



The representation of Asian-Americans amid COVID-19: A case study of The Washington Post and CNN

La representación de los/as Asiático-Estadounidenses en medio del COVID-19: un estudio de caso de The Washington Post y CNN

A representação de asiático-americanos em meio à COVID-19: Um estudo de caso do The Washington Post e da CNN

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the representation of the Asian-American community during the COVID-19 pandemic in the opinion articles of the US media about the growing expressions of violence against the community. These articles were posted in The Washington Post and CNN by an Asian-American journalist and an American journalist, respectively. Quantitatively, this study focuses on the proper nouns "Asian(s)" and "American(s)". Qualitatively, it focuses on identifying patterns and interpreting the meanings underlying the discourse structures employed by each author. For these purposes, corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis (CDA) were employed. Results show that the Asian-American author uses the proper nouns and rhetorical figures more than their American counterpart, who mostly uses quoting. This, since the former speaks from the community and the latter speaks to the community. It is suggested that the opinion articles discourse should be approached critically since they may influence the readers' representations around the topic.

Keywords: COVID-19; Asian-American community; media; critical discourse analysis; corpus linguistics.

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en la representación de la comunidad asiático-estadounidense durante la pandemia del COVID-19 en los artículos de opinión de los medios de comunicación estadounidenses sobre las crecientes expresiones de violencia contra la comunidad. Estos artículos fueron publicados en The Washington Post y en la CNN por una periodista asiático-estadounidense y un periodista estadounidense, respectivamente. Cuantitativamente, este estudio se centra en los nombres propios "asiático/a(s)" y "americano/a(s)". Cualitativamente, este estudio se centra en la identificación de patrones y en la interpretación de los significados que subyacen a las estructuras discursivas empleadas por cada autor. Para ello, se empleó la lingüística de corpus y el análisis crítico del discurso (ACD). Los resultados muestran que la autora asiático-estadounidense utiliza más los nombres propios y las figuras retóricas que su homólogo estadounidense, quien emplea mayoritariamente las citas. Esto, ya que el primero habla desde la comunidad, y el segundo habla a la comunidad. Se sugiere que el discurso de los artículos de opinión sea abordado de manera crítica, ya que puede influir en las representaciones de los lectores en torno al tema.

Palabras clave: COVID-19; comunidad asiático-estadounidense; medios de comunicación; análisis crítico del discurso; lingüística de corpus.

Resumo

Este artigo focaliza a representação da comunidade asiático-americana durante a pandemia da COVID-19 na mídia dos EUA op-eds sobre as crescentes expressões de violência contra a comunidade. Estes artigos foram publicados no The Washington Post e na CNN por uma jornalista asiático-americana e um jornalista americano, respectivamente. Quantitativamente, este estudo enfoca os nomes próprios “asiático/a(s)” e “americano/a(s)”. Qualitativamente, este estudo se concentra na identificação de padrões e na interpretação dos significados subjacentes às estruturas discursivas empregadas por cada autor. Para este fim, foram empregadas a análise lingüística de corpus e a análise crítica do discurso (ACD). Os resultados mostram que a autora asiático-americana faz maior uso de nomes próprios e figuras retóricas do que sua homóloga americana, quem faz maior uso de citações. Isto porque a primeira fala da comunidade, e o segundo fala para a comunidade. Sugere-se que o discurso nos artigos de opinião seja abordado criticamente, pois pode influenciar as representações dos leitores sobre o tema.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19; comunidade asiático-americana; meios de comunicação; análise crítica do discurso; linguística de corpus.

Received: 27/03/2023

Accepted: 03/07/2023

Published: 26/09/2023

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most striking global crises since the beginning of the 21st century. More than two years later since the first cases of COVID-19 were announced around the globe, it has been realized that the pandemic has not been only a health issue, but also a social one. More in particular, in the United States it has led to the exclusion, stigmatization and violence towards Asian-American communities, blaming them for causing and spreading COVID-19 (Gover *et al.*, 2020). These actions were promoted both by the lay citizens and politicians, whose xenophobic rhetoric exacerbated the stigmatization of Asian-Americans since the beginning of the pandemic.

As such, the ex-president Donald Trump publicly labeled COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus” (Gittleston, 2020; Ispahani and Nandini, 2021; Cheung *et al.*, 2020; Buscher, 2020; Wong, 2020; Lee, 2021), and “China virus” (Collinson, 2021) on several online and offline occasions. In addition to this, under Trump’s administration the White House members verbally abused their Asian-American peers by naming COVID-19 the “Kung Flu” (Gittleston, 2020; Collinson, 2021), and the Senator John Cornyn blamed China’s population for the virus because of their cultural and culinary habits (Yoon-Ji Kang, 2020).

These expressions of violence exacerbated by the discourse of political elites are not exclusively placed in the US, but in other countries as well. For instance, the increasing cases of discrimination against Asian descendant people were reported in Italy after the governor of the Veneto Region, Luca Zaia, negatively referred to the hygienic and culinary customs of Asian people (Donmez, 2020, as cited in Ivić and Petrović, 2020). Back in the US, this problem is not novel, for many researchers have relied on the history of Asian-American communities in the US to explain and discuss this issue. In this regard, the behavior of stigmatizing and excluding members of these communities has resulted in immigration policies passed in the country in order to disfavor the arrival of members of these communities. For example, after the Page Act of 1875 was passed, the Chinese-American women were banned from citizenship, and in 1882, this Act expanded to the Chinese-American men. Then in 1934, the immigration of the Filipino citizens was restricted by the Congress.

