

On the Modes of Sino-US Top Speeches from the Perspective of the Interpersonal Function

Yi LUO

(School of Teacher Education, Zhejiang Ocean University, China)

ABSTRACT: *This paper reports a study on the specific modes of discourse of Sino-US top speeches, which focus on performing interpersonal function. The data for analysis was from the speech by former Chinese president Hu Jintao at Yale University in 2006 and the speech by former US president George Bush at Tsinghua University in 2002. The results show that the modes of the two speeches have significant differences, that is, the Chinese speech is formal, paying more attention to the use of modal words and salutations, especially median value of modality, while the American speech is informal, paying more attention to the use of personal pronouns, especially the second person, as well as grammatical modal metaphors.*

KEYWORDS - *stylistic formality, mode of speech, interpersonal function, discourse analysis*

I. INTRODUCTION

Owing to the establishment of new international order in international relations, there has been a gradual increase of international exchange of top visits. It is a vital diplomatic practice that visiting heads of states make speeches in public, especially in some world-famous universities to improve understanding, promote friendship and strengthen cooperation. The speeches by China-US top leaders are typical examples that perform above functions. Based on Halliday and Hasan's System Function Theory and stylistic theory, this paper tries to research into the typical modes of Chinese and American top speeches focusing on interpersonal functions by comparing Chinese president Hu Jintao's speech in Yale University and former US president George Bush's speech in Tsinghua University. Hu's and Bush's speeches are selected as studying materials because they are similar in field, tenor and mode, that is, the field: improving the understanding of the two countries; the tenor: public speeches focusing on interpersonal meaning; and the mode: prepared spoken texts. Additionally, Hu and Bush have common in education background and political position. And the audiences of their speeches are university students and the topics are similar. Therefore, their speeches, which are analyzed as linguistic data, have high validity. In addition, in order to ensure the authenticity of the linguistic data, we have adopted Hu's speech (English version) issued by Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Ireland[1] and Bush's speech (English version) issued by Office of Press Secretary of US[2].

II. ANALYSIS OF THE TWO SPEECHES

Comparison of the length of sentences and words and the use of abbreviations:

The length of sentences and words and the use of abbreviations are important parameters which judge the formality of style of a text. The length of sentences and words is in direct proportion to the formality of style of a text, while the frequency of abbreviations is in inverse proportion to the formality. That is, the longer a sentence, or the more letters a word, the more formal the style, vice versa. The more frequently abbreviations are used, the lower the formality of the style. According to the statistics (Hou,1988:77)[3], long sentences usually include about 20 words, and words with more than 7 letters are long words. Next, see Table 1.

Items Speech	Number of sentences	Average length of sentences	Longest sentence	Number of words/percentage	Average length of words	Longest word	Abbreviation
Speech 1	126	22.02 words	54 words	831/29.95	5.27 letters	20 letters	1
Speech 2	120	17.59 words	43 words	455/21.55	4.6 letters	16 letters	22

As Table1 shows, Speech 1 and Speech 2 are obviously different in the length of sentences, the length of words, and the use of abbreviations. In Speech 1, the sentences have an average of 22.02 words, more 4.43 words than Speech 2; the longest sentence has 54 words, more 9 words than Speech 2; the words have an average of 5.27 letters, more 0.67 letter than Speech 2. In Speech 1, 29.95 percent of the words are long words, more 8.4 percent than those in Speech 2. In Speech 1, the longest word contains 20 letters, more 4 letters than the one in Speech 2. In Speech 1, there is only one abbreviation, while in Speech 2 there are 22 abbreviations. Therefore, Speech 1 is much more formal than Speech 2.

Comparison of the continuum of sentence:

Cheng Yumin (1989:70-71) argues that the continuums of sentences involve two elements: the complexity of sentences and their length. Subordinative relation is a norm that decides the complexity of a sentence, while the length of a sentence is the norm that measures comprehensiveness and briefness of a sentence. Cheng suggests that a sentence with over 31 words is called a long sentence, a sentence with 4 words a short one, and a sentence with 5-30 words medium length. He uses “logical compactness” to measure the complexity of sentences and “comprehensiveness and briefness” to show the difference in the length of a sentence. The concrete norm is that subordinative relation is regarded as “fullness” (+1), and no subordinative relation is regarded as “non-fullness” (0). In the length of a sentence, comprehensiveness includes fullness (31 words in per sentence, +1) and non-fullness (5-30 words in per sentence, 0); briefness includes non-fullness (5-30 words in per sentence, 0) and fullness (1-4 words in per sentence, -1)[4]. Hou Weirui (1988:61) argues that participle structures are more formal syntactic structures, and they often appear in written language[3]. See Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of stylistic elements

Items Speech	Logical compactness		Comprehensiveness & briefness				Value of stylistic elements
	Subordinative relation	Fullness	Long sentences	Fullness	Short sentences	Fullness	
Speech 1	70	+70	29	+29	1	-1	98
Speech 2	54	+54	10	+10	7	-7	57

From Table 2 we know, the value of stylistic elements in Speech 1 is 41, higher than that in Speech 2, which reveals the latter’s stylistic formality is far lower than that of the former.

