

# Attitude Manipulation in International Communication: A Case Study of the U.S. State Department's Spokesperson

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**Abstract:** *Against the backdrop of a profound restructuring of the global order, discourse hegemony is observed in diplomatic discourse, which systematically manipulates audiences' perceptions, attitudes, and value judgments regarding international issues. To effectively safeguard national public opinion security, this study analyzes the U.S. State Department spokesperson's address on the 80th anniversary of the Second World War. Based on Systemic functional linguistics (including appraisal and discourse manipulation theory), we develop a systematic framework for attitude manipulation, aiming to reveal the implicit attitude manipulation strategies in diplomatic discourse and uncover the underlying geopolitical and economic intentions. The analytical results show that the discourse renders emotional tone, transfers behavioral responsibility, and reconstructs the attributes of things through the polarized allocation of attitude resources. It also regulates prosody waves through counter-expectation value binding, constructing three major attitude manipulation models. This model represents a concentrated manifestation of guiding public opinion, disseminating ideology, and serving geopolitical strategies. This study provides a systematic analytical path for decoding attitude manipulation mechanisms in international communication discourse and offers theoretical and empirical foundations for identifying and countering discourse hegemony to ensure a fair and harmonious international communication order.*

**Keywords:** *Systemic Functional Linguistics, Discourse Manipulation, Appraisal, International Communication*

## I. Introduction

The world today is undergoing the reconstruction of the global order. Against this backdrop, international communication is a key area of diplomacy between nations. Diplomatic discourse is one of the main ways in which discursive hegemony arises. State actors has the institutional power to continuously shape the cognitive frameworks and attitude models of international audiences through diplomatic discourse practices such as press

briefing. This discursive hegemony not only influences the international public opinion landscape but also poses a significant challenge to global ideological security and the construction of an equitable international discursive order.

Previous research on discourse hegemony in international communication originated from Gramsci's (1971) theory of "cultural hegemony". Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2006) introduced it into the field of linguistics and propose the concept of "discourse manipulation". Existing research on discourse manipulation mainly focuses on macro-level discourse strategies or communication methods (Wang 2015; Hu 2021; Hu et al. 2023; Liu 2024), while the analysis of how micro linguistic resources specifically realize manipulation mechanisms remains under-examined. Moreover, previous research mostly stops at identifying power relationships and ignores the specific geopolitical demands and economic interests driving discourse manipulation.

This study focuses on the U.S. State Department spokesperson, investigating how attitude manipulation is realized through linguistic resources. The data concerns the historical commemoration of the 80th anniversary of World War II, which possesses high political significance and attracts considerable public attention. Its rich attitudinal resources provide abundant empirical samples for analyzing the operational mechanisms of attitude manipulation. The research questions of this study are as follows. First, how does the U.S. State Department spokesperson achieve attitude manipulation through lexico-grammatical strategies? Second, what attitude model do these strategies construct? Third, how does this attitude model serve the core interests of the manipulators and their underlying true intentions?

In order to realized the research goal, the present study draws on the appraisal (Martin & White 2005) and discourse manipulation theory (Van Dijk 2006) in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014) to build up the stratified analytical framework. According to the analytical framework, the present study is conducted at three levels. First, at the lexico-grammatical level, the linguistic realization of attitude meaning is analyzed, revealing the specific mechanism of discourse manipulation. Second, at the semantic level, the attitude model is deconstructed to clarify the actual results of attitude manipulation. Third, at the contextual level, the conflict of interests between the manipulators and the motivations of the manipulators are analyzed. By relating macro-social analysis with micro-linguistic analysis, a systematic and operational theoretical tool is provided to reveal how hegemony is achieved through linguistic strategies.

This study provides a linguistic approach and applicable framework for analyzing the attitude manipulation mechanisms of political discourse, which provides a theoretical foundation for effectively identify, decode, and counter discourse manipulation and build a more equitable and harmonious communication order globally.

## **II. Literature Review**

Research on discourse hegemony in international communication originates from a critical reflection on political order. Gramsci (1971) proposes the concept of "cultural hegemony" and points out that hegemony is not achieved through coercion. Rather, it naturalize ideology through social consent, which in accordance with the core value

of dominance hierarchy. Gramsci's (1971) research provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding how countries transform their own interests as universal values through diplomatic and media discourse. Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA) deepens this concept from a linguistic perspective, suggesting that discourse is the carrier of social practices and power relations (Fairclough, 1995), which has been applied in empirical research (e.g. Marcelo et al., 2025). Van Dijk (2006) further proposes the concept of "discourse manipulation", defining it as a social practice where dominant groups construct specific discourse strategies to illegitimately influence the cognitive structures of the audience through the abuse of power. This includes their mental models, knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies, which ultimately serve the interests of the manipulators and solidify social inequality. Van Dijk (2006) proposed a three-dimensional analytical framework: society, cognition, and discourse, which provides the theoretical foundation for a systematic analysis of legislation discourse manipulation.

