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# The Legitimacy of Chinese Outward Investment in English News — A Cognitive Approach to Discursive Legitimation\*

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**Abstract**—Chinese Investment Oversea often face legitimacy crisis, and media plays a central role in staging legitimacy struggle. This research attempts to apply Proximization theory and the construals of Cognitive Linguistics to account for the discursive legitimation process in business discourse. The comparative analysis of two reports on a case of Chinese investment in America has shown how different discursive strategies can construe distinct conceptualizations of the same event, influencing the judgment among readership on the legitimacy of the deal. The analysis of this study shows that drawing on the construals of Cognitive Linguistics, the application of Proximization theory can be extended to legitimacy discourse in wider social domains.

**Index Terms**—legitimacy, discursive legitimation, Proximization theory, construals

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since 2003, the trend of Chinese outward investment is picking up. The media hype of *China buying up the world* and *China as a threat* often stirs unfavorable public reaction to the business activities of Chinese companies abroad. This study proposes that this public crisis involves legitimacy. The influence on legitimacy ‘*is built upon language and uses language as its principal instrumentality*’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 64). The focus of legitimacy study has shifted from ‘*the established senses of legitimacy to ongoing discursive struggles for legitimation*’ (Eero Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006, p. 793). The strategic use of language and its instrumental function in affecting legitimacy has been identified by researchers of Critical Discourse Studies as discursive legitimation, focusing on uncovering various discursive strategies in public discourse, especially political discourse, as an enactment of social power (Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; Teun A van Dijk, 2005; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999).

The central role of media in staging corporate legitimacy struggle has only recently drawn attention. A series of studies in Scandinavian region followed the tenets of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), and focused on the social effect of media texts on framing public perspective on business organizations and their activities such as transnational M&As (see Kuronen, Tienari, & Vaara, 2005; E. Vaara & Tienari, 2002; Eero Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Eero Vaara et al., 2006). The power of media lies in its role as secondary text editing and commenting on primary texts, which can be corporate announcement, political speech, interview, etc. This research intends to apply the construal operations of Cognitive Linguistics (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Hart, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; 1991; Ronald W. Langacker, 1987b, 2002, 2008) and the Proximization theory of socio-political legitimation proposed by Cap (2006, 2009, 2013, 2015) to account for how different representations in news reports can incur distinct understandings of the same deal and affect the legitimacy of Chinese Oversea Investment.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Communicative Approach to Legitimacy

Legitimacy is one of the key themes in sociological studies in general (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984; Parsons, 1960; Weber, 1964) and organizational studies in particular (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Dimmaggio & Powell, 1983; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995; Suchman, 1995). Legitimacy is ‘*a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions*’ (Suchman, 1995:574). Communication plays a critical role in the process of legitimation (Hofer & Green, 2016). Most audiences of organization rarely have chance to actually observe what an organization is doing or has done. ‘*It is primarily through texts that information about actions is widely distributed and comes to influence the actions of others*’ (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004, p. 635).

Institutional scholars have examined how rhetorical linguistic devices influence the legitimacy process in particular and institutionalization process at large (Brown, Ainsworth, & Grant, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; R. Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). On the one hand, legitimacy, as a subjective perception held by audience, is not directly based on

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action patterns of legitimation efforts, but on words and symbols that communicate these actions. On the other hand, the legitimacy judgment of an organization mostly relies on the words and symbols representing organizations and their actions. The communicative approach to legitimacy emphasizes the performative role of language in shaping legitimacy judgment and institutionalization (Roy Suddaby, 2010).

### B. Discursive Legitimation

Legitimacy, as a crucial sociopolitical concept, is widely referred to along with power and ideology in Critical Discourse Studies. Legitimacy have been the research theme of many influential CDS scholars including van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999), Fairclough (2003), Chilton (2004), Cap (2006), van Leeuwen (2007), and Hart (2010). The focus is not on the static status of legitimacy but the discursive process of gaining or losing of legitimacy. The process of legitimation is essentially social and political (Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997). Martín-Rojo and Van Dijk (1997, p. 560-1) defined legitimation as the socio-political act of ‘*attributing acceptability to social actors, actions and social relations within the normative order*’, in contexts of ‘*controversial actions, accusations, doubts, critique or conflict over groups relations, domination and leadership*’. Language is assumed to be playing a central role in winning, sustaining, or challenging the legitimacy of power relations, institutional order, and other social practices. CDS enquiries into this process are generally named as discursive legitimation (Cap, 2006; Ieşcu-Fairclough, 2008; Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; Teun A van Dijk, 1998, 2005; van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Discursive legitimation involves the strategic use of language by language producers and the performative role of language in influencing legitimacy. Critical Discourse Studies analyze discursive legitimation in a wide socio-political context. Under the common objective of exposing social problem and making a change, the subjects of discursive legitimation research in CDS centered mostly around political issues such as modern war (Cap, 2006; Dunmire, 2012; Graham, Keenan, & Dowd, 2004; Oddo, 2011; Reyes, 2011; Teun A van Dijk, 2005), international disputes such as Iran nuclear issue (KhosraviNik, 2015; Rasti & Sahragard, 2012), and other political concerns (Amer, 2009; Boukala & Salomi, 2014; Peled-Elhanan, 2010).

### C. The Cognitive Approach to Discursive Legitimation

Previous studies on discursive legitimation mainly focus on the identification of legitimation strategies (see Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). In analyzing the legitimation strategies of political speech, Reyes (2011) called for further studies into which legitimization strategies are culturally bound, and which are inherent to human psyche. Indeed, on the one hand, a decontextualized analysis of legitimation is impossible because legitimation is ‘*founded on the principle of right and wrong [...] justified according to culturally specific values and norms*’ (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 101). On the other hand, the general strategies of legitimation such as group polarization and fear mongering correspond to the core mechanisms of how our minds work. There is a new development in the cognitive dimension of discursive legitimation proposed mainly by Cap and Hart.

