

## Unlocking Newspaper Headlines: Deconstructing the East-West Transcultural Stereotypes in Times of COVID-19

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**Abstract:**The topic of this paper is the analysis of synonymous lexical relations in COVID -19 target-related newspaper headings and articles referring to society (e.g. culture) and economy (e.g. tourism). Drawing from the foundation of cognitive, linguistic and communication functions in the media, the research looks into the qualitative content analysis of the randomly chosen Western i.e. American and Eastern i.e. Japanese online newspapers. The aim is to use cross referencing to unpack a possible conceptual-linguistic framework as a background narrative activity in depicting both cultures. As a result, the understanding of the articles unlocks the stereotypical narrative of “alterity” through a direct synonymous reference in the text and/or as a result of a myth-related deconstruction.

**Keywords:** newspapers, COVID-19, East vs. West, society and economy, synonyms, transcultural stereotypes, alterity, cultural constructs

### 1. Introduction

The topic of this paper is usage of cross referencing [14]in order to examine synonymous relationships in Japanese and American newspapers headings/articles regarding linguistic and cognitive transcultural constructs of the East-West dichotomy. The fact is that language is material [4]and information is not objective and communicative on only one level [6];[7]It provides motivating and challenging learning and investigating experience of foreground linguistic and background cultural concepts. Firstly, the research draws from the theoretical and methodological framework for investigating newspapers background activities of crime articles[15]. Secondly, as the point of departure this research aims to unlocking the newspaper narratives through the direct semantic correlation [3]in the myth-deconstructing processes[15]; [7]. The quantitative content analysis was applied to 300 Japanese and American online headings/articles (150 each).As a main category, COVID-19 was further subcategorized to the specific domains of economy and society, e.g. culture and tourism. However, rather than

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depicting on a detailed analysis of specific domains, the purpose was to apply the principle in order to see how in the pandemic era different aspects of life reflected in their media representations. The aim is to examine possible narratives of culture as a “non-rigid or static entity”, and check stereotypical (superpower) notions “within and between the United States and Japan highlighted regarding specific aspects of culture” [8]. Therefore, the synonymous language relationship further points towards ideological background activities. Finally, in a communicative sphere of a myth-related deconstruction, stereotypes are used in at least 50% on both sides when referring one to another. As a result, the concept of alterity remains, regardless the either the pandemic or 21<sup>st</sup> century changes, which obviously brought about new diversity and multiculturalism, as well as a new map of power [9]; [10]; [12]; [13]. In conclusion, information is neither objective or communicative on only one level and as such carries a construct of a specific narrative. The applied method distinguished synonymous correlations for establishing the conceptual-narrative frame as a background activity, which points towards the all-encompassing media construct of alterity. Respectfully, further studies may look into the acknowledged paradigm shifts in contemporary American and Japanese culture due to predominant specific domains in which stereotypical narratives are used. The way cultures are portrayed in media should reflect the influx of changes in different aspects of life and the unpredictability of times we live in.