In empirical research, Hu et al. (2023) use international media coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative as a case study to systematically analyze how media construct and reinforce negative perceptions of China through discourse strategies. This study identified several manipulation patterns and strategies, but it ignores the specific linguistic mechanisms (such as transitivity, modality, and evaluative systems) through which these strategies are implemented. Furthermore, its discussion of the motivations for manipulation remains relatively general, mainly focusing on "power competition", failing to fully incorporate the comprehensive influence of multiple factors such as geopolitics, economic interests, and cultural differences. Wang (2015) analyses how official discourse reveals the manipulation and abuse mechanisms of discourse power in social practice under the framework of critical discourse analysis. This study discusses the dialectical relationship between discourse and power, especially focusing on how the power-dominated party achieves control over social resources through discourse practices. However, this study lacks an in-depth analysis of authentic corpora (such as government documents and official speeches), thus failing to provide sufficient empirical results on the discourse manipulation mechanism. Alternative to linguistic perspectives, Liu (2024) analyzed the discourse manipulation strategies of mainstream Indian media in their reports on China from the perspective of communication studies based on framing theory. The results indicate that Indian media constructs a narrative system of self-legitimization and other-illegitimization. This is realized through manipulation strategies such as pressure, explanation, friendliness, and confrontation and manipulation strategies. This study enriches the perspective of communication studies, but still lacks a detailed description of the realization relationship between discourse strategies and linguistic forms.

In summary, existing research mainly focuses on identifying macro-level manipulation strategies in the discourse dimension, while lacking analysis of how micro linguistic resources realize these strategies. Moreover, the conflict of interests between the manipulators and the manipulated, the political and economic intentions behind the manipulation, and other influencing factors such as geopolitics and international competition are under-examined. Therefore, the present study investigate the attitude manipulation mechanisms from linguistic perspectives through a qualitative analysis of the transcripts of the U.S. State Department press briefing.

### III. Theoretical Basis

This study constructs a framework for analyzing attitude manipulation based on Martin & White's (2005) appraisal framework and van Dijk's (2006) discourse manipulation theory. Therefore, the core concepts of these two theories will be briefly illustrated below.

#### 3.1 Appraisal Framework

Martin & White (2005) model appraisal language within the macro-system of SFL. In the SFL, language is considered a complex, multi-layered symbolic system encompassing context, content (encompassing semantics and lexicogrammar), and expression (encompassing phonology and phonetics) planes, with the relationships between these layers being realizations (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). The semantic plane serves as the core transformation interface. It not only converts lexico-grammar into social meaning but also operates as the interface for the interaction between language structure and social context at the discourse level. At the semantic plane, language structure expresses meaning through three metafunctions (including ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions/meanings). Ideational meaning represents the experiential world. Interpersonal meaning constructs social relationships, and textual meaning organizes information coherently. The appraisal framework is a subsystem of interpersonal meaning, which focuses on how speakers reveal emotions and values, express status and authority, and ally with actual or potential audiences (Martin & White 2005).

The appraisal framework includes three types of resources: attitude, engagement, and gradation (Martin & White 2005). This study primarily focuses on the attitude system, which relates to emotional expression, including emotional responses, behavioral judgments, and evaluations of things (Martin & White 2005: 35). Within its subsystem, affect focuses on emotional expression, encompassing emotions of happiness/unhappiness, security/insecurity, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and inclination/disinclination. Judgment assesses behavior through social esteem (including normality, capacity, and tenacity) and social sanction (including veracity and propriety). Appreciation involves the aesthetic characteristics of things, including the three dimensions: reaction, composition, and valuation (Martin & White 2005). Furthermore, engagement addresses the source of attitudes and the multi-voiced interactions surrounding viewpoints, while gradation modulates the intensity of attitudes and interventions (Martin & White 2005).

Attitudinal meaning is realized through lexico-grammatical resources, and its realization exhibits a tiered characteristic (Hood 2004; Martin & White 2005). Direct inscription explicitly expresses evaluation through attitudinal lexis, while indirect invocation implies evaluation. Within the indirect invocation subsystem, *provoke* conveys attitude through lexical metaphors or idioms, while *invite* includes *flag* and *afford* strategies, hinting at implicit attitudes through gradation and ideational meaning, respectively. In this framework, the obscurity increases from *inscribe* to *afford*, and the contextual dependence of interpretation strengthens accordingly (Martin & White 2005). Attitude realization strategies can be cross-coded with the three subsystems of attitude (affect, judgment, and appreciation). For example, cross-coding between inscribed affect and invoked judgment is

permissible.

