A Study on Biden Administration's Cognition on China: From the Perspective of Cognitive Discourse Analysis

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Abstract—By using "levels of categorization" in categorization theory in cognitive linguistics, this article studies Biden Administration's cognition on China. After analyzing the categories it uses to recognize China in "Strategic Competition Act of 2021," this article discovers that its categorizing model mainly consists of 5 modules: (1) dividing a category into semantically non-overlapping subcategories, (2) juxtaposing a subcategory and its elements, (3) ignoring the subcategory and upgrading its elements, (4) concealing the subcategory and its elements in the logical suppositions within the relevant discourses, and (5) putting some elements on the border of two subcategories.

Index Terms—Categorizing model, "Strategic Competition Act of 2021", the US's cognition on China

I. INTRODUCTION

After Biden took office in the White House, the US has changed its attitudes towards China drastically. There is a large scholarship on Biden Administration's cognition on China. Xu and Li studies how changes in China's scientific and technological power affect the American public's perception of China from the perspective of three-dimensional view of power, discovering that "first, changes in China's scientific and technological power significantly affect the American public's threat perception of China. Second, national image and national identity mediate the relationship between changes in China's scientific and technological power and the American public's threat perception of China" [1]. By using schema deduction and narrative reconfiguration theories, Yue studies the US value-based diplomacy towards China in the post-cold war era, and discovers that "thanks to the cognitive performance of the 'schema deduction' mechanism, the successive US policy-makers could keep pursuing the consistency of US value system in making China policy" [2]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC points out 21 falsehoods in "US perceptions of China" with abundant facts and figures [3]. Although these studies are helpful to understand Biden Administration's cognition on China, they are to a large extent macroscopic research, ignoring the importance of detailed analysis. "Strategic Competition Act of 2021," the third part of *United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021*, is Biden Administration's programmatic document to launch the strategic competition with China, containing a large number of discourses relevant with its cognition on China. In some of these discourses, its ways of categorizing China are totally different from "the classical taxonomic

structure" [4].

Considering the research status quo, the Act's important position, and Biden Administration's special ways of categorizing China, this article plans to study Biden Administration's cognition on China from the perspective of cognitive discourse analysis. First the categories relevant with its cognition on China, especially the non-classical categories, will be chosen out for analysis, second its categorizing model will be summed up from these analysis, and finally its mentality will be inferred from its categorizing model.

II. CATEGORIZATION THEORY AND NATIONAL COGNITION RESEARCH

Categorization is the "mental process" [5] of classification and its products are categories. With the help of "idealized cognitive models" [4], it operates on both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. Idealized cognitive models are "all the stored cognitive representations that belong to a certain field" [5], including "image-schematic", "propositional", "metaphoric", "metonymic", and "symbolic". The propositional can be further divided into "the simple proposition", "the scenario" (script), "the feature-bundle structure", "classical taxonomic structure" (classical category structure), "radial category structure", "graded categories", and "graded propositions" [4]. Whereas horizontal operation examines the internal organizing mode of a category, vertical operation examines its accommodation, i.e., the hierarchical arrangement of objects from the most abstract to the most specific. Generally speaking, there are three common levels: "superordinate level", "basic level", and "subordinate level" [6]. The basic level is "where we perceive the most obvious differences between the organisms and objects of the world," and "where the largest amount of information about an item can be obtained with the least cognitive effort" [7]. Whereas the superordinate level is more abstract and general than the basic level, the subordinate level is more specific and detailed than it.

After carefully read "Strategic Competition Act of 2021," I first choose all the discourses relevant with Biden Administration's cognition on China to from a corpus. Then by using the idealized cognitive models to examine this corpus, I extract dozens of categories from it. I discover that almost all the categories are propositional, within which the most typical types are classical taxonomic structure, graded category, and scenario. Except abundant discourses containing categories with the classical taxonomic structure, the discourses containing categories with the non-classical taxonomic structure are as follows: (1) China's national policies, (2) China's goals of ensuring its global economic advantage, (3) China's human rights, (4) China's behaviors

affecting other countries' information security, (5) the contents China promotes in other countries, (6) China's behaviors affecting US-Canada alliance, (7) China's strategies of promoting soft power in sub-Saharan Africa, (8) China's behaviors in the Middle East and North Africa, (9) China's goals of reshaping the international order, (10) the possible actions of the Communist Party of China, (11) Chinese companies' actions, (12) China's actions harming the US interests, (13) China's actions affecting countries around the South China Sea, (14) China's ways of expanding its influences in international organizations, (15) the Communist Party of China's actions affecting the world, (16) the goals China realized by utilizing Hong Kong, (17) the contents of China's external publicity, (18) China's impacts on sub-Saharan Africa, and (19) China's impacts on international organizations.

