A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IDEOLOGICAL ENCODING OF ENGLISH AND MANDARIN TEXTS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This study investigates how ideology is linguistically encoded in English and Mandarin texts through a comparative critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework. Drawing upon corpus-assisted methods and grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research analyzes how each language reflects its underlying epistemological and cultural orientations in discourse. The English corpus—comprising news articles, editorials, and academic texts from Anglophone sources such as The Guardian and BBC is compared with a Mandarin corpus consisting of parallel genres from 人民日报 (People's Daily), 新华网 (XinhuaNet), and Chinese university materials. Findings reveal that English discourse predominantly encodes ideology through explicit agency, critical reasoning, and dialogic openness, reflecting values of individualism, rationality, and democratic participation. Mandarin discourse, by contrast, constructs ideology through collective framing, agentless constructions, and evaluative affirmation, embodying Confucian principles of harmony, moral order, and social cohesion. Differences in transitivity, modality, and metaphor demonstrate distinct cultural epistemologies English emphasizing critique and change, while Mandarin emphasizes stability and unity. The study contributes to the interdisciplinary dialogue among CDA, SFL, and intercultural pragmatics by extending the analytical scope of CDA beyond Anglophone contexts. It argues that ideological encoding operates not only at the macro-political level but also within micro-linguistic choices that shape meaning and perception across cultures. The findings have pedagogical implications for intercultural communication, translation studies, and discourse pedagogy, underscoring the importance of ideological awareness in global communication

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, English–Mandarin Comparison, Intercultural Communication, Linguistic Encoding, Cultural Epistemology.*

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, globalization has undergone rapid acceleration, reshaping not only political and economic relations but also the communicative practices that bind individuals and societies across cultural boundaries. As global mobility, digital interaction, and transnational networks expand, encounters between speakers of different linguistic backgrounds have become increasingly common, complex, and ideologically charged. Within this global landscape, English and Mandarin occupy particularly significant positions as the world's most influential languages. English functions as a global lingua franca associated with international diplomacy, scientific inquiry, and global media, while Mandarin has gained growing prominence alongside China's geopolitical influence and cultural reach. Both languages, therefore, serve not only as communicative tools but also as vehicles for transmitting cultural values, epistemological orientations, and ideological perspectives embedded within their linguistic structures.

Language, as many scholars argue, is far from neutral. It operates as a social semiotic system through which societies construct and negotiate meaning, identity, and power relations (Ibtesam Abdul Aziz Bajri, 2020; Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2008). Every

linguistic choice—whether lexical, grammatical, or rhetorical—carries ideological implications that shape how individuals perceive the world and position themselves in social contexts. Through discourse, speakers and institutions subtly encode assumptions, cultural norms, and political stances that may not always be consciously recognized by interlocutors. Ideology, in this sense, is not limited to explicit political declarations but is woven into everyday language practices that appear natural and routine.

Intercultural communication provides a crucial site for examining how such ideological encoding occurs. While cross-cultural interactions often focus on verbal exchanges and linguistic comprehension, the deeper layer of communication involves shared and conflicting cultural worldviews that influence how messages are produced, interpreted, and negotiated (Ulfa & Nurcahyani, 2022). Misunderstandings in intercultural encounters frequently arise not merely from differences in vocabulary or grammar but from divergent ideological orientations that shape discourse patterns. Understanding how languages encode ideology, therefore, is essential for fostering effective and ethical intercultural communication in a world where global interdependence continues to intensify.

English discourse, shaped by the intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment, liberal democracy, and scientific rationality, often foregrounds values such as individuality, critical inquiry, and openness to debate (Ulum & Köksal, 2019). These epistemological influences manifest linguistically through the frequent use of explicit agency, direct argumentation, and dialogic structures that encourage the expression of multiple viewpoints. English texts typically highlight the role of individual actors through active-voice constructions, emphasize personal responsibility, and employ modal verbs to invite analysis and critique. Such discursive patterns reflect cultural ideologies that prioritize autonomy, transparency, and democratic engagement, positioning the individual as a central agent in social processes.

