

A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF THE LEXICAL ITEM “INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY”

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1 Introduction¹

Exploring the meaning of language is essential to understanding the world. Teubert asserts that “corpus linguistics aims to analyze the meaning of words within texts, or rather, within their individual context” (140). Words, according to Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998), are not lexicon or dictionary entries, but text segments whose elements exhibit an inherent semantic cohesion which can be made visible through quantitative analysis of discourse or corpora. This research aims to discuss the meaning of the text segment *international community* in two different discourse communities: British and Chinese, which represent two typical discourse communities in Western and Asian countries respectively. Looking at the different collocations and grammatical structures within which *international community* occurs provides a corpus-based analysis. The GuCorpus constitutes articles from *The Guardian* newspaper and the PdCorpus is made up of articles from the *People’s Daily* newspaper in China. These corpora have been compiled to serve the aforementioned research purposes. Through a comparative analysis, this article aims to explore the different ways in which the lexical item *international community* is used, and how the term’s different meanings are constructed and understood. The analysis will “reveal and clarify how underlying ideologies are inscribed in and mediated through the linguistic system” (Caldas-Coulthard x).

2 Theoretical considerations, data collection and research methodology

2.1 Research context and theoretical considerations

Teubert asserts that there is a lexical meaning indicating what any given word means in a certain context and how it is to be used, and that there is encyclopedic knowledge (or meaning) that signifies what the word stands for within the framework of the English language (2004). Therefore, if we analyze the lexical meanings of the lexical item *international community* in different discourse communities by looking at what has been said about it and how it is used, we will find that its meanings can differ in the ideology it conveys.

Stubbs (28) posits that “language should be studied in actual, attested, authentic instances of use, not as intuitive, invented, isolated sentences.” Corpus linguistics, the study of linguistic phenomena through large collections of machine-readable texts (corpora), is not interested in the meaning of isolated words outside their relevant context. Instead, corpus linguistics is interested in the meaning of semantically connected text segments, extracted from discourse, or in practice, from the corpus

(Teubert 2001). In many cases, certain words co-occur with other words or with word clusters which share common features. Thus, they reinforce each other and display more specific and accurate meaning within certain contexts. In this way, people understand the meaning of language through the process of negotiation (the way that language is being talked about and understood), which is reflected in all kinds of texts.

Furthermore, comparing two specialized corpora is a useful way of revealing opposing stances or ideologies concerned with the same topic. This type of comparative study is supported by Sinclair's comment that "any stretch of language has meaning only as a sample of an enormously large body of text; it represents the results of a complicated selection process, and each selection has meaning by virtue of all the other selections which might have been made, but have been rejected" (76-77). Thus, the different selections made in two specialized corpora will be shown through comparative analysis.

Hunston gives a brief explanation of the background of Critical Linguistics, which, to a great extent, can be regarded as the substitute of Critical Discourse Analysis, when she comments upon the corpus use in studying language and ideology:

A growing concern in applied linguistics is the relation between language and ideology, in particular, the role of language in forming and transmitting assumptions about what the world is and should be like, and the role of language in maintaining (or challenging) existing power relations. (109).

Critical Discourse Analysis, therefore, is concerned with the mediation of ideology in language, and this relates to the power structures in any given society. According to Fairclough, the relationship between language and society is a two-way process, where texts are "socially generated, and their nature is dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which they were generated – as well as being socially transmitted and, in our society, unequally distributed" (24). Wodak gives a clearer interpretation that "language is also a medium of domination and social force which serves to legitimize relations of organized power" and concludes that "in so far as the legitimating of power relations are not articulated, so the goal of Critical Linguistics is to uncover ideology deemed implicit in overt propositions" (2). Thus, Critical Discourse Analysis uses language analysis to discover inequalities, which, in turn, contributes to the critical analysis of the world. Corpus linguistics can strengthen the interpretative basis of Critical Discourse Analysis and produce reliable results of analysis by discovering certain features or patterns of language.

