

# ***Examining Identity Construction Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of the Stop Asian Hate Corpus***

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the discourse of resistance to discrimination faced by Asians, analyzing a corpus of 14,867 words across ten resistance discourses. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of 'Ideological Structures of Discourse' and 'The Discourse–Cognition–Society Triangle', the study employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods. It focuses on eight ideological structures within these discourses, utilizing linguistic analysis tools like Word List, Keyword List, and Collocates from Sketch Engine. The analysis reveals frequent use of pronouns such as 'we', 'they', 'American', 'Asian', and 'against', highlighting a division between 'WE' (Asians) and 'THEY' (racists). This division emphasizes the negative portrayal of racists and the contrasting positive qualities of the Asian community, while also acknowledging the vulnerability of Asians. Activities and personal experiences dominate the ideological constructs, presenting specific practices and relatable experiences, making these narratives convincing and effective. The discourse is characterized by its focus on the vulnerability of Asians to violence and threats, drawing public and legislative attention to their safety and security needs. This study underscores the importance of resistance discourse in promoting awareness, solidarity, and cohesion among Asian communities against discrimination and injustice.

**Keywords:** racism, stop Asian hate, identity construction

## **1. Introduction**

Despite Europe and America's longstanding embrace of freedom, democracy, and equality, the problem of anti-Asian hatred has endured and even escalated. This trend became particularly pronounced following the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, which posed a significant threat to the lives and belongings of Asians. Consequently, there was a notable increase in anti-discrimination advocacy, including widespread protests and online activism in response to the tragic Atlanta shooting in 2021. Various platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Medium became inundated with a substantial volume of hate speech targeting Asians, further fueling the anti-Asian hate movement.

Several scholars, including Yu and Fan [1] and Li [2], have laid important groundwork in the field of Stop Asian Hate discourse. Their work encompasses two main aspects. Firstly, they delve into the social movement against discrimination targeting Asians, with a focus on advocating for action and influencing the narrative surrounding this issue. Secondly, they examine the construction of identity, particularly in relation to specific categories such as movements, events, and entities. However, these

studies predominantly concentrate on the formation of Asian group identities and do not give sufficient attention to the polarization of identities among different groups within the context of anti-discrimination discourse. Moreover, there is a lack of analysis regarding the construction of identity through the examination of high-frequency words in anti-discrimination discourse. The primary objective of this research is to examine the prevalent vocabulary utilized in constructing identities within anti-discrimination discussions among Asians, with a specific emphasis on identifying high-frequency terms. Furthermore, the study aims to analyze the manifestations of the eight ideological structures within the discourse surrounding anti-discrimination. Additionally, it seeks to investigate the construction of identities for both the marginalized Asian community (referred to as 'WE') and the individuals responsible for perpetrating acts of bullying against Asians (referred to as 'THEY') within these discourses.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Ideological structures of discourse**

The research in Critical Discourse Analysis is more specific to discourse analysis of the abuse of power between different social groups, class and organizations, which is based on the structures of ideology, including polarization, pronouns, identification, self-description, activities, norms, and values and interests.

Van Dijk argues that in ideological activity it is possible to be 'US' and 'THEM' according to practical needs, and to express this through ideological frames [3]. Oktar [4] further expresses this in four dimensions.

- (i) expressing or emphasizing the positive message of 'SELF'.
- (ii) Suppressing or downplaying the negative messages of 'SELF'.
- (iii) Suppressing or de-emphasizing the positive messages of 'OTHERS'.
- (iv) Expressing or emphasizing the negative messages of 'OTHERS' [4].

### **2.2. The Discourse–Cognition–Society triangle**

#### **2.2.1. Discourse**

Discourse, in the context of critical discourse analysis, is a field of analysis to describe the myriad of meaning-making resources at disposal, so discourse is also considered 'a form of social practice'. In this sense, 'discourse' in the context of CDA means that the relationship is dialogical between a particular discursive event and all the different elements that structure the event, including context, institutions and social structures [5]

The actual processing of discourse is very different from formal structural discourse analysis, and this article attempts to 'explain more realistically what language users actually do when they speak or understand discourse' [6].

#### **2.2.2. Cognition**

The most important aspect of Van Dijk's 'cognitive structure' is that it is loaded with two 'mental models', a 'situation model' and a 'context model'. The 'situation model' deals with the linguistic meaning of 'semantics', i.e., the objective (representation) of what the discourse refers to, while the 'context model' refers to the 'subjective reproduction of the communication context', i.e., the judgement and reproduction of the time and place of communication, the participants, the purpose of the speech act, the knowledge of other participants, and so on. Words derive their meaning from the intentions of their users, so in order to understand the meaning of words, it is necessary to know the

intentions of the speaker [7].

### 2.2.3. Society

Society encompasses both local, micro, face-to-face exchanges and global, social and political structures, such as groups, group relations (e.g., domination and inequality), actions, institutions, organizations, social processes, political systems and other abstract attributes of society and culture. The triangle between discourse, society and cognition is more or less heterodox, and such a combination is intended to illustrate the relevance of the relationship between social and cognitive dimensions in the (local and global) discursive context. Obviously, critical discourse analysis is concerned with socio-political and social issues and therefore requires a particularly fine-grained theory to clarify the relationship between text and context [8].