Furthermore, attitude meaning in discourse does not exist independently but is bonded to experiential content through the coupling with ideational meanings. This coupling enables attitude meaning to resonate with concrete or abstract things or events, constructing a potential positional alliance with the reader and reinforcing specific ideological networks. Stenglin (2004) defines this strategic coupling of attitudinal and conceptual meanings as “social bond”, which is a process that can unite participants into a community, forming alliances around shared values, thereby reshaping their community identity (Knight 2010: 40).

### **3.2 Discourse Manipulation**

The concept of discourse manipulation originates from critical discourse analysis theory within systemic functional linguistics. Van Dijk (2006) views manipulation as a comprehensive form of social power abuse, cognitive mental control, and discourse interaction, with the fundamental purpose of maintaining or exacerbating social inequality. This theory employs a three-dimensional analytical framework interwoven with social, cognitive, and discourse aspects, which reveals the multi-layered mechanisms of manipulation.

First, at the social level, manipulation is defined as the illicit domination of power that reinforces social inequality. Manipulation unfolds at the social group level rather than the individual level. Its essence is a form of domination exerted by the dominance hierarchy or elite groups (such as political leaders, media institutions, and knowledge authorities) on subordinate groups by utilizing their institutional power and discourse resource (such as priority access to mass media). The illegitimacy of this domination (i.e., “abuse of power”) lies in its violation of the fundamental interests of the manipulated group, serving the (maximum) interests of the manipulator and their group, and undermining the basic ethical principles of fair communication and interaction in democratic societies. The essential difference between illegitimate manipulation and legitimate persuasion lies in the passive role of the recipient (van Dijk 2006). Due to the privileged position of the manipulator, recipients often fail to understand the manipulator’s true intentions and perceive the beliefs and behavioral consequences they advocate; or lack the specific knowledge needed to resist manipulation, thus becoming victims of discursive manipulation (Wodak 1987). Government and media discourse on immigration is a typical example: ordinary people often blame unemployment and other economic difficulties on immigration rather than government policies (van Dijk 1993). This discourse system remains prevalent in some Western countries today and has successfully manipulated the values and behavioral patterns of many people. Therefore, the interpretation of manipulation is highly context-dependent. Some information may successfully manipulate some audiences but be ineffective on others. The manipulation of the same audience also varies in different situations and psychological states (van Dijk 2006). Although many forms of commercial, political, or religious persuasion are ethically sound in form, people can still feel manipulated. Therefore, the core criteria for judging manipulation are: whether the outcome violates the audience’s fundamental interests, and whether it serves the (maximum) interests of the manipulator.

At the cognitive level, manipulation as mental control manifests as interference in the process of understanding,

shaping biased mental models and social representations such as attitudes, knowledge, and ideologies. Compared to mental models, which are easily challenged by specific facts, more profound and lasting manipulation occurs at the level of social representations. Intervention in social representations (including public attitudes, knowledge, and ideologies) possesses stronger stability and systemic effectiveness. For example, power holders can gradually reshape collective cognitive structures by binding specific issues with symbols of social risk through discursive practices (such as establishing a causal link between “immigrant influx” and “rising crime rates”). This type of manipulation aims to influence the audience’s long-term memory (LTM) by generalizing and ideologizing specific events (such as terrorist attacks and immigration), implanting beliefs favorable to the manipulator, thus extending the effects of manipulation beyond a single event and achieving lasting influence (van Dijk 2006). This discursive manipulation is more efficient. It doesn’t require repeated manipulation of each individual event. It can influence a group’s long-term judgments on similar issues simply by altering deeply ingrained cognitive scheme. Furthermore, this manipulation is more covert. It disperses the process of generating abstract beliefs throughout everyday discourse, making it less noticeable than direct narrative manipulation of a single event. Once this social representation is formed, it autonomously guides individuals’ interpretation of new information, achieving self-sustaining manipulation effects (van Dijk 2006).

In the discourse dimension, manipulation manifests itself as a series of strategic discourse structures and practices. A specific discourse structure itself is not necessarily manipulative. Its manipulative function is activated within a specific social power context (such as public communication from elites to the masses). Although the discourse structure itself may not be manipulative, certain structures are more effective in manipulating social representations to achieve the manipulator’s own interests (van Dijk 2006). For example, at the macro level, manipulators selectively highlight topics favorable to them (e.g., national security threats) while suppressing unfavorable topics (e.g., the true cost of war). At the micro level, they employ specific vocabulary (e.g., choosing positive words to describe their own side and negative words to describe others), syntax (e.g., using passive voice or nominalization to weaken their own responsibility), rhetoric (e.g., hyperbole, euphemism, and metaphor), and nonverbal means (e.g., layout design, images, and tone of voice) to strengthen their own moral superiority, legitimacy, and credibility, while simultaneously disparaging opponents, slandering dissidents, and stigmatizing and demonizing the opposition. Manipulative discourse often stimulates emotional reactions (e.g., instilling fear and patriotism) and attempts to create situations that the audience cannot refuse (e.g., not supporting war is unpatriotic).

