

## Articles

## Breach of *pacta sunt servanda*: A corpus-assisted analysis of newspaper discourse on the AUKUS agreement

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## ABSTRACT

The AUKUS agreement,<sup>1</sup> a strategic pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, primarily aimed to facilitate Australia's acquisition of eight nuclear-powered submarines from the US and Britain. This agreement led to the abrupt termination of a previous contract with France's state-owned Naval Group. This article examines the language used in media coverage of the AUKUS agreement in newspapers from various Anglophone and Asian countries. Employing a combination of Sentiment Analysis (Crossley et al., 2017) and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (Partington, 2013; Gillings et al., 2023), we focus on identifying key linguistic patterns, themes, and the sentiment embedded in the discourse. Our findings indicate a general positive assessment of AUKUS in the Anglophone media, contrasted with negative portrayals in Chinese publications. Moreover, the analysis of linguistic components such as adjectives, nouns, and verbs reveals underlying complexities and conflicting viewpoints within the Anglophone discourse itself. By applying Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies, we uncover the contextual and linguistic factors that shape these diverse perspectives.

## 1. Introduction

The AUKUS agreement, a trilateral military partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, was officially established on September 15, 2021. Signed by American President Joe Biden, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, AUKUS aims to uphold a rules-based international order and ensure security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region (Barnes and Makinda, 2022: 1307). Primarily, the agreement is viewed as a strategic response to Beijing's significant naval expansion in the South China Sea and its growing influence in adjacent regions, including Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East.

The focus of the deal was a commitment to help Australia acquire eight nuclear-powered submarines from US and Britain, but AUKUS was also conceived to go beyond that in order to constitute an unprecedented defense partnership. As part of the agreement, the partners would share 'military capabilities and critical technologies, such as cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and undersea domains' (Barnes and Makinda, 2022: 1308). In that context, Australia overnight scuttled its \$90 billion submarine deal with the partially French state-owned Laval

Group and triggered the deepest diplomatic crisis with France since the latter's nuclear testing in the Pacific (Stauton and Day, 2022: 1). Australia violated the norm *pacta sunt servanda* (i.e. agreements must be kept) and, in Rengger's (1997) words, undermined the 'presumption of trust' in international society (Barnes and Makinda, 2022: 1309). The day after the announcement of AUKUS, French President Emmanuel Macron recalled the French ambassadors to Australia and the United States. Before departing from Australia, Ambassador Jean-Pierre Thebault spoke of the "breach of trust" Australia had committed by "blindsid[ing France] intentionally for 18 months" (Cater, 2021). According to Stauton & Day (2022: 2), while the Morrison government viewed the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines through a transactional lens, the French saw it as one of the key pillars of France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

The AUKUS deal has been addressed from multiple disciplinary angles such as international law (Eichensehr 2022), political science and international affairs (Barnes and Makinda, 2022; Crabtree, 2022; Cornelis & Sato, 2022; Godovanyuk, 2022; Heisgourg, 2021; Raube and Rubio, 2022; Rynning, 2022; Satoru, 2022; Staunton and Day, 2022), philosophy (Peters et al., 2022), or physics (Cogswell and Huber, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation AUKUS stands for 'Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States'.

Given the lack of existing research on AUKUS within the fields of language and discourse studies, coupled with the significant public interest and debate it has generated in the media, we have decided to undertake a linguistic analysis of the English-speaking press. This analysis aims to delve into the sociopolitical questions surrounding this matter, providing insights into how language reflects and shapes public discourse.

This paper examines the similarities and differences in how the AUKUS deal was reported in various English-language newspapers from Anglo and Asian regions. We focused our analysis on articles published from September 15, 2021, to October 31, 2021—the period during and immediately following the signing of the agreement, which, according to Google Trends, garnered significant reader interest at that time. Apart from the press from Australia, Canada, the United States, Britain, and New Zealand (i.e. Anglo corpus), our analysis also includes English-language articles on AUKUS from Chinese and Singaporean newspapers, as significant coverage was found in these regions too. The Chinese and Singaporean news represent part of our Asian corpus and are pertinent to our study since these countries belong to the Indo-Pacific region, and AUKUS could have direct or indirect consequences on them. See below the research questions we aim to address:

1. What is the general subjective tone in discussions relating to the AUKUS agreement, and what social values are positively or negatively assessed in the texts?
2. What language patterns are used to construct the major themes on AUKUS?
3. Based on keyword analysis, are there notable differences in how the AUKUS agreement is portrayed in the press across different countries?
4. How might the political stance of these newspapers influence the way discussions evolve?

To answer the above questions, our paper is organized as follows: The next section offers a review of existing literature on the AUKUS agreement. Section 3 describes the corpus under study, and details the quantitative and qualitative methods used for analysis. Section 4 discusses the findings related to the research questions introduced in the Introduction. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the main themes associated with AUKUS and evaluates how they are treated in the two newspaper groups

## 2. The AUKUS agreement in the literature

As of June 2024, a search on the Web of Science database indicates that there are 79 scientific articles addressing the AUKUS topic, predominantly within the field of political science. The literature identifies several key themes: (1) the effects of AUKUS on the Indo-Pacific region have been extensively studied, with contributions from Abbondanza (2022), Hall (2022), Koga (2024), and Kurt et al. (2022), highlighting the geopolitical ramifications. (2) The United States' influence in Southeast Asia is a significant focus, analyzed in works by Crabtree (2022), Lee (2022), and Rizky et al. (2023). Complementary discussions on US strategic alliances in the region include studies by Lai (2023), Wilkins (2024), Connor et al. (2023), and Hoang (2022). (3) The dynamics within Western partnerships, specifically within AUKUS, are explored by Trunov (2023), Rees & Xu (2024), and Chikhachev (2023). (4) The aftermath of AUKUS on Australia-France relations is scrutinized in research by Staunton & Day (2022) and Barnes & Makinda (2022). (5) The implications of AUKUS on India's Indo-Pacific strategy are detailed in studies by Behera (2023) and Tzinieris et al. (2023). (6) Japan's alignment policies in the Indo-Pacific are discussed by Cornerlis-Atanassova (2022) and Frattolillo (2022). (7) The concept of the Anglosphere and its relevance to the discourse on AUKUS is analyzed by Holland & Staunton (2024) and Clayton & Newman (2023). (8) The defense policies of Canada and Australia in the context of AUKUS are

covered by Carvin et al. (2023) and Fortier & Massie (2023). (9) The issue of nuclear weapons expansion as a result of AUKUS is addressed by Tanter (2022), Reynolds (2023), and Blum (2022). These studies collectively underline the complex and multifaceted impacts of AUKUS on international relations, demonstrating the breadth of academic interest in this strategic alliance

