

# Research on Acupuncture Reports in British and American Newspapers from the Perspective of Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the reports on acupuncture in mainstream British and American newspapers in the past five years, examine the discourse construction of acupuncture in British and American newspapers, and specifically analyze the general cognition and attitude of British and American media towards acupuncture and the reasons behind this situation. Most of the reports on acupuncture in British and American newspapers in the past five years are positive. It is considered that acupuncture is an effective and safe adjuvant treatment method in treating pain and regulating body balance, and is gradually accepted by the western public. However, there are still doubts and it is defined as an adjuvant treatment method. These have largely hindered the international spread of acupuncture. Therefore, conducting research on international reports of acupuncture is of great importance to promote the in-depth development and wide spread of acupuncture.

## KEYWORDS

Critical discourse analysis; Acupuncture; Corpus; British and American newspapers

## 1 Introduction

With the continuous development of opening to the outside world and the enhancement of comprehensive national strength, China's exchanges with the world have become increasingly extensive and in-depth, and its influence on the world has become stronger and stronger. The world's cognition of traditional Chinese medicine is also gradually changing through cultural conflicts and interactive integration, and the acceptance of traditional Chinese medicine in western society is constantly improving. As an important part of traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture has taken the lead in going international because of its remarkable curative effect, convenient operation and low cost, and was listed in the Human Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010. Acupuncture is not only widely used in the diagnosis and treatment of traditional Chinese medicine in China, but also one of the complementary alternative therapies recognized and used by the public in the international medical market, accelerating the overseas development and international dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture. In view of Chinese acupuncture, we should not only be limited to the understanding of life science, but also regard it as the perfect combination of Chinese traditional culture and medical science. It bears the great responsibility of inheriting and carrying forward Chinese traditional culture. Media is an important carrier of ideology and social culture. Although media articles generally require neutral and objective content, the choice of words and tone often reflects the attitude and position towards events, thus bringing subtle guidance to readers' value judgment. News discourse dominates public opinion and affects people's understanding and attitude towards acupuncture. However, due to the differences in culture, education, language and many other aspects between China and the West, there are still many differences in Chinese and western media reports of acupuncture. With the in-depth development of acupuncture internationalization, various problems brought about by the impact of Chinese and western cultures have gradually become prominent. Some western countries have reservations about acupuncture, and the one-sided coverage and negative comments of international media on acupuncture have largely hindered the international spread of acupuncture. Therefore, conducting research on international reports of acupuncture is conducive to Chinese media grasping the right to speak and initiative in international news propaganda, and creating a good public opinion environment for the international communication of acupuncture.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

The emergence of critical discourse analysis can be traced back to the 20th century literary criticism, which focused on the language of literary discourse, and gradually formed through pragmatic criticism, neo-criticism and structuralism. In the second half of the 1970s, stylistic studies began to pay more attention to the relationship between texts and their social and historical background and the communicative aspect of texts. That is the pragmatic aspect of literature. This is the critical linguistics proposed by Flower et al. (1979), which took the function of linguistic forms in communicative contexts as its core topic, believed that language use was full of values, and practiced a linguistics aimed at understanding such values. As a representative figure of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (1995) believes that 'critical discourse analysis' is 'a research framework devoted to the relationship between language, power and ideology', which reveals how discourse practice is molded by social reality and how it affects it at the same time. Halliday (1978), from the

viewpoint that language is a social symbolic system, holds that meaning is not produced in a vacuum, and the use of language is implied in social context. Critical discourse analysis not only considers what language is, but also why it is. In addition to research the meaning of discourse, it also studies how discourse creates this meaning. Language is not an objective and transparent communication medium, but it plays an important intervention role in social process. Discourse is a kind of social practice. It is characterized by social structure, however, discourse in turn affects and even constructs social reality<sup>[1]</sup>. Through superficial language forms, it aims to expose how ideology has an impact on discourse, and how the discourse in turn influences ideology. What's more, it reveals how they both originate from social structures and power relations and how they serve them<sup>[2]</sup>. As a kind of discourse analysis method, critical discourse analysis has been increasingly used in analyzing and researching various discourses, and has obtained productive outcomes. It has greatly deepened people's awareness of the relationship between language and society, and itself has made great progress in its application.