2.2 Data collection

According to Sinclair's corpus typology (1994), a specialized corpus must be built for each specific research purpose. In this study, to conduct a comparative analysis of the lexical meaning of *international community* and 国际社会 (*guojishehui*, *international community*) in two different discourse communities, two specialized corpora have been compiled. The GuCorpus is made up of 65 news articles extracted from *The Guardian* newspaper in 2005, with each article containing at least two occurrences of *international*

community. The size of the GuCorpus is 65,663 words. The PdCorpus is made up of 27 news articles extracted from the *People's Daily* newspaper in 2005, with each article including at least one occurrence of “*国际社会* (*guojishehui, international community*)” and the size of the PdCorpus is 28,591 words.

The reasons for designing corpora in these ways are as follows. Firstly, *The Guardian* newspaper and the *People's Daily* newspaper address different audiences with the former consisting of a primarily British readership and the latter a Chinese readership, which constitute two different discourse communities. Language, accordingly, in these two discourse communities will be discussed and understood in different ways (as with the notion of negotiation, discussed above). Secondly, there are at least two occurrences of *international communities* in the articles in the GuCorpus, while there is at least one occurrence of *国际社会* (*guojishehui, international community*) in each article extracted for the PdCorpus. This is because there are over 200 articles in *The Guardian* of 2005 in which *international community* is used, and only 27 articles in the PdCorpus. Such an adaptation is necessary to keep a comparative balance in these two corpora.

2.3 Methodology and tools

Stubbs (89) proves that “meanings are conveyed not only by individual words and grammatical forms, but also by the frequency of collocations and by the distribution of forms across texts”. In order to discover the lexical meanings of *international community* in the GuCorpus and “*国际社会* (*guojishehui, international community*)” in the PdCorpus, Wordsmith Tool (version 4) is used to extract the top 50 collocates of the lexical item in each corpus. When these collocates are displayed, the word span is set as 5 and the pattern table shows the distribution of these extracted collocates. The dominant grammatical structures constructed by repeated use of these collocates can therefore be found and analyzed to discover the different conveyed ideologies. If particular lexical and grammatical choices are regularly made and if people and concepts are repeatedly talked about in certain ways, it is plausible to suggest that this will affect how they are perceived (Stubbs 1996). Bernstein (1975) and Halliday (1990) term this “coding orientations”: symmetric tendencies in the selection of meanings.

In addition, to ensure that the Wordsmith Tool can process the Chinese language properly, ICLAS (Institute of Computing Technology, Chinese Lexical Analysis System) is used to make the Chinese texts segmented whereas the language converter in Wordsmith is used to turn all the Chinese texts into Unicode-based form.

3 Data findings and interpretation

3.1 Analysis of the collocates of *international community* and *国际社会* (*guojishehui, international community*)

3.1.1 Analysis of significant collocates of the phrase *international community* in the GuCorpus

The top significant collocate of *international community* “to” occurs 54 times within the word span set as 5, and it also ranks the first on right one position (see appendix 1 for the full list and appendix 2 for distribution patterns). We find that most of the content words carry negative meanings, such as *pressure*, *fail*, *grapple*, and *intervene*. From appendix 1 and 2, and through further modified analysis, the following dominant grammatical patterns are found:

(1) VERB/PREPOSITION+”THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY”+INFINITIVE

In addition, the words that co-occur with these patterns are significant collocates of the phrase *international community*, highlighting the importance of analyzing these selected grammatical structures.

(2) THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY + INFINITIVE

The sentences which include patterns such as ‘. . . urge the *international community* to put pressure on . . .’, or ‘. . . implore the *international community* to protect the lives of . . .’ indicate the actual actors and specific meaning of *international community*, as well as the tasks that *international community* is required to fulfill.