## **2. Theoretical Framework- Introduction to Research**

### **2.1. Synonymous Lexical Relations and Communication**

The theoretical framework relies on the cognitive and linguistic communicative aspects of newspapers. They are a valid resource of target headlines, features and sections providing the relevant research environment [14]. Drawing from a conceptual-narrative frame as a background newspapers activity on the topic of crime [15], this research examines the COVID-19 articles as motivating and challenging learning and investigating experience in respect to both language and culture. True to the methodological framework [15] the study provides further scientific contribution: the production of narratives is further explored, looking into different types of headlines which carry distinctive features, stylistic, structural and as well as cognitive-cultural. Synonyms in English provide for corpus material which constructs a conceptual frame, thus foregrounded headlines are unlocked: “Yet, like data, language works on several levels, endlessly flipping back and forth between the meaningful and the material: we can choose to weigh it and we can choose to read it. There’s nothing stable about it: even in their most abstracted forms, letters are embedded with semantic, semiotic, historical, cultural and associative meanings” [4]. Journalism is a form that functions in a mythological way shaping events into story and defining the world to reinforce more than myth, a rational discourse that shapes the audience and functions in the ideological way in any culture [2]. Precisely, the East-West dichotomy is represented through Japanese and American media construct, which follows the sociological trail of the stereotypically perceived difference between the binary worlds. According to a broader language review, the synonyms indicate some types of semantic distinctions, not necessarily aiming to particular synonymous language groups, e.g. adjectives [3]. Based on general sameness or similarity of meaning, such relationships bear semantic, expressive and stylistic nuances, “that serve to preserve a synonymic row, which is called shades of meaning” [3]. This meaning points towards the concept of alterity, determined by common features of cultural appreciation and correlation between deconstructed and/or myth-related synonymous representations.

Communication means sending lexical units, which are connected to thoughts and meanings [6]; [7]. Such systematics “enables the grasp from one aspect or concept to another, whereas the concept could be secluded thanks to a higher degree of conventionality” [15]. For example, referring to pre-pandemic tourism according to “5000 Japanese visitors daily” (USA Today), to a cultural scandal as a “cherry blossom affair” (The Japan Times), or to portraying someone as a “manga character” (New York Times), the construct of alterity is enforced not only by words per se, but also with context: “what is said, by whom, in what circumstances and on what political and social grounds” [15]. Therefore, cross-reference of synonymous units proves to be the analytical tool for the purpose of transcultural deconstruction of the narrative concepts in the mentioning of alterity.

### 3. Transcultural construct in newspapers

Online newspapers provide a collection of different facts regarding modes of communication, finding and classifying resources and guidance on the discourse practicalities as a research-based resource [14]. The qualitative corpus and data analysis identify semantic distinctions in respect to circumstances (target articles), duration and frequency (synonymous relations) and the background nature of foregrounded activities (cross reference of headlines pointing towards stereotypical connotations), with the range that provides the semantic associations according to evaluative culture-based construct of alterity. The background newspapers activity constructs a frame in respect to the so-called knowledge of the word of a language speaker: “Due to the conceptual nature of the narrative, journalists as message senders provide the coded messages to the addressees, which they further need to decode” [15]. A conceptual schema of the recipient assures the receptive concepts and understanding of the world, whereas media discourse may be suggestive enough to obtain the autonomous unpredictability. Although the narratives may be completely detached from the writer’s and/or editor’s initial intentions (as prescribed in the postclassical narratological approach) some of them still remain anchored in the reception and perception of the media addressee, thus providing ideal transcultural interpretative environment. Accordingly, linguistic activities include a concept, “as a foundation of our mental entity”, a domain, which is “relevant for understanding some other structure”, and a conceptual cognitive framework, as a culturally condition background structure, the knowledge of the world or a common sense of a language speaker [15]. Some authors point to ever-changing patterns in the East-West dichotomy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, e. g. multiculturalism, globalization, etc. [1]; [11]; [12], whereas the others believe that the cultural shifts are expected and the media should follow [5]. Yet, stereotype patterns remained: for example, the USA is described as a “wealthy superpower”, referring to “individualistic and multicultural culture”, and Japan as “traditional”; i.e. “collectivistic” and “monocultural” [11]; [8]. Truth be told, the unacknowledged paradigm shifts in contemporary Japanese culture, with public discourse at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from a unique and homogeneous society to one of domestic diversity, class differentiation and other multidimensional forms [12]; [13]. Nonetheless, the US newspapers still describe Japan as traditional and exotic other, and vice versa, Japanese media refer to America regarding a “self-made man” or power: soft power, economic power and political power. As described almost 20 years ago: “Not only is America the world’s largest economy, but nearly half of the top 500 global companies are American, five times

as many as next-ranked Japan. Sixty-two of the top 100 global brands are American, as well as eight of the top ten business schools”[10]. Predominant media transcultural narratives continue to perpetuate the pre-pandemic stereotypes, regardless of global and multicultural shifts worldwide.