As shown in the above articles, AUKUS is one of the most significant reflections of the rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region between the US and China. Cox et al. (2023) argue that AUKUS represents the latest evolution of Australia's strategic culture, which is based on the belief that Australia's core security interests can only be secured through the support of the US. However, these authors also highlight the risks associated with this stance, noting that reliance on the US could jeopardize Australia's sovereignty. Additionally, they point out the risks stemming from the uncertainties of the US's position in Asia and the volatility of its domestic politics. Pajon (2021) claims that the U.S. decision to sell the strategic equipment has created a precedent, with potential implications in terms of proliferation, as countries, such as China, might feel encouraged to sell similar devices to Pakistan or North Korea. In addition, this move has destabilizing effects, fueling an arms race. Crabtree (2022) points out that the United States intends to manage China's rise by forging a new balancing coalition with other nations in the Indo-Pacific that view themselves as broadly non-aligned. The author indicates that the Southeast Asian countries—particularly Indonesia and Malaysia—face the dilemma of maintaining a balance of power and regional stability amid an environment of increasing engagement with extra-regional actors. As a result of the region's need for security against external threats, primarily from China, several Southeast Asian countries—including Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines—have come to support AUKUS, whether explicitly or implicitly

The literature also discusses the partnership within the Western alliance. In line with Mouritzen (2023), the AUKUS deterrence strategy towards China contrasts with the more cooperative EU Indo-Pacific strategy. As stated by the author, in Europe, this can be traced to the fact that the UK and France/Germany support different geopolitical world views. According to him, European cohesion requires that geographical and geo-economic heterogeneities are overcome.

In the subsequent sections, we examine how these themes are linguistically represented in newspaper coverage immediately following the signing of the agreement.

## 3. Data and method

For the compilation of the AUKUS corpus (see Tables 1a and 1b), we adhered to the practical guidelines provided by Gabrielatos (2007) on systematic text collection. This involved pre-determining query terms and searching for articles in the NexisUni text archive. This online platform contains databases for computer-assisted legal research, newspaper search or consumer information. First, we used Google Trends (<https://trends.google.com/trends/>), the website that analyzes the top search queries in the Internet, to identify the time period when AUKUS was a most popular topic, which resulted to be from September 15, 2021 to October 31, 2021. Second, we collected all English-language news and opinion articles that included the search query *aukus* in both the headlines and the body of the text. The articles were published by 38 broadsheet and tabloid newspapers from Australia, Canada, the US, Britain, New Zealand, China and Singapore.

Our corpus is representative in terms of the text source (English-speaking newspapers from Anglo versus Asian countries), text topic (the AUKUS agreement), time span (the period when AUKUS is signed), genre (broadsheet versus tabloid), and political stance (left-leaning versus right-leaning). However, its main limitations include (1) the limited size of the dataset collected from Asia, as the Nexis platform only provided news items in English from China and Singapore; (2) the imbalanced representation between broadsheets and tabloids; and (3) the uneven distribution of newspapers retrieved from each country.

**Table 1a**  
AUKUS Corpus - Broadsheets.

Country	Newspaper	Code	Political stance			No. texts	No. tokens
			Left	Center	Right		
Australia	Brisbane Times	AUS_BT		X		6	4617
	The Sydney Morning Herald-online	AUS_SMHO		X		24	18,048
	AFR Online	AUS_AFRO	X			29	25,745
	The Australian	AUS_AU			X	46	49,920
	The Age	AUS_AG		X		15	14,866
	Canberra Times	AUS_CT	X			3	1798
	WA Today	AUS_WAT		X	X	2	1220
Britain	The Guardian	BN_G	X			27	65,630
	Financial Times	BN_FT		X		5	3407
	The Daily Telegraph	BN_DT			X	5	4411
Canada	Canada Gazette <sup>a</sup>	CAN_GZ				1	893
	The Globe and Mail	CAN_GM		X		2	933
	Ottawa Citizen	CAN_OC		X	X	1	1755
	Toronto Star	CAN_TS		X		1	862
China	China Daily	CH_CD	X			2	1204
	People's Daily Online	CH_PDO	X			3	1494
	Xinhua General News Service	CH_XGN	X			4	1538
New Zealand	The Press	NZ_PR	X			1	533
	The Dominion Post	NZ_DP	X			2	547
	The New Zealand Herald	NZ_NZH			X	1	1240
Singapore	The Straits Times	SG_STe		X	X	4	6655
	Business Times Singapore	BTS		X	X	1	2174
USA	The New York Times	US_NT	X			3	3435
	St. Louis Post	US_St.LP	X	X		1	222
	The Monitor	US_M		X	X	1	1398
	Financial Times	BN_FT		X		5	3407
	The Daily Telegraph	BN_DT			X	5	4411
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>200</b>	<b>222,363</b>

<sup>a</sup> The Canada Gazette is the official newspaper of the Government of Canada.

**Table 1b**  
AUKUS Corpus - Tabloids.

Country	Newspaper	Code	Political stance			No. texts	No. tokens
			Left	Center	Right		
Australia	The Daily Telegraph	AUS_DT			X	9	5525
	Herald Sun	AUS_HS			X	4	2123
	The Courier Mail	AUS_CM			X	4	1172
	The Advertiser (Australia)	AUS_AD			X	4	2209
	Newcastle Herald	AUS_NH		X		2	1436
	Hobart Mercury (Australia)	AUS_HM	X			3	3732
	The West Australian (Perth)	AUS_WAP		X	X	1	796
	The Northern Territory News	AUS_NT				3	2082
Britain	The Independent	BN_ID	X			1	893
China	Global Times	CH_GT	X			1	1298
New Zealand	The Dominion Post	NZ_DP	X			2	547
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>34</b>	<b>21,813</b>

In our analysis, we combine two methodological frameworks: Sentiment Analysis (SA) and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS). Very broadly speaking, SA uses natural language processing techniques, together with text analysis and computational linguistics, for the automatic detection and quantification of the subjective tone of a text (particularly, its degree of positivity or negativity), as well as its emotionality. Currently, this is a very productive field that can be applied to all sorts of areas, among others, communication (e.g. Demirel et al., 2022), sociology (e.g. Enders et al., 2022), political science (e.g. Bestvater and Monroe, 2022), and, of course, linguistics (e.g. Bilianos and Mikros, 2022).

In this paper, we use Crossley et al.'s (2017) Sentiment Analysis and Social Cognition Engine (SEANCE), a domain-general tool, to obtain general scores for the sentiment of the values within the corpus. SEANCE offers evidence of lexical differences between positive and negative texts, shedding light on the linguistic elements that predict writers' emotional states. By analyzing these sentiment scores, we gain a deeper understanding of how language reflects and influences emotional

expression. This approach provides valuable insights into the relationship between linguistic choices and the emotional tone conveyed in written communication.