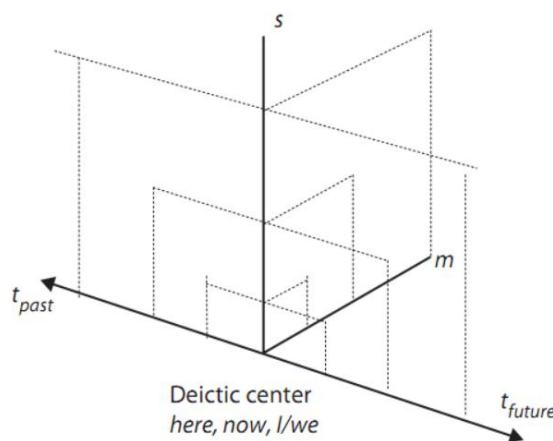


Figure 1. Dimensions of Deixis (Chilton, 2004:58)

In a discourse-pragmatic study of the American involvement in Iraq, Cap (2006, 2009, 2013, 2015) developed Proximization theory to account for how presidential speeches of America were strategically worded to construe particular conceptualization in the minds of the public to legitimate American military intervention in Iraq. Following Chilton’s Discourse Space Theory (2004), Cap’s model posits that in processing discourse, ‘*people “position” other entities in their “world” by placing them in relation to themselves*’ along three axes of spacial, temporal and axiological. Proximization strategy involves conceptualizing the spacial, temporal and axiological relation between Inside Deictic Center (IDC) and Outside Deictic Center (ODC) (see Figure 3-8). The proximization model works by presenting an entity or event as a ‘*threat*’ approaching IDC along spatial, temporal or axiological axis. Cap revealed the legitimating

power of proximization by ‘*alerting the addressee to the proximity or imminence of phenomena which can be a threat to the addressee and thus require immediate action*’ (2006, p. 4).

Proximization model incurs common cognitive processes in human psyche. Cap describes the cognitive effect of Proximization as ‘*forced construals*’ on the public (2014, p. 191). Proximization was proposed by Cap to ‘*mark an organized, strategic deployment of cognitive-pragmatic construals in discourse*’ (2014, p. 190). *Construal* is a central notion in cognitive linguistics, referring to the fact that in different linguistic representations, the same situation can be conceptualized in different ways. Construals offer a number of different options to the conceptualization of a given phenomenon (Ronald W Langacker, 1993). Language producers have the freedom of choice in linguistic devices realizing construal operations. These construal offers ‘*a range of alternative structural characterizations, among which a speaker chooses so as to convey a particular conceptualization of a scene*’ (Talmy, 2000, p. 214). Cognitive linguists have identified and classified a number of specific conceptual operations based on four general cognitive processes: attention, comparison, perspective and constitution (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Ronald W. Langacker, 2002; Talmy, 2000). Proximization is the construal of relations between entities within the discourse space (Chilton, 2004), particularly the symbolic shifts of the peripheral elements encroaching upon the territory of speaker-addressees territory (both physical and ideological).

Proximization theory is a new attempt to account for discursive strategies of legitimation in political discourse with quantitative linguistic evidence (Cap, 2010). Proximization serves to explain the ‘*strategic regularities underlying forced construal in political/public discourse*’, and provides ‘*a missing link between Critical Discourse Analysis and cognitive pragmatics*’ (Cap, 2014, p. 30). But the application of proximization theory is largely limited in the fear-mongering interventionist discourse in political scenario. According to Cap himself (2013:204), ‘*one of the most direct challenges to proximization theory resulting from further applications of the STA model is proposing a DS conception universal enough to handle different ranges of the deictic center and the deictic periphery, in particular discourses*’. To achieve its aim of developing into a communicative theory, ‘*proximization theory needs further input from Cognitive Linguistics*’ (Cap, 2013, p. 204), and prove its efficacy in accounting for a wider range of legitimacy discourses.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTION AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

This study selects a recent case of Chinese company *Shunaghui* 双汇 acquiring American firm *Smithfield Foods* in 2012, featuring one of the largest Chinese takeovers of American consumer brand. One article from *the Washington Post* and the other from *the Economist*, were published shortly after official announcement of the proposed deal. The following part will conduct a contrastive analysis to show how different discursive strategies can lead to distinct conceptualizations of the same event, which cognitively affecting the legitimacy judgment of the deal among newsreaders. The research question of this contrastive study is:

#### ***How can new reports affect the legitimacy of the deal between Shuanghui and Smithfield?***

Adapted from the analytical procedure of Proximization theory Cap (2013), this research intends to analyze the two reports according to the following steps:

- 1) the construal of IDCs and ODCs  
Identify and compare in the two reports the noun phrases construed as elements of the deictic center of the DS (IDCs) and outside the deictic center of the DS (ODCs).
- 2) Spatial Proximization  
Identify and compare in the two reports verb phrases of motion and directionality construed as markers of movement of ODCs towards IDC or impact of ODCs upon IDC, and noun phrases denoting abstract concepts construed as anticipations of impact of ODCs upon IDCs, or effects of impact of ODCs upon IDCs.
- 3) Axiological proximization  
Identify and compare in the two reports noun phrases construed as IDC positive values or value sets, or as ODC negative values or value sets, and discourse forms involving linear arrangement of lexico-grammatical phrases construing materialization in the IDC space of the ODC negative values.
- 4) Temporal Proximization  
Identify and compare in the two reports discourse forms including noun phrases, tenses, modal auxiliaries, and other which involve a symbolic compression of the time axis as a result of two conceptual shifts: past-to-present and future-to-present.