Additionally, the Asian-American community has been racially framed as a “model minority” since the 1960s, which has established the stereotype of a “hardworking, successful and law-abiding minority that has overcome hardship, oppression, and discrimination” (Shih *et al.*, 2019, p. 414). According to Shih *et al.* (2019), the “model minority” label has been imposed on Asian-Americans by white American elites; as such, this label presupposes detrimental influences for members of the Asian-American community since they are externally and internally pressured to meet certain standards to be treated equally in the US society while they deal with ongoing discrimination and social, educational, and working exclusion. Sociopolitically, this label denotes a “colorblind ideology in the sense that Asian Americans’ ‘success’ is used to deny the existence of institutional racism and to ‘prove’ that U.S. society is reasonably fair and open for racial minority groups to move up the social ladder” (Kawai, 2005, p. 114). Therefore, this label presupposes that Asian-Americans, who are erroneously characterized as an homogenous community, do not need any social help as they are high-achievers, which invisibilizes profound social, economic, educational and working inequalities faced by them, and it delegitimizes their problems (Yi and Museus, 2015). Indeed, this label implies the existence of social standards that top a hierarchy in detriment of other minoritized ethnic groups, such as Black Americans or Latinos, which are minimized as ‘inferior’ groups in such hierarchy, and leads them to be mutually compared (Ispahani and Nandini, 2021; Kawai, 2005; Shih *et al.*, 2019; Yi and Museus, 2015).

Consequently, other studies have put emphasis on the role that bigotry and current rhetoric have played in the attacks against Asian-American citizens. According to Jovanović (2015, as cited in Ivić and Petrović, 2020), discourses can be used to create racial, ethnic and national inclusion or exclusion of individuals. In this sense, physical and verbal assaults, microaggressions and hate speech/ crimes toward Asian-American population have been constantly reported since the beginning of the pandemic (Gittleson, 2020; Tessler *et al.*, 2020; Cheung *et al.*, 2020; Buscher, 2020; Hutchinson, 2021). This has led to numerous quantitative and qualitative surveys carried out in the US cities with the densest population. Particularly, the study from the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at the California State University shows how these attacks have increased in nearly 150% from 2019 to 2020 with New York City, Los Angeles and Boston, as the cities with most Anti-Asian hate crimes (Lee, 2021; Hutchinson, 2021). In 2020-2021, the Stop AAPI Hate National Report, carried out by the San Francisco State University, reported 6,603 new cases of violence towards the Asian-American community across the country in forms of verbal harassment, shunning and physical assault (Jeung *et al.*, 2021). These reports were enabled due to the enhancement in means of surveillance and the global reach of social media (Lee, 2021). However, more cases of violence have passed unreported (Hutchinson, 2021).

In their study, Cheung *et al.* (2020) explain how the exacerbated public expressions of violence might reflect identity features of the individuals who commit them. For instance, the authors describe the victimizers’ tendency to stereotype communities as perpetual foreigners rather than citizens who have lived in the country for several generations or negating their citizenship status due to their ethnicity. Furthermore, it is believed that these expressions of violence can be a result of white supremacy ideologies (Collinson, 2021). These aspects, by all means, have had major repercussions on the mental health of the members of the Asian-American community (Tessler *et al.*, 2020), which can be clearly seen through a growing number of testimonies from Asian-American people, victims of these verbal and/or physical aggressions amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Yoon-Ji Kang, 2020; Wong, 2020).

Thus, this health and yet social problem has set the scenario on the main media outlets as the public platforms to express the concerns about the current social beliefs and exacerbated behavior towards citizens from the Asian-American community, whose study will be the focus of our analysis. In order to do so, two opinion articles from two online newspapers: CNN and the Washington Post will be analyzed in search for the ideologies underlying their discourses about the Asian-American community. As put by Kopytowska (2018), mass media stand as “a vehicle for hateful political beliefs, ideologies and actions” (p. 1), and their linguistic choices may reflect, reproduce, and reinforce their value system. Therefore, we claim that by analyzing the representation of the Asian-American community in the aforementioned online newspapers, this study might shed light on the strategies used in them in forming public opinion about the Asian-Americans in the times of COVID-19.

In the following sections, we briefly outline the main theoretical background and methodology employed for this analysis, its results and conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

The existent research on the analysis and interpretation of ideologies in discourse largely rely upon van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (1993), which is a descriptive theory (Gravells, 2017) that focuses on understanding the nature of social power, dominance, and inequality by analyzing their production and reproduction at micro and macro-levels of social structures. In particular, it focuses on the relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society, and culture. Thus, according to van Dijk (1996), this production and reproduction of power can be found in many social and discursive instances and contexts such as in politics, media, academia, and business. These are referred to as *symbolic elites* and present subtle expressions of power in text and talk performed to exclude, as well as to shape and reshape public opinion in specific instances such as political debates, news, textbooks, and opinion articles, resulting in the transmission of certain ideologies (van Dijk, 2006).

Consequently, as a socially centered approach, CDA focuses on the social groups and individuals that enact, sustain, legitimize, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice in discourse or narratives, as well as the social groups and individuals who resist such narratives at various individual and social dimensions. In this regard, Gravells (2017) establishes that “much work in CDA is inclined to make its own claims to truth and objectivity” (p. 33). McCarthy, in his turn, (1991, as cited in Ivić and Petrović, 2020) states that CDA focuses on analyzing language in use through a multidisciplinary lens; namely, by intertwining the research methods of linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology and sociology. Van Dijk (2003) explains that there are typical structures that exhibit ideology; namely “represented as some kind of basic self-schema of a group, featuring the fundamental information by which group members identify and categorize themselves, such as their membership criteria, group activities, aims, norms, relations to others, resources, etc” (p. 43).

