a unique expressive system, the vocabulary and concept system. Moreover, this study carries forward the core socialist values, creatively set up topics based on the values, optimize the communication strategies of official discourse in response to opinions on public emergencies, thus gaining the understanding, support and conscious recognition of the public and building the image of a friendly, efficient, responsible, cooperative and legal government.

### **3.3 The Social Interpretation of Official Discourse to Deal with Opinions of Public Emergencies**

There is a dialectical relationship between the surface frames of discourse and the social structure. On the one hand, the surface frames reflect the social structure and is limited by it. On the other hand, discourse is constructive in social sense [7], so the surface frames can be constructed in social sense through the deep frames, and power relations can be established, maintained and changed.

Through the analysis of the above news reports in China Daily and CNN, it can be seen that the surface frames of discourse are different, and the deep frames activated also show differences, which in the final analysis reflects the differences in their respective moral values and ideologies. Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China, and Hong Kong affairs are purely China's internal affairs. Therefore, relevant Chinese news reports reflect China's traditional spirit of harmony, inclusiveness, cooperation and collectivism. We should properly resolve differences among various parties, restore normal order in Hong Kong society and maintain prosperity and

stability in Hong Kong in line with the principle of consultation and democracy. However, news reports in the United States are full of accusation of the Chinese government and the irresponsible slogans to embolden the illegal violent protesters. The so-called pro-democracy slogans are in fact gross interference in internal affairs of Hong Kong and China, which is the manifestation of the longstanding priority of the United States, accounting for its deliberate use of defacing and distort remarks to cover up the truth, so as to win for himself a favorable position in the international publicity and damage the international image of China. This reflects the relationship between the interpretive reasoning process of discourse and the social process. The use of the frame is essentially dependent on the moral model, which, as a tool for analyzing ideology, can explain the reason for choosing a specific frame in the context of discourse in response to public emergencies.

#### 4. Conclusion

Choosing reported violent protests of Hong Kong in *China Daily* and CNN as the material, this study analyzes the conceptual connotations, cognitive features operation mode and the mechanism of its meaning generation and unique functions of such thinking blocks as metaphors and prototypes in the official discourse to deal with opinions of public emergency from the microscopic perspective in order to master the framing model of official discourse to cope with opinions of public emergency, further clarify the cognitive motivation of the form and meaning in official discourse, enrich and develop the theory. Additionally, this study explores the interaction between official discourse practice and social structure in response to public opinions of public emergencies, which is helpful to understand the potential ideology in discourse from a macro perspective and deepen the understanding of critical discourse analysis theory.

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