## 2.2 Corpus-based CDA

Although critical discourse analysis has attracted much attention because of its interdisciplinary vision, it is also controversial because of its subjectivity in criticizing society. Widdowson<sup>[3]</sup>, Stubbs<sup>[4]</sup>, Toolan<sup>[5]</sup> and other scholars believe that the number of critical discourse analysis texts is too small, lacking representativeness, and the interpretation of discourse lacks objectivity and systematicness. Therefore, in order to strengthen the scientific and empirical nature of critical discourse analysis, some linguists have introduced corpus linguistics into critical discourse analysis, resulting in "corpus-based critical discourse analysis". The advantage of corpus method in critical discourse analysis is that it is more than a single discourse chosen by the researchers, but extracts typical or representative 'language patterns' through a large number of discourses, which is conducive to explore different ways of reality construction in the process of language use and show the ideological meaning behind its use. In recent 20 years, more and more scholars at home and abroad have applied corpus technology to critical discourse analysis. Combining corpus method with CDA, on the one hand, corpus subject words, collocation and retrieval analysis can show the discourse information of the text clearly. On the other hand, critical discourse analysis can reveal the influence of ideology on language and society. Corpus linguistics uses a series of techniques, including collocation, keywords, word lists, word clusters, distribution, etc., to expose the structure and regularity of language use, so as to find out those features with significant significance, which greatly expands the space of critical discourse analysis.

## 2.3 Previous Studies on the Coverage of Chinese Medicine in English Publications

With the rapid spread of acupuncture overseas, the research on cross-cultural communication of acupuncture has attracted the attention of more and more experts and scholars at home and abroad, and the research results are increasing year by year. The research on the history, process and present situation of international communication of acupuncture is relatively mature, while the research on reports of acupuncture in western media has just started, most of which are content analysis, such as revealing the position and method of organizing acupuncture reports in The New York Times by news framework analysis<sup>[6]</sup>, analyzing the image of acupuncture in American mass media based on COCA<sup>[7]</sup>, and narrative research on Twitter culture of acupuncture<sup>[8]</sup>. In addition, it is mentioned as a sub-argument in the discourse analysis of traditional Chinese medicine<sup>[9]</sup>. Western news media reports are mostly positive and neutral, and it is generally considered to be a relatively safe, effective and non-invasive therapy, which has been accepted and recognized by the general public and medical workers. By comparing Chinese and foreign news or new media, we also study the similarities and differences of acupuncture cultural narratives between China and foreign countries<sup>[10]</sup>. What's more, combined with corpus and online reviews, study the spread of acupuncture in the UK to analyze text sentiment through online fieldwork<sup>[11]</sup>. There are few reports on acupuncture in British and American media using corpus-based critical discourse analysis as a tool. At present, most of them study the cross-cultural communication of acupuncture based on corpus. Only one critical discourse analysis paper has been found to explore the acupuncture media image constructed in the news reports of *China Daily* and *New York Daily* in recent ten years<sup>[12]</sup>. This study has been published for more than five years, and only one Chinese and foreign newspaper is analyzed respectively, and the corpus is relatively single. The purpose of this paper is to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the reports on acupuncture in mainstream British and American newspapers in the past five years, examine the discourse construction of acupuncture in British and American newspapers, and specifically analyze the general cognition and attitude of British and American media towards acupuncture and the reasons behind this situation.

