

Original Paper

Investigating Discursive Power by Critical Discourse Analysis of the “Run” Social Media Neologism in China

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Abstract

This research explores the discursive power demonstrated by the neologism “run” recently popular on Chinese social media platforms. With Critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough, the study has looked into 30 posts containing “run” on three platforms in text, discourse practices, and social practices. These findings further revealed the power of discourse. Dominant relations appear between institutions and individuals, as well as implicit forms in issues of discrimination against women, the elderly, and in the workplace. Discourses such as strong opposition to “run” implicitly use metaphors, rewording, intertextuality, etc. The use of grammatical questions and presuppositions can also be imposed on people. Power-to refers to “run” itself, which symbolizes a strong response to “power-over” by textual means of declarative sentences and situational context. Power-with can help connect people who are on the same side, or who have similar “background knowledge”, by paraphrasing, rewording, and grammar questions.

Keywords

social media, critical discourse analysis, Chinese social media, discursive power, Chinese netizens

1. Introduction

Recently, on Chinese social media platforms, there appeared many posts or comments with the catchphrase “润”, as a pun in Chinese pinyin and meaning “run” in English. This statement mostly demonstrates the inclination to move overseas and often appears in various blogs, such as posts about foreign life, disappointment about domestic life, depiction of foreign ideology and value, etc. There are over 10 million Chinese immigrants living in other countries and the number is increasing constantly. There are also many studies about Chinese immigrants and their performance on social media. The recent popular neologism “run” appeared and became an interesting scenario again to explore the

implications. Mostly, the posts or the comments mentioning the catchphrase “run” are from people who have the prospects of leaving China, going overseas, and pursuing a long-term stay in another country. They could be Chinese middle class, Chinese international students, singles, or new families. There always seem to be conflicts between staying in China or “running” to another country, demonstrated by their online dialogue, which is how different interest parties with distinctive stances are showcased. It is in the online dialogues, self-expressions, reviews, and other online gestures that the people supportive of “running” and people against “running” are becoming critical of each other.

Yet, there is a limited number of hashtags explicitly containing “run” on many Chinese social media, instead, many personal expressions and dialogues take place containing “run”, which makes it a more hidden, fragmented, and situated phenomenon on social media to be explored. This “neologism” acts like a replacement word to stand for implicit meaning without being censored on social media. There are more than semantic, cultural, discursive, and social implications embedded within to find out. Power and discourse are significantly important in examining the media expressions involving linguistics, various parties of people, larger social and cultural contexts, and other themes. This research is based on the historical development of discourse and power and makes use of Critical Discourse Analysis to discover the text, discourse practices, and social practices. It’s then followed with generalizations in dimensions of power-over, power-to, and power-with, to explore the power relations and struggles around these topics.

Generally speaking, power is a comprehensive theme in social science and has been given much contention by various categorizations. For example, Allen (1998, 2005, 2008) put forward three important dimensions of power through discourse: power-over, power-to, and power-with. Previously, there were Follett (1940) noted power-over as hierarchy and power-with as the collective ability in common goals. Power-over is normally considered as domination, with prominent themes in social conflict, control, and coercion, which have been the primary focus of Western social and political scientists (Michael Karlberg, 2005). Power-to is considered to be individual empowerment (Townsend et al., 1999), and to be the ability of an individual actor to attain to subvert domination (Allen, 1998). Power-with is also considered to be collective empowerment and resistance (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002) or collective ability and empowerment (Partzsch, 2017). Pamela Pansardi and Marianna Bindi (2021) further developed the concepts of the three concepts.

Discourse is closely interconnected with power, and has long been a perspective to reveal the hidden, comprehensive, and implicit power in the society. The concept of discourse and power has historically been theorized. Michel Foucault (1972) revealed the dominance and control of power over discourse, and profoundly clarified the nature and function of “discourse”. Jürgen Habermas (1983) believes that discourse itself can be a tool for exercising power by explaining the relationship between theory and practice. According to Bourdieu (1998), symbolic power reveals how language relates to power and

how it can play a role that violent means cannot, pointing the way for critical discourse analysis theories to shed light on power relations in social structures. Reed (2013) noted discursive power as the degree to which the categories of thought, symbolizations linguistic conventions, and meaningful models of and for the world determine the ability of some actors to control the actions of others or to obtain new capacities.