### IV. ANALYSIS

#### ***A. The Construal of IDCs and ODCs***

van Leeuwen (2008) exemplifies legitimation as the answer to the spoken or unspoken ‘*Why*’ questions: ‘*Why should we do this?*’ or ‘*Why should we do this in this way?*’. Before answering the question of *Why*, the question need to be answered is: *who are we?* What counts as *we* is subjected to discursive construction. Previous literature on discursive legitimation has shown that the binary conception of in-group and out-group through strategic representation of social actors (social in/out group) is the conceptual basis of discursive legitimation, including *the positive self and negative*

*other representation* in service of social legitimation (T. A. van Dijk, 1988; 1991, 1998), the presumption of an in-group in discursive legitimation as a kind of public justification by Fairclough & Fairclough (2012), and the discursive construction of Inside Deictic Center (IDC) and threats encroaching on it in the proximization model of Cap (2006). Through referential and predicating strategies, social actors and their values are divided between IDC and ODC.

Extract 1) is the first paragraph of *the Washington Post* report on Shuanghui-Smithfield deal. In the extract, national identities including *country, China, Chinese, United States, and American* occurred eight times. Expressions such as *a Chinese firm, Chinese investment, and American consumer brand*, the actual actors of the business deal, Smithfield Foods and Shuanghui, have been identified as belonging to a national collective. These expressions of national names may seem commonsensical on the first look. But in a business report on an deal between two companies, such frequent reference to national identities has been named by Reisigl and Wodak (2001) as nationalization strategy. Such strategy distinguishes IDCs from ODCs in terms of national affiliation. Extract 2) shows that throughout the *Washington Post* report, national entities were reported as related to the business deal. The expressions in extract 2) including *quick rise, largest, and record flow* alert the addressee the proximity or imminence of Chinese investment and activities.

1) *Smithfield Foods, whose signature hams helped make it the world's largest pork producer, is being bought by a Chinese firm in a deal that marks China's largest takeover of an American consumer brand. The \$4.7 billion purchase by Shuanghui International touches several sensitive fronts at once — the quick rise of Chinese investment in the United States, China's troubled record on the environment and the acquisition of Smithfield's animal gene technology by a country considered to be America's chief global competitor.*

(the Washington Post)

2) *...the quick rise of Chinese investment in the United States...*

*... 'In the largest single Chinese purchase in the United States...*

*...a record flow of investment by often cash-rich Chinese companies into the United States... (the Washington Post)*

National metonymy is a key feature of nationalization strategy. National metonymies are found to occur frequently in the news report on M&As (Riad & Vaara, 2011). National metonymies appear frequently in the *Washington Report* such as *Chinese ownership, Chinese purchase, and America exporting* referring to Chinese companies and American companies. In extract 1), the expression *China's largest takeover of an American consumer brand and the acquisition of Smithfield's animal gene technology by a country considered to be America's chief global competitor, China and country* are used as metonymies to refer to Chinese company *Shuanghui*. Metonymy comes from Greek for a change of name, and is taken in Cognitive Linguistics as a conceptual shift in reference realizing selective attention. The COUNTRY FOR ORGANIZATION metonymies appear commonsensical but effectively attach salience to national entities in the conceptualization of a commercial event.

Based on the semantic associations, metonymies can be divided into extrinsic and intrinsic, relating to a conceptual shift inward and outward (Hart, 2011a). The extrinsic metonymies, or whole-for-part metonymies have the function of creating 'difference-levelling sameness and homogeneity, which are the basis on which people are treated uniformly and undifferentiated' (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 56). The social actor of company is referred to as the general category of nationhood. Figure 2 shows how the focus of attention was shifted from the company *Shuanghui* and *Smithfield* to the country *China* or *the Chinese* as a whole. This pattern appears repeatedly in the following report of *the Washington post*.

In contrast to the nationalization strategy of *the Washington Post* report, extract 3) shows that *the Economist* report mainly focuses on the business identity of the Shuanghui and Smithfield in descriptions including *Smithfield Foods, the world's largest pork producer, Shuanghui International, a giant Chinese meat company, and Shuanghui's chairman, Wan Long...China's "number one butcher"*. *The Economist* report comments on the deal as beneficial for both investors and consumers regardless of which country they belong to, both of whom are typically legitimate stakeholders in commercial events.

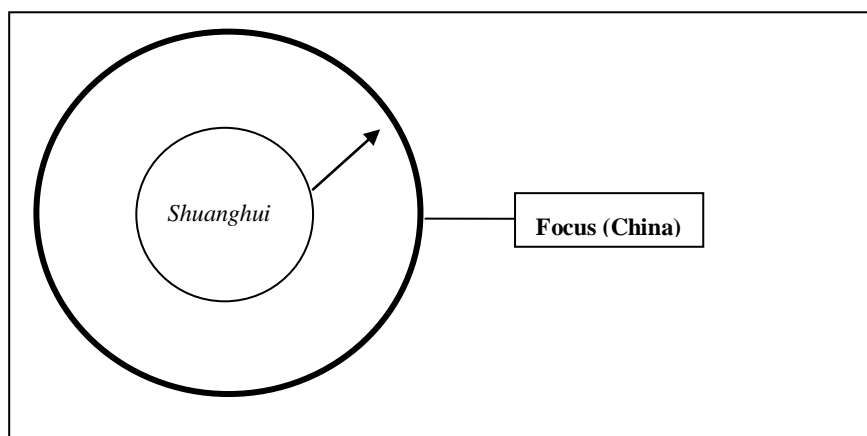


Figure 2. Image schema for extrinsic metonym

As shown in extracts 3), 4) and 5), *the Economist* uses the term *American politicians* metonymically to refer to American government. *American politicians* were used as a MEMBER OF AN ORGANIZATION FOR THE ORGANIZATION metonymy. It is an intrinsic metonymy since it activates a conceptual shift inward, or part-for-whole metonymy. Figure 3 shows that the shift of attention from governmental institution to people running it made explicit who are responsible for the decision.