Statistics show that the formality of prepared speeches is 50%, and that of spontaneous speeches is 44% (Hu,2000:135)[5]. As a set speech, Speech 1 is formal. In it, only one abbreviation is used, but there are many refined words, such as millennia, rejuvenation, phenomenal, proliferation, etc. Although Speech 2 is the same genre as Speech 1, the formality of the former is obviously lower than the latter’s. In addition, in Speech 2 there are more spontaneous elements, which lead its stylistic formality to tend to informality.

Analysis of interpersonal meaning in the speeches:

Besides conveying speakers’ experiences and mental activities, languages have functions to express speakers’ positions, statuses, attitudes, motivations and judgments. The functions of languages are called “the interpersonal function”. The interpersonal function of language is “meaningful potential” of the speaker as an intruder, and it is the participating function of language, from which the speaker involves himself/ herself in the situational context, expresses his/her attitude and judgment, and tries to influence others’ attitudes and actions(Hu et al, 2005:115)[6]. Personal pronouns and modal words are important means to realize the interpersonal function of a text. For this reason, we try to analyze Speech 1 and Speech 2. Comparison of Personal Pronouns: The types and frequency of personal pronouns are closely related to realizing the interpersonal function. We will compare the personal pronouns used in Speech 1 and Speech 2. See Tables 3 and 4. Tables 3 and 4 show that in Speech 1 there are 93 pronouns, being 3.35%, while in Speech 2 there are 193 pronouns, being 9.14%. Obviously, the pronouns in Speech 2 are more than those in Speech 1. According to frequency, the first person plural is used mostly in both the speeches. In Speech 1, the first person plural appears 33 times, being 35.48% of pronouns; while in Speech 2, it appears 45 times, being 23.32% of pronouns. The first person plural is used greatly aiming to reduce the social distance between the speaker and the audience. It appears 27 times in Speech 1 and 41 times in Speech 2. At the same time, it shows negotiation between the speaker and the audience. Secondly, in Speech 1 “it/its” appears 24 times, which shows the objectivity of posing the topic. In Speech 2, “it/its” appears 21 times, showing the objectivity of argumentation. Thirdly, the first person singular appears 17 times in Speech 1, in fact, it represents the speaker 14 times, being 15.2% of pronouns, lower than the average. It shows although the speaker’s position is extremely high, he tries to reduce his status. In Speech 2, the first person singular appears 40 times, being 20.73% of the pronouns, obviously higher than the average, so that the speaker’s position of authority is manifested. Fourthly, the third person plural appears 8 times in Speech 1. Using “they/ their” for Chinese people is more objective than using “we/our”. In Speech 2, the third person plural appears 30 times, aiming to increase the objectivity of argumentation.

Table 3. Personal pronoun scale of Speech 1

Person & quantity	1st person plural	1st person singular	2nd person	3rd person singular	it its	3rd person plural	Number of pronouns	Number of words	%
Greetings	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0
Presentation	11	14	5	2	22	5	59	1701	3.47
Discussion	16	0	0	0	1	0	17	462	3.68
Conclusion	2	0	0	0	1	1	4	252	1.58
Appeal to action	3	2	1	2	0	1	9	251	3.59
Expectation	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	90	3.33
Closing remarks	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	50
Total	33	17	7	4	24	8	93	2774	3.35
Percentage	35.48	18.28	7.53	4.3	25.81	8.6	100		

Fifthly, the third person singular appears 4 times in Speech 1, in representation. While in Speech 2, the third person singular appears 13 times, in representation and discussion. Using the third person singular increases objectivity. Seventhly, in Speech 1, the second person appears fewest times, which seems to be far from the audience; however, the speaker uses salutation (Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends) 6 times, bridging the gap because salutation can realize the interpersonal function effectively. Finally, according to the rate of the use of pronouns, in Speech 1, the rate from high to low is in discussion, appeal to action, presentation, expectation and conclusion, if greetings and closing remarks are excluded from the statistics. In Speech 2, the order is similar to that in Speech 1. However, in Speech 1, the first person plural appears 16 times in discussion, highlighting negotiation in argumentation; while in Speech 2, the second person appears 44 times, showing the speaker tries to reduce the social distance between him and the audience.

Table 4. Personal pronoun scale of Speech 2

Person & quantity	1st person plural	1st person singular	2nd person	3rd person singular	it its	3rd person plural	Number of pronouns	Number of words	%
Greetings	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Presentation	5	16	11	5	2	2	41	470	8.72
Discussion	36	16	18	6	13	20	109	1143	9.54
Conclusion	2	2	8	0	5	5	22	246	8.94
Appeal to action	0	3	1	2	0	2	8	132	6.06
Expectation	2	2	5	0	1	1	11	111	9.9
Closing remarks	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	6	33.33
Total	45	40	44	13	21	30	193	2111	9.14
Percentage	23.32	20.73	22.79	6.74	10.88	15.54	100		

On the whole, the rate of pronouns in Speech 1 is not so high as that in Speech 2, which indicates that the formality of the former is higher than that of the latter, for high frequency of pronouns is just the feature of an informal style of language (Hu, 2000:135)[5].