According to the authors (ibid: 803), SEANCE is a freely available tool comprising several sentiment dictionaries; apart from POS tagging and negation rules, it includes almost 3000 indices and 20 components associated with sentiment, social cognition, and social values. Some of the databases that are used for SEANCE tool are the following: The General Inquirer (Stone et al. 1966), which includes social categories, references to places and objects, communication, motivation, and cognition; The Affective Norms for English Words (Bradley and Lang, 1999), which contains affective norms for valence, pleasure, arousal, and dominance; and SenticNet (Cambria et al., 2012, 2010), as a database extension of WordNet (Fellbaum, 1998), which consists of norms regarding four emotional dimensions (sensitivity, aptitude, attention, and pleasantness), based on Plutchik (2001). Since a large number of indices are potentially unnecessary because of the overlap between databases, the component scores were developed from the SEANCE

indices to provide users with more manageable options and to investigate the potential of combining similar indices into larger macrofeatures (see Table 2). In the analysis, we use these component indices, which allow us to examine how lexical features in our texts are related to the affective state of those texts. By leveraging these indices, we can explore the nuanced connections between word choice and emotional tone, thereby gaining a comprehensive understanding of the affective dimensions embedded within the language of our corpus.

The second methodological framework that we turned to is Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), which examines textual data by applying a corpus linguistic methodology to explore the two-way relationship between discourse and society. It developed by the mid-1990s, when corpus linguistics teamed up with discourse analysis. According to Gillings et al. (2023: 4), Firth was the first one to express an interest in ‘the detailed contextual distribution of sociologically important words’ (Firth, 1935: 40), an early study where corpus and discourse studies (DS) joined forces. More than half a century later, CADS was put on the map by publications such as Leech and Fallon (1992), Stubbs and Gerbig (1993), Caldas-Coulthard (1993), Hardt-Mautner (1995), Stubbs (1997), Baker (2006), Partington et al. (2013), among others. Thanks to research like Baker et al. (2008), now corpora can be approached with a view to facilitating the most rigorous interpretation of texts. There are

**Table 2**  
List of SEANCE 20 component indices.

Description of component scores			
Component	Label	Number of indices	Key indices
1	Negative adjectives	18	NRC negative adjectives, NRC disgust adjectives, NRC anger adjectives, GI negative adjectives, Lu Hui negative adjectives
2	Social order	11	RC ethics verbs, GI need verbs, RC rectitude words
3	Action	9	GI ought verbs, GI trz verbs, GI travel verbs, GI descriptive action verbs
4	Positive adjectives	9	Lu Hui positive adjectives, Vader positive, GI positive adjectives, Laswell positive affect adjectives
5	Joy	8	NRC joy adjectives, NRC anticipation adjectives, NRC surprise adjectives
6	Affect for friends and family	9	Laswell affect nouns, Laswell participant affect, GI kin noun, GI affiliation nouns
7	Fear and disgust	8	NRC disgust nouns, NRC negative nouns, NRC fear, NRC anger
8	Politics	7	GI politics, GI politics nouns, Laswell power
9	Polarity nouns	7	Polarity nouns, Pleasantness nouns, Aptitude nouns
10	Polarity verbs	4	Polarity verbs, Aptitude verbs, Pleasantness verbs
11	Virtue adverbs	5	Laswell rectitude gain adverbs, GI concerns for hostility adverbs, Laswell sureness adverbs
12	Positive nouns	4	Lu Hui nouns
13	Respect	4	Saswell respect nouns
14	Trust verbs	5	NRC trust verbs, NRC joy VERBS, NRC positive verbs
15	Failure	5	Laswell power loss verbs, GI failure verbs
16	Well being	4	Laswell well-being physical nouns, Laswell well-being total
17	Economy	4	GI names adjectives, GI economy adjectives, GI economy all
18	Certainty	6	GI quantity, GI overstatement, Lasswell if, Lasswell sureness nouns
19	Positive verbs	3	Lu Hui positive verbs
20	Objects	4	GI objects, GALC being touched

different variants of CADS around, depending on whether they are located more at the corpus linguistics end or at the discourse studies end of the spectrum. As pointed out by Gillings et al. (2023: 4), range of labels has occurred, including *corpus-led*, *corpus-oriented*, *corpus-informed*, *corpus-based*, and *corpus-driven*, with the latter pair having attracted widely received theorising (McEnery and Hardie, 2012; Biber, 2015). The former is mainly an inductive, quantitative approach drawing on the analysis of frequencies, collocates, sketches, n-grams and keywords in a (large) collection of texts, without previous tagging of the corpus (Baker and Ellece 2011), while, corpus-based CADS is generally a more deductive, qualitative approach that allows the researcher to check their hypotheses using a particular theoretical framework (McEnery and Hardie 2012). There is an increasing acknowledgement that many studies combine elements of both.

We believe that the two aforementioned methodological frameworks, SA and CADS, can complement each other well. According to Venkit et al. (2023: 13750), categorization-based approaches in SA struggle to capture contextual information and subtle variations in the sentiment expressed in text. The disadvantage of the approach is that factors such as tone, sarcasm, and cultural nuances influencing sentiment may not be adequately addressed by predefined categories or limited numerical scores. Most analyzed works focus primarily on lexically categorizing texts as positive or negative, without considering the social, political, and psychological factors that contribute to sentiment measurement. This is where Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies come into the picture since this approach is sensitive to social and contextual factors. Below we describe the procedure applied on our data.

In the first stage of our research, we used SEANCE (Crossley et al., 2017) to do automated Sentiment Analysis on our corpus and provide a general profile of social values (see Table 2 above). In the second stage, we contrasted the Anglo and Asian sub-corpora (each independently) with the English Web 2020 reference corpus in Sketch Engine (Kilgariff et al., 2014), a general reference corpus. This process allowed us to create two lists of keywords for each sub-corpus, aimed at identifying the “aboutness” of the texts and the social actors involved in each of them. By comparing the sub-corpora with the reference corpus, we gained insights into the distinct lexical features and thematic focuses present in the Anglo and Asian texts. Frequently comparing against reference corpora of different (sub)-registers highlights the similarities between the target corpora (Geluso and Hirsch 2019: 225). The practice of using keyword analysis to highlight similarities between corpora is often overlooked (Baker 2004: 349). In order to take into account the fact that our two corpora were different sizes, we compared normalised frequencies between the two corpora, along a common baseline of occurrences per 1000 words (see Baker and Vessey 2018). To determine the major themes in our corpus, we used *WordSmith 8* (Scott 2022), and focused on the concordance lines of the keywords with high dispersion level (i.e. words which occur in 30 percent of the text files; see Millar and Budgell, 2008). Following the procedure described in Baker and Vessey (2018: 261), concordance analysis was used to identify themes emerging from the keyword lists.<sup>2</sup> The two authors equally split all the concordance lines between themselves<sup>3</sup> and coded them manually. Themes that emerged in one corpus were compared against the themes that emerged in the other corpus. The authors then discussed these themes to determine if the categorizations were consistent across the datasets. This collaborative approach ensured that the thematic analysis was thorough and that any discrepancies were addressed through discussion and mutual agreement. In Section 4, we provide the dominant themes shared between the two datasets, as well as the dominant themes that were

<sup>2</sup> We applied a structured bottom-up process whereby the researcher assigns categories to the concordance lines, but these come organically from the corpus rather than being imposed on it (Gillings et al. 2023: 24).