Teun van Dijk (1997) argues that as citizens we form most of our knowledge about the social, political and general facts of the world from the information we hear, read and see on a daily basis. In this context, the media are considered as “spaces for ideological reproduction and legitimation of reality” (Crespo Fernández, 2008, p. 45). That is, they are not only a source of information and public space for the expression of opinions, but also “the main institution of ideological reproduction” (van Dijk, 2000, para. 3) and “powerful spaces for social legitimation” (Villalobos, 2004, p. 4). Thus, the

media are capable of “giving credibility to a certain image (...) and of channeling popular sentiment in one way or another” (Crespo Fernández, 2008, p. 46).

In this regard, opinion articles in media outlets stand as evaluative texts that seek to appeal to the emotions, ethics and aesthetics, as well as to strengthen the value-system shared with their target readers through language (Martin and White, 2005, as cited in Gravells, 2017). Therefore, lexical items that convey judgements and emotions are present in this type of texts since “the language of judgement and evaluation is far more likely to appear in articles that analyse events than articles that report them” (Gravells, 2017, p. 17).

Furthermore, according to Greenberg (2000), opinion articles are largely akin to the biased perspectives that their authors establish about the chosen and described events. Mainly, their authors evaluate the facts and ascribe a responsible agent for their occurrence. In this sense, opinion articles perform a symbolic function (Fowler, 1991, p. 208, as cited in Greenberg, 2000), for they are blame-oriented and seek to position their readers by appealing to their ethics and emotions. As a matter of fact, the authors of opinion articles mainly perform this endeavor through a narrative device, which will form the opinion of their readers through discourse strategies such as the use of certain structures, orders, and components. Therefore, the discourse of opinion articles largely reflects the ideologies of their authors, and the information exhibited in them is meaningful for their target readers and thus open to interpretations (Entman, 1993, as cited in Poirier *et al.*, 2020).

In this regard, the opinion articles written and posted amid the COVID-19 pandemic play a crucial role in shaping public opinion. According to An and Gower (2009): “people seek information about the crisis and evaluate the cause of the event and the organizational responsibility for the crisis based on media coverage of the crisis” (p. 107). Specifically, when expressing an opinion, authors and readers alike are seeking for a responsible actor that caused the crisis (Coombs, 2006b, as cited in An and Gower, 2009). In fact, the amount of information coming from the mass media on the crisis intensifies it given their massive circulation (OSCE, 2020), since “the way people communicate about crises such as epidemics largely determines how they are likely to understand and behave toward them” (Ophir, 2018, p. 13).

3. Methodology

To collect and analyze the data of this study, a qualitative research methodology was selected. This methodology focuses on comprehending phenomena by exploring them from the perspective of the participants in a natural setting in relation to their context (Hernández-Sampieri *et al.*, 2014, p. 358). From Creswell’s (2007) conception, the qualitative method aims to study certain research problems by “inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). In this method, according to Creswell, the obtained data is analyzed inductively, and it aims to establish patterns or themes.

More in particular, the qualitative methodology was approached in the form of collective case study because the research problem was sought to be illustrated through different perspectives or cases (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). These cases were previously identified and selected with the purpose of comparing and understanding the cases in-depth and providing a detailed analysis of the cases (Stake, 1995, as cited in Creswell, 2007).

The selected methodology was pertinent to the purpose of this collective case study, which was to explore and reflect upon the representations of the Asian-American community in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic in the discourse of opinion articles available in massive media outlets of the US. To attain the purpose of this qualitative study, two research questions were thus proposed:

1. What are the representations constructed by an American and Asian-American author in their respective opinion articles available in massive media outlets from the US in relation to the Asian-American community in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021?
2. What are the discursive mechanisms employed by the authors to represent the Asian-American community in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021?

The samples of this study were chosen by following a purposeful sampling strategy. These types of samples, which are of non-probabilistic nature, were chosen because they were not intended to provide generalizable findings. Instead, they were purposefully chosen as rich sources of information to be analyzed and comprehended in-depth as a means to understand the research problem. As such, they were deliberately chosen based on certain criteria, decisions and the research design (Creswell, 2007; Hernández-Sampieri *et al.*, 2014, p. 190; Patton, 2002).

The specific type of purposeful sampling was maximum variation. In qualitative research, this type of sampling is frequently adopted because “when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). This study in particular aimed to show high-quality and detailed differences, coincidences, patterns and particularities in the studied perspectives of the cases as a means to evince the complexity of the research problem (Hernández-Sampieri *et al.*, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Before choosing the samples or different cases to be analyzed, certain criteria must be determined (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the criteria to select the samples were the following: (a) to be an opinion article; (b) to belong to a massive and accessible media outlet from the US; (c) to cover the attacks against Asian-Americans amid the COVID-19 in the US; and (d) to be written by authors from dissimilar backgrounds in the US.

The data for this study were collected during July 2021 because the COVID-19 pandemic was still, at that time, a global trend covered by many media outlets regarding its sanitary, social, and political implications. During that period, the social and political discrimination against the Asian-American community as a repercussion of the pandemic became relevant and alarming in the United States. In this respect, many discourses could be heard and/or read whether in online and offline instances. In particular, two opinion articles written by two authors from different backgrounds and media outlets from the US were chosen for this research.

The first article is called “Coronavirus is inspiring anti-Asian racism. This is our political awakening”. It was written by Madeline Leung Coleman, a Chinese-Canadian freelance writer and senior editor at the Nation with US residence (Gao, 2020). The article was thus published in the Perspective section of The Washington Post online website, where authors discuss news topics and

narratives based on their own experiences. The Washington Post is one of the oldest and most important newspapers in the US as it was first published in Washington D.C. in 1877 and in 1996 it launched its free-access official website, which evinces its status as a massive media.