- 3) *IS PIG farming a strategic industry? This question is likely to give a whole new meaning to “pork-barrel politics”, as American politicians decide whether to approve the sale for \$4.7 billion (\$7.1 billion including debt) announced on May 29th of Smithfield Foods, the world’s largest pork producer, to Shuanghui International, a giant Chinese meat company. The two firms had reportedly been in talks since 2009, but had been unable to agree a price until now. Shuanghui’s chairman, Wan Long, who built his firm from scratch, is known as China’s “number one butcher” because the company slaughters more than 15m pigs a year.* (The Economist)
- 4) *This may encourage American politicians to try to stir things up by raising the possibility that the combined firm will import dodgy meat from China.* (The Economist)
- 5) *So, will America’s politicians do likewise with the acquisition of Smithfield? Or will they end up scuppering the deal,...* (The Economist)

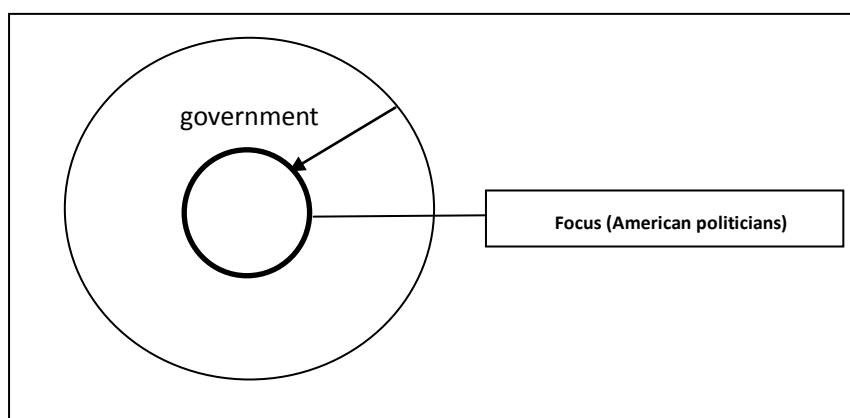


Figure 3. Image schema for intrinsic metonymy

The construal of IDC and ODC concerns with which social actors are selected in conceptual representation of an event and to what degree of salience they are presented. Hart (2011b) connects referential strategy to the construal operation of profiling/backgrounding based on the fundamental cognitive process of *attention*. Human attention is always selective. It is a fundamental feature of cognition that in perceiving any scene one entity stands out relative to another, namely profile/base distinctions grounded in the system of attention (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Explicit referential expressions such as *China* profile particular aspects of identity. The comparative analysis demonstrates that different representations of social actors in the *Shuanghui-Smithfield* deal can incur distinct conceptualizations of IDCs and ODCs as shown in Table 1. *The Washington Post* uses repeated references to national identity and national metonymies to activate a binary conceptualization of business activity as national confrontation. *The Economist* report incurs a business conceptualization of IDCs supporting and benefiting from free business activity and ODC the American politicians or institutions intervening in the deal.

TABLE 1.  
KEY LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL ITEMS OF IDCs AND ODCs

Category	<i>the Washington Post</i>	<i>the Economist</i>
1. Noun phrases construed as elements of the deictic center of the DS (IDCs)	America, Smithfield, employees, local farmers	Shareholders, consumers, Smithfield, Shuanghui
2. Noun phrases construed as elements outside the deictic center of the DS (ODCs)	China, Chinese government, Shuanghui	American politicians, American government, the Committee on Foreign Investment

**B. Spatial Proximization**

Spatial proximization was defined by Cap as ‘a forced construal of the Discourse Space (DS) peripheral entities (ODCs) encroaching physically upon the DS central entities (IDCs) located in the deictic center of the Space’ (2013, p. 105). The linguistic realization of such strategy includes verb and noun phrases construed as markers of movement of ODCs towards IDCs, or the impact of ODCs upon IDCs. *The Washington Post* report repeatedly expressed concerns over the possible impact of the deal on America and its people. Extracts 6), 7), and 8) are examples of verb and noun phrases depicting potential loss on the American side including history, brand, technical know-how, and job. On the other hand, extracts 3), 4), 5) and 9) in *the Economist* report have shown a consistent verbal pattern of American politicians or institutions trying to stop the deal.