## 3. Data

Medium, established in 2012, is a globally recognized blogging platform primarily utilizing the English language for communication. In contrast to Twitter and Instagram, Medium offers a slightly slower pace and lower influence, but compensates with the absence of word limits and the provision of in-depth textual content. These features render it more appropriate for data collection and analysis purposes. The search for relevant material involved using the tag ‘Stop Asian Hate’ on Medium, and through the comparative examination of text structure and content, ten representative anti-Asian texts were selected at random for subsequent analysis.

## 4. Methodology

Based on the observation of anti-Asian discrimination texts published on Medium, this paper finds that identity antagonism accounts for the largest proportion of such texts in the ideological structures of the platform. This paper adopts a critical discourse analysis perspective to analyze the anti-Asian discriminatory texts on this platform by observing and summarizing the characteristics of such texts on this platform and using a ‘database-driven’ paradigm to verify (exemplify) and deepen the hypothesis in order to enhance the scientific validity and objectivity of the hypothesis. From the results, recommendations are also made for the development of anti-Asian discrimination texts on this platform. In this paper, we use Word List Keyword List、Collocates in Sketch Engine to analyze the ten anti-Asian discrimination texts collected on the Medium platform from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. Keyword List identifies keywords through retrieving and analyzing words or phrases that have a high frequency in the corpus. Collocates generates an ordered list of collocations in the corpus. And clusters can produce a list of words ordered in a sequence around the searched words in the corpus. After removing articles, meaningless prepositions such as the, a, of, on, to, etc., the 20 most frequent functional words are obtained:

## 5. Analysis

The frequency of personal pronouns such as ‘us, you, me, they’ and words about nationality or race such as ‘White, black, Chinese, American’ are used more frequently. Considering the high correlation of these words with polarization, identification, it can be assumed that the corpus is higher in relation to the ideological structure polarization and identification. Words such as ‘Against’, ‘racism’ and ‘crimes’ suggest the conflict between different races or groups and the precarious situation and low status of the Asian community. The high frequency of the words ‘woman’ and ‘man’ also suggests that sexism is an indispensable part of the resistance discourse.

According to van Dijk, ideological structures consist mainly of polarization, identification, self-

description, activities, norms and values and interest [3]. However, it can be observed from the anti-Asian hate speeches that group description and personal experience also constitute a large part of the resistance discourse with a more persuasive and convincing effect, so in this study the two elements are also considered part of the ideological structure.

It appears that personal experience is the most prevalent ideological structure in discourse about Asian hate, comprising 10.8% of the discourse. This suggests that individuals who have personally experienced or witnessed Asian hate are playing a significant role in shaping the conversation and drawing attention to the issue. Meanwhile, the lowest percentages are group description and polarization, both at 2.3% and 2.9%, respectively. This may indicate that people are less likely to focus on generalizations about groups or political divisions when discussing Asian hate. The other ideological structures fall somewhere in between, with activity (8.1%) and norms and values (5.3%) being relatively high, and self-description (3.6%), identification (2.4%), and interest (4.8%) falling in the middle. Overall, it appears that personal experience is a significant factor in shaping the discourse about Asian hate, while other ideological structures play a more limited role.

It is important to acknowledge that these percentages offer a restricted perspective on the conversation surrounding Asian hate, and it is crucial to examine the context in which these ideological structures are employed and the type of information they convey, which will be further explored in the subsequent section.

Members belonging to groups fighting against Asian discrimination frequently employ the political pronoun 'WE' to identify themselves and their group members. Similarly, they refer to members of other groups in terms of 'THEY' who are seen as competing or oppressed [5]. To analyze this further, the Sketch Engine's Word List function was utilized after filtering out the top 20 high-frequency words. It was found that pronouns such as 'me', 'you', 'us', 'we' rank among the top five in the frequency statistics. These statistics indicate that the Stop Asian Hate group extensively employs pronouns to categorize both their own members and members of other groups. Among the sentences that employ the term 'my', the injustice faced by individuals, as well as their family members and friends due to their Asian identity, is described. Furthermore, the utilization of 'we' and 'our' serves to strengthen the presence of the ideological group, affirm the collective presence of all individuals within the 'Stop Asian Hate' group, emphasize the coherence of their standpoint, and consequently enhance the feelings of belonging, responsibility, and community. Simultaneously, this approach has the potential to evoke empathy and foster a closer connection between the author and other readers who share similar perceptions regarding 'Stop Asian Hate,' thereby amplifying the sense of interaction and active involvement. In the corpus of ten articles, the word 'we' appears 219 times, whereas 'they' appears 94 times, representing a difference of 132.98%. This observation leads to the conclusion that the 'Stop Asian Hate' texts published on the Medium platform prioritize the emphasis on their own groups.