<sup>3</sup> There were approximately 10,000 concordance lines together in both corpora.



more salient to the Anglo-corpus and the Asian corpus, respectively. Again, following the procedure in Baker and Vessey (2018: 262), dominance was established by calculating the sum of relative frequencies of all keywords in a thematic category and the differences between these relative frequencies in the Anglo and in the Asian corpus.<sup>4</sup> Where relative frequencies were both high and similar in both corpora, we considered this to be a shared theme. Conversely, where relative frequencies were significantly higher in one thematic category than the other, or when a word occurred within the list of chosen keywords in one corpus but not in the other, we considered this theme more salient to the corpus where it occurred. This method allowed us to distinguish between universally relevant themes and those that were particularly prominent in one corpus, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of the thematic differences and similarities. Furthermore, we were also interested in the discourse on AUKUS of each individual country, particularly what stance towards the agreement was taken by their tabloids and broadsheets, and how political stance might influence the way discussions evolved; for this purpose, we analyzed the extended context of the concordances of *aukus*, the keywords with the highest keyness score in both corpora.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

Fig. 1 provides an overview of the comparative sentiment for the two data sets. The 20 component scores measure the features of ethics, cognition and emotional reaction (see Table 2 above). The highest score is 1; the lowest, -1. The higher the score is, the more it predicts the positivity of a text. We present below the results of SA to provide initial trends for the occurrence of social values and components that are positively or negatively assessed in our two corpora. While we aim to highlight these trends, we remain mindful of the approach's limitations, particularly its reliance on one-to-one dictionary matching in a de-contextualized manner. This awareness ensures that our interpretation of the results considers the broader context and nuances that might not be captured through SA alone.

The results from Fig. 1 show that Asian texts have more positive adjectives, verbs and polarity items that contain aptitude and pleasantness vocabulary than Anglo texts together with a low level of negative adjectives and a lower level than in Asian corpus of indices indicating failure. Interestingly, whilst in the Asian sub-corpus the features of trust are more relevant (collocates: *misled, outraged, outcry, stab, losing, unacceptable, struggle*), the Anglo sub-corpus focuses on social order terms, such as *ethics, need, rectitude, and virtue* verbs as well as on the action and economy related vocabulary.

Fig. 2 displays an even distribution of 20 components in the newspapers of the Anglo sub-corpus, signaling that they seem to share a similar perspective on the AUKUS agreement. The components that stand out are present in the data from New Zealand, which has the most dominant positive lexicon in the Anglo sub-corpus, with the highest joy, positive verbs, positive adjectives, and polarity nouns and verbs, and the least presence of negative adjectives. The newspapers from New Zealand also show the highest number of social order components. This country has clearly welcomed the increased engagement of the US and Britain in the Indo-Pacific region and expresses a desire to join the alliance to collaborate on the development of emerging cyber technologies, while maintaining its ban on nuclear-powered submarines. The second country that stands out is the US, with prevailing components of politeness, virtue, and economics, alongside the least positive noun and verb components compared to other countries. We will revisit the position of the US on the announcement of AUKUS when we discuss the major themes in both sub-corpora.

<sup>4</sup> Each keyword was categorised only within one theme. If a keyword had a potential to be classified under two or more categories, it was categorised under more general thematic category such as „Indo-Pacific under AUKUS alliance“.

The comparison between China and Singapore shows a similar even distribution of the 20 components, with economy, positive verbs, polarity nouns (aptitude and pleasantness), and action components being more prominent in the Chinese newspapers, and with negative adjectives being less present than in the Singaporean data (Fig. 3).

The overall tone of the Asian corpus is more positive, and Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis will reveal which themes are dominated by that tone. In the second stage of the analysis, from the two lists of keywords, we selected those that were dispersed in at least 30 % of documents. This resulted in 19 keywords from the Anglo corpus and 11 keywords from the Asian sub-corpus (see Table 3). We established the major themes by examining the concordance lines of the keywords listed in Table 3, which were derived from comparing the Anglo and Asian corpora separately with The English Web 2020 reference corpus, as described earlier in Section 3.

Based on the above list and the described procedure in the previous section, we categorised the keywords into the following themes: (1) Indo-Pacific under AUKUS alliance, (2) Aggressive China, (3) Alliances as aggravation of imbalance in the Indo-Pacific, (4) Breach of trust, and (5) Anglo sphere and manifestation of power. In Table 4, we represent shared and salient thematic categories in both corpora. We then discuss these themes in detail below, providing an in-depth analysis of their significance and implications within the context of our study.

##### • Indo-Pacific under AUKUS alliance

One of the strongest keywords from the Anglo sub-corpus (i.e. *Indo-Pacific*) collocates mostly with words that have positive semantic prosody such as *open, free, strategy, influence, enduring, flourishing and engagement*. These appear in a context that describes the US matching the Chinese growth with 'ever closer alliances among ever capable partners' (AUS\_AFRO\_16092021\_01), such as Britain and Australia, which aim to keep the Indo-Pacific 'free and open' (ibid). According to the newspapers, formalizing cooperation among the US, Britain and Australia with AUKUS will ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific in the long term, making the region 'enduring and flourishing' (AUS\_AFRO\_16092021\_02). The AUKUS alliance has been described as an 'epic project' (AUS\_AU\_25092021\_01), particularly in the Australian newspapers supporting the agreement. Some fierce criticism of the agreement within Australia itself will be mentioned later when we discuss the press of individual countries.

##### • Aggressive China

In the Anglo sub-corpus, the AUKUS allies see China increasingly willing to challenge regional norms and rules as they observe a power balance shifting away from the allied democracies, while Taiwan parades itself as the frontline in the struggle over freedom and democracy. The keyword *Beijing* is found in the company of words with a mostly negative semantic prosody, examples of which are *accused, tensions, military, destabilizing, verbal, blast, coerce, provocation, undermine, deterred, acting, aggression, reacting, bully, warnings, insistence, serious, stepping, or fears*.