- 6) *The acquisition puts under Chinese ownership a prominent American brand and one of Virginia’s best-known companies.* (the Washington Post)
- 7) *In the largest single Chinese purchase in the United States, that history and know-how will be absorbed into a firm that has its own global ambitions.* (the Washington Post)
- 8) *Smithfield Mayor Carter Williams said people in town have expressed concerns about whether jobs might eventually disappear.* (the Washington Post)
- 9) *But will the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, which advises the president, find a way to stop the Chinese bringing home America’s bacon?* (The Economist)

TABLE 2.  
KEY LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL ITEMS OF THE SPATIAL PROXIMIZATION

Category	<i>the Washington Post</i>	<i>the Economist</i>
1. Verb phrases of motion and directionality construed as markers of movement of ODCs towards IDC or impact of ODCs upon IDC	puts under Chinese ownership, history and know-how will be absorbed, jobs might eventually disappear	decides whether to approve the sale, import dodgy meat from China, scuppering the deal, find a way to stop the Chinese
2. Noun phrases denoting abstract concepts construed as anticipations of impact of ODCs upon IDCs, or effects of impact of ODCs upon IDCs.	Takeover of an American consumer brand	N/A

The construal operation of schematization or image schemas in Cognitive Linguistics can offer tools for further analysis of spatial proximization. Grounded in the Gestalt system, image schemas are holistic knowledge structures emerging from our repeated pattern of physical experience (Ruef & Scott, 1998). These image schemas come to form the meaningful basis of many lexical concepts as well as grammatical constructions. People select from available image schemas to construe entities and events as being of a particular type and internal structure. Various image schemas have been identified and catalogued in Cognitive Linguistics (Evans & Green, 2006). Relevant to spatial proximization strategy are FORCE, ACTION, and PATH schema. FORCE schemas incorporate various force-dynamic schemas which, as described by Talmy (2000), constitute concepts of CAUSATION and LETTING ACTION schemas include ACTION-CHAINS as described by Langacker (1991).

The *Washington Post* report construes the event as an ACTION schema. Such schema entails a transfer of energy between an agent and a patient, with AGENT defined as the source of the energy, and PATIENT defined as the target of the energy transfer. In Figure 4, the circles in the diagram represent the participants, the straight arrow is a vector representing the transfer of energy between participants, and the stepped arrow represents the effect. The merger or deal between *Shuanghui* and *Smithfield Foods* is given the role of AGENT, and actively transfers energy by bringing consequences to the PATIENT of America or its people.

In contrast, the *Economist* report construes the event as a FORCE schema. As shown in Figure 5, the deal is the AGONIST, which has an intrinsic tendency to continue or move, and the ANTAGONIST is American politicians or particular institutions, who exert the force of stopping the continuing of the deal. Different from ACTION schema, force event does not have a transfer of energy from an agent to a patient. The vector in Figure 4 is unopposed free flow of energy, while in Figure 5 the tendency of AGONIST (the deal) to happen depends on the force-interaction between AGONIST and ANTAGONIST (American politicians or particular institutions). The *Economist* report construes the deal with an intrinsic tendency to continue, though it might be stopped by the force of American politicians.

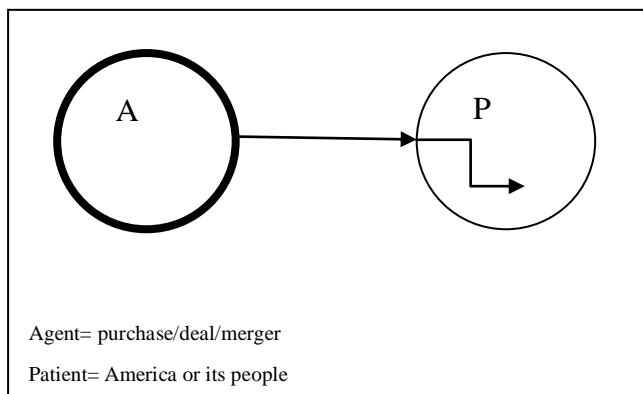


Figure 4 ACTION schema

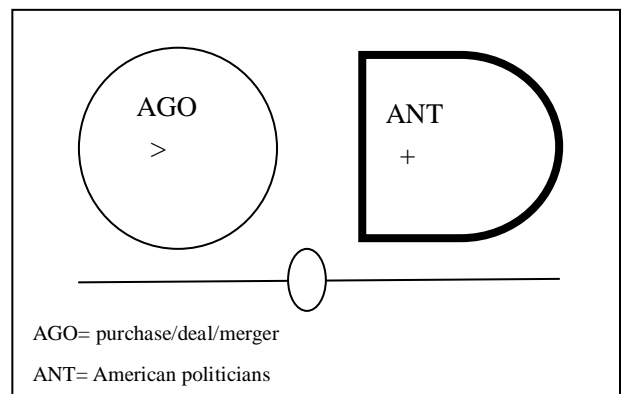


Figure 5 FORCE schema

The comparative analysis of the two reports shows that spatial proximization consists of common construal operations of schematization. By putting the takeover as an active AGENT, the *Washington Post* incurs ACTION schema drawing attention to the unfavorable consequences and local reactions caused by the takeover, which in effect challenged the legitimacy of the deal. In contrast, the *Economist* report challenged the legitimacy of political intervention in business by construing FORCE schema with American politicians as ATAGONIST actively resisting

AGONIST, the on-going business deal.

### C. Axiological Proximization

Axiological proximization is defined by Cap as ‘a forced construal of a growing ODC-IDC ideological conflict which, in time, may lead to a physical clash’ (2013, p. 119). Instead of construing spatial opposition, axiological proximization express an ideological opposition between IDCs and ODCs. Table 3 shows how the same event can be construed as distinct ideological oppositions. In the *Washington Post* report, the shift of attention from companies to their national affiliation allows writer to make generalizations and activate national stereotypes about China. The deal is reported to bring ideological opposition between China and America on issues of environment, food safety, market intervention, etc. The *Economist* report, on the other hand, uses noun phrases of “pork-barrel politics” and *tenuous justification* to activate ideological clash between business and politics.