N	Concordance
1	in aid levels is a kind of goal for the international community to attain, but it isn't a c
2	now ahead. A strong signal from the international community to welcome the new Iraq
3	but there are also other ways for the international community to punish the North." Do
4	been an automatic obligation on the international community to intervene to stop it. Of
5	appealed for calm and called for the international community to put pressure on the Ir
6	good fund, Unicef, has called on the international community to support efforts to get
7	ge, there has been little effort by the international community to capture them. Fatima
8	d have imposed an obligation on the international community to intervene in Darfur. T
9	sist that this is the last chance for the international community to address the fact that
10	ons, human-rights supporters and the international community to make efforts to stop t
11	peace. Iraqi women are imploring the international community to act to protect the lives
12	minister, Rafik Hariri, prompting the international community to call for Syria to pull it
13	l attention spans. And it will bind the international community to Khartoum as tightly
14	you then get the agreement by the international community to the structures of the
15	called on the UK and the rest of the international community to ensure perpeptrators
16	ry difficult situation. We expect the international community to join hands with us so
17	warned: "Despite steps taken by the international community to stop arms flows to
18	oment. So that is why it is up to the international community to give the support to
19	mous with the wilful inaction of the international community to stop the massacre, an

Fig 3.1 shows the concordance lines embedding the pattern under discussion: Concordance lines of *the international community + infinitive structure*:

According to this data, the following can be deduced:

a. Verbs preceding the *international community* include *call on*, *call for*, *implore*, *urge*, and *imposed an obligation on*. These indicate all attached requirements or petitions, such as *punish the north*, *put pressure on Iraq*, or *stop the massacre*. These petitions can be further classified into different areas. Other prepositional phrases preceding the lexical item are: *the last chance for*, *also other ways for*, *the willful inaction of*, *little effort by*, and *an automatic obligation on*, which indicate that the *international community* bears an *automatic obligation* to provide aid. In reality, the *international community* has actually achieved *little*, in that it was warned to seize *the last chance* to take action or advised to adopt *other ways* to solve problems. These examples therefore show the inefficiency of the *international community*.

b. Verbs following “to” are labeled as *put pressure*, *make efforts to stop the bloodshed*, *punish the North*, *stop the massacre*, *capture them*, and *intervene to stop*. These phrases indicate that measures have been taken by the international community to prevent what is perceived to be unjust.

c. Arguably, from the subjects of the concordance lines, the reason for the intervention of the *international community* can be deduced. The subjects of the concordance lines are *called on*, *implored* or *urged* to take action. When the subjects are people from developing countries, they are calling for support from the *international community* in projects such as the development of their education system. Here, the *international community* is usually a department from the UN, or another relevant world organization. However, in reality, action is principally taken by developed countries, as developing countries lack the necessary resources. The second important subject category is the names of Middle-East countries or parties in these countries. The wider contexts of concordance in lines 4 and 5, for example, suggest that the Iranian government has killed hundreds of Kurdish people who live in the border cities of Iran. Both the oppositional leader of Iran and the Kurdistan Democratic party of Iran called for the US to put pressure on the Iranian government, and labeled the US as *international community*; due to the fact that the US is a ‘world leader’ and the most powerful enemy of Iran. It is therefore expected that the US is willing to put pressure on the Iranian government.

It can be concluded from this analysis that most actors, consciously or subconsciously, understand the *international community* as consisting of the US and the UK, followed by other developed countries. This usage reinforces the unequal paradigm in which “powerful” Western countries are regarded as the “leading countries” in the world.

3.1.2 Analysis of significant collocates of 国际社会 (*guojishehui*, *international community*) in the PdCorpus

The top frequent collocate of “国际社会” (*guojishehui*, *international community*) in the PdCorpus occurs 43 times within the word span of 5 (see appendix 3 for the full list and appendix 4 for the distribution pattern). Findings show that most of the collocates have a positive meaning, such as 援助(*denotation*), 发展(*development*), 共同(*mutual*), 建立(*establish*), 共识(*consensus*), 努力(*hardworking*), 关注(*concern*). The following

grammatical structure is found as dominant in the PdCorpus:

国际社会(INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY) + 对(WITH REGARD TO)

The word “对” (with regard to) in Chinese is always followed by the focus, which is concerned by the subject of a sentence. Thus, an examination of what follows *国际社会对* (*the international community...with regard to*) demonstrates that the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*) their concerns, within in the PdCorpus. Figure 3-3 shows the concordance lines with both the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*) and 对 (*with regard to*) being search words:

