

# Linguistic Representation of Japan in US Media Discourse: Frame Analysis

Aleksandra MAKHRAKOVA

## Abstract

The Japanese Government is very conscious of how other countries see Japan, and regularly conducts opinion polls to see how people in other countries feel about this country. These opinion polls revealed that from 2013 to 2016, there was a decrease in Americans' positive perceptions of Japan. One explanation may be that the American mass media portrayed Japan in a negative way in that period. This study uses frame analysis to explore how the media in the United States represented Japan in 2013, focusing upon online, print, and videotaped news stories in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, Fox News, and NPR. Economics and foreign affairs were the two topics most covered. Regarding economics-related issues, coverage overwhelmingly highlighted 'concerning' topics. The foreign affairs stories were framed differently depending on the partner country; coverage emphasized 'critical' issues with South Korea, 'cooperation' with China, and was 'neutral' or emphasized 'cooperation' with the United States. In summary, neither the concerning frame in economics stories nor the critical frame in foreign affairs coverage can explain the sharp decrease in the assessment of US-Japanese relations as friendly.

**Keywords** : US media discourse, perceptions of Japan, frame analysis, linguistic representation

Every year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) commissions research agencies to conduct an opinion poll on the impression of Japan in foreign countries. In contrast to other foreign countries where the poll is conducted once every three to four years, the poll in the US has been conducted almost every year since 1960. That shows the concern that the Japanese government has towards the US's opinions of their country. There are four main issues researched in the poll: the current relations between Japan and the US, the reliability of Japan as a US partner, the reliability of various Asian countries as partners of the US, and the necessity of maintaining the Japan-US Security Treaty. Two groups are asked: the "general public" and "opinion leaders." (A complete copy of the results of the opinion polls is available from the MOFA site: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/culture/pr/yoron.html>).

The results of the 2013 public opinion poll on Japan in the US among the general population showed a significant decrease, from 80% in 2012 to 58% in 2013, when assessing US-Japan relations as “friendly.” The following year, 2014, the results of a survey of opinion leaders revealed a decrease on the same issue, from 86% in 2013 to 70% in 2014. An even more significant decline occurred in 2016, when the rating dropped to 58%.

Most people in the US still get their information about foreign countries through the mass media, be it print media, online resources, or video content. They are the principal channels through which the public is informed about foreign countries. That is why we hypothesize that it was mass media and linguistic representation which caused the changes in the portrayal of US-Japan relations among the “general public” group. The present study has the main research question: How do American media frame Japan? This research question analyzes coverage of Japan in 2013. To address this research question, this study performed frame analysis of the online, print, and videotaped news stories about Japan.

To know how other countries are represented in media narratives or media discourse, the concept of “frame” is very important. Framing Theory was first put forth by Goffman in 1974. He defines the frame as a scheme of interpretation in which the particulars of events (or activities) are organized and made sensible. In other words, a frame is a specific set of expectations that people utilize to make sense of a social situation. The analytical technique of “framing” was developed by social psychologists (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1991; Gitlin, 1980) to study and explain the role of media in identifying problems for the public. Among linguists, Fillmore (1985) was engaged in the development of frame theory in his work “Frames and Semantics of Understanding.” It defines the frame as “the cognitive structure of experience schematization.” At present, the concept of “framing” has been established as a field of mass communication research. Framing involves the choice of certain events, emphasis, or suppression of certain parts of an event, phenomenon, or personality (Entman, 1993).

The articles for the research were selected through ProQuest’s electronic library system, as well as EBSCO’s collection of research databases. Media sources were selected both based on media ratings (Hitwise, 2016; Nielsen Media Research, 2013) and on the basis of media focus (liberal/conservative; economic/political). Hitwise’s “Leading multiplatform print media websites in the United States in August 2016” shows leading multiplatform print media websites in the US, based on the market share of visits. In August 2016, *The New York Times* website was the most popular website for a print publication in the US, with a market share of 5.7%. The second most popular one was *The Washington Post* with a market share of 5.5%. The sources for videotaped news were selected on the basis of Nielsen Media Research’s news

channels' rating of 2013, according to which the most popular channels were Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC. The research also covers news broadcast through NPR, the highly rated American privately and publicly funded non-profit media organization.

The sample for the analysis consisted of all articles that mentioned Japan over the period from January to December 2013. The main options of selection were the presence of the lemma "Japan" in the title of the articles and the mentioning of "Japan" as a location.

Table 1 shows the resources and the number of news pieces selected for the analysis on the basis of ratings. We used print resources such as *The New York Times* (newspaper), *The New York Times Magazine* and *The Washington Post*, as well as online news websites (*New York Times Online*). Among television networks, Japan was covered better by CNN and NPR news programs.

