

Harmonious Discourse Analysis of Diplomatic Discourse from the Perspective of Systemic Metafunction Theory

-- Take the Keynote Speech by President Xi at the China-Central Asia Summit as an Example

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Abstract

This paper take the Keynote Speech by President Xi at the China-Central Asia Summit as an example to explore the concept of harmony conveyed in Chinese diplomatic speeches in the new era through the analysis of the three metafunctional perspectives of systemic functional linguistics. Namely, the experiential function, the interpersonal function and the textual function. Research has shown that in terms of the experiential function, material and relational processes are mainly used to actively evaluate the fruitful results of comprehensive cooperation between Central Asian countries and China. At the same time, China looks forward to further deepening mutual cooperation and bringing more benefits to people of all countries. In terms of interpersonal function, the study of modality and mood shows China's confidence in the future development of Central Asia. Finally, from the textual function, the president indicated that the Central Asian countries and China have enjoyed friendship for thousands of years, and are always good partners of mutual support and trust.

Keywords

Harmonious Discourse Analysis, Diplomatic Discourse, Systemic Metafunction Theory.

1. Introduction

With the development of productive forces and social progress, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. Faced with the unprecedented changes in the world in a century, our country needs to do a good job in diplomatic work in the new era. China's diplomacy has always followed a path of peaceful development and is committed to building a harmonious world. In China, the word "harmony" has become the keyword for the country's peaceful development. Only when international, national, and people-to-people relations are harmonious can global relations be harmonious and consistent.

In recent years, in the research of linguists on the discourse of diplomatic speeches, Chinese scholar Huang Guowen has proposed a discourse ecological analysis model with local characteristics based on Halliday's theory in the Chinese context which is known as the harmonious discourse analysis. As a new branch, it has gradually entered the field of linguistics. Harmonious discourse analysis is put forward in the context of China to promote the harmonious relationship between human beings, between human beings and other species, between human beings and nature, and between language and ecology.

Many scholars have also begun to use such a localized research method which is of certain significance to study Chinese diplomatic speeches with harmony as the keyword. This paper

will try to make a harmonious discourse analysis based on the three metafunctions proposed by Halliday and take the Keynote Speech by President Xi at the China-Central Asia Summit as an example. The harmonious concept of Inclusive and open promotes the harmonious coexistence of the international community. The aim is to analyze the harmonious concept of "people-oriented" and "inclusive and open" in China's diplomacy and promote the harmonious coexistence of the international community.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. Overview of Metafunctions of Systemic Functional Linguistics

The systemic functional theory of language, proposed by Halliday, is one of the most influential linguistic theories in the second half of the 20th century. Its emergence has deepened people's understanding of language and played a greater role in linguistic research in the new century. Halliday (1968) believed that this functional theory should be able to explain the internal structure of language, as well as the problem of "why language is like this". In 1970, he proposed the "metafunctions" in systematic grammar, which include three functional parts—experiential function, interpersonal function, and discourse function.

For the experiential function, it is used to encode people's experience of the word; that is people use it to convey a picture of reality.

For interpersonal function, it is used to encode interaction and show how defensible people find their propositions. Thus, it allows them to encode meanings of attitudes, interactions, and relationships which realize the tenor of discourse.

For discourse function, it is used to organize people's experiential and interpersonal meanings into a linear and coherent whole. Thus, it allows them to encode meanings of text development which realize the mode of discourse.

2.2. Overview of Harmonious Discourse Analysis

The harmonious discourse analysis is put forward by Chinese scholar Huang Guowen in 2017 in the specific context of China, which is based on systemic functional linguistics, problem-oriented, and the development background of China. To some degree, it inherits Chinese philosophical thought. Huang Guowen and Zhao Ruihua (2017,2019) point out that harmonious discourse analysis is influenced by Chinese traditional Confucianism and Taoism. The core of analyzing and observing the relationship between human beings and other organisms and between language and ecosystem is to explore how the various relations can merge and coexist. This theory emphasizes human problems, including both personal and human caused problems. At the macro level, people refer to the people as a group with political and social characteristics. At the micro level, the people involved in the discourse can be further divided into specific groups based on the tenor of the context. According to Huang Guowen's viewpoint, harmonious discourse analysis follows three principles—the principle of conscience, the principle of proximity, and the principle of regulation. These three principles form an organic network that provides a basis for evaluating the rationality, authority, and effectiveness of discourse, and can be used to analyze discourse with Chinese characteristics.

