

A Study of the Discourse Subjects of the Winter Olympics

—Based on *China Daily*

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Abstract

At the beginning of 2022, despite the fact that COVID-19 in the country was still not fully under control, Beijing successfully hosted the Winter Olympic Games, which have attracted the whole world's attention. The Winter Olympic Games were covered by the media both at home and abroad, and in these reports there were many subjects of discourse who expressed their own views on the Winter Olympic Games from their own standpoints. Discourse is subjective, and the words quoted in the news may seem objective, but in fact they reflect the position and attitude of the news. In this article, *China Daily*, a well-known English language newspaper in China and abroad, is searched with the neutral reported verb say, and the subjects of the discourse are analysed to explore the international and domestic impact of the Winter Olympic Games hosted by China, as well as *China Daily's* attitude on China's foreign publicity.

Keywords: subject of discourse, *China Daily*, the Winter Olympics

1. Introduction

The subject of discourse is the person speaking in a particular context. In academic research, the subject of discourse is often combined with higher education via journalism and communication, ideological and political education, and the study of Marxism. Journalism is a specific kind of discourse. The study of the subject of discourse in the news can broaden our analytical perspective so that we can analyse the objectivity and authenticity of the news.

In 2022, the Winter Olympic Games were successfully held in Beijing. The Winter Olympics are the world's largest comprehensive winter games, held every four years, and each city that hosts them has unparalleled glory. Wang (2017) stated that "in the present day, cities expect to shape, enhance and improve their city image, city visibility and competitiveness through hosting sporting events in order to have a positive impact in political, economic, social and cultural aspects." Prior to this, Beijing has successfully hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics, which was very impressive. At the present, Beijing is the first city to have hosted both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, and China is taking this international event seriously, with the whole country looking forward to it with great anticipation. During the 2022 Olympic Games, *China Daily*, China's leading English language newspaper, provided real-time coverage of the event, allowing more people to learn about China's hosting of the world event. Pre-event preparations, the scores of athletes from all around the world, and how they feel during the Winter Olympic... All of these have been covered comprehensively. Based on *China Daily's* coverage of this international event, a self-built corpus, combined with relevant corpus analysis software, were used to analyze the reports on Winter Olympics.

2. Corpus Building

Gans (1987:92) pointed out "buying and selling lead journalist to construct a highlighted reality". News always

tends to report on things that are of interest to the world, or to “construct highlighted facts” to attract attention. As an important window for China to understand the world and the world to understand China, *China Daily* is the preferred English-language Chinese media for high-end people at home and abroad, the only Chinese newspaper that has effectively entered the international mainstream and has the highest reprint rate in foreign media. What’s more, it is also the media that has hosted the most major international conferences in China.

In the case of the Winter Olympics, which have attracted worldwide attention, *China Daily* also covered them extensively. In building the corpus, *China Daily*’s coverage of the Winter Olympics began to intensify at the beginning of the year, as the Games were scheduled to run from 4 February 2022 to 20 February 2022, and the enthusiasm for the Games had already started to grow at the beginning of the year, with preparations already in their final stages. In the month following the end of the Winter Olympics, people were still excited about the Games, and enthusiasm for winter sports continued to rise, so based on the intensity of *China Daily*’s coverage of the Winter Olympics after its conclusion, we set the date range for our study at 3 January 2022 to 2 April 2022, with winter Olympic, winter sports and athlete as the keyword search term. If there was more than one report on the same day about COVID-19, the dates were numbered as 02, 03, etc. After building the corpus, the reports were manually read and screened for relevance, resulting in the identification of 89 reports. As this study used Antconc 3.5.8.0 as the corpus processing software to search for relevant paraphrased verbs and count their word frequencies, only the text was analyzed, so invalid information such as images, audio and video were excluded and only the text was retained. According to Antconc 3.5.8.0, 99,153 tokens were the final object of study.

And as for reported verbs, Geis (1987:134) introduced a new concept of “volatility” when classifying them, and he classified them into two classes. “The “low volatility” verbs are often the usual, standard reported verbs such as report, reply, answer, comment, say, etc. In order to be as objective and impartial as possible in the study of the discourse subjects, we analyse the discourse subjects that appear in the reports by using the neutral reported verb *say* and its past tense and past participle *said*, which appear more frequently in the reports. According to Antconc 3.5.8.0, the frequency of *say* and *said* is 441, which shows that there are numerous discourse subjects in reports on the Winter Olympics. And then, the subjects of discourse were identified and classified for later analysis.

3. Research Content

The self-constructed corpus has been searched with the reported verb *say* as well as its past tense and past participle *said* with the help of Antconc 3.5.8.0. In our analysis, we covered as many domestic and international discourse subjects as possible, exploring the reports related to the Winter Olympics in *China Daily*. The following examples are used as examples. Meanwhile, the three-dimensional analysis framework description-interpretation-explanation of Fairclough has been adopted to analyse the subjects of the discourse.