**Table 1: Resources selected for analysis**

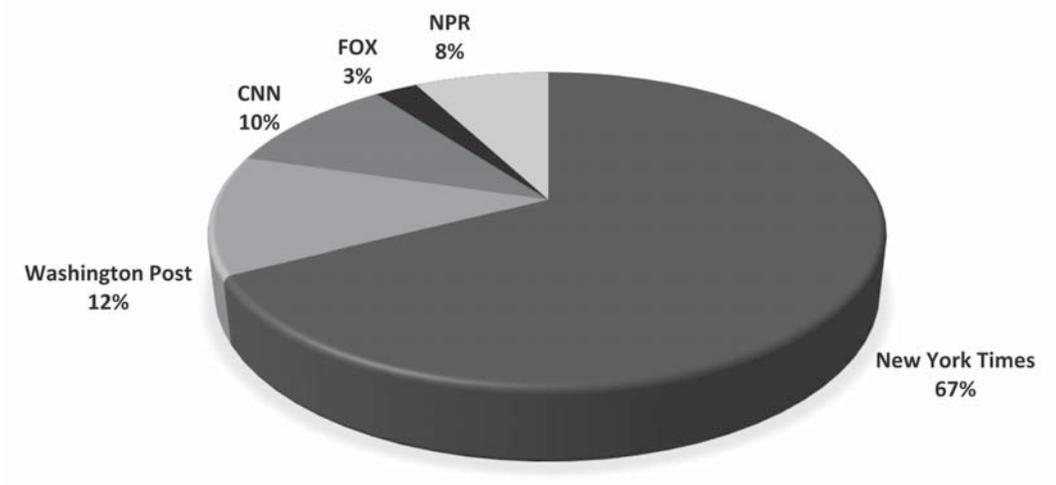
Company/Channel (number of news samples)	Resources/Program
New York Times (219)	<i>New York Times</i> (newspaper and online), <i>New York Times Magazine</i>
Washington Post (40)	<i>Washington Post</i>
CNN (33)	New Day (CNN), CNN Newsroom, Around the World (CNN), Situation Room (CNN), News Stream (CNN International), CNN Starting Point, Student News (CNN), The (CNN)
FOX (8)	Fox News, Journal, Editorial Report Fox News, Imus Simulcast (Fox), Special Report with Bret Baier (Fox)
NPR (25)	Morning Edition (NPR), All Things Considered (NPR), Talk of the Nation (NPR), Weekend Edition Sunday (NPR)

Chart 1 shows the share of each resource used in the content analysis. The New York Times has by far the largest share of 304 articles, both in *The New York Times* (online) and *The New York Times* (paper), but we eliminated some of the articles from the analysis due to repetition.

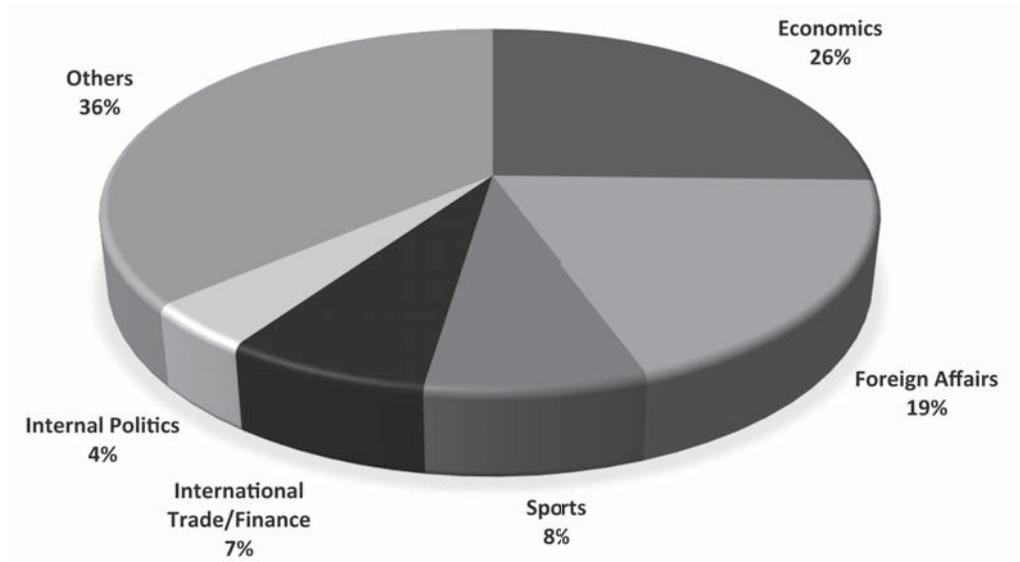
Analysis of thematic content revealed what the news stories were about. These thematic categories were analyzed by two coders and are reported in Chart 2 according to the rate of coverage.