3. Metafunctional Analysis of Diplomatic Discourse

3.1. Overview of the Chosen Diplomatic Speech

Based on the above theoretical basis, the author will conduct a detailed analysis of President Xi Jinping's diplomatic discourse from the perspectives of experiential function, interpersonal function, and discourse function. This paper selects a diplomatic discourse from the official diplomatic website (<http://www.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/>) and takes the Keynote Speech by

President Xi at the China-Central Asia Summit in 2023 as an Example. The title is Working Together for a China-Central Asia Community with a Shared Future—Featuring Mutual Assistance, Common Development, Universal Security, and Everlasting Friendship.

3.2. Experiential Functional Analysis

Language has an experiential function, so it has experiential meanings. Moreover, language builds up pictures of reality - in terms of the things and events and circumstances – that form the landscape of our human experience. These three general categories of human experience typically occur together in clauses, with the pivotal elements of the clause being the expression of event or process. It includes six major processes, namely material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process. (Halliday, 2012) Material processes construe doing and it encodes experiences in the external, material world. Relational processes are to encode relationships of being and having between two participants. They are to do with the attributes of class membership or with a specific identity.

Mental processes encode the inner world of cognition, perception, inclination, or affect. Behavioral processes encode physiological or psychological behavior. Existential processes are to construe being as simple existence. These processes are almost always preceded by there. Verbal processes encode the experience of bringing the inner world outside by speaking. They are to do with saying and asking.

This paper will divide and analyze the transitivity process of the corpus based on clauses. The number and proportions of the six processes in this presentation are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Distribution of transitivity process

Process type	Frequency	Percentage
Material	126	76%
Relational	22	13%
Mental	6	4%
Behavioral	9	5%
Existential	1	1%
Verbal	2	1%
Total	166	100%

Since material processes and relational processes account for the vast majority in this speech, this paper will focus on the analysis of these two processes. It will be explained in the context of concrete examples.

a. Xi'an, known as Chang'an in ancient times, is an important cradle of the Chinese civilization and nation. It is also the starting point of the ancient Silk Road on the east end.

b. It is important that we deepen strategic mutual trust, and always give each other unequivocal and strong support on issues concerning our core interests such as sovereignty, independence, national dignity, and long-term development. We should work together to ensure that our community features mutual assistance, solidarity, and mutual trust.

c. Over the past decade, China and Central Asian countries have worked closely together to fully revive the Silk Road and actively deepen future-oriented cooperation, steering our relations into a new era.

The first example uses two relational processes, starting with the location of the conference, Xi'an, and introducing China's Silk Road. Therefore, the background of the meeting was clarified. From the second example, it can be seen that material processes are realized by using action

words such as "deepen", "give", "work" and "unsure". It explains a series of mutual actions that need to be done in the common development. And through the relational process, it reflects the importance of these practices which is also in line with the theme and center of this diplomatic speech. It is mainly about what we should do in the future. The third example is the material process guided by the verbs "work", "revive", "deepen" and "steer" to illustrate what China and Central Asian countries have done and achieved in common development over the past decade. Overall, the extensive use of material clauses reflects that the speech closely revolves around "what has been done" and "what will be done" in the common development of China and Central Asia. The relational clause expresses and defines the values related to politics, economy, history and other fields at the national level, and constructs the national image through these values.

3.3. Interpersonal Functional Analysis

To understand how the interpersonal meaning of language can serve the construction of a cohesive society by employing linguistic resources properly. For instance, the modality value and mood system.

3.2.1. Analysis of Modality Value

The modal system expresses the speaker's subjective judgment, which is directly related to his speaking intention. Based on the theories of Halliday, modality verbs can be divided into three types according to the value of modality—high, median, and low. As we can see from table 2, there are five modality verbs in total.

Table 2. Distribution of modality verbs

Modality	Frequency	Percentage	Value
Must	3	7.0%	high
Need	9	20.9%	high
Will	21	48.8%	median
Would	2	4.7%	median
Should	8	18.6%	median
Total	43	100%	

In general, the median modal verbs are used most frequently in this diplomatic discourse. The most frequently used medium modal verb is will, accounting for 48.8%, followed by the high modal verb need and the medium modal verb should. For instance:

- A dynamic and prospering Central Asia will help people in the region...
- China will also hold a live-streaming sales event to further promote Central Asian products...
- China will also step up the development of China-Europe Railway Express assembly centers...

The president used the median modality verb, *will*, to show that in order to build a China-Central Asia community of common destiny, China will unswervingly promote the docking of development strategies and create more opportunities for cooperation. It can be seen from this that the use of Modal verb will in a large number shows how China will work with Central Asian countries to promote stable economic development and promote economic and ecological harmony in Central Asia in the future. The second is to demonstrate China's attitude to the world, expressing China's firm will and determination to build a community with a shared future in Central Asia.