Regarding discourse analysis on social media, there have been numerous studies. Majid and Nadia (2017) discussed bottom-up discursive practices on social media to explore the pan-Arabic identity versus the Persian identity. Barber and Salam (2013) found the alignment of CDA and social media research as discursive systems, like social movements, and cyberbullying. There are also some other relevant empirical studies about the Chinese internet and online neologism related to immigrants and moving. Zhang and Qiu (2022) find that Chinese popular nationalist discourse demonstrates a sense of hostile attitude towards foreign countries on Chinese BRI projects. Chen et al. (2021) investigated the role social media plays in self-display and self-employment among digital forms of Chinese immigrants. Tao (2017) studied Chinese Internet neologisms reflecting emerging phenomena, and fresh changes. However, most research related to neologisms is from linguistics and morphology, few studies tapped deep into the social and cultural dimensions, and to the discursive and power implications.

Therefore, the research gap lies in the lack of discussion about the “run” social media neologism and focus on discursive analysis of it. This would be beneficial in discovering the power relations and power struggles of the topic on social media surrounding these individuals. It’s also important to explore the linguistic value, mechanism of production and consumption, and larger sociocultural context of the theme. Below are the key questions for this research.

- 1) What does “run” mean textually on social media?
- 2) How are the discourses of “run” on social media risen and communicated?
- 3) What are the power relations and struggles transmitted in the “run”?

2. Method

To showcase the covert power of the social media performance about “run”, and suggest the ideology, problems, and clashes engaged, the research would take the perspective of Critical Discourse to investigate this theme. This research will take qualitative analysis by choosing 30 posts containing the catchphrase “run” across various social media as the representative case studies. The criteria for selecting the posts would consider equal distribution on Chinese social media like Little Red Book, Zhihu, and Weibo. The selection also considers the multiple viewpoints including showing support or disagreement, being objective or subjective, and the abundance of information. Then the posts and relative information like comments, further dialogues, and surrounding online behaviors would be examined as the language and communication acts on social media from the perspective of Critical

Discourse Analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis from Fairclough (1989, 1995) is suitable for interpreting the meaning, discourse, and sociocultural factors of this scenario. The CDA approach is instituted to analyze “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). There is a substantial amount of discursive practice and communicative concentration on social media that turns the participatory web into new spaces of power and influence for society. There is also a need for the contextualization of language-in-use by drawing on the sociopolitical context of the audience and networks of discourse, both in the immediate online context and in the sociopolitical context of society (Ruth Wodak, 2015). Thus, it’s the inherent power, injustice, and social problems to be investigated in this social media phenomena that engage some Chinese netizens’ online inclination about leaving or staying, nationalism or westernization, belonging or detachment.

According to the Three-dimensional framework of CDA (Fairclough, 1995, p. 98), it constitutes text analysis, discourse analysis, and sociocultural practice (Figure 1). The description is the process of text analysis, focusing on the text itself, such as style, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, rhetoric, tone, etc. Interpretation is processing analysis, which involves text and discourse practice to understand the relationship between text and interaction. Explanation rises to the macro stage analyzing sociocultural practice, further revealing social factors such as politics, economy, and cultures.

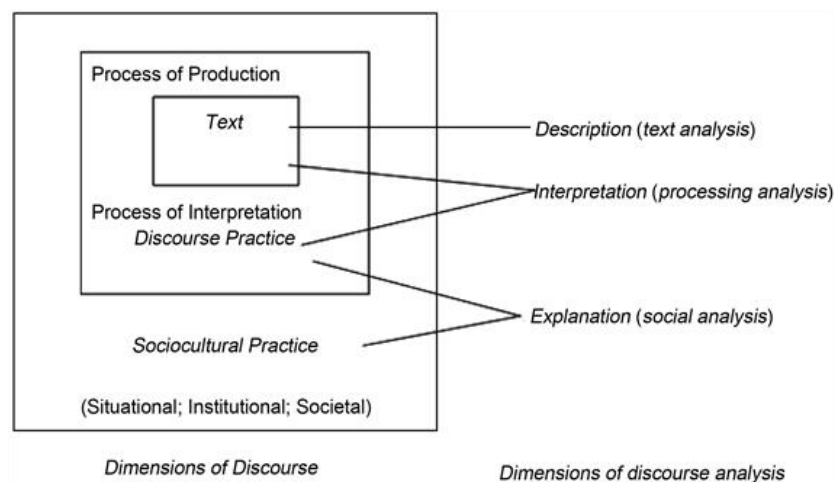


Figure 1. The Three-dimensional Framework of CDA (Fairclough, 1995, p. 98)

3. Result

To understand the trendy topics containing the catchphrase “run”, it’s important to search for hashtags on social media, which can be “linked to a search for those characters” (Sagolla, 2009) and stand for the “community building linguistic activity” (Zappavigna, 2011, p. 2).

