ABSTRACT

YUQIU LIU. Discursive Construction of Chinese Returnee Identities in Mainstream Chinese Newspapers and a Reality TV Show: A Methodological Synergy of Corpus Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. (Under the direction of Professor Agnes Bolonyai.)

Chinese returnees – Chinese who have studied abroad and returned to China – is an increasingly large social group whose identities are undergoing interesting transitions. This study combines methods of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analytic approaches to analyze the discursive construction of Chinese returnees’ identities in media, specifically in mainstream Chinese newspapers and in a reality TV show, Only You. A one-million-word corpus of mainstream Chinese news articles published in the year 2016 was built to uncover the general representation of Chinese returnees in the Chinese press. Keywords are grouped into topoi and evaluative language was closely examined for patterns. For the reality TV show, special attention was paid to discursive devices for constructing identities, such as footing, stance-taking, positioning, and deictics. The results show that two membership categories emerge from the two data sources. Mainstream newspapers tend to represent Chinese returnees as outstanding talents and entrepreneurs who are engaged in high-tech innovative projects. They are also depicted as patriots who returned to repay their motherland. On the other hand, returnees in the TV show display various kinds of identities, ranging from enthusiastic patriots to world citizens with high “cultural flexibility” (Sussman, 2010). What they have in common is that all of them highlight their studying abroad experience by repeated mentioning and discursively flagging their host countries. The hosts and employers tend to position the returnee applicants as ordinary Chinese with studying abroad backgrounds, who should be “in sync with” (Gee, 2014) other ordinary Chinese people. Therefore, the hosts and employers took a negative stance towards those
returnees who seemed to distanced themselves from China or who regarded themselves as important patriots.