In addition, another median modality verb, *should*, also appears frequently. In diplomatic discourse, *should* generally expresses the obligation modality, indicating that the speaker

agrees with a certain responsibility or obligation of the subject. In speeches, use it to indicate that Asian countries should shoulder their responsibilities. For instance:

- d. We should work together to ensure that our community features mutual assistance, solidarity, and mutual trust.

3.2.2. Analysis of Mood System

In interpersonal communication, the use of different mood reflects different speech functions. Halliday believes that the mood system has four functions: giving information; demanding information; demanding goods and service and giving goods and services. They correspond to declarative mood, interrogative mood and imperative mood respectively.

As shown in Table 3, the most commonly used mood in diplomatic discourse is declarative mood, while imperative and interrogative mood are seldom used.

Table 3 Distribution of sentence types

	Declarative sentence	Interrogative sentence	Imperative sentence
Amount	80	0	6
Percentage	93%	0%	7%

Here are some examples:

- a. Xi'an, known as Chang'an in ancient times, is an important cradle of the Chinese civilization and nation. It is also the starting point of the ancient Silk Road on the east end.
 b. Over 2,100 years ago, Zhang Qian, a Han Dynasty envoy, made his journey to the West from Chang'an, opening the door to the friendship and exchanges between China and Central Asia.
 c. Over the past decade, China and Central Asian countries have worked closely together to fully revive the Silk Road and actively deepen future-oriented cooperation...

Examples of statements illustrate the history of the Silk Road and the fact that international cooperation has been deepened through the Silk Road. The President pointed out in a declarative tone that China, together with the peoples of all ethnic groups in Central Asia, promoted the rise and prosperity of the Silk Road and made historic contributions to the exchange, integration and rich development of world civilizations. The use of declarative tone can better reflect the calm, objective, reasonable, and convincing features of national leaders. At the same time, it also shows that China has always adhered to the concept of harmonious coexistence and worked together to promote the steady and long-term development of China-Central Asia relations.

In addition, six imperative sentences are also used. For example:

- d. Let us work closely together to pursue common development, common affluence, and common prosperity, and embrace a brighter future for our six countries!

This example is from the end of the speech, the President expressed the hope that the Central Asian countries will join hands to actively promote common development and prosperity, then jointly embrace a better tomorrow.

3.4. Textual Functional Analysis

The textual function is to organize our experiential and interpersonal meanings into a linear and coherent whole. It connects language and context, making context the foundation of language expression (Hu Zhuanglin, 2017). It is mainly reflected by the thematic system, which is related to the arrangement of clause components. According to Halliday, the first position in the clause is to signal to the audience what the message is about, which is known as the theme. While rheme is the extension and supplement of theme. Theme signposts the development of a text which can be divided into topical theme, interpersonal theme and textual theme. Therefore,

analyzing the thematic system helps to discover the structural characteristics, content focus, and the speaker's discourse intention.

In this diplomatic speech, the single theme is more prominent, represented by We. Throughout the speech, it appeared 44 times. This result is also consistent with the characteristics of concise and objective language used by national leaders in speeches so that the audience can quickly receive new information and achieve the effect of direct communication. As far as the pronoun "we" is concerned, the meaning of its expression can include both the speaker and the receiver, or only the speaker. However, throughout the speech, the meaning of the pronoun "we" is used only to include both the speaker and the recipient. Such words can express the idea that China wants to work hand in hand with others and develop in harmony. This is also consistent with the theme of this speech to create a community of shared future for mankind together.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, this paper takes Halliday's three major metafunctions of systemic functional linguistics as the theoretical framework and combines the harmonious discourse analysis to conduct a harmonious discourse analysis of President Xi's diplomatic speech at the China-Central Asia Summit. The study shows that in terms of experiential function, the transitivity of the President Xi's diplomatic discourse reveals that the president mainly uses the terms of material process and relational process to positively evaluate the fruitful results of all-round cooperation between Central Asian countries and China, and hopes to deepen mutual cooperation, bring more benefits to the people of all countries. In interpersonal function, the study of modality and mood reveals China's confidence in the future development of Central Asia through a series of objective data, as well as China's contribution and actions in the process. It also proves to the world China's confidence and determination to safeguard world peace and build a closer China-central Asia community of shared future. In the textual function, the repeated use of "we" as the theme shows that the Central Asian countries have enjoyed friendship for thousands of years with China and have always been good partners of mutual support and trust. It stressed that China will contribute its own strength together with the Central Asian countries.

This paper is an active attempt to harmonious discourse analysis from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, and it is hoped that more scholars will pay attention to this field in the future.

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