Generally, as Table 1 noted, there are only 4 relevant topics searched on Weibo in hashtags containing “run”, which are #running out (40k reading), #the state after run out (91k reading), #she starved to death after she runs out to Japan (1.83million reading), and #new ways of run abroad (146k reading). These relevant topics have a low number of specific posts and mostly negative stances about “run”. And there are no search results with keywords like “running to foreign countries” which exist on the other two platforms. On the Zhihu platform, there are about 13 hashtags found containing “run”, which are #run (580 million readings), #runner (440 million), #running out (3.9 million), #running abroad, #running to the US, #running to Canada, etc. On Little Red Book, about 8 hashtags contain both the Chinese character “润” and the English one “run”, such as #run (1100 million readings), #running to the US (758k readings), #running to Singapore, #running, etc. Therefore, in comparison, there is a greater variety of hashtags, with a higher volume of reading on Zhihu than on Weibo and Little Red Book.

Table 1. Descriptive Data of Hashtags on the Three Social Media

	Number of Hashtags containing “run”	Number of reading	Number of discussions	The most popular hashtag
Weibo	4	2.1million	over 1200	#she starved to death after she ran out to Japan
Little Red Book	8	122 million	over 2000	#run
Zhihu	13	1.67 billion	over 675,000	#run

4. Discussion

Generally, among the thirty posts, there are types of purposes in support, in opposition, or in wavering attitude to running, as well as other opinions related. There are various themes of these media representations containing the catchphrase “run”. Some of them show skeptical attitudes towards running, some are supportive, some are focused on information and strategy sharing related to immigration, and some provide critical analysis about the pros and cons of migration and leaving, there are also other themes like finance-related information. There will be some examples of the posts across the three platforms to be analyzed in the framework proposed by Fairclough (1989), which extends from text analysis to discourse analysis and sociocultural analysis.

4.1 Text Analysis

Text is the first step in the three-dimensional framework of CDA. The text covers both the written and spoken discourse. For Fairclough (1995b), ‘Texts’ “may be written or oral, and oral texts may be just spoken (radio) or spoken and visual (television)” (p. 57). Text analysis will be conducted by looking

into features demonstrated in the 30 posts like vocabulary, grammar, metaphor, and cohesion.

4.1.1 Vocabulary

In terms of vocabulary, “run” in most of the posts is used as a verb, and there appeared many phrases or changed forms like “run to”, “run back to”, and “running”, in various sentences and grammar scenarios. This can also be viewed as a form of rewording, which means an existing, dominant, and naturalized, wording is being systematically replaced by another one in conscious opposition to it. For example, “the people who run abroad”, “see where you want to run to”, “after running to another country”, “running out”, “running abroad”, “who are now running”, “ignorant running”, “reversely running” etc. The core meaning of “run” as a word signifies the action of leaving an original place and going to another. The “running” sometimes refers to the gerund following the conjunction, to showcase the state of the present, while it can also become a nominalization to be described as a phenomenon, where the person is less focused on, and the action of “run” becomes more of attention.

In the example “The Zhiren (colonized people) run to the Piaoliangguo (the US), tasted the iron fist of capitalism...” (from weibo@mizhitunvlang X, on 29 Jan 2024), “Zhiren” and “Piaoliangguo” both have experiential, relational and expressive values. As a declarative sentence, this statement can have the purpose of declaration, with “run” here acting as a verb connecting colonizers and US, as the subjective and objective. “Zhiren” means the people of the colony as an intentional rewording. Here it can be translated into “colonized people”), and has appeared in one of the posts as an interesting word. It seems to be a hasty generalization due to it summarizes all the people or immigrants as only one category. For Piaoliangguo (the US) as the objective where the “Zhiren” runs to, it acts as a nickname given by some Chinese netizens to the US. It shows the author’s tendency to be interconnected into the discourse of commenting on immigration on the Chinese internet and shows a sense of humor and euphemism. This post claiming “Zhiren” and “Piaoliangguo”, shows the resistance, despise, and ridicule towards the people who immigrate to the US through euphemism and rewording.

4.1.2 Grammar

There are diversified grammatical features, at the level of words and sentences. The objective after “run” can be any foreign country such as Australia, while the objective after “run back to” is the definite one “China”. This can imply that in these online posts, “China” is the country with the greatest level of belonging, while foreign countries are normally considered as the outside world, where they could live a different life.