Because Discourses (3), (16), and (19) can not only reflect Biden Administration's cognition on China's "distribution of capabilities" [8] and interaction with "security complexes" [9] in "the international political system" [8, 10], but also contain non-classical categories with the most typical types of propositional idealized cognitive models, they are selected out for detailed analysis. Under the perspective of cognitive discourse analysis, by analyzing the categories within the three discourses, especially the non-classical categories, not only Biden Administration's cognition on China and its categorizing model can be revealed, but also its mentality can be inferred from it.

III. BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S COGNITION ON CHINA

Biden Administration's cognition on China is reflected in the discourses in "Strategic Competition Act of 2021". In this part, Discourses (3), (16), and (19) are analyzed in details.

(3) to hold the Government of the PRC accountable for—
    (A) **violations** and **abuses** of human rights;
    (B) *restrictions on religious practices*; and
    (C) **undermining** and **abrogating** treaties, other international agreements, and other international norms related to human rights [11].

Discourse (3) is Biden Administration's cognition on China's human rights. Two secondary level subcategories (3-A-1) "violations of human rights" and (3-A-2) "abuses of human rights" are "graded categories" [4] for each other, forming a first level subcategory (3-A) "China's way of treating human rights." As graded categories, (3-A-1) and (3-A-2) are semantically overlapping in some places, i.e., there are some elements situate on their border. This signals that Biden Administration does not know the details of China's human rights, and by putting (3-A-1) and (3-A-2) into the "container" [4] of (3-A), it is just making up facts to tarnish China's international image.

Another two secondary level subcategories (3-C-1) "undermining treaties, other international agreements, and other international norms related to human rights" and (3-C-2) "abrogating treaties, other international agreements, and other international norms related to human rights" form another first level subcategory (3-C) "China's way of treating treaties, other international agreements, and other

international norms related to human rights," which is a classical taxonomic structure superordinate category. Putting (3-C-1) and (3-C-2) into the container of (3-C), Biden Administration wants to express that they possess features "hypocritical and cunning" and "despotic and dictatorial" respectively, and China is damaging international treaties, agreements, and norms related to human rights, and hindering human civilization progress.

The "graphemics" [12] of Discourse (3) shows that the US has upgraded the secondary level subcategory (3-A-1') "restrictions on religious practices" to the same level of its superordinate category (3-A) and another superordinate category (3-C). In doing so, Biden Administration wants to express that China not only treats human rights rudely and disregards international human rights treaties, agreements, and norms, but also has no religious freedom.

(3-A), (3-C), and the upgraded (3-A-1') finally constitute category (3) "the status quo of China's human rights." By juxtaposing and putting them into the container of (3), Biden Administration wants to express that although focus on different aspects, they truly reflect the reality of China's human rights.

So in Biden Administration's eyes, whereas the US's international political influence and image are declining, those of China are increasing. Presently it can do nothing but to attack China's human rights to weaken its international influence, damage its international image, and disturb its internal stability.

(16) The report required by subsection (a) shall include the following:
... An assessment of how the Government of China uses Hong Kong to **circumvent** *United States export controls* ...;
An assessment of how the Government of China uses Hong Kong to **circumvent** *duties on merchandise exported to the United States from the People's Republic of China* ...;
An assessment of how the Government of China uses Hong Kong to **circumvent** *sanctions imposed by the United States or pursuant to multilateral regimes* ...;
... an assessment of how the Government of China uses formal or informal means to *extradite or coercively move individuals* ...;
An assessment of how the intelligence, security, and law enforcement agencies of the Government of China ... use the Hong Kong Security Bureau ... to *conduct espionage on foreign nationals* ... *conduct influence operations*, or **violate civil liberties** ... [4].

Discourse (16) is Biden Administration's cognition on the goals China realized by utilizing Hong Kong. It first upgrades elements "conduct espionage on foreign nationals" and "conduct influence operations," which originally belong to the secondary level subcategory (8-A-a) "the actions China carries out," to the same level of the secondary level subcategory (8-A-b) "violate civil liberties." (8-A-a) and (8-A-b) should form a first level subcategory (8-A) "violate human rights." By doing so, It regards (8-A-a) is too abstract, wanting to express China not only steals foreign nationals' personal information and assimilates them, but also restricts Kong Kong citizens' freedom.