#### **IV. Research method**

In this section, the data collected for the study and the methods of data analysis will be elaborated

##### **4.1 Data**

This study employs a qualitative research method. We develop an attitude manipulation analytical framework based on appraisal and discourse manipulation theory to investigate the discourse of U.S. State Department

spokespersons. The data for this study were selected from the transcripts of statements made on the 80th anniversary of the Second World War by the spokesperson Tammy Bruce at the U.S. State Department’s regular press briefings in 2025. These transcripts are a response to questions about the nuclear explosion in Hiroshima. We annotated and analyzed the English transcript using the analytical framework proposed in this study.

#### 4.2 Analytical framework

As mentioned above, the goal of discourse manipulation is to shape the social representation of the audience, especially attitudes and ideologies. Once these specific cognitive models are formed, they will have a long-term impact on the audience’s values and behaviors. Therefore, the manipulation of attitudes (evaluative tendencies towards things, events, and behaviors) is the key to discourse hegemony. Appraisal theory provides a systematic classification framework for analyzing attitude meaning and a detailed description of its realization methods. Hence, through an appraisal analysis of the data, one can identify the precise lexico-grammar and linguistic strategies that realize the attitude manipulation and reveal the exact attitude model formed through the manipulation process that shapes the audience’s values and behaviors.

Accordingly, the present study develops an analytical framework for attitude manipulation based on the appraisal framework and discourse manipulation theory. The overall analytical framework is demonstrated in Figure 1. This framework systematically describes: (1) the criteria judgment of attitude manipulation at the contextual level; (2) the realization mechanisms at the semantic level; and (3) the final results of manipulation.

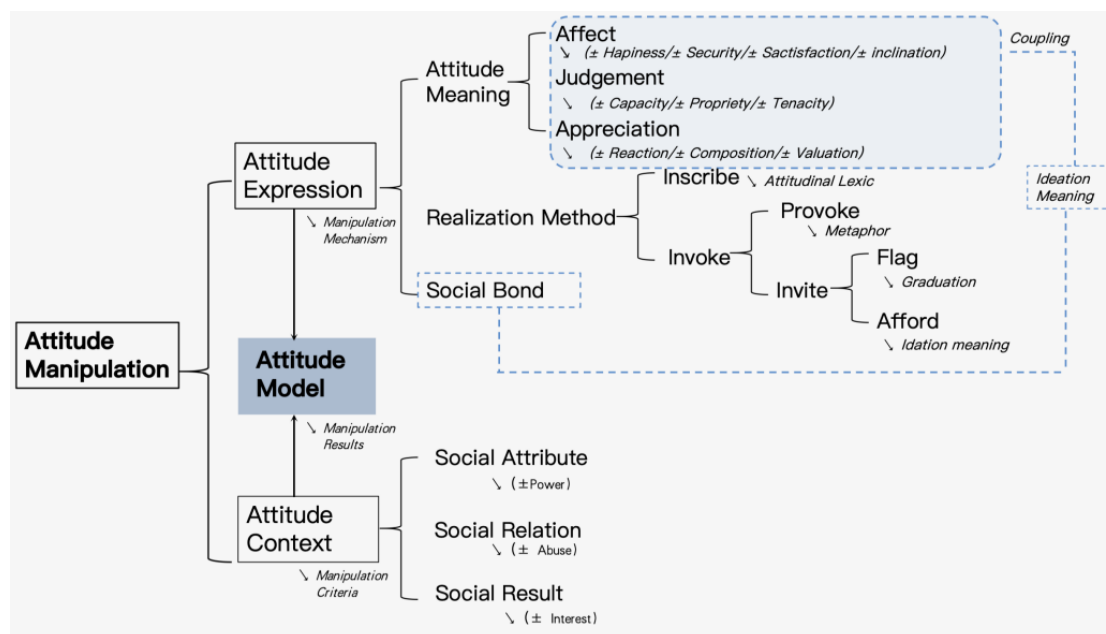


Figure 1: Analytical framework for attitude manipulation

As shown in Figure 1, at the lexico-grammatical level, attitude expression involves attitudinal meaning, realization method, and social bond (the coupling of attitude meaning and ideation meaning). Attitude meaning includes affect (emotional expression), judgment (behavioral judgment), and appreciation (evaluation of things). Affect involves feelings of happiness (enjoyment or pain), security (security or fear), satisfaction (contentment or disappointment), and inclination (willingness or repulsion). Judgment involves defining whether an action demonstrates capacity, tenacity, and propriety. Appreciation involves evaluating the reaction (interest or disinterest), composition (harmony or conflict), and value (precious or inferior) of an object. The attitudinal meaning can be explicitly expressed (inscribe) through attitudinal lexis, or indirectly invoked through metaphor (provoke), graduation (flag), and ideation (afford) resources. These attitudinal meanings are coupled with ideational meanings in discourse, charging different types of attitudinal meanings into the experiential content of the text to form social bonds. These social bonds construct or reinforce alliances of specific attitudinal stances. Different attitudinal models can be constructed through the strategic configuration of the three parameters: attitudinal meaning, realization method, and social bond. However, when this strategic configuration is placed in a manipulated context, its attitudinal model becomes illegitimate, i.e., a tool for attitudinal and ideological manipulation.