## 3 Methodology

The corpus of this article is British and American newspaper reports on 'acupuncture' in the 'LexisNexis News Database' from January 2021 to December 2025. Taking 'acupuncture' as the search term, this paper builds a special corpus of British and American newspaper reports on 'acupuncture', and makes research based on it. LexisNexis news database is an ideal news database. It contains more than 2,500 newspapers (such as *The Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc.), more than 1,000 periodicals (such as *Newsweek*, *Library Journal*, etc.), more than 300 network and blog news websites, as well as various TV and radio drafts, news wire texts, etc. from all over the world. The database is updated on the same day

and covers news for nearly 25 years. The corpus built in this paper contains a total of 112 English corpus. Using the retrieval software AntConc 4.3.1, the number of token of 'acupuncture' in the corpus is 771. According to the index line, the evaluation meaning of the surrounding words is observed, and the span is set to +5/5. Use 'collocate' to obtain the high-frequency collocation words of the search terms, and analyze the overall cognition and attitude of the British and American media towards acupuncture.

#### 4 Results and Discussion

Corpus linguistics focuses on language use. Firth emphasizes the importance of context when studying the collocation of words, and thinks that the meaning of words is the result of the choice of context (collocation words). In other words, the evaluation and attitude of British and American newspapers towards "acupuncture" is reflected in the evaluation meaning of its surrounding words. Therefore, to analyze the evaluation of "acupuncture" by British and American media, we can observe the evaluation significance of its collocation words.

Taking 'acupuncture' as the node word, 11 high-frequency collocation words are extracted. After classification and summary, it is found that it can be divided into the following three aspects:

The first category: therapeutic effects. (1) 'significantly'. Appeared 14 times in total, mentioned in 7 articles, the collocated verbs are 'improve', 'relieve', 'aid', etc., showing the efficiency of relieving various pain and discomfort during pregnancy. (2) 'help'. Mentioned 32 times in total, the most common matching is what kind of diseases are treated, such as arthritis, chronic diseases, anxiety, etc., followed by cosmetic effects, and the therapeutic effects on these are more obvious. (3) 'treatment', which appeared 60 times in total. The most common ones were various diseases, followed by treatment methods. And others including prejudice against acupuncture and patients' treatment experience, etc. (4) 'effects', which appeared 17 times in total, mostly matched with positive words, indicating that acupuncture has a good effect, and this effect can encourage others to try acupuncture. There are also several mentions of doubting the effects of acupuncture. (5) 'status', mentioned 8 times in total, most of which describes that acupuncture can improve the physical function and happiness index. For example:

- a. Acupuncture significantly improved pain, functional status, and quality of life in women with lower back/pelvic pain during the pregnancy.
- b. Studies has show acupuncture can help with sickness and significantly relieve lower back or pelvic pain experienced by 90 per cent of women during pregnancy.
- c. We believe that our coati is the first in the world to receive acupuncture as a form of treatment for arthritis.
- d. We now have good evidence that acupuncture is an effective treatment for chronic tension-type headache.
- e. There is some skepticism around acupuncture's effects.
- f. This study helps move acupuncture from having an unproven status in complementary medicine to an acceptable evidence-based treatment for patients impacted by chronic tension-type headache.

The second category: treatment methods. (1) 'sham' and 'superficial', which appear 12 times and 6 times respectively. Together with acupuncture, they form a professional term, which means simulated acupuncture and superficial acupuncture. With clinical tests, grouping and other studies on the therapeutic effects of pain, the results show that acupuncture can have a better analgesic effect. (2) The words 'laser' and 'market' appear 12 times and 17 times respectively. Most of them together constitute the global acupuncture lasers market. They discuss the application areas and treatment methods of the global laser acupuncture market. With the increase of chronic diseases, this technology is becoming more and more popular. For example:

- a. ... and colleagues investigated the effect of acupuncture versus sham acupuncture for treatment anxiety in patients with Parkinson disease.
- b. One of the major factors driving the acupuncture laser market is the increasing chronic diseases.
- c. By contrast, headache days decreased from 23 days per month to 12 days per month among participants who received superficial acupuncture.