The second opinion article is called “Why anti-Asian American violence is rising - along with White supremacist propaganda”. It was written by John Avlon, an American political analyst and journalist at CNN. The article was published in the Opinion section of the CNN International free-access website. Since June 1980, CNN has been one of the most massive and distributed news media around the globe, for it is also transmitted in other languages by having branches in other countries such as Mexico, Brasil, Chile and Japan, among others. Both articles are of free access, and they are available on their respective websites.

These media outlets and opinion articles were chosen for the analysis of this study because of their free accessibility, their potential to influence and impact readers’ opinion due to their status as massive media outlets, and the representativeness that they can convey based on their political stance. For instance, according to a quantitative study by Meylan (2022), which analyzed the writing tone, cited evidence, author expertise, and publication history of the articles comprised by 240 different media outlets, The Washington Post is rated as “Liberal” in political reporting and overall stances whereas CNN is rated as “Left”. Moreover, given the nature of opinion articles, it was predicted that each author could approach the topic differently based on their corresponding background and media outlet. Therefore, both opinion articles were chosen as it was predicted that their backgrounds could reflect how they position themselves and others in discourse.

The methodology employed to analyze the data of this study combined CDA and Corpus Linguistics approaches (Baker *et al.*, 2008) with the purpose of accounting for the linguistic features employed in the articles under the study at the time of covering the Asian-American community. Additionally, the usage of corpus approach enabled uncovering patterns of language use hidden to the average reader (Gravells, 2017). In other words, CDA and CL were combined with the purpose of reinforcing their methodological and analytical features: the quantitative results of CL could be analyzed in depth through CDA, and the qualitative findings of CDA could be validated through CL (O’Halloran and Coffin, 2004, as cited in Baker *et al.*, 2008).

In order to do so, the study employed AntConc, a free corpus analysis tool to facilitate a quantitative analysis of the linguistic features of both texts. This software required both texts to be adapted into a .txt format with the purpose of being subsequently uploaded to AntConc. Once uploaded, the software automatically generated word frequency lists and concordances for both texts. The first ones provided the list of all words and their frequency in both texts. The second ones allowed for the exploration of the selected words and their corresponding linguistic environment by providing their immediate linguistic context (five or more words to the left and to the right of the selected word). As put by Ivanova (2015) “the close reading of the collocational lines and larger units (sentences) (...) determine the linguistic environment, or, to put in other words, semantic fields of the node under scrutiny” (p. 98).

More in particular, the study concentrated on the analysis of the proper nouns “Asian(s)” and “American(s)” as they convey and describe ethnic identities, which refer to “the attachment one

feels to one's cultural heritages, including those not based specifically on one's country of origin" (Cheryan and Tsai, 2007, p. 125). As such, and according to Cheryan and Tsai, ethnic identities shape worldviews and behavior. Furthermore, both ethnic identities were analyzed in this research under the lens of discourse and semiotics since they are "constructed by means of cognitive processes linked to articulations of meaning based on a narrative principle" (Moreno Barreneche, 2020, p. 25), and they are "inter-subjective co-constructions based on a negotiation of meaning" (Moreno Barreneche, 2020, p. 25). Under this constructivist view, ethnic identities are not fixed representations, therefore, they cannot be essentially defined (Moreno Barreneche, 2020). Indeed, the representation and interpretation of identities are largely based upon social and controllable criteria that change over time (Helberg Chávez, 2021).

In literature, there are certain characteristics and definitions that establish referential points to acknowledge these ethnic identities. On the one hand, according to Cheryan and Tsai (2007), the Asian ethnic identity refers to the degree of self-conception based on the incorporation of cultural beliefs and practices of certain Asian groups. Based on the Asian ethnic identity, and in a socio-historical sense the Asian-American identity emerged as a political identity in the US during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and it was consolidated in the 1970s as a means to stand against discrimination as well as to gain access, rights, and representation in socio-political dimensions. On the other hand, and in a study by Rodríguez *et al.* (2010), it was found that the American ethnic identity is usually considered as being encompassed by different factors, such as being born and raised in the United States, having a citizenship status, speaking fluent English, and/or coming from a European ethnic background. In a socio-political sense, Devos and Mohamed (2014) conclude that power and status are conveyed in ethnic distinctions and identities, which at the same time shape the boundaries of national identity. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze how socio-cultural context, ethnic identity, value systems and ideologies interplay in the description of ethnic-national identities in discourse.

In this research, it was thus analyzed how these ethnic-national characteristics and identities were represented and described in the discourse of both opinion articles since we believe they convey a different meaning and message depending on their context; in this case, the US during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the same vein, we believe that both proper nouns are transmitted differently depending on the ideologies that underlie the discourse of two authors in two different media outlets of the US.

In this regard, and to broaden the examination of the content, both texts were qualitatively analyzed under the umbrella of the "discourse structures" (van Dijk, 1993), that is, discursive strategies used by the authors that may represent their beliefs and knowledge, as well as to persuade their recipients by influencing their opinion in one way or another. Such discourse structures are argumentation, which is a personal evaluation grasped from the factual information that is described; rhetorical figures, which are the hyperbolic or euphemistic expressions that enhance positive and negative actions from the parties involved in the events; lexical style, which are linguistic choices made to positive or negatively evaluate the facts; storytelling, which is the detailed narration of the negative or positive events; and quoting, which is the usage of reliable sources when evaluating the facts (van Dijk, 1993). In particular, the bits of each text that are believed to present these discourse structures were labeled, further analyzed, and compared with

their counterparts since it is believed that the usage of any of these discourse structures in longer stretches of written text may reflect the ideologies of each author.