The two distinct ideological oppositions are only hinted at by expressions such as *Chinese management standards* and “pork-barrel politics”. It is important to note that these expressions are only ‘the tip of a submerged iceberg of moral values’ (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 97). According to Cognitive Linguistics, experience and knowledge are distilled and stored in chunks named as frames, which is ‘system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits’ (Fillmore, 1982, p. 111). Frames are activated by particular lexical items and in turn, provide the cognitive base against which the meaning of words are ‘profiled’ and understood (Ronald W. Langacker, 1987a). The ideological conflict is construed through the construal operation of framing, which is the conceptualization process of linguistic devices selectively activating frames stored in the long-term memory of language receivers. In this process, the same event can be categorized into different classes of prior experience. ‘In comparing the new experience to prior ones and categorizing it in one way or another, we attend to some characteristics and ignore others’ (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p. 55).

TABLE 3  
KEY LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL ITEMS OF THE AXIOLOGICAL PROXIMIZATION

Category	<i>the Washington Post</i>	<i>the Economist</i>
1. noun phrases construed as IDC positive values or value sets, or as ODC negative values or value sets	China’s troubled record on the environment, a Chinese industry with a history of food-safety problems, Chinese pork products or management standards,	“pork-barrel politics”, America’s justification for blocking foreign ownership was fairly tenuous
2. discourse forms involving linear arrangement of lexico-grammatical phrases construing materialization in the IDC space of the ODC negative values	bringing Chinese pork products or management standards to the United States, China uses strict control of its market to force American companies...to surrender intellectual property	N/A

### D. Temporal Proximization

Temporal proximization is defined by Cap as ‘a symbolic “compression” of the time axis, and a partial conflation of the three time frames, involving two simultaneous conceptual shifts’, which are ‘past-to-present shift,’ and ‘future-to-present shift’ (Cap, 2013, p. 85). The ‘past-to-present shift’ is the conceptual shift of bringing past events and actions closer to ‘now’ and construe such events and actions as still occurring (Hart, 2014, p. 175). The ‘future-to-present shift’ is the conceptual shift of bringing possible future events and actions closer to ‘now’ and construe such event or action as momentous and imminent thus requiring immediate counter-action (Hart, 2014, p. 175).

Markers of ‘future-to-present shift’ in extracts 10 and 11) are *at once*, *quick rise*, and *a record flow*. The adverbial expression *at once* construes the future impacts of ODC action (the investment from Chinese companies) as taking place imminently. The noun phrases *quick rise* and *a record flow* construe future Chinese investment as not only coming but at an increasing larger scale. The investment of Chinese companies is presented not as a benefit but as an imminent and growing threat.

- 10) *The \$4.7 billion purchase by Shuanghui International touches several sensitive fronts at once — the quick rise of Chinese investment in the United States, China’s troubled record on the environment and the acquisition of Smithfield’s animal gene technology by a country considered to be America’s chief global competitor.*

(the *Washington Post*)

- 11) *The deal comes amid a record flow of investment by often cash-rich Chinese companies into the United States. While Chinese firms have taken over some well-known U.S. brands, including the AMC theater chain and IBM’s personal computer business, the Smithfield acquisition is the first major foray into the food industry and the most significant in terms of a daily consumer item.*

(the *Washington Post*)

Extracts 12) and 13) from the *Economist* report are examples of ‘past-to-present shift’. In extract 12), similar deals made by Chinese companies in other countries construed as closer to memory by the expressions of *recently* and *following*. These expressions construe the investment of Chinese companies as natural and still occurring. Extract 13) referred to a past decision made Chinese government similar to the decision about to be made by American government. The construal operation of bringing past event closer to the current helps activate the value of fairness.

- 12) *Joining forces with a Western brand to overcome local food-safety concerns in China is becoming a trend. Danone, a French firm, **recently** announced a big investment in expanding its dairy operation in China, **following** similar initiatives by Arla Foods, a Danish firm, and Nestlé a Swiss food manufacturer.*  
(The Economist)
- 13) *The main difference with this pork deal is that it is a Chinese firm putting up the money. Ironically, **in 2006** a large share of Shuanghui was bought by an investor group including Goldman Sachs, which later sold much of its stake at a juicy profit reckoned to be around five times the original investment. That deal **was approved** by the Chinese government.*  
(The Economist)

The contrast between the examples of ‘future-to-present shift’ and ‘past-to-present shift’ above shows significant difference in the strategy of legitimation of the two reports. Due to the lack of precedents of Chinese investment with negative impact on America, *the Washington Post* construes future Chinese investment and its impact on America as imminent and momentous, while the *Economist* report chose to construe numerous normal practices of Chinese investment as happening close to the present time. The comparison of two reports shows that temporal proximization does not necessarily always construe threat or danger as momentous and imminent, it can also construe action or event as normal and continuing. As Hart analyzed, temporal proximization serves to further enhance the legitimating effects of spatial (as well as axiological) proximization as a form of intensification (Hart, 2014, p. 173).

## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The comparative analysis of two reports on the deal between *Shuanghui* and *Smithfield* has shown how different discursive strategies can construe distinct conceptualizations of the same event, influencing the judgment among readership on the legitimacy of the deal. The analysis shows that legitimacy is the result of dynamic process rather than a static state, in which public discourse, especially media plays a central role. The Proximization theory developed by Cap can account for discursive legitimation by connecting linguistic patterns to the common cognitive mechanisms these patterns incur. Since Proximization is a ‘forced construal’ on the public, its application should not be limited to interventionist political discourse. This study is an attempt to extend its application in business discourse to account for the discursive process legitimation for business entities. Proximization theory is a macro strategy in particular socio-political context. In a series of longitudinal studies on American presidential speeches, Cap has supported his theory convincingly with quantitative lexico-grammatical evidence. Yet, the focus on the distilment of quantitative linguistic patterns may leave out nuances in discursive legitimation, such as metonymy exemplified in this research and other figurative uses of language. This research proposes that Proximization is a forced construal consists of more fundamental construal operations in Cognitive Linguistics, which can offer the flexibility Proximization theory needs to account for legitimacy discourses outside of political domain.