N - Concordance

1. 主席代表所有成员国表明了看法，表达了国际社会对伊朗总统所发表言论的切
2. 世界卫生组织向全世界发出了警报。目前国际社会对流感流行的威胁高度管注
3. 是基于错误的历史认识，是无视邻国以及国际社会对日本首相参拜靖国神社问
4. 架势。克林顿的表态，其实，正好反映了国际社会对台湾以及两岸问题的普遍

[Translations:

1. The chairman, on behalf of all the members in Security Council, expressed his views (on the Iranian president's speech), which shows the **international communities** concern **with regard to the** Iranian president's speech.
2. At present, the **international community** shows its great concern **with regard to** the serious influenza all over the world.
3. The Japanese Foreign Minister's speech . . . neglects the neighboring countries' and the **international community's** [sic] serious criticism **with regard to** the Japanese leader's visiting Yasukuni Shrine
4. Bill Clinton's speech reflects the mutual consensus of the **international community with regard to the** Taiwan issue.]

Figure 3.3 Concordance lines of *国际社会 + 对* (*international community + with regard to*)

Concordance line 1 (as translated) suggests that the chairman's views demonstrate the *international communities* concern about the Iranian president's speech. This indicates that the Security Council, to some extent, can be regarded as the *international community*. In concordance line 2, the *international community* should be understood as all the countries and people in the world. The other two concordance lines concern issues in China and the *international communities* response. In concordance line 3, the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*) refers to those countries which support China and condemn Japan. The same connotation is demonstrated in the last concordance lines; the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*) refers to those countries who support China on the issue of Taiwan and condemn Taiwans separations. It is interesting to note that when Chinese people comment on conflicts between China and other countries/areas, the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international*

community) always remains on the “right side” of China; it *holds the general consensus*(共识) with China, and *criticizes*(谴责) the opposing side.

In summary, three categories of meaning attached to the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*) are available in the PdCorpus. Firstly, when an international organization (usually the organization in UN) expresses its opinions on international affairs, the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*) is always used as the substitute of the organization concerned. The second situation concerns non-political affairs such as worldwide diseases or natural disasters. In this context, the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*) refers to countries and people all over the world. Thirdly, when China expresses criticism about countries with which they are experiencing conflict, “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*) is uniformly defined as the community which supports China and condemns the opposing side. Consequently, Chinese people are convinced that China, together with the “国际社会” (*guojishehui, international community*), is morally correct and stands for justice. If a country is friendly towards China, the IC will be supportive; if the country represents China’s ‘opposition’, the IC will be critical.

3.2 Comparing the GuCorpus and the PdCorpus: an interpretation

It can be concluded that in the GuCorpus, the *international community* is, in most cases, used to refer to developed Western countries; principally the United States and the UK. This usage reinforces the ideology of a world divided into a “leading” developed world and a developing world that receives aid from developed countries. The collocative study further shows that it is always the developed world who identifies perceived problems in the developing world and who make decisions regarding how to “improve” the situation. However, the actions of the international community are not always satisfactory, and are often condemned as inefficient. In the PdCorpus, the meaning of *international community* varies widely according to different contexts; for example, when natural disasters and worldwide diseases are discussed, the *international community* refers generally to every country in the world. When the importance of China is emphasized, the *international community* refers to the third world countries, for the *international community* has high expectations of China and hopes that China will continue to help and speak for them. In the instance of conflicts between China and other countries or areas, the *international community* is represented as allies of China, who will always support China and condemn the opposition. This suggests that China is always supported by the rest of the world and, whatever happens, the *international community* will always stay on the “right side” of China.

The fact that the meanings of the same lexical item “international community” varies to such a large extent in two different discourse communities supports and contributes to both the field of developing meanings of words through corpus analysis and the field of discourse analysis. That is, the meaning of a word can only be interpreted through what has been said about it by looking at a corpus of authentic data about that word. However, this interpretation is ultimately incomplete, and it varies

when the words are used in different discourses. The meaning of words is always restricted or legitimized by ideologies of certain discourse communities, and this is what my research results shows.