(1) “China has maintained a steady global influence and (received) acknowledgment for its contribution to fighting COVID-19,” said Dicky Budiman, an epidemiologist at Griffith University in Australia, in response to Xi’s New Year address. Budiman noted that China’s vaccines and other international assistance have contributed to global efforts to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Asia and Africa. (2022010301)

In the context of international events, epidemic prevention and control is a top priority. In example 1, Dicky Budiman, an Australian epidemiologist, acknowledged China’s efforts to combat the COVID-19 and the international recognition it has thus received. As a foreign epidemiologist, Dicky Budiman’s words are convincing and will make people from all over the world confident that the Winter Olympics will be successfully held with China having ability to prevent and control the epidemic.

(2) “Becoming a volunteer who’s served both at the Beijing 2008 Summer Games and the Beijing 2022 Winter Games is a great honor for me, and I feel a strong sense of pride and responsibility,” said Liu. (2022031001)

In Example 2, the subject of the discourse is Liu, who can be seen as representative of the many volunteers at the Winter Olympics. He has made a huge contribution to the Games and given considerable time and effort during the international event. The success of the Winter Olympics could not have been achieved without these volunteers, and each of them is proud to have contributed to it. The tremendous efforts and selflessness of the volunteers are an important guarantee of the success of the Winter Olympics. This not only reflects the responsible, pragmatic and dedicated attitude of the Chinese people, but also demonstrates the strength and the spirit of a great nation.

(3) Xi visited the National Speed Skating Oval, the Main Media Center, the athletes’ village, the Games-time Operations Command Center and a winter sports training base in Beijing, learning about preparatory work as well as Chinese athletes’ preparations for the Games. This was the fifth time he inspected preparations for the Games in the past five years.

During the inspection tour, Xi said that thanks to years of efforts, work on all fronts was mostly ready. “We are fully confident and able to present a brilliant, exceptional and excellent Olympic Games to the world.”

(2022010601)

The subject of discourse in Example 3 is President Xi. In the coverage of the Winter Olympics, President Xi appears frequently as a subject of discourse. According to Wang Pengyu (2018:2), “As the spokesman and forerunner of a country, the leader’s every move is important to show the image and strength of the country.” The importance that China attaches to the event and the extent to which it is being prepared can be seen in the fact that, prior to the Winter Olympics, Secretary Xi visited the competition site many times and asked about the preparations. Indeed, it took almost six years to prepare for the Beijing Winter Olympics. On 15 December 2015, the inaugural meeting of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games Organising Committee was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, marking the official start of preparations for the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. Especially in the context of COVID-19, China’s preparations for this international event have been even more difficult, with the prevention and control of the epidemic being an important part of it. As a result, China has put a considerable amount of effort and resources into the Winter Olympic Games.

(4) “Director Zhang Yimou created the impressive 2008 Games opening ceremony that wowed the world,” Chang said. “In 2017, we hired him to take charge of ‘Beijing’s eight minutes’ in Pyeongchang, and he was able to present the world a different China in such a limited time with a well-received show.

“Therefore, when we decided on the chief director in 2019, we chose him again after careful deliberation.” Zhang said he never thought of repeating the highly rated 2008 masterpiece. (2022011201)

Thomas Bach, president of the International Olympic Committee, said in a video message at the ceremony that the Olympic flame will show that Beijing is “ready to make history”, becoming the first-ever host city for both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games. (2022020302)

The subjects of the sentences in Example 4 are Thomas Bach, the President of the International Olympic Committee, and Zhang Yimou, the director of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Winter Olympics, who talked about the selection of the opening and closing ceremonies and the design of the opening and closing ceremonies from different perspectives.

The importance of the opening ceremony for the Winter Olympics cannot be overstated. It is a major event that is of interest to people from all over the world and is vital to the image of the country. Therefore, China has attached considerable importance to the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics, giving the task to Zhang Yimou, who had previously designed the opening ceremony and closing ceremonies of 2008 Olympics.

Zhang once said in an interview, “Because of the country’s development, its elevated status, and China’s ability to host two Olympic Games in such a short period of time, the possibility of me becoming the director of the ‘Double Olympics’ came about.” It is also because of his considerable experience that he is still taking on the role of director of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Winter Olympics this time. He has put a lot of work and effort into this, under a lot of pressure, and has carefully designed the opening and closing ceremonies of the Winter Olympics. As he said in his speech, he would not repeat the design of the 2008 Beijing Summer Games, but would create a completely different opening and closing ceremony. In the end, he proved to live up to his expectations and made the opening ceremony a feast for the eyes and ears of the entire audience.

(5) “That guy who said ‘welcome to China’ literally makes me tear up every time,” Maud said in the video. “They are so nice. All the volunteers are so sweet and kind. They are so happy that we’re here. We feel so welcomed.”