### APPENDIX A. THE ECONOMIST REPORT

#### Pigs will fly

#### A Chinese buyer for America’s biggest pork producer

Jun 1st 2013 | NEW YORK | From the print edition

<https://www.economist.com/business/2013/06/01/pigs-will-fly>

IS PIG farming a strategic industry? This question is likely to give a whole new meaning to “pork-barrel politics”, as American politicians decide whether to approve the sale for \$4.7 billion (\$7.1 billion including debt) announced on May 29th of Smithfield Foods, the world’s largest pork producer, to Shuanghui International, a giant Chinese meat company. The two firms had reportedly been in talks since 2009, but had been unable to agree a price until now. Shuanghui’s chairman, Wan Long, who built his firm from scratch, is known as China’s “number one butcher” because the company slaughters more than 15m pigs a year.

Smithfield’s shareholders appear to be delighted to receive 31% more for their shares than they were worth before the deal. They include Continental Grain, an American company which owns a big steak, sorry, stake in Smithfield and which has been arguing for its break-up. But will the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, which advises the president, find a way to stop the Chinese bringing home America’s bacon?

The merger announcement stressed the global reach that the new firm will have. This may encourage American politicians to try to stir things up by raising the possibility that the combined firm will import dodgy meat from China. More likely, though, the pigs will fly in the other direction, from the mature meat market of America, which has seen consumption



This little piggy went to China



shrink for four consecutive years according to the Department of Agriculture, to the fast-growing one of China, which is already twice the size of America's.

Although this deal is clearly part of a broader strategy by corporate China to, er, beef up its global presence, the primary reason for acquiring Smithfield is domestic. The Chinese love pork and as their incomes soar they want it more than ever. A domestic herd of 476m pigs, around half of the global pig population, already seems insufficient; China has been a net importer of pork since 2008.

Moreover, wealth is bringing with it a more sophisticated consumerism, and growing concern about the safety of food produced locally. In March thousands of dead pigs were seen floating down the Huangpu river to Shanghai, raising fears of water contamination. Police in China have reportedly arrested more than 900 people in a three-month crackdown on illegal meat sales, including two people who had sold over 40 tonnes of diseased pork.

In 2011 Shuanghui itself was involved in a scandal over feeding livestock a chemical harmful to humans. For Chinese consumers, then, a combination of Shuanghui with Smithfield, bringing with it the prospect of shipping in much more pork from America, is a corporate marriage made in hog heaven.

That said, Smithfield has had some problems of its own. It is currently partway through weaning its pigs off ractopamine, a lean-muscle-promoting drug that has already been banned in China. In 2009 it faced allegations, later disproved, of swine flu at one of its pig farms in Mexico.

Joining forces with a Western brand to overcome local food-safety concerns in China is becoming a trend. Danone, a French firm, recently announced a big investment in expanding its dairy operation in China, following similar initiatives by Arla Foods, a Danish firm, and Nestlé a Swiss food manufacturer.

Bye, bye, Miss American pie?

The main difference with this pork deal is that it is a Chinese firm putting up the money. Ironically, in 2006 a large share of Shuanghui was bought by an investor group including Goldman Sachs, which later sold much of its stake at a juicy profit reckoned to be around five times the original investment. That deal was approved by the Chinese government.

So, will America's politicians do likewise with the acquisition of Smithfield? Or will they end up scuppering the deal, as happened with CNOOC's bid for Unocal, an oil company, in 2005, and the attempt to buy the operator of several American ports by Dubai Ports World in 2006? In both of these cases, America's justification for blocking foreign ownership was fairly tenuous. So the Chinese bid for Smithfield may yet be stopped because, say, keeping down the price of a barbecue is a matter of national security.

#### APPENDIX B. THE WASHINGTON POST REPORT

##### **Smithfield Foods to be bought by Chinese firm Shuanghui International**

By Howard Schneider and Brady Dennis, Published: May 29, 2013

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/smithfield-foods-to-be-taken-over-by-chinese-firm/2013/05/29/a520434a-c873-11e2-9245-773c0123c027\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/smithfield-foods-to-be-taken-over-by-chinese-firm/2013/05/29/a520434a-c873-11e2-9245-773c0123c027_story.html)

Smithfield Foods, whose signature hams helped make it the world's largest pork producer, is being bought by a Chinese firm in a deal that marks China's largest takeover of an American consumer brand.

The \$4.7 billion purchase by Shuanghui International touches several sensitive fronts at once — the quick rise of Chinese investment in the United States, China's troubled record on the environment and the acquisition of Smithfield's animal gene technology by a country considered to be America's chief global competitor.

What's more, the deal puts a major company from a Chinese industry with a history of food-safety problems in charge of a U.S. firm with past environmental problems of its own.

Separately, U.S. government and business officials often complain that China uses strict control of its market of 1.6 billion people to force American companies that want to do business there to surrender intellectual property.

The deal may become a test of U.S. attitudes toward China as it moves through likely reviews by the Justice Department and the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States.

