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A Corpus-based Discourse Analysis of Depression in Western and Chinese media

My research investigates different social constructions (Burr, 2003) of an increasingly relevant aspect of social life, namely mental disorders, more specifically, depression in Western and Chinese news media, aiming at delivering a contribution to people's understanding of the link between the discourse and the social reality of depression.

I understand discourse as all that has been said to the discourse object in question (Teubert, 2010). Therefore, to examine the meanings of a certain object, a researcher has to firstly, define the discourse that s/he is going to look at, and then discuss the meaning negotiations that have taken place within the defined discourse. The researchers' findings in this way, can only be considered as a construction on the meanings of the object in question, which should be further submitted to a wider discourse community.

In this research, to examine the meanings of mental depression in both UK and China, I define my discourse as represented by two large diachronic corpora consisting articles in which *depression* occurs in all national newspapers in both UK and China from 1980 to 2009. Furthermore, both the corpora are divided into five phases based on the frequency distribution patterns of the articles about depression. It is found that in the beginning phases of British subcorpus, depression is, in most cases, constructed as a psychological illness caused by major life events. And the main form of treatment has been represented as psychotherapy. While in the following phases, depression was more constructed as a biological disease and thus can be treated by antidepressants. The final phase of British subcorpus constructs depression as a rather complex problem that needs more scientific research, and more integrated forms of treatment are recommended. By contrast, in our Chinese subcorpus, it is found that depression has been always considered as being caused by external factors, such as problems of human relations and so on. Therefore, to cure depression, both psychological treatment and the repair of human relations or other external problems have been constructed as crucial in Chinese context. Medication, on the other hand, has been marginalized and represented as a last choice.

My talk then, will firstly review the literature part of cultural roots and depression studies in both western and Chinese contexts, including the work of depression study in cross-cultural psychiatry, pioneered by Arthur Kleinman (1985). Then, I will show how I have used corpus research methodology to reveal such striking differences between British and Chinese subcorpora about depression. Therefore, this research not only provides a social constructionist research on how depression has been understood in both British and Chinese news media in the last 20 years, but also proves the role of corpus in revealing larger discourse patterns, those patterns that can frame our beliefs and understandings towards the world.

References:

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Teubert, W. (2010) *Meaning, Discourse and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.