4 Conclusion

Through the significant collocate study of *international community* in the GuCorpus and the PdCorpus, this article shows that different discourse communities result in different meanings and usages of the same lexical item. Thus, it contributes to the field of meaning development in corpus linguistics. However, due to limitations in time and space, the present analysis only uses two small corpora. Larger and more general corpora should be used in future analyses to obtain a wider view of the meaning of *international community*. Furthermore, the newspapers used here consist only of *The Guardian* and the *People's Daily*. Newspapers from other countries and sources could show different findings on the meaning and usage of *international community*. Finally, there are other phrases such as 'world community' and 'western community' that are worthy of future study. These phrases are also widely quoted in the official news of many different countries, because the meanings of these phrases are, to a large extent, related to the meaning of the lexical item *international community*.

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Appendix 1: most relevant collocates of *international community* in the GuCorpus²

N	Word	With	Total	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	
1		THE	IC	191	10	17	1	2	130	0	2	11	10	8
2		IC	IC	132	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3			IC	117	0	0	0	0	0	11	7	0	0	0
4		TO	IC	54	3	5	1	4	0	0	16	9	7	9
5		OF	IC	37	5	2	0	20	0	0	2	0	3	5
16		SUPPORT	IC	9	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
39		ASSISTANCE	IC	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
40			EU	IC	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
41		FAILED	IC	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
42		GRAPPLE	IC	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
46		INTERVENE	IC	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
49		MUST	IC	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
50		PRESSURE	IC	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1

Appendix 2: Pattern picture of the distribution of the significant collocates of *international community* in the GuCorpus

N	L3	L2	L1	CENTER	R1	R2	R3
1	THE	SUPPORT	OF	The IC	TO	THE	THE
2	AND	REALISE	IN	The IC	IS	TO	TO
3	TO	SHAME	THAT	The IC	HAS	ITS	AND
4	A	ASSISTANCE	BY	The IC	THAT	NOW	BY
5	NOT	THE	AND	The IC	AND	BE	OF
6	OF	CALLED	FROM	The IC	CAN	A	THAT
7	HE	EU	FOR	The IC	WILL	IS	ACT
8	HAS	STATES	TO	The IC	IN	IT	A
9	GRAPPLE	ON	ON	The IC	S	STOOD	INTERESTING

Appendix 3: most significant collocates of 国际社会 (*guojishehui, international community*) in the PdCorpus:

N	Words	With	Total	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	R1	R2	R ₃	R4	R5
1	国际	国际 社会	64	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	社会	国际 社会	64	0	0	0	0	0	64	0	0	0	0
3	的	国际 社会	43	7	3	4	3	3	0	14	1	4	4
4	和	国际 社会	11	1	0	1	0	7	0	2	0	0	0
5	了	国际 社会	10	2	2	3	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
6	对	国际 社会	9	1	0	0	0	2	0	5	1	0	0
7	日本	国际 社会	8	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
8	在	国际 社会	8	0	1	0	1	4	0	0	0	1	1
9	国家	国际 社会	6	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	0
10	是	国际 社会	6	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
11	向	国际 社会	6	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
12	我们	国际 社会	5	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
13	中国	国际 社会	5	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
14	表明	国际 社会	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
17	需要	国际 社会	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	0
24	共同	国际 社会	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
25	关注	国际 社会	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
27	建立	国际 社会	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
33	引起	国际 社会	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
34	应该	国际 社会	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
35	援助	国际 社会	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
39	必须	国际 社会	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0

Appendix 4: pattern picture of the distribution of top collocates of 国际社会 (*guojishehui, international community*) in the PdCorpus:

N	L3	L2	L1	CENTRE	R1	R2	R3
1	的	邻国	和	国际 社会	的	援助	的
2	了	的	向	国际 社会	对	多	关注
3	日本	在内	在	国际 社会	表明	加强	共识
4	共同	才能	的	国际 社会	需要	创	清楚
5	无视	心愿	与	国际 社会	和	日本	发言人
6	问题	领导人	因此	国际 社会	建立	信赖	国家
7	集团	理应	呼吁	国际 社会	更	一个	开创
8	抓住	机遇	获得	国际 社会	正在	我们	新型
9	特别	中	让	国际 社会	控制	广泛	首相
10	此	中国	对	国际 社会	是	的	接受

Notes

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