At the level of social attributes, the primary focus is on whether there is inequality of power between the social groups represented by the participants. For example, if the speaker represents [+power] (such as government agencies) and the receiver represents [-power] (such as the general public), this is considered to constitute inequality of power. At the level of social relations, we examine whether there is abuse of power among the participants. The key is whether the [+power] participants engage in abuses of power such as concealing information, fabricating facts, or preventing the flow of truth. If the information is transmitted fully and fairly, it may not constitute manipulation even though there is a power inequality between the participants. Finally, at the social result level, we examine whether the outcome oriented by the attitude model benefits the (maximum) interests of the speaker's social group while harming the interests of the other parties. This means that the judgment of manipulation is never based on the manipulator's intention, nor on the receiver's degree of awareness of manipulation, but rather on the interest orientation of its social consequences (van Dijk 2006; Etzioni-Halevy 1989).

## V. Results and Discussion

This study uses the analytical framework presented above to annotate and analyze the data, revealing the discourse mechanism of attitude manipulation and its hegemonic nature. The results are as follows.

### 5.1 Attitudinal meanings

The summary of the distribution of attitude resources is demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1 The overall analytical results

Attitude Meaning	Polarity	Attitude Expression	Frequency	Realization Method	Frequency
<b>Affect</b>	Positive (+)	+ Happiness	4	Indirect: Afford	13
		+ Security	10	Indirect: Provoke	2
		+ Satisfaction	1		
<b>Judgement</b>	Positive (+)	+ Capacity	8	Indirect: Afford	19
		+ Tenacity	3	Indirect: Provoke	1
		+ Propriety	9		
<b>Appreciation</b>	Positive (+)	+ Composition	3	Direct: Inscribe	7
		+ Valuation	5	Indirect: Afford	2
	Negative (-)	- Reaction	1	Indirect: Provoke	1
		- Valuation	1		
<b>Total</b>			45		45

As shown in Table 1, the expression of attitude meaning in the speech exhibits a high density, with 45 instances of attitude expression, including emotional expression (15), behavioral judgment (20), and appreciation of objects (10). Among these, positive attitude expressions occur 43 times, while negative ones occur 2 times, resulting in a highly unbalanced ratio. The main realization method of attitude realization is indirect provocation. The most significant mechanism is *afford* (34 times). This indicates that the speech tends to implicitly use ideational meanings (e.g., actions) to convey evaluative stances.

Although attitude meaning itself does not have manipulative properties, the overall configuration of a certain distribution pattern of attitude meaning in the discourse (e.g., polarity, mode of realization, and its coupling with ideation meaning) can more effectively influence the audience than other attitude meaning distributions when serving the interests of the social group represented by the speaker. In the speech, this is mainly reflected in the distribution pattern of attitude resource (i.e., the selection of attitude meaning subsystems, the mode of realization of attitude meaning, and the regulation of the ratio of positive and negative polarities), as well as the social bond of attitude meaning and ideation meaning.

First, the meaning expression and positive/negative polarity of the three subsystems of attitude in the attitude distribution pattern exhibit the following characteristics. First, the emotional expression in the data is all positively assigned, focusing on three emotions: [+safety] (10), [+happiness] (4), and [+satisfaction] (1). The expression of these emotions is relatively indirect, mainly triggered by the material process in the ideation meaning, rather than attitudinal lexis. For example, through behaviors such as “concluded a devastating war”, “stood shoulder to shoulder”, “safeguard peace and prosperity”, and “strengthened the U.S.-Japan alliance and shared commitment

to peace and prosperity”, the feelings of security, happiness, and satisfaction is evoked from the audience. This constitutes a significant counter-expectancy in the context of war and nuclear explosion, transforming the negative emotions such as grief and anxiety (that might have been triggered) into a positive emotional atmosphere. In a negative context, rendering a positive emotional atmosphere serves the manipulation of the attitude. Secondly, the judgments in the data are all positively assigned, covering three aspects: [+capacity] (8), [+tenacity] (3), and [+propriety] (9). The main means of realization are *provoke* (19) and *afford* (1), which are relatively implicit. The data shows the positive behavior of the United States and Japan (such as “safeguard peace and prosperity in the Pacific”), prompting readers to have positive evaluations of the ability and morality of the actors. However, the negative judgments that should have been triggered by historical facts (such as the cruelty of the nuclear attack and war responsibility) are systematically shielded, thus achieving a transfer of moral responsibility. Thirdly, the appreciation resources in the speech include 8 positive expressions ([+composition], [+valuation]) and 2 negative expressions ([-reaction], [-valuation]). The realization of appreciation is relatively direct, using attitudinal vocabulary to evaluate things. The anniversary of the nuclear bombing is defined as “solemn”, and the site of the nuclear bombing is defined as glorious. By giving negative things positive appreciation meaning through the unexpected means, the attributes of things are reconstructed.

