

## PRAGMATIC AND MULTIMODAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE TRUMP–XI BEIJING SUMMIT IN AMERICAN POLITICAL MEDIA

**Aminov Farrukh Komiljon ugli,**  
*Karshi State University, Doctoral student*

**Karimov Ramis Ayratovich,**  
*Karshi State University, Master's student*

**Abstract.** Coverage of President Trump's visit to Beijing on 13–16 May 2026 by three American news organizations, *The New York Times*, CNN, and Fox News, is analyzed by a combined pragmatic and multimodal analysis. Each outlet builds its perspective of the meeting between the U.S. and Chinese leaders through distinct verbal architecture, attribution patterns, evaluative resources, and image-text relations. The same event becomes three different discursive objects, and newspapers within the broadly liberal segment of American journalism diverge from one another nearly as much as they diverge from conservative outlets. The combined procedure of pragmatic and multimodal analyses are needed to capture differences that neither tool alone would cover.

**Keywords:** political media discourse, pragmatics, multimodal analysis, framing, Trump-Xi summit, American journalism, critical discourse analysis.

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqolada Prezident Trampning 2026-yil 13–16-may kunlari Pekinga amalga oshirgan tashrifining Amerikaning uchta ommaviy axborot vositasi — *The New York Times*, CNN va Fox News tomonidan yoritilishi pragmatik va multimodal tahlilning uyg'unlashgan yondashuvi asosida o'rganiladi. Har bir nashr AQSH va Xitoy rahbarlari uchrashuviga oid o'ziga xos nuqtayi nazarni turli verbal tuzilishlar, atribusiya (manbaga tayanuvchi bayonlar) usullari, baholovchi vositalar hamda tasvir va matn o'rtasidagi munosabatlar orqali shakllantiradi. Natijada bir xil voqea uch xil diskursiv obyekt sifatida namoyon bo'ladi. Amerika jurnalistikasining umumiy liberal yo'nalishiga mansub nashrlar ham o'zaro sezilarli darajada farqlanishi, ayrim hollarda konservativ nashrlardan farqlanish darajasiga yaqinlashishi kuzatiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, pragmatik va multimodal tahlilning birgalikda qo'llanishi alohida-alohida qo'llanganida aniqlash qiyin bo'lgan farqlarni ochib berishga imkon yaratadi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** siyosiy media diskursi, pragmatika, multimodal tahlil, freyming (voqelikni talqin qilish modeli), Tramp–Si sammiti, Amerika jurnalistikasi, tanqidiy diskurs tahlili.

**Аннотация.** Освещение визита президента Трампа в Пекин 14-15 мая 2026 года тремя американскими новостными организациями, *The New York Times*, CNN и Fox News, рассматривается через призму прагматического и мультимодального анализов. Каждое издание выстраивает свой рассказ о встрече лидеров США и Китая посредством особой вербальной архитектуры, моделей атрибуции, оценочных ресурсов и отношений “изображение-текст”. Одно и то же событие становится тремя разными дискурсивными объектами, и издания внутри широко либерального сегмента американской журналистики расходятся между собой почти так же, как они расходятся с консервативными изданиями. Совмещение прагматического и мультимодального анализа необходимо, чтобы зафиксировать различия, которые ни один из методов не выявил бы по отдельности.

**Ключевые слова:** политический медиадискурс, прагматика, мультимодальный анализ, фрейминг, саммит Трампа и Си, американская журналистика, критический дискурс-анализ.

**Introduction.** Diplomatic summits between the United States and China are moments where media outlets reveal the assumptions they bring to questions of foreign policy. Trump's mid-May 2026 visit to Beijing, his first since returning to office, was such a moment. Major American news outlets covered a huge meeting between two leaders,

balancing several demands at once. They reported on their disagreements about Taiwan, tech, and trade, highlighted symbolic and ceremonial features of the visit, and placed the U.S.-China relationship in its competitive context.

The outlets handled these demands differently. The New York Times examined Trump and Xi's styles, portraying Trump as conciliatory and Xi as firm. CNN made the visit seem unclear, focusing more on appearances than substance. Meanwhile, Fox News highlighted the event as a string of Trump's accomplishments, using his own words. Therefore, each news source gave its own spin on the same diplomatic event.

