

A Study of Le Figaro's Report on COVID-19 in China

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Abstract: Taking the news reports about the COVID-19 epidemic in China published by Le Figaro in 2020-2021 as the research object, this paper adopts the corpus-based approach to conduct an empirical study on the number, trend, theme and collocations of the reports. The study found that Le Figaro is very concerned about China's economy, diplomacy, politics and social media under the epidemic. In this regard, this paper believes that various media should be used to expand the main body of communication, tell Chinese stories well, adjust narrative strategies, balance reporting angles, and let the world understand China. It is also necessary to carry out dialogue, exchange and cooperation with mainstream media in France.

Keywords: Le Figaro; China; The epidemic; Corpus

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At the end of 2019, the pneumonia epidemic caused by novel coronavirus broke out in Wuhan and gradually enveloped the land of China. The prevention and control measures taken by the Chinese government to contain the spread of the epidemic and the results achieved have attracted wide attention from western media. Le Figaro is a comprehensive daily newspaper with the largest circulation and the most influential influence in France. Studying the attitude and views of Le Figaro on China under the COVID-19 epidemic is of great significance for promoting the dissemination of a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive national image of China in French-speaking countries and regions.

1. Research Design

In this study, we built a corpus of Le Figaro's reports on COVID-19 in China. The construction and application of the corpus are as follows: Firstly, in the LexisNexis news database, Le Figaro was selected as the news source, and the date was set as January 1, 2020-December 31, 2021. A total of 154 news reports with titles related to the novel coronavirus epidemic in China were retrieved to build a micro-corpus.

2. Statistics and Analysis

2.1 Number and trend of reports

The first report was published on January 7, 2020, because the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention successfully isolated the new coronavirus strain that day, and this "mysterious pneumonia of unknown cause" began to attract the attention of the newspaper. After Academician Zhong Nanshan proposed the virus is transmitted from person to person on January 20, and Wuhan began to shut down on January 23, the newspaper's attention to the epidemic in China continued to rise. With the novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic listed as a public health emergency of international concern by WHO on January 30, the report on China's epidemic reached a peak in February, with a total of 38 articles. Since then, it has gradually declined that the newspaper's attention to China's COVID-19.

2.2 The reporting theme

The reports cover eight main topics: politics, economy, diplomacy, science and technology, trade, medical research, people's livelihood and public health. Among them, the most were political articles (31 articles). Next are public health reports (28 articles). The newspaper carried out a series of reports on the outbreak of COVID-19 in China, the measures taken by the government and the results achieved. The number of diplomatic articles (23) and economic articles (22) followed, with the former covering Sino-US relations, Sino-French relations and China's medical assistance to other countries, and the latter reflecting the impact of COVID-19 on China's economy. In terms of social livelihood (18 articles), the newspaper pays more attention to the daily life of ordinary people under the epidemic. In addition, medical research reports (17 articles) mainly focused on the source of the virus, the clinical manifestations of the novel coronavirus pneumonia and treatment methods, while trade reports (12 articles) paid more attention to the price fluctuations in international raw material and the trend of Sino-foreign trade. Among all the topics, science and technology reports (3 articles) are the least, mainly related to the rise of Chinese pharmaceutical companies such as Sinovac and Sinopharm, and the development layout of some of China's leading Internet companies in the post-epidemic era.

2.3 Report collocations

In order to further investigate how Le Figaro interprets the epidemic in China, this paper takes the French adjectives "chinois, chinoise, chinoises (Chinese)" in the self-built corpus as the search item, sets the span as L5-R5, and extracts the nouns matching the above adjectives. Meanwhile, collocations are sorted according to MI3. In this paper, the top 10 collocation nouns are divided into four categories: Economics (économie, croissance), diplomacy (diplomatie), politics (autorités, président, caractéristiques, gouvernement), social media (Twitter, internet, Weibo). After analysis, it is found that the newspaper mainly focuses on the following aspects:

2.3.1 Being optimistic about the development prospects of the Chinese economy

After searching the sentences with the main language of "économie chinoise (Chinese economy)", we found that sentences with the Chinese economy as the subject are almost always positive and neutral. Relevant reports believe that China's economy suffered a severe blow in the early stage of the epidemic and once stagnated, but since the end of 2020, China's economy has begun to recover. More than ever, China is the locomotive of the world economy.