Secondly, the strategic coupling of attitudinal meaning and ideation meaning also constitutes an important discourse strategy for attitude manipulation. In the data, attitudinal meaning does not exist independently, but is understood through coupling with ideation meaning. Authors strategically inject different types of attitudinal meaning into the experiential content of the text, making it resonate with concrete or abstract things and events. This constructs a potential alliance of value stance with the reader, and strengthens a specific ideology network. Stenglin (2004) defines this strategic dynamic coupling of attitudinal and ideation meaning as “social bond”. The attitudes, values, and ideologies reinforced by these social bonds become powerful tools for discourse manipulation when serving the interests of the power structure.

There are three core coupling patterns of social bond in the data. The first is the social bond of [American behavior + positive affect + positive judgment], formed by the coupling of American behavior (including ending the war, safeguarding peace and prosperity, and acting as a beacon of freedom and progress) with positive attitudinal meaning (+security, +happiness, +capacity, +propriety). For example, [American behavior (concluded a devastating war) + <invoke> positive affect (+happiness, +security) + <invoke> positive judgment (+capability, +propriety)]. This social bond, on the one hand, shapes the image of the U.S. as a righteous peacemaker and defender. On the other hand, it obscures the numerous moral controversies surrounding the use of nuclear weapons and the contributions of other Allied members in World War II. For example, the value binding of [US actions (protecting peace and prosperity in the Pacific region) + <invoke> positive affect (+security) + <invoke> positive judgments (+capacity, +propriety)] again shapes the image of the United States as a defender of peace and a promoter of world prosperity, concealing its military hegemony in the Pacific region.

The second one is the social bond of [nuclear explosion + positive affect/positive judgments/positive appreciation]

constructed by the coupling of nuclear explosions (including nuclear explosion anniversaries and targets of nuclear weapons use) and positive attitudes (+satisfaction, +propriety, +tenacity, +capability, +valuation). For example, the value binding of [nuclear explosion anniversary + <invoke> positive appreciation (+valuation)] defines the nuclear explosion anniversary as solemn. The social bond of [Nuclear weapon target (Hiroshima) + <invoke> positive affect (+satisfaction) + <invoke> positive judgments (+tenacity, +propriety)] defines Hiroshima as a place of glory. This social bond is counterintuitive. It does not connect nuclear weapons and their devastating impact with any negative emotional expressions (e.g., -happiness, -security, and -satisfaction) or negative behavioral judgments (e.g., -propriety). Instead, it deliberately shifts the audience's attention from the moral controversy and historical responsibility of the nuclear explosion to the abstract theme of peace and hope, thereby moralizing violence and constructing the legitimacy of our political violence. It attempts to shape the public's attitude towards violence. Furthermore, this social bond contains strategic ambiguity and weakening. The anniversary of the nuclear explosion is referred to as "tomorrow", and the target of nuclear weapons use is referred to as "Hiroshima". The entire text contains no mention of "nuclear explosion" or "nuclear weapons", nor any description of historical facts related to the event.

The third one is the social bond of [US-Japan relations + positive affect + positive judgment], which is constructed by the coupling of US-Japan relations (partnership, alliance, cohesion, shoulder to shoulder) and positive attitudes (+security, +capability, +propriety). For example, the social bond of [US-Japan relations (our two nations stand together as close allies) + <invoke> positive affect (+security) + <invoke> positive judgment (+capacity)] constructs the U.S. and Japan as equal military allies, jointly defending peace and stability in the Pacific region. This social bond is repeatedly emphasized and reinforced in the speech, shaping the U.S.-Japan alliance into a beacon of freedom, prosperity, and progress. It conceals Japan's comprehensive dependence on the US since the end of World War II and the significant power inequality (Xiang 2022), and reconstructs it as an equal, united partnership with a shared mission, hiding its geopolitical essence of serving the US "Indo-Pacific strategy" and engaging in great power competition (Lu 2025; Liu 2025). Through the frequently repetition of these social bonds, the data constructed a highly consistent prosodic spread throughout the text, continuously reinforcing the alliance of evaluative positions and value networks favorable to the speaker's national interests, guiding the audience into a pre-defined attitude model.