The argument here is that pragmatic analysis and multimodal analysis, applied together, can recover the distinctive register of each outlet. Pragmatic categories – speech acts, implicature, modality, appraisal, and proximization – capture the verbal architecture of news writing. Multimodal analysis describes how photographs and visual layout interact with verbal content. Framing theory connects the two, since frames coordinate lexical, pragmatic and visual choices into something recognizable as an outlet's position. Recent work in this tradition has examined Instagram posts of women political leaders [9] and the pragmatic functions of political news headlines in digital media [12]; this article extends the apparatus to summit coverage in long-form American journalism.

**Literature review.** The framework draws on three traditions. Critical discourse analysis provides the premise that news writing is not a neutral conduit for events but a constructive practice in which language participates in shaping the meaning of what is reported [3.4]. Pragmatics contributes the categories of speech act theory developed by Austin and Searle [1.8], Grice's account of conversational implicature [11], Palmer's typology of modality [7], and the appraisal model of Martin and White, which describes how texts negotiate evaluation and reader engagement.[6] Multimodal semiotics supplies Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design and the typology of image-text relations developed by Martinec and Salway.[5.13] Framing theory, in the formulation of Entman and Reese, supplies the macro-level concept that links these micro-level instruments together.[10.14]

Cap's notion of proximization is useful for analyzing coverage of foreign affairs, since it describes the discursive operation by which something distant – a foreign leader, a foreign policy, a foreign threat – is brought close to the reader.[2] In coverage of a summit, what is brought close and what is kept at a distance reveals the orientation of the outlet.

**Research Methodology.** Each article was first read against its accompanying images, with attention paid to which visual elements appear alongside which verbal content. The verbal text was then analyzed for headline syntax, opening pragmatic structure, dominant speech-act types, attribution patterns, modality, evaluative resources, and lexical choices around the principal actors and issues. Multimodal analysis described the type of image-text relation in each article and the kind of visual proximization

performed by the photographs. The materials are three articles published on 14–16 May 2026: David E. Sanger’s analysis in the NYT, Simone McCarthy’s analysis on CNN, and Ashley J. DiMella’s news report on Fox News. The first two are presented by their outlets as analysis; the third is presented as news reporting. The generic asymmetry is itself a finding.

**Analysis and Results.** *The New York Times: a presidential contrast*

Sanger’s headline reads: “*Trump Was Flattering, Xi Was Resolute. The Difference Spoke Volumes.*” The structure remains parallel and contrastive. Two concise clauses, each carrying an evaluative adjective, are set side by side; the third sentence carries the analyst’s judgment. In pragmatic terms, this is an assertion with built-in commentary – the second sentence asks the reader to read significance into the contrast the first sentence has just constructed. The use of past tense closes the events off as facts to be interpreted, not as current developments.

Throughout the body, Sanger uses honorific titles – “Mr. Trump,” “Mr. Xi” – with strict consistency. The effect is to mark institutional distance from the political actors, in contrast with the easy familiarity of “Trump said” or “Xi told reporters” found in tabloid or partisan press. The article’s architecture is comparative throughout. Pairs of sentences contrast the two leaders’ actions: Trump speaks in conciliatory terms; Xi sets boundaries. Trump arrives with executives, Xi does not. Every pair lays evidence next to its counterpart, and the reader assembles the inference.

Direct quotation is selective and weighted. Trump is quoted on “You’re a great leader” and “we’re going to have a fantastic future together,” both leaning into the claim that he was flattering. Xi is quoted on “the two countries will collide or even clash,” leaning into the claim that he was steadfast. In Martin and White’s terms, this is heteroglossic attribution: the journalist takes no overt evaluative position but constructs a dialogic field where the contrast supplies the verdict.

Implicature carries the analytical weight in places where a direct claim would be too explicit. The reference to Xi’s confidence “despite his challenges with the domestic economy, as he watches the United States plunge into conflict with Iran” does not assert that the U.S. is overstretched – but the juxtaposition allows the inference to form on its own. Photo-1 shows the two leaders at a podium during the welcome ceremony, the architecture of the Great Hall of the People visible behind them. The composition follows what Kress and van Leeuwen call demand. The image-text relation is enhancement in Martinec and Salway’s typology: the photograph documents the setting while verbal text supplies the interpretation.