If a story contained two or more themes, the story was coded under the main theme of the story. If two or more themes were considered to have relatively equivalent importance in the story, the first-mentioned theme was counted, because the first-mentioned theme generally is regarded to represent the story. Like the story rank, the order in a story was also assumed to indicate the importance of the themes. Chart 2 illustrates the five most covered topics, which

**Chart 1. Company/channel used for research: share of the news samples about Japan**



**Chart 2: Topics about Japan covered in the U.S. media**



are foreign affairs<sup>1</sup>, economics<sup>2</sup>, sports<sup>3</sup>, international trade/finance, internal politics<sup>4</sup> and others<sup>5</sup>. Up until now, we have analyzed the theme of “foreign affairs” and “economics.”

The selected stories were coded for analysis using categories that had been developed through a preview of the news’ titles, abstracts, or the article itself if it was hard to assign it to a certain category just on the basis of its title and abstract.

A search of related previous studies located several studies that described media frames utilized in covering foreign countries (Freeman, 2017; Park, 2003, Saleem, 2007; Trumbo, 1996). The research utilizes both deductive and inductive approaches to frames’ creation, and

as it intends to discover topics and linguistic tools causing the decrease in the positive portrayal of Japan, it is reasonable to utilize contrasted frames. Thus, Park (2003) compared US television networks' coverage of Japan and South Korea on the following topics: international relations with the US, economics, demonstrations and protests, and disasters. Park created cooperative/conflict frame categories for international relations stories and cooperative/rival frame categories for economic stories. The idea that the democracy/chaos frame captures political protest and demonstration stories and that the innocent victim/human problem frame captures disaster stories was deduced from the previous research of Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997) and Keshishian (1997) respectively. Using both content and linguistic analysis, optimistic/concerning frame categories for economics and the cooperative (support)/critical frame for foreign affairs stories were designated.

Intercoder reliability was checked on a category-by-category basis by using the 'coefficient of reliability' (Holsti, 1969). One hundred abstracts of news stories were randomly selected from the total of 325 stories and coded by the first coder (the author of the present study) and the second coder (a Japanese Ph.D. holder in Linguistics). The percentages of agreement are shown in Table 2. The percentages were within the acceptable level of 80% (Riffe et al., 1998).

Table 3 reveals that the US media framed most news about Japan's economics in the

**Table 2: Inter-coder agreement**

Variables	Percentages Coder Reliability (%)
Economics	85
Foreign Affairs	88

**Table 3: Frame Analysis - Economics (%)**

Frame	Samples' Share	Examples
Optimistic	9 (13%)	next phase of his aggressive strategy to kick-start Japan's economy, <i>with plans to encourage foreign investment, nurture innovation and improve regulation</i>
Concerning	56 (84%)	building boom is <i>a throwback to Japan's troubled 1990s</i> /"How long before all this winds down again?" That's what everyone's <i>worried</i> about/... economists say that Japan's recovery has become <i>dangerously dependent</i> on large-scale public works ....., fueling <i>pork-barrel politics/negative public reaction</i> to a coming increase in a national sales tax.
Neutral	2 (3%)	The bank set the goal of achieving a target of 2 percent annual inflation rate by 2015 or early 2016.
Total	67	

concerning frame. For Japan, the percentages of the cooperative frame and the concerning frame were 13% and 84% respectively. This means that the US news provided a negative frame for economics news about Japan. Along with the kind of admiration expressed by the US media for Abe's bold and risky policies, there is obvious concern if the measures being taken would succeed.

As the frame analysis of the category of "foreign affairs" was being conducted, the decision was made to divide the category into three sub-categories depending upon the partner country. It was done due to obvious differences in the way the relations were estimated. The predominance of the critical frame was observed mainly in articles about Japan's relations with South Korea.

**Table 4: Frame Analysis - Foreign Affairs (Column %)**

Frame	South Korea	China	USA
Cooperative	0	16 (44%)	3 (30%)
Critical	5 (71%)	7 (19%)	0
Neutral	2 (29%)	13 (36%)	7 (70%)
Total	7 (100%)	36 (100%)	10 (100%)

Table 4 reveals that the US news presented most of the news stories about Korea's and Japan's political relationship in a critical frame. Most of the samples of the sub-category touched upon the topic of WWII and the issue of "comfort women." On the contrary, Japan and China's relations were presented in a cooperative frame. Even the news on another painful topic, Yasukuni Shrine, showed Japan in a neutral light. In reporting the US political relationship with Japan, the news stories described the alliance either as the key to security and prosperity among the countries or just reported the results of certain events in a neutral way.