In contrast, Mandarin discourse draws deeply from Confucian philosophical principles, collectivist social structures, and an enduring emphasis on harmony (和谐 héxié). Mandarin texts often utilize agentless constructions, nominalization, and evaluative expressions that foreground collective identity, moral order (伦理 lúnlǐ), and social cohesion (团结 tuánjié) (Hu & Zainol Abidin, 2025). Rather than emphasizing critique or confrontation, Mandarin discourse tends to promote unity, stability, and respect for hierarchy. Metaphors rooted in familial relationships, communal responsibility, and moral virtue are common, reinforcing an ideological orientation that values social balance and collective well-being over individual autonomy. These linguistic patterns correspond to broader cultural epistemologies in which the maintenance of harmony and the prioritization of the group are seen as essential for societal flourishing.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a powerful theoretical lens for uncovering the ideological dimensions of language use. As Fairclough (1995), Wodak (2011), and Jahrir et al. (2025) emphasize, discourse is both shaped by social structures and actively shapes social reality. Through CDA, researchers seek to reveal how linguistic choices naturalize particular power relations, legitimize dominant ideologies, and marginalize alternative

perspectives. Applying CDA to English and Mandarin texts provides insight into the ideological mechanisms that underpin each language's discursive practices and illuminates how cultural values become encoded in textual meaning. CDA also underscores the importance of examining language within its broader sociocultural context, recognizing that ideology is embedded not only in overt content but also in subtle structural and stylistic features.

Despite the extensive scholarship on CDA, comparative studies that examine ideological encoding across linguistically and culturally distinct systems remain limited. Most CDA research focuses on English-language contexts, which inadvertently reinforces an Anglophone-centric view of discourse analysis and overlooks the ideological complexities inherent in non-Western languages. This gap is particularly evident in comparative studies involving Mandarin, a language whose discourse patterns reflect philosophical, cultural, and political traditions markedly different from those of Western societies. Investigating how English and Mandarin encode ideology through linguistic and discursive mechanisms offers a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural epistemologies shape meaning-making practices.

The present study seeks to address this intellectual gap by conducting a comparative analysis of ideological encoding in English and Mandarin texts across equivalent genres, including news articles, editorials, and academic discourse. It explores how each language constructs agency, represents social relationships, utilizes modality, and deploys metaphorical expressions to convey ideological orientations. Central to this investigation is the question of how these linguistic encodings reflect the underlying cultural and epistemological traditions of English-speaking and Mandarin-speaking societies. The analysis aims not only to identify the distinct ideological patterns within each language but also to illustrate the potential implications for intercultural communication, translation practices, and discourse interpretation.

By examining the micro-level linguistic features that contribute to macro-level ideological structures, this study contributes to the interdisciplinary dialogue between critical discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, and intercultural pragmatics. It highlights the ways in which ideology operates through the textual and semantic choices that shape discourse, demonstrating that ideological influence extends beyond overt political rhetoric into everyday communication. Furthermore, the study expands the scope of CDA by incorporating Mandarin as an important site of ideological analysis, thereby challenging the dominance of Anglophone discourse in critical linguistic research and offering a more diverse and inclusive understanding of global communication practices.

Ultimately, the ability to recognize and interpret ideological encoding in multilingual contexts holds significant implications for academia, diplomacy, media studies, and translation. As English and Mandarin continue to serve as key languages in global interaction, understanding how each encodes cultural values and ideological assumptions is essential for navigating potential misinterpretations, fostering intercultural sensitivity, and promoting more equitable cross-cultural dialogue. This study underscores the importance of

ideological awareness in a globalized world, where linguistic encounters are not merely exchanges of words but reflections of deeper cultural and epistemological frameworks that shape human understanding.