##### • Alliances as aggravation of imbalance in the Indo-Pacific

Based on the word sketches<sup>5</sup> of the token *Indo-Pacific* (*concern, disruption, risk, implication, security*) in the Asian sub-corpus, the region is portrayed as an aggravation of the existing imbalance, with worries that

<sup>5</sup> The word sketch shows the most typical collocations and word combinations of each word in the language identified in a text corpus.

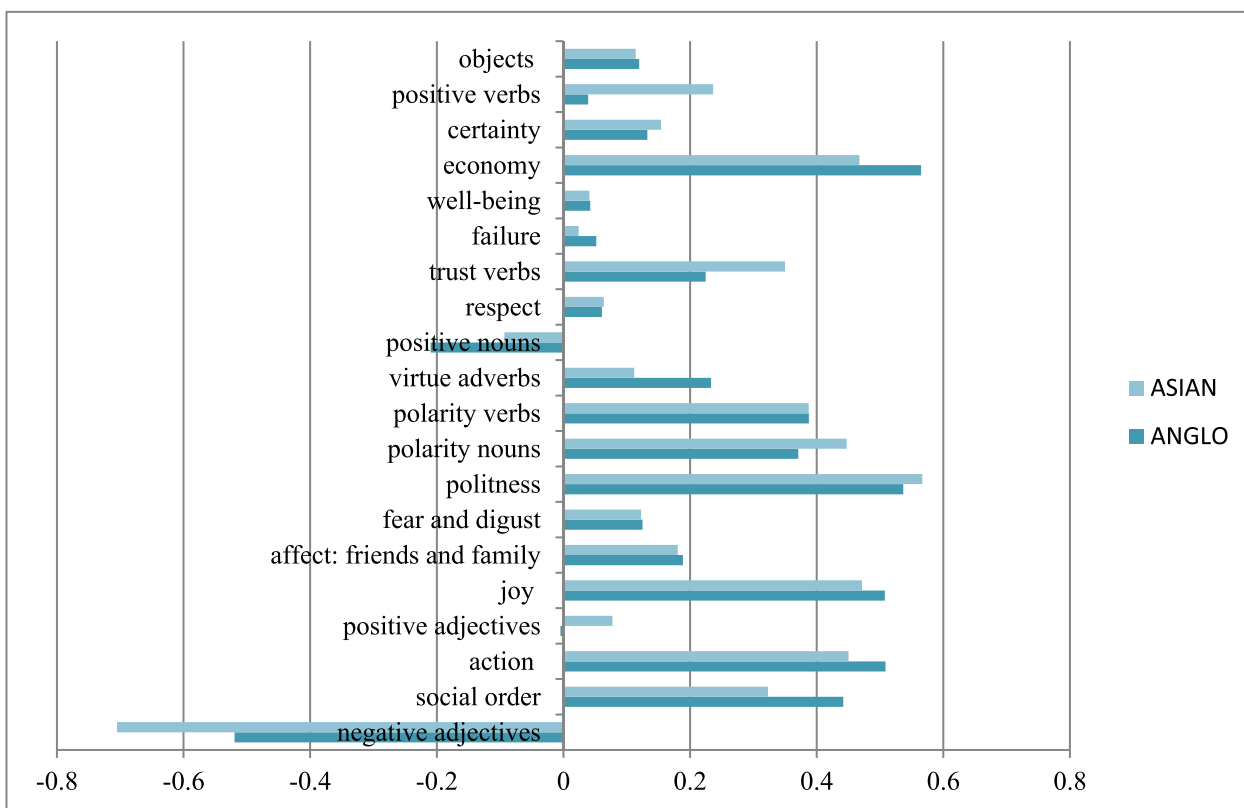


Fig. 1. Comparative SEANCE 20 components sentiment analysis of the Anglo and Asian sub-corpora.

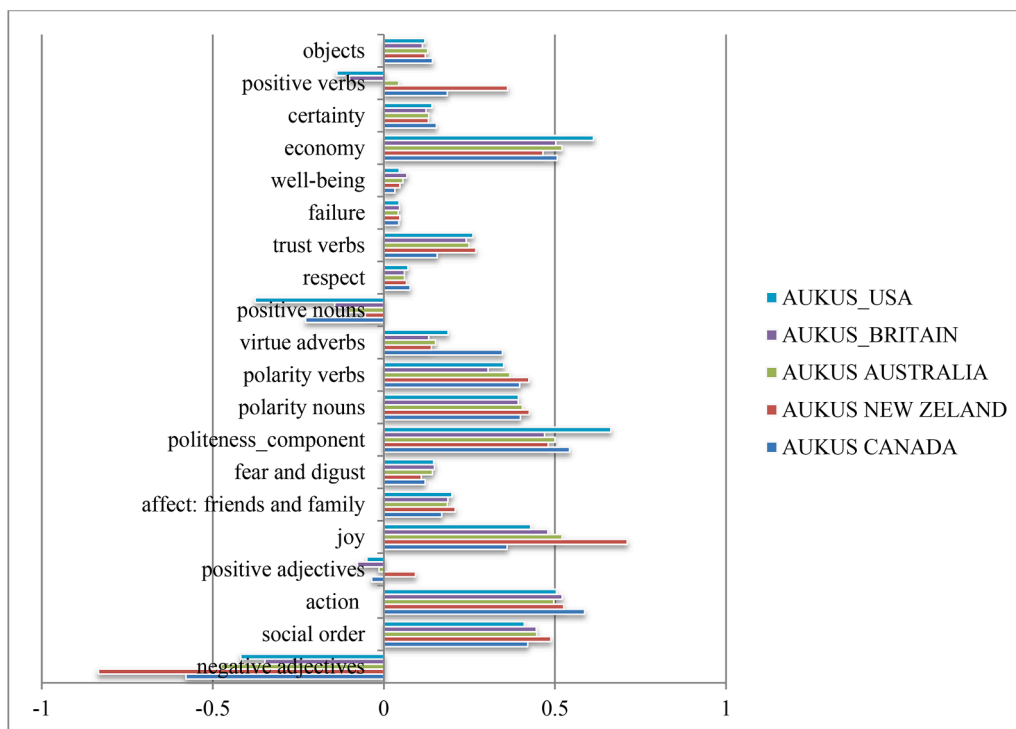


Fig. 2. Comparative SEANCE 20 component sentiment analysis (Anglo countries).