Finally, the obtained results are discussed considering the social context of each article and/or the social background from which each opinion was expressed and thus sheds light on the message that both authors intend to convey. For a concise illustration of discussion arguments, the article texts were consulted.

4. Results and discussion

Based on the described techniques and procedures, our analysis revealed that the text length for text one (The Washington Post) comprised 1470-word tokens, whereas the length for text two (CNN) comprised 1047-word tokens. Further on, and concentrating our analysis on the selected words for the study, it was detected that in text one, the proper noun “Asian(s)” was used 28 times, and “American(s)” 28 times. Conversely, in text two, the proper noun “Asian(s)” was used 12 times, and “American(s)” 21 times (see Table 1).

Table 1

Frequency of the nodes “Asian(s)” and “American(s)” in the texts from the Washington Post and CNN

	Total word tokens (N=number of words in the corpus)	Frequency of the node “Asian(s)” (N=times in corpus)	Frequency of the node “American(s)” (N=times in corpus)
Text one (The Washington Post)	1,470	28	28
Text two (CNN)	1,047	12	21

Note. The frequency of the nodes “Asian(s)” and “American(s)” in both texts were generated on AntConc.

Having obtained these quantitative results, the further analysis employed concordance function of the AntConc tool to automatically generate concordance lines of the words under the study (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2

An example of concordance lines for the proper noun “Asian(s)” in the Washington Post article

hile yelling, “Where’s your coronavirus mask, you **Asian** b----!” Just a few subway stops away, a stops away, a teenager kicked a 59-year-old **Asian** man to the ground screaming
 The other is the low drumbeat of anti-**Asian** racism. It’s a background noise growing louder, Coronavirus is inspiring anti-**Asian** racism. This is our political awakening. What we uring for centuries. **Asian** Americans’ fixation on Asian-specific racism elides the bigger story. odian immigrant — and the knowledge that many non-**Asians** don’t know or care about the difference is new, or that it hits the “wrong” **Asians**. It is that what’s being targeted at erupted after 9/11, aimed at Muslims and South **Asians**; it’s the hate that black Americans have outlets seem to use are those that involve **Asians** — Japanese internment, or late-19th-century propa of the ongoing story of American bigotry. **Asian** Americans have sometimes struggled to understand our place

Note. The concordance lines for the proper noun “Asian(s)” in the Washington Post article were generated on AntConc.

Table 3

An example of concordance lines for the proper noun “Asian(s)” in the CNN article

analysis by the Anti-Defamation League, anti-**Asian** American hostility and conspiracy theories spiked the internment camps, America elected its first **Asian** American Senator, Hiram Fong of Hawaii, the Why anti-**Asian** American violence is rising -- along with White on Tuesday night, six of whom were **Asian** American women. But we do know that sciences were awarded to immigrants. **Asian** Americans are not only the fastest growing immigrant group in the US, but they also have higher rates income than the population at large. But **Asian** Americans have also been part of the we do know that hate crimes against **Asian** Americans have been on the rise since of the Covid pandemic in the US. **Asian** Americans have reported being targeted at least 5 was a notorious law that codified anti-**Asian** discrimination back in 1882, making immigration we have seen anti-immigrant and anti-**Asian** sentiments stirred up in our society, especially

Note. The concordance lines for the proper noun “Asian(s)” in the CNN article were generated on AntConc.

The close reading of these concordance lines demonstrated that the word “Asian” in the Washington Post article (see Table 2) goes together with “American”, “racism” and “Asian-specific racism”. In its turn, the proper noun “Asian(s)” in the CNN article (see Table 3) goes hyphenated together with “American”, and its most usual preceding words are “anti-” and “against”.

Both authors include races and ethnicities as linguistic choices in their discourse around the proper noun “Americans”. For instance, it is used in the Washington Post article (see Table 4) together with “Asian”, “Black”, “White”, and “Chinese”, as well as in the CNN article (see Table 5) together with “Asian”, “Chinese”, and “Native”. Nevertheless, the modification of the proper noun “American” with diverse ethnicities and races is believed to be used with a different aim depending on their author.

Table 4

An example of concordance lines for the noun “American(s)” in the Washington Post article

enabled — is part of the ongoing story of **American** bigotry. Asian Americans have sometimes struggle very important that we totally protect our Asian **American** community in the United States, and all around about, anyway? Then there’s the term Asian **American** itself, a civil-rights-inspired creation of the was supposed to hold. A fourth-generation Chinese **American** shares little family history with a first-generat The model-minority term is one of **American** white supremacy’s most successful campaigns, simu simultaneously driving a wedge between Asian **Americans** and other people of color and alienating us Vandalism was down; violence was up. Black **Americans**, as usual, bore the brunt of most hate it feels almost unbearably lopsided that white **Americans** can be so mediocre at ally-ship, while D. Wu has written, the idea that Chinese **Americans** in particular were high-achieving and compliant w of “protection” we can believe in. As Asian **Americans** push back against what’s happening, I want

Note. The concordance lines for the proper noun “American(s)” in the Washington Post article were generated on AntConc.