With no obvious national security concerns stemming from the production of ham, bacon and sausage, Smithfield chief executive C. Larry Pope said he expects approval. He emphasized that the deal wasn't about bringing Chinese pork products or management standards to the United States but about sending U.S. products and expertise the other way. The deal will leave intact Smithfield's management, workforce and 70-year presence in Virginia, he said. "I know how people react — that we are selling out to the Chinese. This is not selling out to the Chinese. This is Smithfield



LM Otero/AP - A Smithfield ham at a grocery store in Richardson, Texas. Chinese meat processor Shuanghui International Holdings Ltd. agreed Wednesday to buy Smithfield Foods for approximately \$4.7 billion in a deal that will take the world's biggest pork producer private.

being part of a global organization,” Pope said at a media briefing after the deal was announced. “There will be no impact on how we do business in America and around the world. . . . This is about America exporting.”

### Concerns in Tidewater

The acquisition puts under Chinese ownership a prominent American brand and one of Virginia’s best-known companies. The tidewater town of Smithfield has been synonymous with ham production for decades. With roots in a local packing plant, the parent company grew into a conglomerate that includes popular brands such as Armour, sponsors the Richard Petty Motorsports NASCAR team, and has developed genetic strains that the company’s annual report promotes as “the leanest hogs commercially available.”

In the largest single Chinese purchase in the United States, that history and know-how will be absorbed into a firm that has its own global ambitions. Officials of Shuanghui, already the largest pork producer in a nation where pork consumption has exploded in tandem with national income, have said that they want to make their company one of the premier meat producers in the world.

The takeover comes as a surprise, said Ron Pack, president of Smithfield Station, a hotel on the town’s Pagan River waterfront that serves many Smithfield products, including sausages, bacon and pork chops. “I’m a little apprehensive, but I think everything will be fine,” Pack said.

Smithfield Mayor Carter Williams said people in town have expressed concerns about whether jobs might eventually disappear. “I don’t like to see it,” Williams said. “I don’t think a lot of people do. We’re a little hometown place here.”

A top Virginia official said the deal is expected to help the state’s economy. “We’re looking at this as a really good thing,” said Todd Haymore, Virginia’s secretary of agriculture and forestry. “China represents the grand prize, as far as pork exports are concerned.” Smithfield’s access to that market could lead to significant economic opportunities for smaller growers who supply the company with hogs and for the Port of Virginia, if exports increase.

He said it was “premature” to speculate about issues such as whether the new owners might squeeze small farmers to lower their prices, or whether a substantial jump in exports might raise prices for U.S. consumers.

### Debate over food safety

#### Food-safety advocates criticized the deal.

In China, food safety has become a major issue as the government battles a steady string of reports about tainted milk, rodent meat disguised as lamb, the overuse of pesticides and the dumping of thousands of rotting pigs by farmers into a Shanghai river. Shuanghui closed a plant two years ago after reports that it fed pigs an illegal chemical to make the meat more lean.

Smithfield has had its own environmental and financial troubles, including a \$12 million fine levied in 1997 for several thousand clean-water law violations, a clash with North Carolina over manure-filled lagoons, and Humane Society complaints that led the company to agree to change some of its animal-handling practices.

“When you have a giant merger like this, the investors want profitability,” said Wenonah Hauter, executive director of the consumer advocacy group Food & Water Watch. “There will be more pressure to be profitable, and probably more shortcuts.”

The deal comes amid a record flow of investment by often cash-rich Chinese companies into the United States. While Chinese firms have taken over some well-known U.S. brands, including the AMC theater chain and IBM’s personal computer business, the Smithfield acquisition is the first major foray into the food industry and the most significant in terms of a daily consumer item.

Thilo Hanemann, a Rhodium Group analyst who tracks Chinese investment in the United States, said the deal represents an emerging strategy of Chinese companies to buy up market-leading expertise — whether the insight an AMC has into running a national theater chain or the skill Smithfield has in raising, slaughtering and processing pigs.

In many cases, he said, “Chinese companies are buying assets in the U.S. not to expand in the U.S., but to gain a competitive edge at home.”

### Export hopes

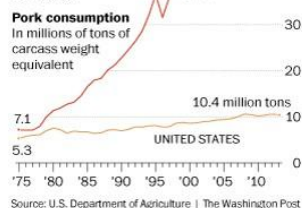
The \$34 per-share price that Shuanghui agreed to pay represents a roughly 30 percent premium over Smithfield’s stock value at the close of business on Tuesday. With U.S. pork consumption largely stagnant, Smithfield posted record sales of \$13 billion last year and a profit of \$361 million — growth driven by overseas sales.

Like many American companies, pork producers have had some success exporting to China, but also faced setbacks — such as an unexpected prohibition on the common animal food additive ractopamine. Pope said Smithfield is eliminating use of the additive. But the merger with Shuanghui is expected to help smooth other export barriers. No other combination [of companies] has such a great opportunity,” Zhijun Yang, managing director of Shuanghui, said during a conference call. “Chinese consumers like American pork. American farmers want access” to the Chinese market.

The anticipated review by the federal foreign investment panel will be unusual: the panel is typically associated with oversight of deals involving sensitive technology. Still, the Smithfield acquisition comes at a sensitive moment in

### China's rapidly growing pork consumption

Pork consumption in the United States has grown slowly but steadily in the past 25 years, but in China, it has increased rapidly. Such growth is a factor in the purchase of Smithfield Foods by a Chinese meatpacking company.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture | The Washington Post

China-U.S. relations, and given the size and prominence of the deal, Pope said the company was voluntarily submitting it for review. Allegations of cyber spying, among other issues, have raised tensions between the two countries, and the United States has been closely analyzing deals involving Chinese firms.

“No one can deny the unsafe tactics used by some Chinese food companies,” said Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), who urged a close review by the committee on foreign investment. “To have a Chinese food company control a major U.S. meat supplier without shareholder accountability is a bit concerning”

Jia Lynn Yang and Amrita Jayakumar contributed to this report.

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