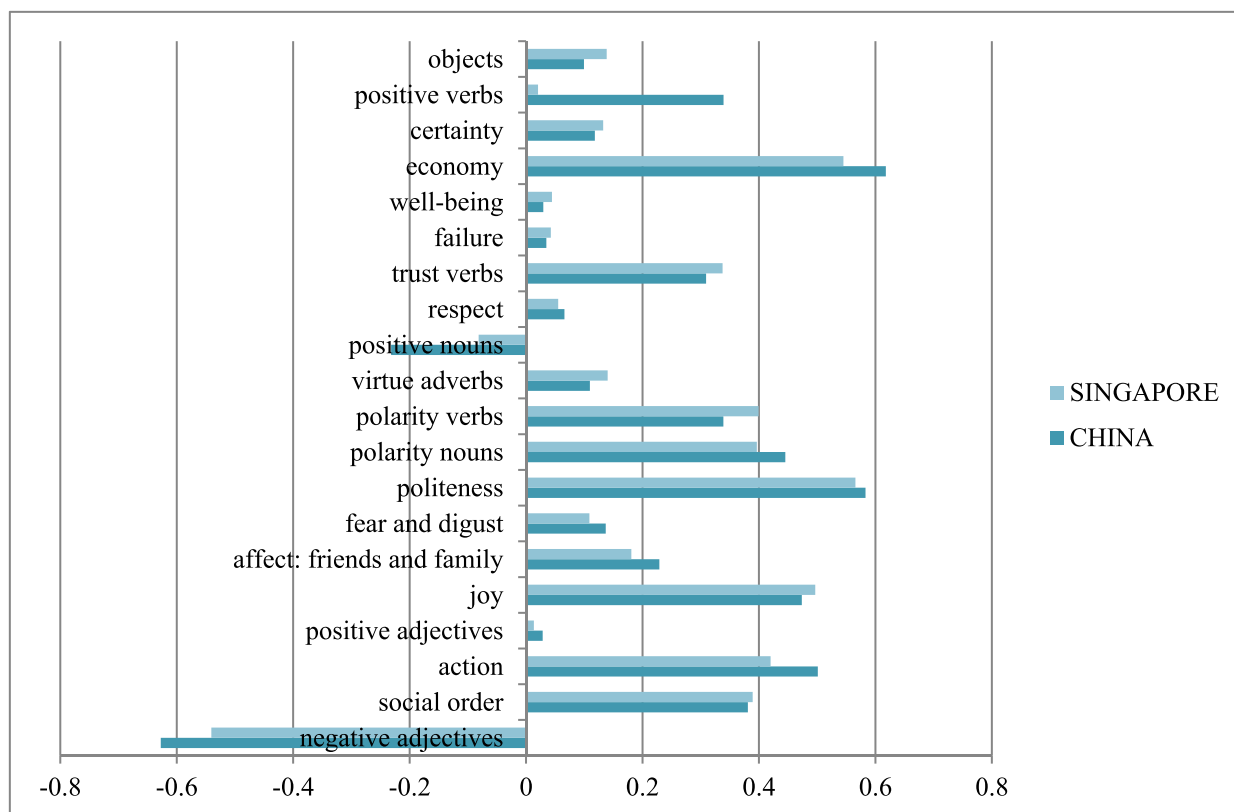


Fig. 3. Comparative SEANCE 20 component sentiment analysis (Asian countries).

Table 3

The most prominent keywords in the Anglo and Asian subcorpora.

Anglo subcorpus			Asian subcorpus		
Keywords	Relative and raw frequencies	keyness score	Keywords	Relative and raw frequencies	keyness score
aucus	3.8 (846)	3030.52	aucus	5.4 (118)	7122.5
nuclear-powered	1.8 (397)	1104.47	nuclear-powered	2.2 (48)	2249.76
indo-pacific	1.2 (264)	612.118	indo-pacific	1.2 (26)	1015.57
submarine	6.4 (1432)	496.868	asean	2.3 (51)	737.479
morrison	3.6 (805)	403.889	submarine	6.8 (148)	689.989
macron	0.8 (174)	245.289	quad	1.5 (32)	333.716
biden	2.8 (620)	239.367	biden	1.5 (32)	208.227
non-proliferation	0.3 (72)	148.19	pact	0.7 (16)	174.778
dutton	0.4 (84)	145.667	nuclear	4.1 (89)	90.179
turnbull	0.4 (103)	132.332	cooperation	1.6 (35)	68.159
pact	0.9 (209)	135.506	naval	0.9 (20)	61.638
quad	0.7 (162)	100.364			
asean	0.5 (107)	92.017			
canberra	0.7 (152)	91.329			
taiwan	1.3 (297)	83.213			
keating	0.2 (55)	82.864			
defence	3.1 (695)	79.113			
australia	9.8 (2194)	76.68			
beijing	1.3 (284)	63.206			
boris	0.4 (89)	59.539			

it will potentially become a battlefield for a new round of major power competition. Together with Quad,<sup>6</sup> AUKUS is seen as a formation aimed at challenging and ring-fencing China.

On the other hand, the positive pool of the lexicon in the Asian corpus comes from the content on ASEAN. The word labeling this

alliance frequently collocates with adjectives such as *dynamic*, *effective*, *successful* and *steady*, since the China-ASEAN ties have been described with a promising prospect. The negative collocates of the word ASEAN (*woo*, *threats*, *hypocritical*, *harming*, *incapable*, *uncertainty*) refer to the news that the US has doubled down on its efforts to woo ASEAN members to support AUKUS; according to the Chinese newspapers, this will push ASEAN members to inevitably become embroiled in the US-

<sup>6</sup> The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly known as the Quad, is a strategic security dialogue between [Australia](#), [India](#), [Japan](#) and the [United States](#).

**Table 4**  
Shared and salient thematic categories in the Anglo and Asian corpora.

Themes	Anglo corpus (keywords)	Relative frequency	Asian corpus (keywords)	Relative frequency
Indo-Pacific under AUKUS alliance (salient)	aukus, indo-pacific, morrison, biden, australia, dutton, turnbull, keating, australia, non-proliferation	22.5	aukus, indo-pacific, biden	9.2
Aggressive China (salient)	beijing, taiwan	2.6		
Alliances as aggraviation of imbalance in the Indo-Pacific (salient)	pact, quad, asean	2.1	asean, quad, pact, cooperation	6.1
Breach of trust (shared)	nuclear-powered, submarine, macron, canberra	9.3	aukus, nuclear-powered, nuclear, naval, submarine	11.8
Anglo sphere and manifestation of power (salient)	defence, non-proliferation, boris	4.9		

Chinese rivalry and the South China Sea issue of uncertainty in the bilateral relations between China and ASEAN.<sup>7</sup>

We checked the reactions of the individual countries in the region, which turned out to be mixed. The collocates of words such as *Indonesia* and *Malaysia* (*anxious, reacting, provoking, feared, clash*) show that these countries have expressed concerns regarding the formation of AUKUS, while Singapore is entirely comfortable with the announcement. Vietnam, which has been involved in multiple territorial disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea, released a cautious statement saying that ‘the development of nuclear energy must serve peaceful purposes’ (AUS\_AG\_25092021).