## **5.2 Attitude Model**

Given that the ultimate goal of discourse manipulation is not merely to influence the audience's immediate perception of a single event, but to shape or change their stable, abstract social representations (i.e., attitude models and ideologies in long-term memory) (van Dijk 2006). This study will further reveal the attitude models constructed in the data. These models shape international public attitudes towards the Second World War, nuclear weapons, and a series of regional hegemonies and acts of violence, and dominate people's opinions and actions in various contexts over a long period. Furthermore, it is significant to reveal the information weakened and concealed by the manipulated is particularly important in addition to analyzing the shaped attitude models, since

there lies “concealed information (historical facts)” behind each attitude model. This concealed information hidden behind the manipulator’s intentions are interests and countermeasures. Therefore, we not only analyze “what was told (what attitude models were constructed)”, but also investigate “what wasn’t told (what truths were hidden)”.

The analytical results identify three core attitude models. The first attitude model is: the U.S. safeguards regional freedom and peace, promoting regional prosperity and progress. This attitude model is shaped by social bonds constructed through the coupling of [American behavior + positive affect + positive judgment]. It deliberately constructs an attitude model contrary to historical and current facts, and the contributions of other countries to maintaining regional peace and development during and after World War II.

The second attitude model is: military strength are the foundation of peace and hope. This model is shaped by a social bond of [military strike+positive affect/positive judgment/positive appreciation]. It deliberately conceals key (detailed) information such as the moral controversies surrounding nuclear weapons, the decision-making process for their deployment, the number of casualties, and the aftereffects of nuclear radiation. It attempts to transform the audience’s potential negative evaluation of nuclear weapons use, reinforcing the importance of weapons for world peace. The original intention of commemorating the Hiroshima atomic bombing was to remember the tragedy, reflect on the war, and warn the future, but it has been transformed into an ideological manipulation tool to rationalize “military deterrence”.

The third attitude model is: the relationship between the U.S. and Japan is that of equal partners and allies. This model is constructed by repeatedly reinforcing the social bond of [U.S.-Japan relations + positive emotions + positive judgments]. It weakens the historical fact of the confrontation between the U.S. and Japan in World War II and conceals Japan’s comprehensive dependence on the United States after the war, obscuring the essence of U.S. military and political hegemony and geopolitical strategy.

### **5.3 Context of manipulation**

At the context level, the data meet the three social conditions for discourse manipulation defined by van Dijk (2006). First, there is a clear power inequality among the participants. The speaker is the spokesperson for the U.S. State Department, who represents the government. Therefore, it is coded as (+power). The dominance hierarchy possesses a series of privileges and controls powerful official communication channels. The receiver is the international public (-power), whose information acquisition largely depends on the dissemination of such authoritative discourse. This constitutes the basic condition of discourse manipulation.

Secondly, the speech involved inadequate information and abuse of power. The content of communication was a highly inadequate representation of historical events. It deliberately concealed, obscured, or reconstructed key information (such as the decision-making process regarding the nuclear test, the inequality of the U.S.-Japan alliance, and strategic intentions in the Pacific region), constituting an abuse of power by leveraging the privileged position of the dominance hierarchy. Audiences were highly susceptible to becoming passive manipulators due to the difficulty in accessing sufficient and diverse information.

Finally, manipulation means exerting illegal influence through discourse. In the data, the manipulator convinced the audience that their actions were in the audience's best interest. However, we observed the illegal practice of expressing attitudes that served the interests of the manipulator while violating the interests of the manipulated. This manipulation was clearly self-serving at the contextual level. The U.S. State Department spokesperson essentially represents the voice of the government (the dominance hierarchy), therefore, the speech essentially represented the interests of the government. From the perspective of manipulative intent, the speech had a clear ideological bias, representing the discourse practice of "Indo-Pacific Strategy", and "America First" policies of the Trump administration's second-term. The specific manifestations are as follows.

First, in 2017, the White House released the National Security Strategy, establishing 'great power competition' as a core strategic objective (Qi 2025). The 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy report explicitly identified China as a major competitor (Niu & Yuan 2025: 9), strengthened the Quad (U.S.-Japan-India-Australia) mechanism, and vigorously promoted multiple smaller multilateral security cooperation mechanisms such as those between the U.S., Japan, and Australia; the U.S., Japan, and South Korea; and the U.S., Japan, and the Philippines (Niu & Yuan 2025). Against this backdrop, Japan constitutes a core force in the U.S.'s strategic deployment as a pivotal player in the Indo-Pacific strategy. Japan speaks in unison with the U.S. on major regional issues. It assists the U.S. in promoting the implementation of its Indo-Pacific strategy (Liu 2025). Thus, the U.S. attempts to conceal the adversarial roles of the U.S. and Japan in World War II and hides the fact that the U.S. deployed nuclear weapons to Japan and exercised military control over Japan after the war. Instead, it focuses on the interests and objectives behind building an equal partnership and alliance with Japan.