Modal System:

Modality refers to not only modal verbs but also some adverbs, adjectives, nouns, verbs and phrases which have modal meanings. Halliday (1994:88) argues that “polarity is the choice between positive and negative, as in is / isn’t, do / don’t. However, the possibilities are not limited to a choice between yes and no. There are intermediate degrees: various kinds of indeterminacy that fall in between, like ‘sometimes’ or ‘maybe’. These intermediate degrees, between the positive and negative poles, are known collectively as modality.” [7] Modal meanings include modalisation and modulation. Modalisation is the speaker’s judgment of probability and usuality of propositions. Modulation involves the tendency or willingness of speaker; therefore, modulation can be further divided into obligation and willingness. Besides types of modality, Halliday (1994:76) divides modal verbs into three modal operators: high, median and low[7].

The modal system of interpersonal meanings further reveals the interaction between the participants in the communication. The addresser conveys his/her attitude and influences the addressee's attitude and behavior through the modal system (Miao, 2004)[8]. Below is the comparison of modal verbs in Speech1 (S1) and Speech 2(S2). See Table 5.

Table 5 shows that in Speech 1 median modal verbs appears 33 times, being 78.57% of modal verbs used; low modal verbs appear 5 time, being 11.9%; and high modal verbs appear only 4 times, being 9.52%. While in Speech 2 median modal verbs appears 11 times, being 45.83% of modal verbs used; high modal verbs are similar to those in Speech 1; but low modal verbs appear 9 time, being 37.59%, being 7.88 times to those of Speech 1. Obviously in Speech 1 plenty of median modal verbs are used, while in Speech 2 plenty of low modal verbs are employed.

The degree of modal value speakers choose is related to their social roles. The higher the value is, the higher the speaker's power and position is. On the contrary, it shows that both speakers and listeners' positions are equal (Hu, 2005:209)[4]. However, as presidents, whose social roles are extremely high, they use few high modal verbs. On the contrary, they use plenty of median and low modal verbs, which reduce greatly the social distance between the addressers and addressees, to make the social statuses of both tend to be equal and highlight the interpersonal function.

Table 5. Modal verbs

	Low	T	Median	T	High	T		Low	T	Median	T	High	T
	could	1	will	2	need	3		could	1	will	9	need	2
S1	can	1	would	2	must	1	S2	can	8	would	1	can't	1
			should	6	cannot	3				is not to	1	cannot	1
			should not	3									
			is to	1									
			are yet to	1									
Total	2;	4.76%	33;	78.57%	7;	16.67%	Total	9;	37.5%	11;	45.83%	4;	16.67%
Grand total/ percentage	42/ 1.51%						Grand total/ percentage	24/ 1.09%					

(notes: S1=Speech 1, S2=Speech 2, T=Times)

III. CONCLUSION

The Chinese and American speeches realize their interpersonal function effectively; however, they have great differences in their modes of discourse. First, the Chinese speech pays more attention to the function of the interpersonal meanings of modal verbs, especially the use of modal words with median value. Although the frequency of modal verbs is not so high as that in the Chinese speech, but the frequency of modal verbs with low value in the former is high than that in the latter. On the other hand, the American speech places more attention to the function of the interpersonal meanings of modal verbs, especially the use of the second person pronouns. Next, as for the use of modal words, the Chinese speech focuses on usuality, while the American speech stresses probability. Finally, more use of salutation is a feature of the Chinese speech, while more use of modal metaphors is the characteristics of the American speech. However, studying the interpersonal function of speeches is a complicated issue, involving various aspects. Then, what kind of mode of discourse can convey the function of the interpersonal meaning more effectively? What is the relationship between the formality and the interpersonal function of speeches? These will be important matters which need to be further discussed by more scholars.

REFERENCES

- [1] New Haven. <http://ie.china-embassy.org/eng/NewsPress/+259224.htm>; April 21, 2006.
- [2] Office of Press Secretary. <http://whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/02/20020222.html>; February 22, 2002.
- [3] W.R. Hou, *Varieties of English*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press; 1988
- [4] Y.M. Cheng, *English Stylistics*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press; 1989.
- [5] Z.L. Hu, *Theoretical Stylistics*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press; 2000.
- [6] Z.L. Hu, Y.S. Zhu, D.L. Zhang, and Z.Z. Li, *An Introduction to Systematic Functional Linguistics*. Beijing: Beijing University Press; 2005.
- [7] M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Edward Arnold; 1994.
- [8] X.W. Miao, Interpersonal Meaning and Construction of Discourse. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*; vol.4, 2004:5-11.