- *Breach of trust*

In both sub-corpora, the breach-of-trust theme can be observed through the concordances with the word *France*.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the affective lexicon related to this theme is present much more in the Anglo than in the Asian dataset, particularly in the Australian newspapers, which describe France’s position as ‘doubly betrayed’, because of the ‘secrecy and diplomatic exclusion’, with the three AUKUS partners ‘scrambling to contain the damage from such a public rift’ (AUS\_AFRO\_19092021).

More specifically, in the Anglo sub-corpus, the keyword *Macron* is found in co-occurrence with negative evaluative nouns and adjectives with affective meaning such as *wounds, splits, untreated, sugared, sobering, shattered, repairing, and mending*. According to the different views of the newspapers from this dataset, the Australian decision to dump the French diesel submarine contract, and join the UK and US in a new agreement to deliver nuclear submarines, ‘caused serious diplomatic splits with France, and threatened the progress of the Australia-European Union free trade agreement’ (AUS\_AU\_23092021).

Unsurprisingly, this theme is covered quite broadly in the Australian press with a range of perspectives, starting from the idea that the relations need to be restored; through the concern how negative perceptions can be used against Australia in the field of international politics; to the idea that the dynamics and wide geographic reach of the Indo-Pacific require multilateral groupings that are ‘flexible and adaptable in membership, strategic aims and the appropriate wherewithal to respond to changes in the regional military balance’ (AUS\_AU\_22092021).

- *Anglo sphere and manifestation of power*

When announcing AUKUS, Morrison described it as a ‘forever partnership’, while British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it was an

agreement among ‘kindred nations’ (AUS\_AG\_25092021). The Anglo sub-corpus reflects the idea that France has long bristled at what it sees as ‘Anglo-Saxon arrogance on the global stage and has not been shy about rallying resistance to perceptions of British-and German-speaking dominance in matters ranging from commerce to conflict’ (BN\_ID\_24092021). In addition, France was also ‘angry’ (ibid.) with the US for ‘not appreciating France’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific given its troops, territories and money in the region’ (ibid.). For that reason, France’s President Emmanuel Macron was demanding substantial financial compensation after the breach of the contract, while at the same time he looked for a political dividend from the US, as he faced re-election in the following six months. According to the Anglo news dataset, during talks with Mr. Macron in Rome ahead of the G20 summit, Mr. Biden was expected to ‘offer guarded support for France’s desire for ‘stronger European defence’, including a European military force separate from but complementary to NATO’ (BN\_DT\_30102021).

Some of the concordances of the keyword *Biden* in the Anglo sub-corpus point to the US President’s reaction after Australia cancelled the submarine deal with France. Based on the Australian newspapers, in an interview with French television, Mr. Kerry, US special envoy, said that Biden ‘had not been aware of what had transpired’ when the Macron government protested the AUKUS military agreement and subsequent cancellation of a 2016 contract to build French subs in Adelaide. Biden said:

1. ‘It was not done with a lot of grace. I was under the impression that France had been informed long before that the deal was not going through. Honest to God, I did not know you [France] had not’ (AUS\_SMHO\_30102021).

Additional perspectives of this event show that the AUKUS alliance may signal to Europe that ‘it [Europe] is not perceived as a global player with whom the US will gain [from a deeper] co-operation, at least in the Indo-Pacific’ (BN\_FT\_25102021), as pointed out by Marie Jourdain, visiting fellow at the Atlantic Council and former French defense official.

In our qualitative analysis of the concordance lines of *aukus*, a top keyword in both datasets, we observed how the agreement was portrayed in both the liberal and conservative broadsheet and tabloid newspapers for each country. The themes described above are fully present in the Australian, British, American, and Singaporean broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. The difference in the assessment of AUKUS is mostly noticeable between the liberal and conservative newspapers in Australia, UK and the US. Whilst the Australian conservative newspapers are more critical of the agreement, in the UK and the US, it is the more liberal newspapers that are disapproving of it. As for the genre (i.e. broadsheet or tabloid), this did not play a fundamental role on the views towards the deal in any of the analyzed countries. Due to space constraints, below we provide only the highlights from the newspapers of different countries.

In all the Australian newspapers, AUKUS is seen as a way for Australia to access the leading-edge technologies and artificial intelligence. Another positive side of the deal, as represented by conservative tabloids, is adopting nuclear energy to expand high-energy industries, while nuclear power should become part of Australia’s climate change

<sup>7</sup> Territorial disputes in the South China Sea involve conflicting island and maritime claims in the region by several states: The People’s Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam and Brunei.

<sup>8</sup> In the Anglo sub-corpus, France is in position 74 of a word list, while in the Asian corpus, it is in position 45.



policy. The criticisms of AUKUS in liberal broadsheets are rather unusual; they cite the anti-nuclear movement and Greens for which the AUKUS agreement poses the biggest threat to nuclear non-proliferation since North Korea's breakout. The criticisms of the deal are more frequent in the centrists' and conservative broadsheets; according to these newspapers, two former liberal prime ministers, Paul Keating and Malcolm Turnbull, are accusing the Morrison government of compromising the nation's sovereignty and security; former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull warns Australia needs to develop a nuclear industry to maintain its proposed fleet of submarines and lashes his successor, Scott Morrison, for not being upfront with France over its decision to dump a \$90 billion contract. Both broadsheets and tabloids point to the fact that the Australian naval security remains exposed with the new submarines not in service for another 20 years. Australia could face a hostile Indo-Pacific naval environment, until at least 2040, as China rapidly builds its maritime fleet.

*The Daily Telegraph*, a British conservative newspaper, strongly welcomes the agreement. Similarly to the Australian conservative newspapers, the latter emphasizes the positive side of adopting nuclear energy, which would enable Australia to expand and grow high-energy industries and agriculture, and rapid electrification of land transport without overloading electricity production and transmission.

The *Guardian* as a liberal broadsheet comments on a very critical part of the AUKUS agreement (i.e. space), because there are fears that China might target satellites in any escalation of hostilities, leaving countries including Australia 'deaf, dumb and blind' (BN\_G\_07102021). From the perspective of the *Guardian*, the negative side of the agreement is the lack of the US strategy for trade for regional countries in the Indo-Pacific and the lack of alternatives to the huge gravitational pull of the Chinese economy for those countries. It also cites British former Prime Minister, Theresa May, who questioned whether the pact meant Britain could be dragged into a war with China over Taiwan, as Washington demands a greater British presence in the Pacific. After Brexit, the UK government thought it could deepen its relationship with the US and its economic relationship with China. It realized rather early, though, that this would be very difficult, because the US would not really accept it and gradually the UK would gravitate closer to just aligning with the US.