#### 4. Methodology

##### 4.1. Corpus and method

The research looks into the qualitative content analysis: corpus comprises of randomly chosen online articles in times of COVID-19, (altogether 300); The American articles referring to Japan, and vice versa (150 each). The principle incorporates (1) cross-reference of synonymous in the headlines with the randomly chosen articles referring to the USA and Japan; (2) corpus qualitative analysis which runs on (a) on the level of language (synonyms), and (b) on the level of construct-related narrative (stereotypes); and (3) the unlocking the headlines through the interpretative background cultural activity as a narrative frame in media representations. Firstly, the method unlocks synonymous relationships between headlines and typically first paragraphs of the follow up articles (in the period from April 2020 to January 2021). The optimum headlines consist of (3) to (10) words. Randomly, it was intentional to use various newspapers: American (26) and Japanese (19)<sup>3</sup>. More American newspaper sources were found and the reason might be a predominance of the EL as a lingua franca online, which in itself presents a stereotypical view of “soft power”; Even as early as in 2004 the Americans represented nearly half of the internet users [10]. Secondly, the target lexical synonymous relationships are established. However, the language being “material” resource, the formal linguistic properties are “pushed to the front in order to notice the concepts of communication” [4]. In the end, further “conceptualization that constitutes our experience”[7] consequently resulted with a topic-related generalization: from the main category (COVID-19) to the more specific “networks of consequences”, or subcategories (society and economy), i.e. domains (those mentioned more than 4 times). After all, the aim was not to tackle detailed specific domains, but to confirm the overall approach to stereotypes in media on a more general level. A sufficient number of all-encompassing domains are as listed (Tables II and III):

Society:

- Culture (e. g. travel, the Olympics, food, etc.)
- Health (e. g. safety, pandemics, vaccination, crisis)
- Multiculturalism (e. g. demographics, gender, race)

Economy:

- Tourism (e.g. business, travel, industry)
- Market (e. g. technology, stocks, funding)
- Globalization (e. g. jobs, work rules)

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<sup>3</sup>For the restrictions of this paper, Appendix I is enclosed to illustrate the corpus-related crossreferencing of synonyms in newspapers.

**5. Results and Interpretation**

The research has shown the correlation, i.e. synonymous relationship between the target words in headlines and the follow-up articles. Culture-based concepts are constructed through stereotypical representations, which perpetuate the narrative of transcultural alterity: a) Western (American newspapers about Japan), where (91) articles out of (150) use stereotypes in relation to Japan (60,7%); b) Eastern (Japanese newspapers about America), where (77) articles out of (150) use stereotypical mentioning in relation to the USA (51,3 %). Stereotypes about Japan include specific domains of society and economy as follows: market (23), tourism (16), class (11), travel (11), health (10), and culture (20). Some of the examples are: health and safety (referring to collectivistic, traditional and religious society), kamikaze pilot, the kanji, a manga (a cartoon depiction of a person), a commoner (referring to the class system), so-called host and hostess bars (referring to sex industry), a mascot (for pandemic), cute characters (e.g. Hello Kitty), sushi (delivered by restaurants to survive the pandemic), the Zoom boom (for Asian economies), traditional (work ethics and business), robotics, smart devices (as technology-oriented society) Japanese as tourist (in pre-pandemic era and in the pandemic situation), etc. Stereotypes about the USA are as follows: tourism and globalization (22), global market (24), sport and travel (9), multiculturalism (6), health (10), and culture (6). Some of the examples are: health and wealth (in reference to money-oriented individualistic culture), (economy which) soars, rises, is upgrading, (nation that) seeks competitive coexistence, (and is progressive as in) rolling with the changes, uplift, upgrade navigates, (America as nation is able) to fix, to mend, to untangle, to solve, (as a principle of) climbing, rise, victory, win, to prevent, to stop, to rejoin (trade and business), etc. Results are relevant regarding a transcultural approach to the Western and Eastern constructs of alterity as both exceed 50% of stereotypical mentioning in the media (Tables I, II, and III).