METHOD

This study employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach that draws primarily on the theoretical contributions of Fairclough (1995, 2013), Van Dijk (2008), and Wodak and Meyer (2016), emphasizing the interconnected relationship between language, power, and ideology. CDA is complemented by the analytical principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), which provides a systematic framework for examining how meaning is encoded through the lexico-grammatical system. Within this combined approach, the analysis focuses simultaneously on textual features, discursive practices, and the broader sociocultural contexts that shape and are shaped by discourse. The textual dimension examines vocabulary, grammatical structures, modality, and cohesion; the discursive practice dimension involves the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption within institutional environments; and the sociocultural dimension concerns ideological and cultural forces that underpin discourse practices.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative comparative design supported by corpus-assisted discourse analysis techniques, following the approach suggested by Lou and Lu (2021). Two corpora representing English and Mandarin discourse were compiled to enable systematic comparison. The English corpus (EN-corpus) consists of news articles, editorials, and university-level reading materials drawn from widely accessible Anglophone sources such as The Guardian, BBC, and openly distributed educational texts. The Mandarin corpus (CH-corpus) includes equivalent genres obtained from major Chinese media platforms such as 人民日报 (People's Daily) and 新华网 (XinhuaNet), as well as academic texts distributed by Chinese universities. The use of comparable genres allows for balanced cross-linguistic examination of ideological encoding across both languages.

The analytical procedure proceeded through several stages. The first stage involved lexical and collocational scanning to identify high-frequency words and key ideological terms commonly associated with particular cultural or political orientations, such as freedom, responsibility, harmony, and stability. The second stage consisted of detailed grammatical analysis focusing on transitivity structures, including actor–process–goal relations, variations in active versus passive constructions, and the use of nominalization as a mechanism for obscuring agency. In the third stage, modality and evaluative expressions were analyzed to determine the degrees of certainty, obligation, persuasion, and stance encoded in both corpora. This involved examining modal verbs, hedging devices, evaluative adjectives, and rhetorical markers that signal ideological alignment. The fourth stage examined metaphorical and discursive framing by identifying conceptual metaphors—such as war, family, or journey frames—and broader interpretive patterns that construct social reality and reinforce ideological perspectives. Throughout these stages, triangulation was

employed by integrating textual analysis with contextual interpretation and comparative reading in order to enhance the credibility and validity of findings.

Ethical considerations were observed by relying solely on publicly available texts, all of which were cited in accordance with academic standards. Reliability was strengthened through a double-coding process in which two independent researchers analyzed the data, followed by inter-coder agreement checks to minimize subjective bias. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by acknowledging the researchers' own linguistic backgrounds and cultural positionalities, ensuring that interpretations remained critically aware of potential biases and positioned within transparent methodological reflection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents major findings, organized around four thematic clusters: (1) transitivity and agency, (2) modality and evaluation, (3) metaphor and framing, and (4) ideological implications for intercultural communication.

Transitivity and the Representation of Agency
1) English Texts: The Discourse of Individual Agency

In the English corpus, transitivity analysis revealed a predominance of material and mental processes with explicit agents. Clauses such as "Citizens demand greater transparency", "Experts warn that immediate action is necessary", and "The government must protect individual freedoms" foreground actors and their intentionality. The syntactic emphasis on subjects (agents) and action verbs creates a discourse of accountability and empowerment.

Moreover, active voice dominates in English texts (approx. 78% of action clauses), reflecting the cultural ideology of agency, responsibility, and critique. Even when nominalization is used (e.g., "the implementation of policy"), the text often reintroduces agency in surrounding clauses, maintaining an argumentative and analytical tone.

2) Mandarin Texts: The Discourse of Collective Harmony

Conversely, Mandarin texts exhibited frequent agentless constructions and nominalized expressions. Phrases such as "取得了显著进展 (significant progress has been achieved)" and "社会稳定得到了保障 (social stability has been ensured)" obscure individual agency, focusing instead on collective outcomes and institutional legitimacy. Passive or neutral constructions accounted for nearly 65% of the process clauses.