In discussions centered around resistance, the concept of ideological polarization frequently emerges to describe individuals holding radically contrasting views on race, namely racists and anti-racists. This notion aims to highlight the detrimental impact of racism on social and economic harmony and success. The examination of the word list reveals that crucial terms associated with divisive ideologies consist of: 'our' (appearing 219 times), 'they' (appearing 94 times), 'white' (appearing 57 times), 'black' (appearing 41 times), and 'Asian' (appearing 192 times). These words are the most commonly occurring in the dataset. In this document, individuals are classified into two distinct groups, 'WE' and 'THEY,' representing opposing ideologies based on the presence or absence of racial discrimination. These pronouns effectively highlight the clear distinction and contrasting stances between these groups.

Self-presentation often appears in the opening section of these racist articles. Establishing the speaker's Asian identity right from the start amplifies the credibility and effectiveness of the

storytelling. The speaker adopts a straightforward and uncomplicated approach to self-presentation, focusing primarily on aspects such as race, gender, place of residence, and experiences of discrimination, while often omitting details about their occupation.

A significant portion of the vocabulary list utilized in describing the group consists of important terms like ‘us’ ‘Asian’ and ‘Chinese.’ These words serve to depict the group’s attributes and convey a shared consciousness among its members. The language used to portray the group does not bring forth novel ideas or pre-existing knowledge concerning Asian groups. Instead, it accentuates the existing prejudice encountered by Asians, serving as a reminder to fellow Asians who face discrimination that they have the ability to navigate through their circumstances.

‘Ideological factions are commonly recognized through their actions, specifically their typical activities [8].’ The messages addressing the issue of Stop Asian Hate primarily emphasize the need for active participation. Analyzing the ten collected texts reveals that the ideological discussions frequently revolve around collective efforts—highlighting the necessary steps to alter the present circumstances that threaten ‘WE’ and ensure the protection.

The discourse surrounding Stop Asian Hate reveals the underlying norms and values of the ideology opposing such hate. The name itself emphasizes the crucial principle of equality, placing it as the main objective, and also assumes and provides evidence that the present state of affairs in the United States is marked by inequality directed towards Asians.

Personal experiences are an important part of ideology formation, and personal experiences may be personal, but at the same time they may also be experienced by family members, friends and others around them. Expressing firsthand encounters with unfairness from an Asian perspective not only elicits emotional connection but also bolsters the genuineness of the narrative, ultimately making it more captivating.

Finally, in discourses against discrimination against Asians, much space is often devoted to describing crimes of discrimination against Asians, with the purpose of demonstrating that fundamental basic interest of Asians, namely personal safety and job opportunities, has been seriously violated. And most of these examples refer to vulnerable groups such as the elderly and children in order to moderately provoke fear among Asians as a way to stimulate or motivate resistance from Asian groups. On the other hand, it is also possible to put the Asian community in a relatively vulnerable position as a way of arousing sympathy and concern among non-Asian groups.

## 6. Conclusions

Discourses of resistance to discrimination by Asians are a way of complaining about injustice, of inspiring self-esteem and racial cohesion among their compatriots, and of being an important way of defending their basic interests and human rights. The analysis of this paper is based on the discourse of 14,867 words of resistance to discrimination. Considering the subjective nature of traditional qualitative research methods or the difficulty of quantification, this paper combines qualitative and quantitative research methods to count, compare and analyze each of the eight ideological structures in each of the ten resistance discourses. At the same time, linguistic analysis tools such as Word List, Keyword List and Collocates in Sketch Engine were used to count the most frequent keywords in the corpus, which yielded the following results.

1. According to the analysis of the frequency of specific words and discourses, the pronouns ‘we’, ‘they’, ‘American’, ‘Asian’ and ‘against’, which reflect the ideological square, appear most frequently. In the resistance discourse, speakers tend to divide people into two groups, ‘WE’ and ‘THEY’ based on racism, and to emphasize the irrational and rude character of ‘THEY’ (racist). In contrast, the diligence, humility and innocence of the Asian ‘WE’ are emphasized. In a slight departure from the theoretical framework, the negative image of Asian ‘WE’ as vulnerable and susceptible to bullying is also emphasized in the resistance discourse, thereby raising awareness of the injustices and

discrimination faced by Asians as well as inspiring solidarity and cohesion among Asian communities.

2. In a corpus of 10 resistance discourses, activities and personal experience are the most numerous of the eight ideological constructs, and account for the largest proportion of half of the discourses. Activity content tends to present specific practices and objectives with a more effective effect. Personal experience, on the other hand, is based on actual experiences and is therefore more convincing and persuasive. Consequently, these two ideological constructs are more favored by discourses.

3. The anti-Asian discourse exhibits distinctive features in its ideological framework. The corpus contains numerous instances of vulnerable individuals of Asian heritage who face threats of violence, capturing the empathy and garnering attention from the broader public and even lawmakers. Consequently, the discourse within the corpus frequently addresses Asians' primary interest, which is their personal safety and security.

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