For sentences, most cases in this research are declarative sentences, question sentences, and others, which can demonstrate relational value as well. In a typical declarative sentence, the subject position of the blogger is that of a giver, and the addressee’s position is that of a receiver. In a grammatical question, the writer is again asking something of the addressee and the addressee is in the position of a provider of information. Further, a declarative may have the value of a request for information, and a

grammatical question may have the value of a demand for action. There could be systematic asymmetries in the distribution of modes between participants due to participant relations: asking, be it for action or information, is generally a position of power (Fairclough, 1989, p. 126). On Zhihu, the headlines of the articles containing “run” are mostly grammatical question sentences, some of which are yes/no questions, and there are also many examples on Zhihu and Weibo that belong to why- and how-questions, which are open and showcase the room for answers.

“Is there no more involution after running to another country?”

“Is life going to be happier after running to another country?”

“Why are there many people who want to run to Singapore?” (Zhihu, over 6000 likes and 1000 comments)

“Why do so many Chinese despise those who run out?”

“How are those people who have run abroad doing now?”

In the purpose of inviting comments and conversations in their column, it seems like the audience/addressee to be in the position of providers of information and beliefs, it can also be regarded as an implicit demand for action. Hence, the relationship between the blogger and the viewers is not limited to asking and answering, it can be extended to the power of starting an online discussion and leading possibilities of responses. For yes/no questions, the framework of participating in the topic has no more than two ways, and the participants have the right to provide their viewpoints, knowledge, and ideas. Yet, intentions might exist like “Is there no more involution after running to another country?” could be a suggestion of involution or fierce competition is everywhere, and running to another country may not be the solution. For open questions with interrogative pronouns, there are many more pathways to take part in the discussion. Some of the questions ask about the situation of “running out”, some ask about the choice of countries, some focus on the analysis of the subjects of “runners”, and other relevant phenomena. The answers followed show much more variety and standpoints than that of yes/no questions.

4.1.3 Metaphor

A metaphor is a means of representing one aspect of experience in terms of another. The post on Weibo received over 1200 likes, “The people who are now running are like those joining the national army in 1949.” This post used metaphorical relations to demonstrate sarcasm and disagreement about running. In another post on Zhihu, “...many people think that foreign countries are as safe as ours. The colonizers ran to the Piaoliangguo (the US), tasted the iron fist of capitalism, and then began to understand what greenhouse flowers are”, there appeared several metaphors as well. The phrase “greenhouse flowers” is using metaphorical representation to depict people as being fragile and

innocent, to strengthen the contrast between domestic and capitalism. The “iron fist” stated the harshness of another system different to socialism, which is inherently not mentioned as opposed to capitalism.

4.1.4 Cohesion

There are generally formal connections between sentences in a text, which are collectively referred to as cohesion. Cohesion can involve vocabulary links between sentences—repetition of words, or use of related words (1989, p. 130). This can be found in many posts as a short passage of long and complicated sentences. For instance, in the case of “Is it correct for people like us in this great country to run out and buy American stocks? I’m sorry, although I appreciate your advice, I can’t agree with that. I hope our market will improve. I hope everything is getting better”, there are “although”, and repetitive “I hope”. This post is from Weibo @erjishichang with over 5000 likes and over 1000 comments. This post referred to a comment left at the account’s previous posts, discussing financial management. The comments of it include financial purpose, advice about asset threat after running out, and spiritual comments of nationalism, surrounding the topic of “run”. The pictures along with the posts are also coherent with the theme of finance and foreign countries.

4.2 Discourse Analysis

According to Fairclough (1989, p. 141), interpretations are generated through a combination of the text and the resources in the interpreter, in the sense of the MR which the latter brings to interpretation. From the point of view of the interpreter of a text, formal features of the text are cues that activate elements of interpreters’ MR (background knowledge). Unlike text practice, discourse practice focuses on explaining the relationship between text and discourse practice, that is, how text is generated, disseminated, and accepted. There are interpretations of the text and context, the latter is divided into situational context and intertextual context. Situational context taps on external cues like features of the physical situation and properties of participants. Intertextual context means participants in any discourse operate on the previous discourses the current one is connected to, and their assumptions determine what can be taken as a common experience.

4.2.1 Situational Context

To explore the situational context, here are emphasis on discourse types of contents, subjects, relations, and connections. Contents can incorporate activity, topic, and purpose. For example, the activity type in the post “the elderly young woman is preparing to abandon everything in Asia and run to America from Japan” is leaving China, comparing west to east, and immigration to various countries. The set of possible topics could be expatriate experience, comparison of west to east, and selection of immigration countries. The purposes are recognized as personal sentiments, persuasion, and looking for recognition by using hashtags of # Japan # Run America.