*CNN: vibes, optics, and the analytical voice*

McCarthy’s headline takes a different line: “Trump’s Beijing visit was more vibes than details. And Xi set the tone.” The opening clause carries an evaluative judgment of unusual sharpness for a wire-style outlet – “more vibes than details” is colloquial and

dismissive. The choice of “vibes” signals to the reader that the analyst will talk frankly about the limits of the diplomatic theater the trip produced, and that the verdict will be skeptical rather than ceremonious.

The essay has three parts: the opening passage, "Optics as outcome," and "Taiwan talk." Each section argues that the visit was mostly symbolic for Beijing, with no real issues resolved. The structure keeps this idea going, building on it piece by piece, like the heading says it does.

Scare quotes do a great deal of work. “Fantastic future,” “constructive strategic stability,” “red line,” “great jeopardy,” “make a determination,” “pay their respect,” “national rejuvenation,” “Make America Great Again,” “great rejuvenation,” “in abeyance,” “very good negotiating chip” – almost every direct utterance from either leader appears between quotation marks. The reporter does not say Trump was effusive; she shows him being effusive by quoting him, and the scare quotes themselves cue the reader to evaluate the quoted phrase as a phrase. Fairclough’s account of intertextual appropriation applies: every quoted phrase is a small ideological negotiation.

Proximization in the CNN article operates on Beijing’s perspective rather than Washington’s. The reader is invited to see the trip through Chinese eyes: “Beijing didn’t need big tangible outcomes,” “China’s diplomats were well aware of the opportunity the trip afforded them,” “the US president reflected back just the kind of optics that China’s foreign policy establishment will relish.” The article is published by a U.S.-based outlet for a primarily American audience, but its analytic vantage point is Chinese statecraft. The effect is to position Trump’s performance as an object of Chinese strategy rather than as American policy in action. The image-text relation is anchorage in Barthes’s sense: the verbal text directs the reader’s interpretation of the visual, fixing the meaning of the ceremonial photographs as theater rather than substance.

#### *Fox News: breakthroughs, voice, and amplification*

DiMella’s headline takes the third available approach: “Trump leaves China with breakthroughs – and unfinished business on Xi’s biggest fights.” The structure is positive-qualifier, in which a claim of accomplishment is followed by a qualification – and the qualification is attributed to Xi rather than to the U.S. or Trump. The reader who scans the headline takes away two impressions: Trump achieved breakthroughs, and remaining issues belong to the other side’s agenda. The subtitle reinforces the achievement frame from a different angle: “Jimmy Lai’s daughter said she remains ‘extremely confident’ Trump will secure her father’s freedom from China.” A human rights case in which the trip did not produce a release is reframed through a third-party endorsement of presidential capability.

The body is organized into subject-based sections – Taiwan, Human Rights, AI and Tech Race, Trade and tariffs, Iran. Each section presents an issue and reports Trump’s position on it, almost always in his own words. The dominant pragmatic feature is

explicitly quotation from Trump. The article uses some variant of “Trump said” eleven times in approximately 1,200 words – one direct quotation roughly every hundred words. The reporter’s voice performs an introducing function while the substantive claims come from the principal actor himself.

Several of Trump’s quoted utterances are striking on close reading. On Taiwan: “We’ve had it for thousands of years. And then, at a certain period of time, they left that they were going to get it back. They had the Korean War.” The pronouns are notable. “We” does not refer to the United States but appears to refer to China; “they left that they were going to get it back” is grammatically ambiguous. A different outlet might gloss the utterance or quietly correct it. The Fox article presents the quotation intact. On trade: “We didn’t discuss tariffs – I mean they’re paying tariffs. They’re paying substantial tariffs.” The self-correction within a single utterance contradicts the first clause; the article presents the quotation as-is.