Her videos garnered hundreds of thousands of views, and many left comments saying they were touched by the warmth and friendliness of the volunteers. (2022021002)

“I’ve never felt one time any animosity (from Chinese curlers) toward us or our country, and we try to show them the same respect. At the end of the day, man, we all bleed the same blood and play the same game. “It’s fun to experience each other’s cultures a bit and show them it’s all love.” (2022020603)

The subject of discourse in Example 5 is the athlete from abroad. Wang Fan (2015: 10) pointed out that “the channel of national image transmission is international communication” and that “the cross-cultural communication that takes place through various media stages is ultimately transmitted to the people of other countries through filtering, selecting and recoding”. The Winter Olympic Games have brought Beijing closer to the world, and China even closer to the world. The Chinese people are willing to make friends with people from other countries, and foreign friends and athletes who come to China often feel the great warmth of the Chinese people. It is a famous Chinese saying that “It is such a delight to have friends coming from afar”. And it is so that the Chinese people practise in their daily life. I believe that every volunteer and athlete who comes to China will feel the great warmth and hospitality of the Chinese people. China has always been known for its warmth and the athletes who come to China must have a deep appreciation of this. At the same time, what they say on social media reinforces the impression of China and will spread to more international friends, which is more

convincing. Because of international events, China's hospitality to international friends can be known far and wide. This is of great significance in demonstrating international friendship and promoting cultural exchange between East and West.

This is a good example of how China's international image has been recognized by foreign friends and spread abroad in a world where social media is constantly developing. At the same time, although the epidemic control has not yet been completely under control, China has still taken good measures to prevent the epidemic. The holding of the Winter Olympics as scheduled is the best testimony to China's strength and commitment.

(6) "Because the city is so big, you have the infrastructure, the accommodations, the transportation and the catering. You can organize everything so that competitors and visitors feel welcome in the city." (2022021003)

The success of an international Olympic event requires not only a great deal of time but also much attention to every detail. The country must be prepared for any unexpected situations that may arise, in which volunteers play an important role. The success of the Winter Olympics has proved that China has the confidence and ability to run international events, demonstrating the role of a great nation and the strength of a great country that always puts the lives and safety of its people first.

China has worked hard and prepared for this Winter Olympic Games, which has contributed to the major sports event that is presented to us with worldwide attention.

(7) Splitting the two Slovenians, Katharina Althaus of Germany won silver for the second straight Olympics. "I am very happy about winning the silver medal. I don't consider it as a loss. It's so great for me. I'm very happy about my silver medal. I made very good jumps," Althaus said. (2022020602)

Example 7 features Katharina Althaus, an athlete from Germany. 6th February was the third day of the Winter Olympics and the competitions were in full swing. Katharina Althaus was very happy and proud to have won her second medal, which shows that the success of the Games and the careful preparation has paid off. Thus, the Winter Olympics has given athletes from all countries the chance to do their best.

Meanwhile, apart from Katharina Althaus, athletes from all over the world competed fiercely at the Winter Olympics, bringing us an audiovisual feast and embodying the Olympic spirit at the same time.

(8) "Not just athletes and professionals winning gold medals and achieving amazing things, but getting more people to participate in sports," he said. "It's always about the people."

In the seven years since Beijing's successful bid, China has fulfilled its promise to engage 300 million people in winter sports. (2022020402)

The subject of the discourse in Example 8 is Zhang Yimou, a famous director in China. In his view, the Winter Olympics is not only about athletes winning medals, but more importantly lies in getting the whole population involved in winter sports, inspiring enthusiasm for winter sports, promoting fitness for all, and promoting the development of ice and snow sports in China, while narrowing the gap between China and other countries. In this sense, the Winter Olympics have a more far-reaching and positive impact on the nation.

And as Zhang said, that is indeed what happened. After Beijing's successful bid for the Olympic Games in 2015, it set out to fulfil its promise to get 30 million people involved in winter sports. And after this Winter Olympics, more people's passion for snow and ice sports has been aroused. In the past, not as many people were aware of winter sports, but the Winter Olympics are good for promoting snow and ice sports, allowing more and more people to understand winter sports and to join them, which is conducive to promoting national fitness and strengthening the physical condition of the people. It is clear that the Winter Olympics held in China have made a huge impact on the nation and have left a good impression on the world.

The subjects of the above examples cover domestic leaders, directors of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games, foreign friends and athletes, Chinese volunteers, etc. They all gave their views on the Winter Olympics from their own perspectives, giving an international voice and conveying the spectacle of this international event.

4. Conclusion

China's successful hosting of the Winter Olympics in 2022 was achieved despite so many difficulties and the enormous pressure it faced. This has strengthened the friendship between China and the rest of the world, and has demonstrated China's strength and commitment as a great power.

In *China Daily*, there are many subjects of discourse related to the Winter Olympics, both domestic and international, and there are also subjects from the international community. We have chosen the neutral reported verb *say* to analyse the discourse subjects that appear in the reports, in order to draw relatively fair and objective conclusions. The fact that so many subjects expressed their opinions before, during and after the Winter Olympics also shows us the preparations for the Winter Games, and the subsequent enthusiasm for winter sports.

At the same time, the analysis of the typical subjects of the discourse and the content of their words allows us to better appreciate China's role in the Games. It also enables us to better understand the role of *China Daily's* coverage of this event in shaping China's image.

However, there are some shortcomings in this study, such as the short time interval of the research subjects and the choosing of relevant discourse subjects in the reports by say only may lead to a lack of comprehensive discourse subjects. The Winter Olympics was a great success, and the study of the subjects of discourse in the Winter Olympics can be explored from more angles in the future.

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