Subjects refer to the people who are involved in the discourse, and relations can help figure out the subject's positions set up. For example, most posts are drawing upon other "runners", as representative examples in their discourses. Normally they have no personal relations with the subjects they refer to. In the case of "The person has successfully run to Japan with the family", the author attached screenshots of the person's story shared on social media. Thus, it's noted that many speeches on social media find their topics as a commentary about other people's stories, experiences, or social issues. Connections are associated with the language used, constituting words, pictures, comments, and other social media features. Most examples in this research have multiple formats including words in paragraphs, relevant pictures like that of the person referred, the author/himself, or scenarios, etc. Therefore, the situational context of "run" has activities of immigration with various topics and purposes of persuasion, subjects of other people unknown to the authors, and multiple formats in coherent connection.

I, the elderly young woman am preparing to abandon everything in Asia and run to America from Japan. Have been studying and living in Japan, left for two years, and went to Vietnam before returning to Japan, I feel more like I returned to my happy hometown... # Japan # Run America. (from @Tt jiang running to the US from Japan)

The person has successfully run to Japan with the family, but they are tricked by bad intermediaries and the money has also been spent. What they are thinking now is how to survive. (from Weibo @ A Rabbit, I Drink and Get Drunk)

4.2.2 Intertextuality and Presupposition

According to Fairclough, the interpretation of intertextual context is a matter of deciding which series a text belongs to, and what can be taken as common ground for participants, or presupposed. This further leads to the discussion of intertextuality emphasized by Fairclough, which means that any discourse is an absorption and transformation of other discourse, by direct or indirect references, paraphrases, metaphors, and so on. Many discussions about running are based on comments from others, taking screenshots of content posted on other social media or accounts, and then opening new media posts and conversations. For instance, there are indirect references taking place in many posts like "a person said that China's foreign trade has already ended and the economy is about to end, so hurry up and run", "the person has successfully run to Japan", "after successfully running to New Zealand after her life as a resentful woman...", "the elderly young woman is preparing to abandon everything in Asia and run to America from Japan...". The authors are taking the perspective of others' stories, experiences, ideas, and speeches.

Presuppositions are sometimes drawn from particular texts, in other cases they make a general appeal to “background knowledge”. For example, in some posts, nonshared information between the disseminator and the receiver is impersonated as shared information to induce and impose on the receiver. In the following three cases, there are social issues noted as the focus of the discussions. In the first example, there is a direct quotation from a news agency about the previous HK unrest, while in the second one, there is an indirect and direct reference from other people’s comments listed. In the third example, the presupposition is showcased to appeal to the background knowledge of the popular Wechat article as a social issue. The popular topic by hashtag is also noted and acts as the start of the conversation for the second topic. The common feature of the three posts is that the disseminator presupposes that the audience is aware of the news, viral topics, and social issues mentioned, and with direct or indirect reference, the disseminator aims to draw attention, gain traffic, and others.

Japan Times: Young people in Hong Kong once caused unrest in 2019 due to fear of the mainland, but except for some who run abroad, the rest accepted the new cross-border lifestyle they had previously rejected. (from Weibo)

#Wu Jing and his family celebrate the Spring Festival in Singapore #How can this topic be on hot search? What kind of peanut brain Zhiren (colonizer) can ask such a question? ... “Patriotism” might be the most strict lifestyle of people in all...(from Weibo @Modernpoet Niubiao)

My wife’s death (the recent popular WeChat article) is a tragedy behind the aged and ignorant running.... (from Little Red Book @Fish cat cat)

4.2.3 Production and Consumption

To analyze the posts from the perspective of production, it’s important to explore the roles of the authors or bloggers. The authors of these social media examples have various identities. Some of the disseminators are KOLs with large numbers of followers on the topic of immigration, and political affairs, some are common people like international students, some are young, some are middle-aged family men/women, etc. For Weibo, most accounts disseminating posts about “run” on social media are professional accounts with overwhelming stances of being negative and critical. On Little Red Book, accounts active in sharing information or feelings about “run” are diversified including international students, professional accounts doing immigration business, middle-aged family members, young people looking for jobs, etc. On Zhihu, accounts of the production of the questions and answers also include many KOLs who are experts in the field of foreign countries, and policies. This can imply

various powers and resources owned by different accounts. The accounts with a larger number of followers are considered to have a greater impact and have more people who would echo their posts, while those individual or common accounts might have less traffic and, therefore have less chance to be noticed and disseminated further.

In terms of consumption, most followers of these social media accounts are international students, new families, and young workers, who show great interest in living a life in another country, with various ages, professions, and locations. In some comments in the posts, it's also found that many people have more interest in commenting on the idea or behavior of immigration, without experience of overseas life. This is to say, there is little evidence in many commentators' speeches, rather they are taking the topic as a way of entertainment, showing patriotism, and disagreement, and trying to find the circle with the same attitude with them. For example, the following posts show extreme feelings in the posts and comments from consumers of these speeches. The comment with over 300 likes of the second post said "But she can enjoy the fresh air and freedom, don't be cynical". "Fresh air" easily reminds people of the previous graduation speech made by a Chinese student in the US, which went viral and was harshly criticized by Chinese netizens for being snobbish and ungrateful. Thus, production and consumption in this regard can be emotional, sentimental, intentional, and diversified.