Attribution overwhelmingly favors Trump’s own description of what happened. There is no third-party expert in the article – no academic, no policy analyst, no foreign correspondent in Beijing whose account might cross-check what Trump describes. The contrast with the CNN article, which cites Marco Rubio and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, is sharp. The contrast with the NYT article, which cites Rush Doshi of Georgetown by name, is sharper still. Lexical choices are consistent with the achievement frame: “fantastic trade deals,” “amazing period of time,” “a big thing.” Where outcomes are uncertain, the wording softens: Jimmy Lai’s case is “a tougher one”; the chip discussion “did not come up”; tariffs were “not discussed.”

Multimodally, the Fox article carries seven images and one video clip. Photo-1 is a head-and-shoulders close-up of Trump speaking, with Xi in the background – a composition that visualizes the article’s textual prioritization of Trump’s voice. Following images repeat the pattern. The image-text relation is mostly relay in Barthes’s sense: the images carry independent meaning of their own (Trump as the active figure in each scene), while the verbal text supplies what is being said.

Read together, the three articles produce the Trump–Xi summit as three different events. For the NYT, it is a contrast between two presidential styles in a setting of strategic competition. For CNN, it is a Chinese diplomatic performance in which the U.S. president was the principal stage prop. For Fox, it is a series of presidential accomplishments delivered against the resistance of foreign adversaries. Table 1 summarizes the pragmatic and discursive profile of each outlet.

Table 1

Pragmatic and discursive profile of three American outlets covering the Trump–Xi summit

Parameter	The New York Times	CNN	Fox News
Headline structure	Parallel-contrastive (past tense, evaluative)	Verdictive opening with colloquial register	Positive-qualifier with attribution shift
Speech-act profile	Assertions with embedded evaluation	Verdictives with quoted material	Reproduced direct speech from Trump

Parameter	The New York Times	CNN	Fox News
<b>Attribution pattern</b>	Honorifics (Mr.); third-party experts named	Reporter voice with scare quotes; Chinese officials cited	Trump-centered; eleven “Trump said” in 1,200 words
<b>Dominant evaluative resource</b>	Heteroglossic attribution; implicature	Intertextual appropriation via scare quotes	Trump’s superlatives reproduced (“fantastic,” “amazing”)
<b>Object of proximization</b>	Leader-to-leader encounter as psychological set piece	Beijing’s strategic perspective	Trump’s voice as central
<b>Image-text relation</b>	Enhancement (image documents, text interprets)	Anchorage (text fixes meaning of visuals)	Relay (images carry independent meaning)
<b>Photographic composition</b>	Two leaders paired	Ceremonial wide shots	Trump centered in frame
<b>Register label</b>	Humanized-investigative	Analytic-skeptical	Populist-securitizing (achievement mode)

Each architecture comes with a different distribution of speech-act types and a different proximization target. NYT brings the leader-to-leader encounter close, with policy substance at a slight remove. CNN brings Beijing’s strategic perspective close, with the U.S. president as object of analysis. Fox brings Trump’s voice close, with everything else – Xi, trade details, the Chinese press, third-party experts – at considerable remove. Table 2 records the surface-level features that produce these effects.

Table 2

*Distribution of selected verbal and visual features across the corpus*

Feature	NYT	CNN	Fox News
Word count	~1,330	~1,310	~1,270
“Trump said” / direct attribution to Trump	Limited; selective	Distributed; mostly via scare quotes	11 instances (~1 per 100 words)
Use of honorifics (Mr. Trump / Mr. Xi)	Consistent throughout	None	None
Direct quotation marks (pairs)	Moderate	~25 pairs (high)	Numerous; Trump dominant
Third-party experts cited by name	Yes (Rush Doshi, Georgetown)	Yes (Rubio; Wang Yi; analysts)	None
Number of photographs	4	3 plus 2 video stills	7 plus 1 video
Trump as centered figure in photographs	Paired with Xi	Paired with Xi	Predominantly solo or centered

These findings are continuous with prior work on the four-register typology developed for English-language migration coverage.[12] Of those four registers – humanized-investigative, institutional-assessive, activist-humanitarian, and populist-securitizing – only the first and the last are represented directly in this corpus. The NYT article fits the humanized-investigative register; the Fox article fits the populist-securitizing register in achievement rather than threat mode. CNN occupies a position not captured by the four-register typology developed on migration coverage; its register is best described as analytic-skeptical, foregrounding the analyst’s judgment more than the NYT

does and orienting that judgment toward the strategic perspective of the foreign counterpart. The four-register typology may therefore need extension when applied to foreign policy coverage.