The third category: interpretation. The word 'is', mentioned a total of 126 times, most of which define acupuncture as a treatment method originated from ancient Chinese medicine. The relatively low frequency is the patient's self-report, which is described as an attempt and experience. Finally, a few are newspapers that define acupuncture as alternative medicine and auxiliary medicine. For example:

- a. She explained that acupuncture is a treatment derived from ancient Chinese medicine.
- b. Acupuncture is a treatment rooted in Chinese medicine that entails a practitioner inserting fine needles into the skin to induce a therapeutic effect.
- c. Acupuncture is a form of natural medicine in which small needs are inserted for a short period of time to relieve pain, tension, and stress.
- d. Acupuncture is a component of traditional Chinese medicine that stimulates the flow of energy in one's body.

The fourth category: clinic. The word 'clinic' appears 28 times in total. Most of them are reports on clinic locations, mentioning that clinic locations moved to more prosperous areas, reflecting the increasing popularity of acupuncture. One excellent physician is included. What's more, there are some reports of a Chinese acupuncturist who was accused of

sexual assault, but proved to be performing acupuncture in trial and was acquitted. For example:

- a. An acupuncture and Chinese medicine clinic has moved to a bigger premises after 22 years.
- b. It is now known as St John's Acupuncture Clinic. Dr Zou began her practice in both conventional and Chinese medicine in hospitals in China ...
- c. A CHINESE doctor has been found not guilty of sexual assaulting a patient at a Bournemouth clinic.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that most of the reports on acupuncture in British and American newspapers in the past five years are positive. It is an effective and safe adjuvant treatment method in treating pain and regulating body balance, and is gradually accepted by the western public. However, there are also negative reports such as 'suspicion', as well as reports of misunderstanding of secondary treatment methods because of ignorance of acupuncture. In addition, there are generally few reports on acupuncture in the past five years, indicating that although acupuncture has been recognized to a certain extent, it still faces some difficulties in its overseas promotion as an alternative medicine. For example, acupuncture has been accused of infringement, indicating that the understanding of acupuncture in the West is not deep, and there are still prejudices and misunderstandings. Western medicine still dominates, and the ideology and theoretical basis of the two medicines are fundamentally different. Acupuncture abroad is only a simple borrowing from the technical level, rather than an affirmative integration from the cultural level, which will greatly limit the in-depth development and wide spread of acupuncture. Under the impact and collision of Chinese and western civilizations, acupuncture, as a medical thinking mode of traditional culture, is facing westernization and dilution, and the western recognition of its culture is not high. For example, articles and books as academic carriers are less accepted in the west, and the names of international acupuncture points are different from the traditional ones. This is the result of cultural differences between China and the West. And cultural shock has brought many problems to the development of acupuncture.

## 5 Conclusion

The evaluation meaning implied in media discourse subtly affects people's thoughts and perception. However, because of its latency, it is difficult for traditional research methods to conduct large-scale empirical research on it. The combination of corpus method and critical discourse analysis makes up for the shortcomings of traditional media discourse analysis, such as limited number of texts and lack of objectivity, and makes the research more convincing.

This paper takes the British and American newspaper reports of 'acupuncture' as the research object, and makes a scientific and in-depth exploration from the perspective of critical discourse. The results show that most of the reports on acupuncture in mainstream newspapers in Britain and America are objective and sufficient, and construct the image that acupuncture is more effective in relieving pain. However, there are still doubts. It is defined as an adjuvant treatment method, which fully reveals that the cognition and attitude are dominated by western medicine. The concerns of western medical circles and the public about acupuncture affect the internationalization of acupuncture. To overcome these negative effects, first, we should start from the traditional knowledge systems and ways of thinking, building local Chinese medicine culture and cultivating the self-confidence of acupuncture practitioners. The second is to promote the standardized scientific research achievements and diagnosis and treatment schemes of acupuncture, so that their application is more concise and standardized, and it is easier to be accepted by the West. Third, attach more importance to the common understanding with western medicine and focus on cultural propaganda, which could strengthen the western sense of identity with acupuncture culture and create a good public opinion environment for acupuncture, making it go further and further on the road of internationalization.

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