What disgraceful face you have! You run as you want to and you come back as you want to! China is not a garbage collection station, just stay in the Piaoliangguo (US), a group of sophisticated interests! ... Do you want a face? Get lost! (weibo @xipingjunyushi, with about 800 likes, 61 comments and 25 shares)

After successfully running to New Zealand after her life as a resentful woman, she began to complain bitterly that life abroad was too difficult: no place to live, no food, no financial assistance... (from weibo @theeagleofgod_5zn, with over 2000 likes and over 300 comments)

4.3 Social Analysis

The last level of the communicative event of CDA is the sociocultural practice. By 'sociocultural practice', Fairclough (1995) "means the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is a part of" (p. 57). It's noted the mediated relationship is realized by the social context of the discourse, and the relationship of discourses to processes of struggle and power relations is the concern of explanation (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 140-141). To explore the social determinants of these discourses, there are multiple significant stakeholders involved, including countries' social media companies, culture, etc.

For countries, “run” clearly notifies the variation of China and the foreign countries especially the developed countries that people desire to “run” to. Statistics show Chinese make up the largest Asian population in America, with about 2.5 million (International Migrant Stock Database). There are also many other destination countries like Europe, the UK, Australia etc. It used to be easy to leave their hometown and move out to the US, yet it’s becoming harder for immigrants in China as well as other countries to move to developed countries like the US and Australia regulated by new policies of governments. Meanwhile, China is gaining much more influence and economic power, which is why there appeared ideas like “reversely run back to China” on social media. “Run” stands for not only the choice of the individual but also speaks about the politics, economy, and cultural influence on a global scale.

On the level of social media companies, each of the three media platforms has a different capital proportion, audience proportion, media regulations, etc. Some have foreign capital, some are personal-invested, or state capital controlled. For example, the biggest stakeholders for Weibo are Sina.com and Alibaba.com, while Alibaba has a strong foreign shareholder, SoftBank. The revenue in the market or profits for stakeholders could be one of the reasons for the supervision of Weibo, and the regulations from both the Chinese government and foreign capitals. Zhihu also has external investors like Tencent.com, which is one of the conglomerates in China’s information and communication technology. Little Red Book is a recently popular social media space focusing on the youth lifestyle, without much foreign investment. It’s comparatively more popular among the Z generation and has slightly more tolerance in speech, perspectives, and information sharing.

For cultural factors, there are also some essential and intriguing societal issues pertinent to the topic of “run” in these posts, such as “the aged women in their 30s” in China, the wealthy officials fleeing abroad, the 35-year-old crisis, and the retirement issue in China. These are the hot topics that imply the living struggle facing women over 30 years old, people over 35 years old, and people who are facing retirement. In China, people treat age as an important thing in the workplace, in marriage, and many living conditions. Most problems are specific to Chinese culture, such as “the aged women in 30s” is a prominent and long-existing hot topic. 30 might be a normal age in other cultures, but in China, 30 has always been a critical age that has especially strict requirements for Chinese women instead of men. The common prospect for women in their 30s is to get married, while the prospect for men of the same age is to have a secure job. Therefore, the post said, “As an ordinary single daughter from a family in Jiangsu, and over 30 years old, I return home during Chinese New Year as if I were an unforgivable sinner”. The other topics also mentioned the 35-year-old crisis, such as in “Before being eliminated at the age of 35, run back to US #international student #h1b”. 35 years is another strict age limit, especially in workplaces like the government, banks, universities, and other companies. Hence, these have showcased the unique social issues in China like the burden on Chinese people for different

generations, and their tryouts in transferring the burden by “running abroad”.

In summary, description explores the micro-levels of the texts from vocabulary, grammar, metaphor, and cohesion, with findings in rewording like “Zhiren”, changing forms of “run”. For grammar, the question sentences are found to have the power of leading and framing in both types of questions. In terms of metaphor, several metaphorical expressions can stand for the alternative concepts and perceptions of the disseminators. Cohesion is showcased by repetitive words and various formats. Secondly, discourse analysis (interpretation) helps to figure out the situational context involving content, subjects, relations, and connections. Intertextual context and presupposition are regarded as another keyword in understanding the background knowledge, direct and indirect reference, and a disguised and covert embedded within. What’s more, production and consumption are investigated as being differentiated by the platforms, resources of the accounts, and resources of knowledge and experience, etc. Lastly, the social analysis explains well the context of the topic of “run” in terms of countries, social media companies, and some other pertinent social and cultural issues are referred.