It then upgrades three secondary subcategories (8-B-a)

"circumvent United States export controls ...," (8-B-b) "circumvent duties on merchandise exported to the United States from the People's Republic of China ...," and (8-B-c) "circumvent sanctions imposed by the United States or pursuant to multilateral regimes ...," which originally belong to the first level subcategory (8-B) "circumvent the US rules," to the level of (8-B). By doing so, it regards (8-B) is too abstract, wanting to express China has realized its purpose of circumventing many US rules by utilizing Hong Kong.

Biden Administration finally upgrades the already upgraded elements "conduct espionage on foreign nationals" and "conduct influence operations," and the secondary level subcategory (8-A-b) "violate civil liberties," to the same levels of (8-C) "extradite or coercively move individuals ..." and the already upgraded secondary level subcategories (8-B-a), (8-B-b), and (8-B-c). All together, they form category (8) "the goals China realized by utilizing Hong Kong." By juxtaposing and putting all of them into the container of (8), it wants to express China has realized many goals of harming the US and international community's interests.

It is not difficult to discover that Biden Administration regards the West has already lost Hong Kong, the bridgehead to assimilate China, and China has changed Hong Kong into a favorable front to game with itself and realized many goals previously difficult to realize by utilizing Hong Kong.

(19) The report ... shall include the analysis of the following:

(1) The influence of the PRC and Chinese Communist Party in international organizations and how that influence has expanded over the last 10 years, including—

(A) Tracking countries' voting patterns that align with Chinese government voting patterns;

(B) The number of PRC nationals in leadership positions at the D-1 level or higher;

(C) Changes in PRC voluntary and mandatory funding by organization;

(D) Adoption of Chinese Communist Party phrases and initiatives in international organization language and programming;

(E) Efforts by the PRC to secure legitimacy for its own foreign policy initiatives...;

(F) The number of Junior Professional Officers that the Government of China had funded by organization;

(G) Tactics used by the Government of China or the CCP to manipulate secret or otherwise non-public voting measures, voting bodies, or votes;

(H) The extent to which technology companies incorporated in the PRC, or which have PRC or CCP ownership interests, provide equipment and services to international organizations; and

(I) Efforts by China's United Nations Mission to generate criticism of the United States in the United Nations... [11].

Discourse (19) is Biden Administration's cognition on China's behaviors affecting the international organizations. Different from its cognition on China in other discourses, here it conceals its cognition on China in the "logical presupposition" [13] within the above discourses, which can be inferred out as follows:

(a) Chinese government **has formed** its own voting patterns;

(b) PRC nationals **have occupied** leadership positions at the D-1 level or higher;

(c) China **has established** its voluntary and mandatory funding;

(d) Chinese Communist Party **has used** its own phrases and initiatives in international organization language and programming;

(e) China **has worked hard** to secure legitimacy for its own foreign policy initiatives;

(f) China **has funded** Junior Professional Officers;

(g) China **has manipulated** secret or otherwise non-public voting measures, voting bodies, or votes;

(h) Chinese technology companies **has provided** equipment and services to international organizations;

(i) China **has generated** criticism of the US in the UN.

"Has formed", "have occupied", "has established", "has used", "has worked hard", "has funded", "has manipulated", "has provided", and "has generated" form a classical taxonomic structure superordinate category (19) "China's behaviors affecting the international organizations." So in Biden Administration's eyes, China in the past 10 years has deeply influenced the international organizations and its members with corrupted, immoral, selfish, and greedy tactics.

From the analysis of Discourses (3), (16), and (19), I conclude that Biden Administration regards its international political influence and image are declining, and it has already lost its control of Hong Kong and many international organizations; on the contrary, China's international political influence and image are increasing, and has successfully controlled Hong Kong and many international organizations; presently except making up facts to smear China, it has no others good tactics to curb China's rise.

IV. BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S CATEGORIZING MODEL ON CHINA

After examining Biden Administration's categorization on China in the above analysis, I discover that it mainly uses 5 modules to categorize China, which constitute its categorizing model on China (see Fig. 1).

In Fig. 1, A, B, etc. are first-level subcategories; A1, B1b, etc. are second-level subcategories or elements upgraded to the second-level; A1a, A2a, etc. are elements under the second-level subcategories.

Module 1: Biden Administration divides category A into semantically non-overlapping subcategories A1 and A2.