This pattern resonates with Confucian ideals of social hierarchy and harmony, where collective identity supersedes individual agency. Responsibility is distributed across the social whole rather than attributed to specific actors. Linguistically, this strategy reduces confrontation and constructs a moralized image of coordinated progress.

3) Comparative Interpretation

The contrast illustrates two epistemological orientations:

a) English: agent-centered epistemology (change emerges through critique and responsibility).

b) Mandarin: collectivity-centered epistemology (change emerges through cooperation and moral order).

These orientations are not merely grammatical; they encode distinct cultural logics that influence perception, judgment, and interaction in intercultural contexts.

Modality and Evaluation: Constructing Truth and Obligation

Modality analysis revealed significant differences in expressing certainty, obligation, and evaluation.

1) English Modality

English texts frequently employ epistemic modals (may, might, could) and deontic modals (must, should, need to). These choices signal degrees of certainty and moral stance, creating dialogic space for contestation. For instance:

a) "The government must act to ensure equality."

b) "This policy might undermine individual freedoms."

Such formulations align with the discourse of rational argumentation characteristic of Western academic and journalistic traditions. Modality here encodes both obligation and openness—reflecting a worldview where truth is provisional, contestable, and subject to reasoned debate.

2) Mandarin Modality

Mandarin texts favor evaluative certainty rather than modal contingency. Expressions such as "已经取得显著成果 (has already achieved significant results)" or "展现了强大的领导力 (has demonstrated strong leadership)" convey affirmation rather than probability.

Modal markers like 应该 (should) or 必须 (must) appear primarily in policy statements rather than argumentative discourse. The dominant strategy is epistemic affirmation, reinforcing the legitimacy of institutional narratives.

3) Cultural and Ideological Implications

The English modal system embodies a discursive openness tied to individual interpretation and rational doubt. The Mandarin system promotes discursive closure that stabilizes collective meaning. Each system serves ideological purposes: the former normalizes critique; the latter naturalizes unity and consensus.

For intercultural communication, these differences can lead to misunderstanding—what English readers interpret as "neutral reporting" may seem overly confrontational to Chinese readers, while what Mandarin readers perceive as balanced affirmation may appear as propaganda to Anglophone audiences.

Metaphor and Ideological Framing
1) English Metaphors: Conflict and Progress

English texts rely heavily on metaphors of conflict, competition, and journey, such as "fight against inequality", "battle climate change", and "take steps toward reform." These metaphors construct social change as a dynamic process driven by struggle and progress. They reflect the ideological legacy of Enlightenment rationalism—a belief in linear progress through debate, reform, and confrontation.

2) Mandarin Metaphors: Harmony and Family

In contrast, Mandarin discourse favors metaphors of family, balance, and organic growth—"构建人类命运共同体 (building a community with a shared future for mankind)", "社会是一家 (society as one family)". These metaphors foreground interconnectedness, stability, and moral unity. The metaphorical network constructs society as a moral organism rather than a battlefield, aligning with Confucian notions of relational ethics and social harmony.

3) Comparative Frame Analysis

Table 1. Summarizes The Framing Contrast

Dimension	English Discourse	Mandarin Discourse
Dominant Metaphor	Conflict / Journey	Family / Harmony
Ideological Focus	Individual agency and change	Collective unity and order
Evaluation Mode	Critical / Dialogic	Affirmative / Moralistic
Social Function	Challenge authority	Legitimize cooperation

These frames reveal how each linguistic system encodes a specific worldview. Ideological encoding is not inherently "biased" but culturally patterned; each discourse type performs distinct social functions rooted in its moral and epistemic tradition.

Discursive Practice and Institutional Context

Analysis of production and distribution practices further clarifies ideological encoding. Mandarin media texts, primarily state affiliated, operate within a centralized discourse system emphasizing stability and legitimacy. Educational materials in both languages replicate these orientations: English textbooks encourage debate and personal opinion, while Mandarin textbooks prioritize collective responsibility and moral exemplarity.

The contrast underscores that ideology is not only linguistic but institutional a product of broader systems of media governance, educational philosophy, and epistemic authority.