4.4 Implications of Power

Taking considerations from the Critical Discourse Analysis by description, interpretation, and explanation, there are some more implicit and prominent themes as generalizations of the findings in terms of power relations and power struggles. The power and discourse can be further looked into by the three dimensions of power brought by Allen (1998), which are power-over, power-to, and power-with, as well as other notions brought up as additions to the concepts in literature.

4.4.1 Power-over

Allen (1998) defines power-over as “the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way”. This refers to power as domination, which highlights issues of social conflict, control, and coercion, which have been the primary focus of Western social and political scientists (Michael Karlberg, 2005).

In the case of “run” on social media, there are dominant relations between institutions and individuals. Institutions like government and social media companies are powerful entities that can have rights of political force, supervision, economic values, culture consumption, and so on. The netizens on social media are Chinese citizens at first, which means they must abide by the laws and regulations as citizens, like the Internet Law, the Constitution, and other explicit rules. This means people are bargaining away dominance in exchange for their rights and security at various levels. Further, social media companies as another category of essential component of economic entities, are treating people as consumers while being socially and legally controlled by the state as well. The limited hashtags about “run” on Weibo are an explanatory example to prove the strict supervision by cultural and media administration in China. In addition to political supervision, these listed companies are also market value-oriented, worrying about their stock performance with versatile influence from finance, society, international

affairs, etc. On the other hand, the media corporations have provided the basic rules, regulations, and frames for consumers to be engaged in, which can also be regarded as a way of domination. For example, users need to abide by the requirements of word length, picture format, community rules, and the limited choices of functions on social media. It seems that social media offers individuals the freedom to be connected with others on the internet, they are also confined in a sphere in which the rule of the game is set up by the programmers and the company.

The people are under extreme pressure such as the themes noted in social analysis—the aged women in their 30s, the 35-year-old crisis, and the retirement issue in China. These topics disclose the anxiety and pressure brought by society on people. These can be extended to issues of discrimination against women, the elderly, and in the workplace. Common people seem to be powerless when facing this collective and long-standing recognition. For instance, some posts mention their struggles in life about whether running, as being a “Leftover woman” or “Shengnv”, which is a controversial word used to describe women in their 30s who are not married. They are labeling themselves with ideological and discriminatory adjectives themselves. Thus, the depth of the traditional concept is ingrained and has become the dominant thoughts and values of people living in it.

Power-over is manifested in many discourses such as strong opposition to “run” by implicitly using metaphors, rewording, intertextuality, and impact endorsed by the profession and popularity of their accounts. The metaphors of “Zhiren” and the rewording of “Piaoliangguo” both expressed despise and disagreement with “run”. Intertextuality is utilized by referring to the examples of others’ online speech or pictures. The impact of the accounts is another means to increase the accounts’ authority and trustworthiness. Therefore these methods are taken to construct the one-sided social media posts like the harsh criticism of other people’s failure in running abroad. In these kinds of discourse, you can hardly find any ideas showing support, empathy for the person in the reference, or other dissent voices. This could be the result of the filter function set up by social media mechanisms or the bloggers who initiate the discussion. Therefore, in the column of these posts, dominance is permeated to control the perspective, eliminate the objections, and empower their standpoint. For the viewers who are not aware of the authenticity of the examples or the overview of the failed cases of running, they can get easily influenced and tend to agree with the critiques. Especially when the author of the post and numerous comments make the same standpoint, the viewers with little background knowledge might find it more natural to agree rather than disagree.

Another implicit power-over consists of a demonstration of grammatical questions and presupposition. The questions also can have an ideological leading effect, like “Is there no more involution after running to another country?” The answers below the leading question tend to believe in the statement after the “is there”, instead of negating the statement. Presupposition also draws people by listing social issues and their perspectives about them in the front, before leaving enough room for viewers to search

and think. Second-hand information or indirect reference can be very misleading or could be a covert approach for the disseminators to add to their supposition.

4.4.2 Power-to

Power-to, as the second modality of power (Allen, 1998) is concerned with everyday social interactions as a response to power-over. It's defined as the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends that serve to subvert domination. Pansardi (2011) also believed that power-to exists in the ability of the actor to carry out certain specific outcomes. To some scholars, power-to has the real meaning of "power" (Morris, 2002).