In Discourse (3), it divides "China's way of treating treaties, other international agreements, and other international norms related to human rights ..." (A) into "undermining treaties, other international agreements, and other international norms related to human rights ..." (A1) and "abrogating treaties, other international agreements, and other international norms related to human rights...." (A2) This shows that it regards attacking China's way of treating treaties, other international agreements, and other international norms related to human rights can unite other

countries to isolate China, and China's international influence has already threatened the US's hegemony.
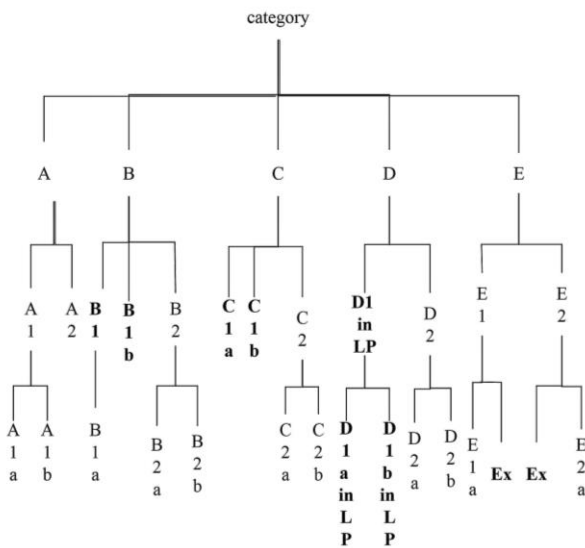

Fig. 1 Biden administration's categorizing model on China.

Module 2: In order to foreground element B1b whereas emphasizes subcategory B1, Biden Administration upgrades element B1b in subcategory B1 to the same level of B1.

In Discourse (3), it upgrades "restrictions on religious practices" (B1b) to the same level of "violations and abuses of human rights." (B1) This shows that it regards attacking China's human rights, especially its actions on religion, is the best way to stimulate Chinese citizens' anger and make chaos in China, and China's internal political situation is very stable.

Module 3: Biden Administration ignores the existence of subcategory C1 and upgrades its element C1a, which originally belongs to C1, to the same level of subcategory C2.

In Discourse (16), it downplays "the actions China carries out," (C1) and upgrades "conduct espionage on foreign nationals" (C1a) and "conduct influence operations" (C1b) to the same level of "violate civil liberties." (C2) Within the same discourse, it downplays "circumvent rules," (C1') and upgrades "circumvent United States export controls...," (C1a') "circumvent duties on merchandise exported to the United States from the People's Republic of China ...," (C1b') and "circumvent sanctions imposed by the United States or pursuant to multilateral regimes ..." (C1c') to the same level of "extradite or coercively move individuals...." (C2') This shows that it regards China has succeeded in the wrestle with the West in Hong Kong, and the US is skillful in integrating the international community and all ranks to realize its purpose.

Module 4: Biden Administration puts element Dx in subcategories D1 and D2 simultaneously.

In Discourse (3), it places an element (Dx) under the subcategories "violations of human rights" (D1) and "abuses of human rights." (D2) This shows that it is not familiar with the details of China's human rights, and it has no other ways to curb China's rise except slandering its human rights.

Module 5: Biden Administration hides subcategory E1 and its element E1a in the logical presupposition of the relevant discourses.

In Discourse (19), it hides category "China's behaviors affecting the international organizations," (E1) and its elements "has formed," (E1a) "have occupied," (E1b), "has established," (E1c) "has used," (E1d) "has worked hard," (E1e) "has funded," (E1f) "has manipulated," (E1g) "has provided," (E1h) and "has generated"(E1i) in items (A), (B), (C), (D), (E), (F), (G), (H), and (I) respectively. This shows that it wants to hide the US's previous fault of neglecting China's activities in the international organizations, and it is not clear about to what extent China has succeeded in international organizations.

In most cases, Biden Administration uses model 1 to categorize China, but when has special purposes, it would use the other modules. When wants to foreground something, it would use modules 2 and 3; when wants to make clear the relevant contents with limited information, it would use module 4; and when wants to conceal something, it would use module 5. Although attacks China with various methods, its ways of organizing categories are based on the 5 modules. For example, in discourse (3) it uses modules 1, 2, and 4. The 5 modules form the US's categorizing model on China.

V. CONCLUSION

By analyzing the categories extracted from the discourses Biden Administration uses to recognize China, this article discovers that its categorizing model on China mainly consists of five modules: (1) dividing categories into semantically non-overlapping subcategories; (2) juxtaposing subcategories and their elements; (3) ignoring subcategories and upgrading their elements; (4) hiding subcategories and their elements in the logical presuppositions within the relevant discourses; and (5) putting elements into two subcategories. When deliberately highlights some contents to smear China, Biden Administration will use modules 2 and 3; when wants to hide some information, it will use model 4; and when the information is incomplete, it will adopt module 5. Compared with the traditional American studies, this article has not only revealed Biden Administration's categorizing model on China, but also deepened our understanding of its ways of thinking. Yet limited by the space, some other valuable discourses probably containing other modules are not analyzed, which will be done in the future study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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