The focus of the British centrist and conservative broadsheets is on Australia's decision to ditch France in favor of the US and UK, which follows the US's failure to consult its European allies on its Afghanistan withdrawal plan. Events in Kabul sparked a debate over the EU's ability to project itself as a standalone defense power. Contrary to that, a liberal tabloid such as the *Independent* emphasizes that the AUKUS agreement has alienated France, a natural UK ally on security, and marked another step away by the UK from cooperation with its European neighbors.

The American left-leaning newspapers in our corpus have mostly a critical view on the agreement. In their view, the defense deal can be seen as a clear indication that Washington conceives of Beijing as an adversary. The *New York Times* does not see urgent reason for the US to undertake risks to prevent China's rise to regional leadership. AUKUS, from their perspective, also risks compromising long-term nonproliferation interests in favor of near-term militarism, while not seriously altering the regional military balance against Beijing. In the analysis of the newspaper, the perceived betrayal of France could cause unnecessary friction in NATO and make it more difficult to cooperate with France on China.

The US center-right newspaper *Monitor* focuses on the question of Quad's identity, expressing concerns that its focus could shift towards countering China. This shift could undermine the group's emphasis on liberal international principles such as the rule of law, transparency, and freedom of maritime navigation.

The Canadian newspapers focus mostly on the Anglo alliance and Canada's role regarding AUKUS. *The Canada Gazette* cites Kim Nossal, a professor emeritus of international relations at Queen's, who says that it is inaccurate to characterize Canada as being "excluded" from the AUKUS initiative, but that 'there is no willingness in Canada to spend the

kind of money needed to buy a country nuclear-powered sub fleet' (CAN\_GZ\_24092021). *The Globe and Mail*, a centrist newspaper, emphasizes that Australia made the 'biggest (and the least certain) bet'. For the US, 'AUKUS requires it to share sensitive nuclear submarine technology in return for a strengthened regional stance against China' (CAN\_GM\_23092021). According to the newspaper, this sets Australia's course for decades to come in a way that cannot easily be undone, if the Australian government ever has second thoughts.

Similar to the Canadian press, the newspapers from New Zealand mostly discuss the AUKUS agreement from the perspective of the alliance among the Anglo countries. The liberal press points out that, although New Zealand should have been made aware of the agreement when it was in the making, it has opened the door to joining it with Australia, Britain and the United States, while maintaining its ban on nuclear-powered submarines. The conservative *The New Zealand Herald* warns over danger that AUKUS could find itself in a two-front war, as Russia and China diplomatically and geographically co-ordinate their international efforts and have each other's backs.

The Chinese newspapers in English focus on the alliances as aggravation of imbalance in the Indo-Pacific and on the breach of trust of Europeans, who have voiced concerns about the AUKUS agreement. The newspapers also emphasize that the Philippines has openly backed the nuclear submarine deal, which is in sharp contrast with its ASEAN counterparts such as Malaysia and Indonesia, who are alarmed by a rivalry in Southeast Asia. The China-ASEAN ties are described in the newspapers as the most 'effective relations with a promising prospect' and the focus of the positive lexicon in the Chinese sub-corpus is on this topic (CH\_CH\_PDO\_30102021).

The Singaporean newspapers cover all the major themes listed above. They point out that the tensions in the region may lead to a global or even regional polarization, which is not healthy for businesses. *The Business Times* suggests that Singapore should stay neutral and welcoming to all parties. The *Straits Times* emphasizes that AUKUS has intensified Asia's quest for nuclear submarines. Based on their information, some in Washington seem to believe that, by providing sophisticated technologies like nuclear propulsion, the military capabilities of allies such as Australia, Japan and South Korea are strengthened. This serves two important purposes: one is to reduce incentives for allies to acquire independent nuclear arsenals of their own; the other is to build 'integrated deterrence' in partnership with allies (SG\_Ste\_15102021).

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, we produced a keywords analysis that is useful for studying discourse because it helps to reduce the large amount of language in a corpus down to a short list of more manageable words. Then we applied a structured bottom-up concordance analysis of these keywords whereby we assigned categories to the concordance lines which came directly from the corpus. We found that identifying positive and negative semantic prosodies within Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies can tell us how discourses are constructed and how prosodies complement Sentiment Analysis due to their sensitivity to contextual information.

Our mixed-methods approach shows that the discourse of the Anglo sub-corpus on the AUKUS alliance is focused mainly on four themes: (1) The Indo-Pacific as an open and free area, (2) China as an aggressive counterpart, (3) the importance and consequences of breach of trust in international relations, and (4) the Anglo sphere's power potential. Given the well-known tensions in the region and the confrontation with (and distrust of) the West, it is understandable that these newspapers portray China's role negatively, depicting it as a real military threat fighting for hegemony in that corner of the world. In contrast, the future of the Indo-Pacific under the auspices of AUKUS is represented in a very positive light. This positive portrayal is due not only to the geopolitical and financial benefits expected to be generated but also to the social and

ethical values exported by the so-called more stable liberal democracies on the planet.

As for the Asian newspapers, these are especially centered on the Indo-Pacific-related alliances as an example of aggravation of imbalance. Still, marked with positive SEANCE indices in the Chinese articles, they also highlight the strong cooperation of China with the ASEAN association.

The high level of ethic and trust components observed in the Sentiment Analysis of the whole corpus highlights the importance given to the breach of trust between France and Australia. However, the focus of the Anglo news is on the image of Australia vis a vis the international community, and the political and financial repercussions of the agreement, which is accompanied with a high component scores for action and economy related vocabulary. The Asian newspapers mostly discuss the geostrategic consequences of the alliance in the Indo-Pacific.

As demonstrated by the combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses of the corpus, the AUKUS agreement is generally positively assessed by the Anglo newspapers and negatively by the Chinese newspapers. Nevertheless, the higher presence of the component scores for failure and a lower scores for positive adjectives, nouns and verbs in the Anglo sub-corpus points to the conflicting perspectives on the agreement and its future outcome, especially in the Australian newspapers. The conservative Australian press is more negative about the deal than the liberal one because of the possible consequences regarding the country's sovereignty, and its reliance on the US and the UK for security and the development of highly advanced technologies. Nevertheless, it also highlights the positive side of the agreement, namely, the adoption of nuclear energy for nuclear-powered submarines without actually having nuclear weapons, which would not affect any international non-proliferation treaty. In contrast to that, the liberal newspapers in the UK and the US are mostly negative about the deal because it may increase the risk of a real war with the People's Republic of China.

Although we expected tabloids to be more vocal about both the advantages and problems caused by AUKUS, the genre of the newspapers in the individual countries does neither seem to have any impact on their choice of themes nor the perspective on the agreement. However, all the newspapers share the same point of view about the grandiosity of the deal, as well as its repercussions and impact in the region and wider.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Radoslava Trnavač:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Encarnacion Hidalgo Tenorio:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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