"Run" itself symbolizes power-to as a strong response to "power-over", with words and actions about running. The most distinctive feature of the hashtag "run" or any mention of "run" in online speeches is calling for action of leaving the original place, in most cases which means China, and going to another country, in most cases meaning the developed countries. This shows the mobilizing connection between online space and reality. To analyze the motivations of the people in favor of "run", some aim for a better living condition with higher wages and welfare, some intend to flee from the pressure of age, workplace in the domestic environment, some desire reputation, and so on. All of the motivations for running are related to the relative dissatisfaction about the society mechanism and their personal life in the original place, and prospects for foreign countries. It's their action to pursue a better living condition as struggle with the domestic environment. In social analysis, the running can specifically refer to the opposition or subverting of women to the men-dominated society, of the working class to the capitalist class-led society, and individuals' mobility to the stable structure of the society.

Power-to in the text analysis is more prevalent in declarative sentences, with the subject position of the blogger being that of a giver, to provide information and ideas to the viewers. There are professional accounts sharing immigration policy and strategies and individual accounts sharing personal experiences and ideas about "running". The situational context is diversified in contents, subjects, relations, and connections. The content for instance has various purposes like persuasion of others with different views, knowledge transmission about different countries and policies, and critical analysis by comparing the benefits and weaknesses. The connection highlights the multiplicity in the description of the topic, such as by using contrasting colors of pictures to introduce the immigration countries, sharing the self-experience of "running" like a story and making opposing arguments to the opinion of anti-running, etc.

4.4.3 Power-with

Power-with, in Allen's idea, can be understood as "the ability of a collectivity to act together for the shared common purpose of overturning a system of domination" (Allen, 1998). Power-with means the ability of a group to act together given collective outcomes or goals (Pansardi, 2011a; 2012a). This can be related to intertextuality where multiple discourses are viewed altogether with references to each

other, which can connect people who are on the same side of opinion, or who have similar “background knowledge”. For instance, cyber nationalism is showcased by criticism and extremely negative expressions in some posts about “run” by some KOLs and their followers with the same stance of opposition and ridicule about running. It’s among the group of people with similar stances that the collective patriotism and resistance to “running” are strengthened. Power-with also consists of the people who share information and strategy about running, and appeal to the people who are in favor of, who have experienced, or who are in the same struggle about “running”. They also try to pursue the discourse of pro-run or objective analysis about “running”, through paraphrasing, rewording, and grammar questions as ways of intertextuality and leading the thoughts.

4.5 Conclusion

To conclude, this research explores the discursive power demonstrated by the new word “run” on Chinese social media platforms. Viewed by Critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough (1989, 1995), description explores the micro-levels of the texts from vocabulary, grammar, metaphor, and cohesion, with findings in rewording like “Zhiren”, changing forms of “run”. For grammar, the question sentences are found to have the power of leading and framing in both types of questions. In terms of metaphor, several metaphorical expressions can stand for the alternative concepts and perceptions of the disseminators. Cohesion is showcased by repetitive words and various formats. Secondly, discourse analysis (interpretation) helps to figure out the situational context involving content, subjects, relations, and connections. Intertextual context and presupposition are regarded as another keyword in understanding the background knowledge, direct and indirect reference, and a disguised and covert embedded within. What’s more, production and consumption are investigated as being differentiated by the platforms, resources of the accounts, and resources of knowledge and experience, etc. Lastly, the social analysis explains well the context of the topic of “run” in terms of countries, social media companies, and some other pertinent social and cultural issues are referred.

These findings further are theorized by power-over, power-to, and power-with. Dominant relations happen between institutions and individuals like the control from government and social media companies. The companies and government are also inter-dominant and influenced. Power-over has also implicit forms in issues of discrimination against women, and the elderly, and in the workplace, which are too deep-rooted as collective recognition that people find it nearly impossible to fight against. Power-over is also manifested in many discourses such as strong opposition to “run” by implicitly using metaphors, rewording, intertextuality, and impact from accounts in production. The use of grammatical questions and presuppositions can also impose people with suppositions. Power-to can be explained by “run” itself, which symbolizes a strong response to “power-over”, with words and actions about running, by textual means of declarative sentences and situational context. Power-with can help connect people who are on the same side of opinion, or who have similar “background knowledge”.

Those with collective patriotism and resistance to “running” or those who are in favor of “running” can realize their discourse purposes by paraphrasing, rewording, and grammar questions to lead their stances.

The limitations of this research mainly come from the limited number of cases on social media, which can’t represent the whole overview of “run”. There is also a lack of hashtags or topics similar to “run”, in the field of immigration, mobility, and intercultural communication on social media. Future research can look into more varieties in specific demonstrations surrounding “run” or other related words or notions. The concept of discursive power can also be improved and better theorized, with more empirical evidence and research.

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