During the Trump 2.0 administration, the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" exhibited a transactional nature, emphasizing the exchange of interests and cost-benefit logic. Therefore, the U.S. used military protection and tariff policies as leverage to demand that Japan undertake higher military spending (3% of GDP), enhance the combat capabilities of its Self-Defense Forces, and sign strategic guarantees (Dalton & Bartoux 2024; Liu 2025). Economically, Japan needed to expand its investment in the U.S. to promote local employment (Tatsumi 2024). Rather than the equal and shoulder-to-shoulder partnership constructed in the data, the U.S. viewed its ally Japan more as an instrument of economic development (Liu 2025).

Furthermore, under the "America First" policy, the standard for U.S. diplomatic actions was whether they could make the U.S. safer, stronger, and more prosperous, implicitly revealing the policy's self-serving nature (Shi 2025; Rubio 2025). The data emphasized the U.S.-Japan alliance working together to defend regional peace, progress, and prosperity, convincing the audience that the alliance and U.S. diplomacy were in the interests of the international community. However, the true result of this manipulation served the fundamental interests of the manipulators. It is to win the "great power competition" and achieve "America First" policy. It does not serve the progress, prosperity, and peace of the world. Instead, these actions served the progress, prosperity, and peace of the US itself. Therefore, the ultimate beneficiaries of this attitude manipulation were the social group represented by the manipulators.

Secondly, the speech attempted to strengthen the moral legitimacy of US military hegemony by portraying nuclear violence as a “symbol of peace and hope”, thus catering to Trump’s continued “peace through strength” deterrence ideology in his second term (Shi 2025). As the Trump administration emphasized, what the United States truly pursues is “the world’s most modern, lethal, and powerful military force” (e.g., nuclear deterrence and the deployment of the Golden Dome missile defense system) (Rubio 2025). Therefore, the narrative constructed in the address (i.e., “America is a beacon of peace, freedom, and progress”) is not factual. Its true intention is not peace itself, but to reduce geopolitical risks, lower commodity prices, and ensure that American business activities are not hampered by regional wars (Shi 2025).

Therefore, the data is not a simple historical commemoration, but a typical practice of discursive hegemony, a concentrated manifestation of the power elite using attitude manipulation mechanisms to disseminate ideology, legitimize strategic goals, and serve geopolitical strategies in the international arena. The data reconstructs violence into a morally justifiable narrative and glorifies an asymmetric alliance as an equal partnership. Its ultimate aim was to consolidate the U.S. hegemonic order in the Indo-Pacific region and strengthen the basis of its global leadership.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In summary, this study, based on evaluation frameworks and discourse manipulation theory, constructs an attitude manipulation framework to analyze the typical case of the U.S. State Department spokesperson addressing the 80th Anniversary of World War II. It reveals how the U.S. reconstruct historical acts of violence into a tool for self-glorification and legitimizing its current geopolitical strategic attitude manipulation through a series of discourse strategies.

An analytical framework is developed to model how discourse manipulation is realized through linguistic resources. The analytical results are as follows. First, the study reveals the lexico-grammatical mechanisms of attitude manipulation, mainly achieved through the pattern of attitude resources and social bonds. Specifically, the attitude manipulation is realized in three perspectives: (1) In terms of attitude resource, the three subsystems of attitude constitute a significant anti-expectation attitude expression pattern in the context of war and nuclear explosion. This is realized through positive assignment (+happiness, +security, +satisfaction, +capacity, +tenacity, +propriety, +composition and +valuation) and implicit realization methods (afford and provoke); (2) In terms of social bond, the meaning of attitude is injected into the experiential content of the text, constructing a potential positional alliance with the reader. These social bonds construct a highly consistent “prosody wave” of evaluation throughout the text, building three core attitude models at the semantic level that are favorable to the national interests of the U.S. The developed attitude model involves deliberately concealing, obscuring, or reconstructing key information (such as the decision-making process of the nuclear explosion, the inequality of the U.S.-Japan alliance, and strategic intentions in the Pacific region), serving the (maximum) interests of the manipulators at the contextual level while violating the fundamental interests of the manipulated. It constitutes an abuse of power by taking advantage of the privileged position of the ruling class. Therefore, the data is not a simple historical

commemoration, but a typical practice of discourse manipulation, a concentrated manifestation of the power class spreading ideology and legitimizing its strategic goals, such as the Indo-Pacific strategy. Through systematic attitude manipulation, it reconstructs violence into a morally justified narrative and glorifies asymmetric alliances as equal partnerships.

The findings of the present study have both theoretical and practical contributions. First, this study develops an applicable framework for attitude manipulation, closely integrating macro-level attitude manipulation with micro-level discourse analysis, providing a systematic analytical tool for understanding how discourse hegemony is achieved through lexico-grammatical strategies. It also provides linguistic evidence for the ideological manipulation of power institutions at the discourse level, thus possessing theoretical value for discourse research in international political communication. Second, this analysis is an exposure of a common and typical manipulation pattern in international communication, providing a theoretical basis and empirical support for the world to effectively identify, decode, and counter discourse manipulation. It sheds light on safeguarding national public opinion and ideological security, and building a more equitable new international discourse order.

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