TABLE I: COVID-19-Related Media Frame: Stereotypes of Alterity

Media	Society	Economy	Articles/ Sum	%
	Culture etc.	Tourism etc.	(150)	
Western Media Frame	52	39	91	60,7
Eastern Media Frame	31	46	77	51,3

TABLE II: Stereotypes in Western (American) Newspapers about Japan

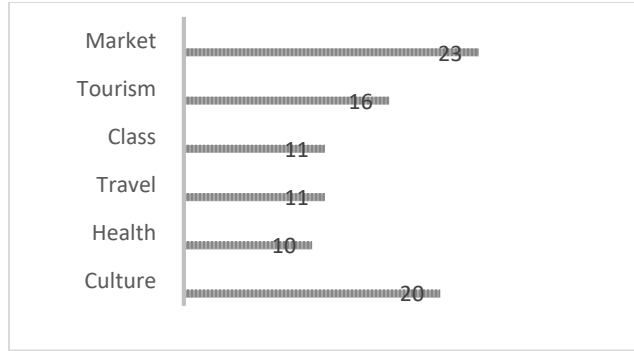
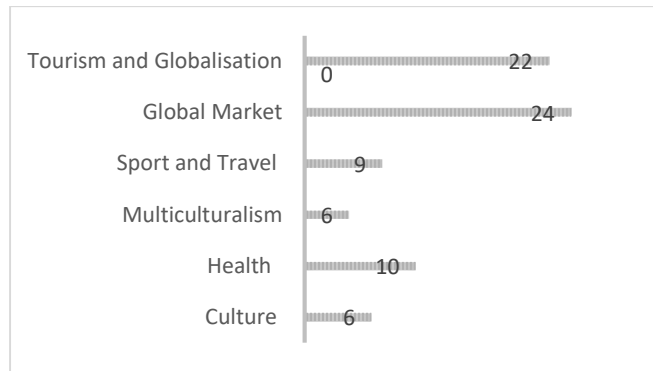


TABLE III: Stereotypes in Japanese Newspapers about the USA



The results show that the concept of the language reflects the one and only myth-related construct of alterity in the case of the East-West dichotomy. On the one hand, the American construct describes Japan regarding the expected stereotypical aspects, which contradicts the changes towards new diversity [13], as the culture is thoroughly addressed as “family culture”, “work culture”, “technological culture”, “housing and food culture”, etc. [8];[9]. Although talking about so called traditional concepts [5];[11], it is said that a monocultural society should be now losing monopoly over the way Japanese culture is portrayed, since ethnic diversity has rapidly expanded and formed a seemingly irreversible trend. Even so, American media creates the public perceptions of no structural changes that have been in progress since the late 20th century and partly results from the accumulation of observations that point to the notion that Japan as noncompromising regarding a considerable range of ethnic groups. Likewise, Japanese media perpetuates the myth about American superpower: military, economic or soft, regarding coercion, deterrence, protection, inducement, attraction, or agenda-setting[10]. In addition, when questioning ‘What, then, is American?’ somewhat expected concepts are addressed of „America successfully colonizing the future“, „a culture in which transformation is the essence“, „the wealthiest nation in the world“, „symbols of America’s economic, military, and political supremacy“, „new heroes“, „a country that had long believed itself the trailblazer, the pathfinder, the pioneer of modernity“, „a new Pax Americana“, „the world’s only superpower“ [1]. In comparison, Americans would consider “health” in relation to “wealth”, thus being portrayed as

materialistic and individualistic society, whereas in Japan “health” would connote with “safety”, which deconstructs the myth of eastern world as non-materialistic and religious. On both sides, the myths about individualism and collectivism remain.