The integrative methodology proves necessary again. A pragmatic analysis alone would identify the speech-act differences but miss the visual rhetoric in which Trump is the centered figure in Fox photographs and a paired figure in NYT photographs. A multimodal analysis alone would notice the visual differences but lack the categories for explaining their ideological import. A framing analysis alone would supply the labels – achievement frame, contrast frame, optics-as-outcome frame – without the tools for documenting how each frame is built. The full apparatus is what makes the three-way distinction visible at the level of textual and visual choices.

One observation is worth recording specifically. The Fox article's near-exclusive reliance on Trump's direct speech reproduces the speaker's logical and grammatical features without paraphrase or annotation. Trump's account of Taiwan as something "we've had for thousands of years" is presented intact. Where the NYT and CNN would, in different ways, position such an utterance as something to be interpreted by the reader, Fox positions it as something to be heard. The work of evaluation is silently transferred from the reporter to the audience.

**Conclusion.** American media coverage of Trump's May 2026 visit to Beijing produces the same diplomatic event as three discursively distinct accounts. NYT performs a presidential contrast in the register of considered analysis. CNN performs a sustained verdict in the register of skeptical commentary. Fox performs a series of presidential accomplishments in the register of direct presidential voice.

Several observations follow. First, the conventional distinction between liberal and conservative American media does not capture the analytical differences observable here. NYT and CNN are both broadly liberal outlets, but their accounts of the same event are organized along very different pragmatic and multimodal lines. The differentiation between them is comparable in scale to the differentiation between either of them and Fox. Second, the integrative method of pragmatic and multimodal analysis remains productive for short-form political journalism. Third, proximization is at work in all three accounts, but what is brought close differs: the leader-to-leader encounter at NYT, the Chinese strategic perspective at CNN, and the figure of the U.S. president at Fox. The general descriptive force of proximization holds across ideological positions; what changes is the object of the operation.

The study is limited by its small corpus and by the fact that it considers only three U.S. outlets. A wider corpus including The Washington Post and The Guardian as well as non-Anglophone media would test whether the analytic-skeptical register tentatively identified in the CNN account here is a stable register or a feature of this particular case. These questions are left for further work.

**References:**

1. Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Clarendon Press.
2. Cap, P. (2013). *Proximization: The pragmatics of symbolic distance crossing*. John Benjamins.
3. Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Longman.
4. Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. Edward Arnold.
5. Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
6. Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
7. Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and modality* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
8. Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Aminov, F., & Karimov, R. (2026). Semiotic resources in Instagram posts of women political leaders: A contrastive multimodal analysis of English and Uzbek political discourse. *Ilmiy Xabarlar (Qo‘qon DPI)*, (3), 965–972.
10. Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
11. Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Vol. 3. Speech acts* (pp. 41–58). Academic Press.
12. Karimov, R. (2026). Pragmatic and multimodal functions of political news headlines in digital media. In *Improving the methodology of TESOL: Problems and solutions* (pp. 247–250). Karshi.
13. Martinec, R., & Salway, A. (2005). A system for image–text relations in new (and old) media. *Visual Communication*, 4(3), 337–371.
14. Reese, S. D. (2001). Prologue: Framing public life: A bridging model for media research. In S. D. Reese, O. H. Gandy, & A. E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life* (pp. 7–31). Lawrence Erlbaum.
15. DiMella, A. J. (2026, May 15). Trump leaves China with breakthroughs — and unfinished business on Xi’s biggest fights. Fox News. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-leaves-china-breakthroughs-unfinished-business-xis-biggest-fights>
16. McCarthy, S. (2026, May 16). Trump’s Beijing visit was more vibes than details. And Xi set the tone. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2026/05/16/china/xi-trump-china-visit-taiwan-analysis-intl-hnk>
17. Sanger, D. E. (2026, May 14). Trump was flattering, Xi was resolute. The difference spoke volumes. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/14/world/asia/trump-xi-jinping-us-china.html>