Table 5

An example of concordance lines for the proper noun "American(s)" in the CNN article

camps. This is a horrific side of **American** history -- but it needs to be remembered and demand a different path - consistent with **American** ideals, not our fears. equality under the law is the alternate **American** tradition, fitfully pursued but ultimately making later by Sen. Daniel Inouye, a Japanese **American** who had fought with the celebrated 442nd Asian Americans have also been part of the **American** tapestry for a long time -- and it's not the immigration illegal and barring existing Chinese-**Americans** from becoming citizens. It was repealed in 1943-- the Covid pandemic in the US. Asian **Americans** have reported being targeted at least 500 times were 29 racially motivated attacks against Asian **Americans** in New York City, according to the both loved by millions of law-abiding **Americans**. It could turn out that he was base in Kansas -- when immigrants and Native **Americans** were baselessly blamed for spreading the disease

Note. The concordance lines for the proper noun "American(s)" in the CNN article were generated on AntConc.

Moving on to a critical analysis of discourse that delves into the results of the corpus linguistics analysis, it was found that both authors recurred to the following discursive mechanisms and persuasive moves: argumentation, rhetorical figures, storytelling, and quoting (van Dijk, 1993).

To begin with, the most usual persuasive move is lexical style and argumentation, for the authors of opinion articles seek to evaluate the facts whether based on their personal experience or based upon the knowledge of their professional fields. In Leung's article, they are used to talk on behalf of the Asian-American community, whereas in Avlon's - to talk on behalf of the US nation or the white American elites.

More in particular, in the Washington Post opinion article, written by an Asian American journalist, the author focuses on the diversity of communities that coexist in the US since the overall message of the text is aimed for the minoritized communities of the US to solidarize with each other. This, the author emphasizes, since the attacks towards the Asian American community amid COVID-19 has unveiled how the xenophobic rhetoric coming from white elites can easily use them as scapegoats and put them in such situations of violence against them:

What is horrifying about coronavirus racism is not that it is new, or that it hits the "wrong" Asians. It is that what's being targeted at Asian Americans — what the Trump administration has mindlessly enabled — is part of the ongoing story of American bigotry. (Leung, 2020, para. 8)

Therefore, Leung (2020) positions her usage of lexical styles and argumentation as a member of the Asian-American community; namely, *from* the Asian-American community. Indeed, by mentioning this diversity of American citizens from different cultural backgrounds, Leung's intended message may be for all minoritized groups to unite and resist the attacks and the xenophobic rhetoric. This can be seen through the constant usage of the pronouns "we" and "us", and the possessive pronoun "our" which are used on behalf of the minoritized communities in the US. Conversely, the pronoun "they" points towards the white elites, such as in the following excerpt:

On Monday, Trump tweeted, unconvincingly, ‘It is very important that we totally protect our Asian American community in the United States, and all around the world.’ Needless to say, his is not the kind of ‘protection’ we can believe in. As Asian Americans push back against what’s happening, I want to believe that other groups will show up for us, too — that they can trust we would show up for them. (Leung, 2020, para. 15)

In addition, Leung’s discourse in this excerpt may reflect how *axiologization* was used, which refers to how the actors and identities created in discourse are arbitrarily provided with positive or negative connotations. In particular, this semiotic mechanism underlies the dichotomy of the pronouns “we” and “they”, which convey positive and negative moral values in discourse (Moreno Barreneche, 2020).

In its turn, the CNN opinion article, written by an American journalist, is focused mainly on the Asian American community since they are placed as victims who should not deserve such xenophobic attacks due to their contribution to the growth of the country in economic, political, scientific, and cultural ways:

America is a nation of immigrants. We are the most diverse large nation on earth, which we should count as our greatest renewable resource. Studies show that immigrants are far more likely than native born Americans to start businesses and more than a third of the Nobel Prizes awarded to Americans in the sciences were awarded to immigrants. Asian Americans are not only the fastest growing immigrant group in the US, but they also have higher rates of college degrees and income than the population at large. (Avlon, 2021, para. 15)

Therefore, Avlon (2021) positions his usage of lexical styles and argumentation as an American journalist and, as a result, largely targets his arguments *to* the Asian-American community. In fact, Avlon’s remarks of Asian-Americans’ high academic achievement and income in comparison to other groups may reinforce the “model minority” stereotype that has been imposed on the Asian-American community by White Americans. From this view, although Avlon’s intended message is to value the social success and contribution of Asian-Americans, the literature demonstrates that the “model minority” stereotype has negatively influenced how the members of the Asian-American community are perceived and treated in the US society (e.g., Shih *et al.*, 2019; Yi and Museus, 2015). Furthermore, the author tries to bring the readers and victimizers into awareness, and, thus, stop the attacks against the Asian American citizens. The author further attempts to convey this message through the pronoun “they”, largely used to place the Asian-American community as a victim, such as in the following excerpt: “But Asian Americans have also been part of the American tapestry for a long time – and it’s not the first time they have experienced periods of profound discrimination” (Avlon, 2021, para. 16).

Thus, the data reveal that both authors aim to strengthen their positions towards the issue since “this form of positive self-representation and negative other-presentation is not only a very general characteristic of group conflict and the ways we interact with opposed groups, but also characterizes the way we talk about ourselves and others” (van Dijk, 2003, p. 44). In the same vein, these discursive representations may trace implicit and explicit minority-majority dichotomies (Devos and Mohamed,

2014). Further on, since opinion articles are largely biased (Greenberg, 2000) depending on each author's background and schematic knowledge, their content employs different types of discourse structures and persuasive moves which have different referents and aims. As put by van Dijk (1996): "news topics selection and prominence is a direct function of the differential access, interests and perspectives of majority and minority news actors" (p. 93).