The purpose of frame analysis in this study was to investigate how American media interprets and frames the selected issues and events in Japan. The study assumed that news stories about Japan might provide consistent frames that impact particular views of the country regarding the issues and events. These frames can lead to people looking at the country in a particular way. The predominant topics about Japan covered in US media discourse are Japanese economics (26%), foreign affairs (19%), sports (8%), international trade and finance (7%) and Japanese politics (4%). The analysis of articles with an economic orientation shows the predominance of the concerning frame (84%) over the optimistic frame. The foreign affairs stories were framed differently depending on the partner country. However, the prevalence of

the critical frame is observed mainly in articles about Japan's relations with South Korea. It can be argued that neither the concerning frame in economics stories nor the critical frame can explain the sharp decrease in the assessment of US-Japanese relations as friendly.

To conclude, further analysis of articles and less covered topics is required. The articles about Japan's politics or the mass killing of whales as a result of the traditional round-up hunt are of particular interest.

## Notes

- 1 Foreign affairs: summit talk, treaty, agreement, international convention and conference, territorial diplomatic dispute, diplomatic
- 2 Economics: company, business, industry, trade, employment, agriculture, fishery, banking
- 3 Sports: sports, athletic events, athletes
- 4 Internal politics: government, election, congress, party, judiciary, protest, demonstration, civil disorder
- 5 Themes which have a coverage of less than 4%.

## References

- Entman, R. M. (1991). Framing US coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran Air incidents. *Journal of Communication*, 41(4), 6–27.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication* 43(4), 51–8.
- Fillmore, C. J. (1985). Frames and Semantics of Understanding. *Quaderni di Semantica*, 6, 222–254.
- Freeman B. C. (2017). Claims, frames, and blame: Coverage of climate change in ASEAN's English-language newspapers, 2002–2012. *Sage Open*, 7(1), 2158244016675199.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. University of California Press.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Hitwise: Marketing Charts (2016). *Leading multiplatform print media websites in the United States in August 2016, based on market share of visit*. Retrieved accessed 20 July, 2021, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/203948/us-market-shares-of-selected-video-and-multimedia-websites/>
- Holsti, O.R. (1969). *Content Analysis for the Social Science and Humanities*. Addison-Wesley Publishing.
- Keshishian, F. (1997). Political Bias and Nonpolitical News: A Content Analysis of an Armenian and Iran Earthquake in the New York Times and the Washington Post. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14(4), 332–43.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. *Opinion Poll on Japan*. Retrieved 25 August, 2021, from <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/culture/pr/index.html>
- Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (1997). Media Framing of Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance. *American Political Science Review*, 91(3), 567–83.
- Nielsen Media Research (2013). *2013 Report on Television*. Nielsen Media Research.

- Park J. (2003). Contrasts in the coverage of Korea and Japan by US television networks: A frame analysis. *Gazette*, 65(2), 145–164.
- Riffe, D., S. Lacy and F. G. Fico (1998). *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Saleem N. (2007). US media framing of foreign countries image: An analytical perspective. *Canadian Journal of Media Studies*, 2(1), 130–162.
- Trumbo, C. (1996). Constructing climate change: Claims and frames in US news coverage of an environmental issue. *Public Understanding of Science*, 5(3), 269–283.

# 米国のメディアディスコースに取り上げられる 日本像の言語化：フレーム分析

アレクサンドラ・マフラコワ

## 要 旨

本調査は米国のメディアが世論に影響を及ぼした「対日イメージの悪化」に焦点を当てたい。日本外務省は、ニールセン社に委託して、米国における対日世論調査を定期的に行っている。その世論調査を長期的に見ると、2013年から2016年にかけて、日米協力関係を「極めて良好」「良好」と評価したアメリカ人の割合が低下していたことが明らかになった。その低下は米国メディアの日本に対するネガティブな取り上げ方に関係があると仮定を立てた。この調査では、フレーム分析を使用して、オンライン、印刷物、ビデオで取り上げられたニュース記事に焦点を当て、2013年に米国のメディアが日本をどのように表現したかを研究した。最も取り上げられたトピックは経済と外交だった。経済関連の問題については、報道が圧倒的に「懸念」フレームを使った。それに対して外交は、相手国によってフレームが異なっている。日韓関係においては日本を「批判」的に位置づけたが、中国との関係では「協力」を、米国とは「中立」を強調した。しかし、経済関係記事の「懸念」のフレーム及び外交報道の批判的なフレームの割合から見ても、日米関係に対する「良いイメージ」が急激に低下したことを説明することはできない。さらなる分析が必要である。

キーワード：米国のメディアディスコース、日本像、フレーム、言語化