Implications for Intercultural Communication

The findings carry profound implications for intercultural discourse competence. Misunderstandings often arise not from translation errors but from ideological incongruence between linguistic systems.

a) English communicators may perceive Mandarin discourse as evasive or excessively deferential.

b) Mandarin communicators may interpret English discourse as aggressive or disrespectful of collective harmony.

Effective intercultural literacy therefore requires ideological awareness the ability to recognize how languages encode values, power, and epistemology differently.

The comparative analysis of English and Mandarin texts reveals that ideological encoding operates as a deeply cultural and linguistic phenomenon, manifesting in systematic differences in agency, modality, and metaphor. These findings affirm the central premise of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): that language is both socially shaped and socially constitutive (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2008). The observed linguistic contrasts are not simply stylistic or grammatical but ideological enactments of distinct epistemological traditions. This discussion interprets these findings in relation to prior scholarship, situating them within broader debates in CDA, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and intercultural communication.

1. Ideology and Linguistic Realization of Agency

The divergent constructions of agency in English and Mandarin align with the socio-philosophical orientations underpinning each language. English discourse's preference for explicit agents and active transitivity structures corroborates Fairclough's (2013) argument that liberal-democratic ideologies are linguistically realized through individualized agency and critical rationality. The agentive, actor-centered syntax observed in English texts enacts an epistemology of personal responsibility and critique—features long associated with Western Enlightenment discourse traditions.

By contrast, the Mandarin corpus displays what Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) would describe as a "grammatical metaphor" of collectivism. The frequent use of agentless constructions and nominalization suggests an ideological preference for the concealment of individual responsibility and the elevation of collective outcomes. This linguistic pattern resonates with Hu and Zainol Abidin's (2025) claim that Confucian moral philosophy continues to inform Chinese discourse practices, emphasizing order, relational harmony, and deference to institutional authority. Thus, while English texts linguistically materialize power through critique, Mandarin texts do so through consensus and moral affirmation.

2. Modality, Evaluation, and Epistemological Orientation

Differences in modality further illuminate how epistemological traditions shape truth construction. English discourse exhibits dialogic openness, where modality functions as a tool of argumentation and epistemic negotiation. Such expressions of probability ("might,"

"could") and obligation ("should," "must") align with Western academic and journalistic conventions of rational deliberation and contestable truth (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Conversely, Mandarin texts display evaluative certainty and epistemic closure, privileging affirmation over argumentation. This tendency reflects Van Dijk's (2008) observation that discourse in hierarchical societies often legitimizes authority through certainty and moral positioning rather than through debate. The Mandarin modality system thus encodes epistemological trust in institutional voice and moral rectitude. The juxtaposition of these systems illustrates how linguistic form both reflects and sustains culturally distinct modes of knowing—the English epistemology of inquiry versus the Mandarin epistemology of harmony.

3. Metaphor and Ideological Worldbuilding

Metaphorical framing emerges as another key mechanism of ideological encoding. The English reliance on metaphors of conflict ("fight," "battle," "challenge") and movement ("steps toward reform") enacts a worldview grounded in struggle and progress—one that privileges dynamic change and critique. This aligns with Ulum and Köksal's (2019) assertion that English-language discourse frequently reproduces hegemonic ideologies of progress and reform.

In contrast, Mandarin's dominant metaphors of family ("社会是一家") and unity ("命运共同体") construct society as an organic moral entity rather than a site of contestation. These metaphors perform an ideological function of integration, reinforcing collectivist values and moral order. The contrast supports the CDA premise that metaphors are not decorative but constitutive—they frame social experience and guide interpretation (Fairclough, 1995). English discourse frames the world as a site of transformative action; Mandarin discourse frames it as a moral continuum to be maintained.