Additionally, Leung employs more rhetorical figures than Avlon, since she is producing her discourse to strongly visualize, describe and reflect upon the struggles they have faced as a community whether historically or amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Leung uses rhetorical figures to emphasize and to defy the negative actions of the white elites. For instance, this is done by Leung (2020) in the following excerpt:

To the ears of Asian Americans, the escalating crisis of the novel coronavirus in the United States is set against two horrible sounds. One is the high-pitched wail of a mounting infection rate and an economy in free fall, as thousands more people are diagnosed every day and hundreds of thousands lose their jobs. The other is the low drumbeat of anti-Asian racism. It's a background noise growing louder, as President Trump and many Republicans have tried to drown out critiques of their own bad decisions by refocusing blame on China and Chineseness. (paras. 1-3)

In this excerpt, the quantifiers "thousands" and "hundreds of thousands" are hyperboles, which make an emphasis on their struggles, but without necessarily providing a factual background. In addition to this, Leung concludes her opinion article with a metaphor that largely relies on a vocabulary related to the nature of a virus:

The coronavirus may be new. But the hate it inflamed was there before, barely symptomatic and easily triggered. We should all assume that we're already infected — and agree together that we'll fight to eradicate it. (Leung, 2020, para. 16)

In fact, we believe that Leung (2020) utilizes hyperboles as negative representations on purpose, for she tries to reproduce a discourse that has come from the white elites for generations, as in:

We are an ethnically diffuse, low-voting group, wildly divided in economic class and too concentrated on the coasts to have any real impact on national elections. We are not, and have never been, a powerful united front. That's part of why it's so easy for Trump to call it the 'Chinese virus' wounding us all: Electorally, it won't even hurt him. (para. 10)

In spite of these negative community representations, Leung (2020) concludes: "We've never been alone in this; it's time to stop acting like we are" (para. 15). Since the Asian-American community in the US, according to Leung, has been historically represented in different positive or negative ways, Leung may express an ideological dilemma. In Crespo del Río *et al.* (2022), ideological dilemmas are defined as contradictions in discursive representations due to the tensions that emerge from the differences in social representations and these dilemmas can emerge collectively as much as they can emerge individually. Indeed, and according to Crespo del Río *et al.* (2022), these ideological dilemmas normally emerge during the early stages of a social phenomenon. In Leung's opinion

article excerpts, it can be read that she personally represents the Asian-American community as a diffuse yet united community during the COVID-19 pandemic context which, at the time of being published, was still a recent social event.

Moreover, both authors recur to storytelling and quoting differently depending on their background. Leung intertwines the function of storytelling by assessing the historical data she describes. For instance, this is shown when Leung (2020) asserts:

Then there's the term Asian American itself, a civil-rights-inspired creation of the 1960s that has never managed to contain all the identities it was supposed to hold. A fourth-generation Chinese American shares little family history with a first-generation Cambodian immigrant — and the knowledge that many non-Asians don't know or care about the difference can feel like an insult. (para. 10)

Same as Leung, Avlon (2021) recurs to storytelling to provide historical data. In a preliminary manner, Avlon (2021) does this to criticize certain past and negative actions of American politicians; for instance, he does this by asserting:

The Chinese Exclusion Act was a notorious law that codified anti-Asian discrimination back in 1882, making immigration illegal and barring existing Chinese Americans from becoming citizens. It was repealed in 1943-- at roughly the same time that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established Japanese-American internment camps. (para. 16)

Subsequently, this historical data is told by Avlon (2021) to express that similar political decisions should not be repeated in the present as a way to prevent further xenophobic attacks against the Asian-American community. In so doing, Avlon uses the pronoun “we” as a way to speak on behalf of the US nation: “This is a horrific side of American history – but it needs to be remembered so that we do not repeat it” (Avlon, 2021, para. 17).

Furthermore, both authors quote studies that come from their peers. Namely, whereas Leung quotes the Asian-American authors to enhance her arguments throughout the opinion article, Avlon cites studies by American organizations and authors. This adds truthfulness and weight to both authors' efforts to represent the Asian-American community. On the one hand, Leung (2020) paraphrases the work of a Chinese American academic as it follows:

As the historian Ellen D. Wu has written, the idea that Chinese Americans in particular were high-achieving and compliant was exploited first to bolster an alliance with China during World War II, then spun to discredit the black civil rights movement. (A movement from which, ironically, all Asian Americans greatly benefited.) The model-minority term is one of American white supremacy's most successful campaigns, simultaneously driving a wedge between Asian Americans and other people of color and alienating us from our own right to dissent. (para. 9)

On the other hand, Avlon (2021) recurs to quoting to provide reliable facts endorsed by prior quantitative studies related to the topic; for example, the author does this by claiming:

According to an analysis by the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Asian American hostility and conspiracy theories spiked 85% on Twitter in the 12 hours after Trump's Covid diagnosis. Hate speech has been a growing problem in the USA, with a new report from the ADL showing that white supremacist propaganda nearly doubled in 2020 to the highest levels they've ever recorded. Much of it featured "White supremacist language with a patriotic slant" in an effort to "normalize white supremacist message and bolster recruitment while targeting minority groups". (paras. 12-13)

This said, even though one of the aims of Avlon's opinion is to talk about the struggles of Asian-Americans throughout history and during the COVID-19 pandemic, he seemingly positions himself on behalf of the American nation in a top-down manner to talk about how the nation has sought to help the Asian-American communities over the years despite how mistreated the community has been. In the following excerpt, Avlon (2021) does not refer to material help; instead, he refers to help in the form of positions provided to Asian-American people in the political sphere of the US:

Discrimination does not define us as a nation. A decade after the internment camps, America elected its first Asian American Senator, Hiram Fong of Hawaii, the son of Chinese immigrants. He was joined a few years later by Sen. Daniel Inouye, a Japanese American who had fought with the celebrated 442nd Infantry during World War Two and served in the Senate for a half century. (para. 18)

Therefore, the opinion, which may be discursively expressed by him as a member of the white elites (American white elites), may perform and reinforce Van Dijk's view that the discourse of those who emphasize equality by denying or mitigating racism enables them to marginalize opposite claims (1993, p. 265).