2.3.2 Paying attention to China's anti epidemic actions and foreign exchanges

Searching for sentences with "autorités chinoises (Chinese government)" and "diplomatie chinoise (Chinese diplomacy)" as subjects, it was found that most of the reports were objective, such as describing the prevention and treatment measures taken by the Chinese government, sending civil aviation charter flights to pick up Hubei compatriots stranded abroad, and providing medical assistance to other countries.

2.3.3 Amplifying the voice of Chinese netizens

The newspaper has repeatedly mentioned the views or feelings of individual Chinese netizens in relevant reports, both positive and negative. It seems to have carried out a more balanced report on the epidemic in China, but in fact, it cleverly integrated its own position and views.

3. Cause Analysis and Enlightenment

3.1 Cause analysis

Le Figaro pays close attention to China's economy, diplomacy, politics and social media under the epidemic. The main reason is the differences between China and France in social system, ideology, culture and values. As a result, Le Figaro infiltrated "political and social factors such as national interests, business objectives, and reader positioning into the discourses"^[1]. On the one hand, in order to safeguard the interests of the country, while recognizing the achievements of China's economic development, the newspaper repeatedly interpreted the epidemic situation in China from the perspective of politics and diplomacy to influence the perception of the French people on China, and divert the attention of the domestic people, and to alleviate the huge pressure faced by the domestic epidemic prevention and control. On the other hand, reporting on China's anti-epidemic action from the perspective of social livelihood can often attract the attention of French readers, thereby to expand newspaper sales and bring more advertising revenue.

3.2 Countermeasures and suggestions

In view of the discourse characteristics of relevant reports, measures should be taken from the following three aspects.

Firstly, we can use all kinds of media to expand the main body of communication and tell Chinese stories well. We should give full play to the efficient advantages of instant social media such as Weibo and WeChat in releasing emergency information, so that foreign audiences can hear the voice of China and understand the story of China in the first time. In the process of building the foreign discourse system, we can guide the general public, especially the vast number of netizens, to participate in it, providing them with certain public opinion space on the emerging media platform, to form a joint force with the traditional media to jointly shape a real

and three-dimensional image of China.

Secondly, we can adjust narrative strategies, balance reporting angles, and let the world understand China. Timely and proactive responses should be made to the focus of international attention, hot issues and topics of interest to foreign audiences. Comprehensive and multi-angle reports are easier to be accepted by foreign audiences and easier to win their trust. To adopt a communication model that foreign audiences are happy to see and feel, it is necessary to convince people with reason and move them with emotion. Heartwarming stories are often more likely to resonate between audiences in different countries and different ethnic groups, which narrows the psychological distance between each other.

Thirdly, we should carry out dialogue, exchanges and cooperation with mainstream media in France. Both China and France are ancient civilizations with profound historical and cultural deposits, and the exchanges between the two countries have a long history. French is not only the official or common language of more than 40 countries and regions, but also one of the working languages of many international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union. French mainstream media such as Le Figaro play an important role in shaping China's national image and spreading it overseas. In line with the principle of "putting ourselves first and being good at leveraging external forces"^[2], we should take the initiative to build Bridges between media colleagues of the two countries, enhance mutual trust and cooperation, and jointly show the Francophone countries and regions that China advocates peaceful development and win-win cooperation.

4. Conclusion

More than three years have passed since the outbreak of COVID-19. Looking back at the French mainstream media Le Figaro's coverage of the COVID-19 epidemic in China helps to further strengthen the construction of our country's international communication capacity, so as to better show the world China in the new era.

References:

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