4. Discursive and Institutional Contexts

The findings also highlight the institutional dimensions of ideology. As Fairclough (2013) and Wodak (2011) argue, discourse cannot be divorced from the conditions of its production and circulation. English-language media and educational institutions operate within pluralistic environments where critique and debate are normalized forms of power negotiation. Mandarin media, operating under centralized structures, articulate ideological cohesion as a form of social responsibility. Thus, the linguistic differences observed are not merely textual but institutionalized—reproducing the macro-level power dynamics embedded in each communicative system.

5. Implications for CDA and Intercultural Communication

The comparative approach adopted here extends the analytical reach of CDA beyond its traditional Anglophone boundaries. Much of CDA scholarship, as Fairclough (2013) and Wodak & Meyer (2016) note, assumes Western epistemological premises—chiefly that ideology manifests through overt dominance and that critique is the preferred mode of

emancipation. The present study challenges this by demonstrating that in non-Western contexts, ideology may operate through affirmation, harmony, and moral legitimation rather than through confrontation. Such findings call for a culturally adaptive CDA framework that can accommodate multiple ideological grammars.

From an intercultural communication perspective, the study reveals that ideological incongruence can underlie pragmatic miscommunication. When English interlocutors interpret Mandarin affirmation as dogmatism, or when Mandarin speakers perceive English critique as disrespect, the root cause often lies in differing ideological encodings of truth and power. Therefore, developing intercultural discourse competence requires not only linguistic proficiency but also ideological literacy—the ability to recognize and negotiate these underlying epistemic frames.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

While the study provides substantial insight, it is not without limitations. The corpora, though representative, remain limited to specific genres (news and educational texts), which may not capture the full ideological spectrum of English and Mandarin discourse. Additionally, the analysis remains largely textual; future studies might incorporate multimodal and reception-based methods to examine how ideological cues are interpreted by audiences. Expanding the corpus to include digital media, political speeches, or online discourse could further reveal how ideological encoding evolves in globalized communication spaces.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study has demonstrated that ideology is not a peripheral aspect of discourse but an intrinsic feature of linguistic choice and structure. Through the combined framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research revealed how English and Mandarin texts encode divergent ideological orientations rooted in their respective epistemological traditions. English discourse, characterized by explicit agency, dialogic openness, and argumentative reasoning, embodies an individualist and rationalist worldview. In contrast, Mandarin discourse, marked by collective framing, evaluative affirmation, and agentless constructions, reflects Confucian ideals of harmony, moral order, and social cohesion.

The contrast between these two linguistic systems underscores that ideology operates not only at the level of macro-political discourse but also through the micro-level mechanisms of grammar, modality, and metaphor. English transitivity patterns foreground individual agency, while Mandarin nominalization and passive structures reinforce collective identity. Similarly, modal choices in English signal contestability and obligation, whereas Mandarin modality tends toward affirmation and legitimacy. These patterned linguistic differences reveal how each language constructs a culturally specific "way of knowing" — one that privileges critique and change, the other stability and unity. From a theoretical standpoint, the study extends CDA beyond its predominantly Western scope by

demonstrating how ideological operations can be expressed through non-Western linguistic and cultural systems. It challenges the assumption that critique is the only mode of ideological resistance and proposes that affirmation and harmony may also serve ideological functions within alternative cultural paradigms. By integrating cross-linguistic perspectives, this research contributes to the development of a more inclusive and culturally responsive CDA framework. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of ideological awareness in intercultural communication, translation, and pedagogy. Misunderstandings between English and Mandarin speakers often arise not merely from linguistic gaps but from divergent ideological grammars. Cultivating intercultural literacy therefore requires an understanding of how language encodes values, authority, and social relations. Incorporating CDA-based approaches into language education can help learners move beyond surface-level proficiency toward critical and reflective communication.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms that every linguistic system embodies a worldview and that understanding ideology in language is essential for fostering meaningful intercultural dialogue. By uncovering the ideological underpinnings of English and Mandarin discourses, the research contributes to bridging epistemological divides in global communication. Future investigations may expand this comparative model to multimodal or digital genres, enabling deeper insight into how ideology evolves in the rapidly shifting landscape of global discourse.

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