5. Conclusion

Media discourses are one of the main sources of people's knowledge about global and local realities (Ko, 2019). In the case of pandemic, the media present important mechanisms for the construction and development of public opinion and public response towards it. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus was constructed in the media as an unknown, but remote threat, making the Chinese responsible for its global spread (Rubio Escobar, 2021). This resulted in numerous statements against this nation from the part of political leaders and lay citizens, reproducing xenophobic attitudes towards the whole country. As such, in the United States, there has been an increasing exacerbation resulted in verbal and physical demonstrations of violence against Asian-American citizens. This social problem has generated numerous opinions coming from Asian-American and American citizens, which according to Greenberg (2000), are largely biased as they seek to position their readers through discursive strategies which narrate and focus the facts in different ways, resulting in a certain representation of the parties involved in the issue.

Drawing on the analysis of two opinion articles from The Washington Post and CNN online editions, this qualitative research has shown that the most used terms around Asian-Americans were the ones that convey races and ethnicities, such as "Black", "White", "Chinese" and "Native". These terms were differently focused depending on the author. In The Washington Post article, these terms

were accompanied by the terms “American”, “racism” and “Asian-specific racism” whereas in the CNN article these terms were accompanied by “anti-” and “against”. By analyzing both articles, it was found that the overall topic of the struggles faced by the Asian-American community had more presence in the Washington Post article than in the CNN article because the former was written by an Asian-American author whereas the latter was written by an American author.

The analysis has revealed that both authors wrote their opinions with different linguistic choices, discourse structures and lexical styles that convey implicit and explicit messages, evaluations, and meanings. On the one hand, it was found that in Leung’s (2020) opinion article on The Washington Post the use of rhetorical figures predominated over the use of storytelling and quoting since the author is positioning herself on the side of the Asian-American community. Thus, she constantly uses metaphors to emphasize the negative actions of white American elites during the pandemic. Moreover, she utilizes storytelling to stress the struggles of the Asian-American community over the years, and contrary to Avlon (2021), she cites Asian-American authors to enhance her arguments. On the other hand, in Avlon’s (2021) opinion article on CNN there was a predominance of argumentation, storytelling and quoting. The employment of these persuasive moves was performed from the author’s position as a white American male from which he constantly emphasized the role of the US nation in including every ethnicity by quoting American authors, organizations, and studies. In addition, even though he mentions controversial historical events that happened against the Asian-American community, he communicates this with the purpose of preventing similar events from happening at present. Therefore, it may be interpreted that Avlon’s discourse is communicated on behalf of the nation. According to Van Dijk (1993), these types of persuasive moves discredit the opinion of those who claim the opposite.

All in all, both authors call for solidarity with the Asian-American community in their discourse. Nevertheless, they represent the community and its corresponding identities differently in discourse based on their background knowledge and ideologies (Helberg Chávez, 2021) in doing so. On the one hand, the Washington Post article, written by an Asian-American author, represents the community on the basis of an ideological dilemma (Crespo del Río *et al.*, 2022) since she considers them as a diffuse yet united community in the context of xenophobic aggressions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the Asian-American author represents the community as active members who demand solidarity from the rest of minoritized communities in the US. By doing so, the implicit message is for the Asian-American community to resist. In this case, the opinion is written *from* the community in a bottom-up manner. On the other hand, the CNN opinion article, written by an American author, represents the Asian-American community members as contributors and high achievers, which may reinforce the ‘model minority’ stereotype. Also, the CNN opinion article represents the Asian-American community members as victims who need solidarity from the American nation. As a result, the message intended is for the victimizers to stop attacking Asian-American citizens as a means to avoid repeating former historical mistakes. As such, the author writes *to* the community in a top-down manner.

On a final note, the topic about the aggressions against Asian-American citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic is still paramount both for the Americans and the Asian-Americans. In particular, the importance of this problem may largely rely on how it is described in discourse since “Discourses play a significant role in constructing social realities and conditions” (Ivić & Petrović, 2020, p. 423). We may consider that the problematic will be differently approached and explained

depending on the position and background of the author, who will utilize different discourse strategies, as well as make certain linguistic choices to influence the reader's opinion. This may help to approach the text critically, for if we are trying to understand deep issues happening outside our countries, it is crucial to consider the perspectives we are positioning ourselves to be informed and to shape our opinion towards those issues, especially, the ones coming from foreign countries.

Finally, this study was a limited analysis on the struggles faced by the Asian-American community in the US amid the COVID-19. For further research, a larger corpus has to be explored in order to shed light on this issue. However, together with the Asian-American community, there are more communities around the globe facing similar issues, covered by the national and international media outlets, expressing their opinion towards these problems. In this regard, it becomes crucial for the media to be aware of the possible effects they may produce on the global public.

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Author's contribution

José Diego Sepúlveda has participated in the preparation, design of the research, obtaining and analyzing the corpus, and in writing the article, which is his final project for the course "Analysis of Applied English Discourse" taught by Anna Ivanova within the curriculum of Pedagogy in English for Basic and Secondary Education. Anna Ivanova has participated in the supervision of the research design, analysis, critical review, and final approval of this article.

Acknowledgement

The authors extend their gratitude to the reviewers of the final draft of this paper.

Funding

This research was conducted thanks to the funding from Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo, project FONDECYT 11180178, where Anna Ivanova is a principal investigator.

Conflict of interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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