## 6. Conclusion

A purpose of this paper was to examine possible media construct in times of COVID-19. Following the footsteps of the previously set methodologies, further analysis offered the original approach to the narrative in Japanese and American media regarding each other. Synonymous concepts proved the function of the stereotypical transmission. The goal is achieved as the research proves the construct of alterity which both on the linguistic and cultural level, which further corresponds to stereotypical impressions regarding the East-West dichotomy. In other words, the unpacking of headlines recognized myths of alterity which are perpetuated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, regardless of the multicultural and globalization changes or the pandemic era. In future, researches may refer to the specific-oriented narratives in media, as hereby suggested. We believe that this research offers guidelines for the analytical approach to conceptual and linguistic exchange of various narratives in different media, as well as provides scholars with the intellectual tools necessary to deconstruct stereotypes and look into precise domains of ways cultures are portrayed.

## 7. References

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#### Online Newspapers

New York Times	FOX	Washington Times
The Washington Post	CFR News	LA Times
USA Today	US News	The Japan Times
Star Tribune	The Boston Globe	Asahi
Chicago Tribune	Newsweek	Japan Today
The Week	The Week	The Japan News
Fox Business	Forbes	News on Japan
ABC New York	Reuters	HNK World Japan
The Wall Street Journal	Mainichi	Nippon
Santa Fe	New York Post	Asia
Seattle Times	NBC News	Japan Daily
CNN	WSJ	Kyodo News



APPENDIX I: Examples of Transcultural Cross Referencing: Synonymous Relationships in Online Newspapers

Western and Eastern Frame	Lexical Synonymous Unit in Headlines	Cross Reference with Articles
<p><b>The USA about Japan</b></p>	<p><b>Japanese tourists</b> who test negative for COVID-19 will be able to bypass Hawaii quarantine.</p>	<p>Hawaii's tourism-dependent economy gets more travelers from Japan than any other foreign country. Before the coronavirus pandemic, the state would welcome about <b>5,000 visitors from Japan daily</b>. Those numbers have dwindled to almost none.  <a href="https://eu.usatoday.com/story/travel/2020/10/28/test-allow-japanese-visitors-bypass-hawaii-quarantine/3760057001/">https://eu.usatoday.com/story/travel/2020/10/28/test-allow-japanese-visitors-bypass-hawaii-quarantine/3760057001/</a> (28 October, 2020)</p>
	<p>Japan is using <b>robots</b> as a service to <b>fight</b> coronavirus and for better quality of life.</p>	<p>As societies around the world grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, service robots have emerged as a <b>powerful tool</b> in fighting the virus and addressing social needs.  <a href="https://www.forbes.com/sites/japan/2020/11/17/japan-is-using-robots-as-a-service-to-fight-coronavirus-and-for-better-quality-of-life/?sh=493069b45b4e">https://www.forbes.com/sites/japan/2020/11/17/japan-is-using-robots-as-a-service-to-fight-coronavirus-and-for-better-quality-of-life/?sh=493069b45b4e</a>                      (November 17, 2020)</p>
<p><b>Japan about the USA</b></p>	<p><b>Dollar</b> rises to around ¥103.60 in Tokyo trading.</p>	<p>The <b>dollar</b> <b>firm</b>ed to around ¥103.60 in Tokyo trading Monday, while European currencies were battered by renewed concerns over the coronavirus pandemic in the region.  <a href="https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/12/21/business/financial-markets/dollar-rises-tokyo-trading">https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/12/21/business/financial-markets/dollar-rises-tokyo-trading</a> (21 December, 2020)</p>
	<p><b>Birds of a Feather:</b> QB Laughrearelishesreunion at Seagulls, chance for title.</p>	<p>Two years later than he had hoped, quarterback Jimmy Laughrearelishesreunion with his best friend from high school, who was also his roommate in college.  <a href="https://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0006957217">https://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0006957217</a> (26, November, 2020)</p>

