

Analysis of New Year Address from the Perspective of Interpersonal Function

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Abstract

Based on the interpersonal function of Systemic-functional Grammar, this paper analyzes the construction of interpersonal functions in the political discourse of the year 2022 New Year Address in China from the perspectives of personal pronoun, mood and modality. The main objective of this study is to investigate the language features and conventions of the political speech. Therefore, a study of it in the light of Systemic-functional Grammar will help to gain an in-depth understanding of the interpersonal meaning and the thoughts of national leaders in political speeches.

Keywords: New Year Address; interpersonal function; mood; modality; personal pronoun.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Every year, leaders of a nation deliver the New Year Address, a ceremonial speech summing up the past, looking forward to the future, and expressing New Year's greeting to the peoples. It is an extremely important carrier for countries to shape and display their national image, and the main front for a country to create and spread mainstream ideology. Besides, this kind of speech will help the people better understand the determination and confidence of the leaders to seek happiness for the people, and make contributions to the prosperity and strength of the country. Therefore, the New Year Address not only has political connotation, but also has interpersonal meaning, which is worth studying.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHOD

The study implemented by Halliday (1994) states that the context of a situation is arranged in three categories: field, tenor and mode. Corresponding to that, Halliday analyzes language into three broad metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Through the interpersonal function, users of language establish, negotiate and assume their position in social relationships, and it is concerned with clauses as exchange. Mood and modality are two main ways to achieve the interpersonal function in the discourse. In the past decades, some scholars in China have conducted a number of research papers and books on

the analysis of the interpersonal function. With this regard, Huang Guowen (2002) mainly focuses his study of the interpersonal function on the analysis of Du Mu's "Qingming" and its translated versions. And Zhu Hongtao (2003) analyzes interpersonal functions of person and mood in English advertising discourse". Recent years have witnessed discourse analysts' increasing interest in discourse analysis of speech, which mainly concerns the relationship between the form and meaning. Zhang Chunli (2010) analyses language features of Obama's victory speech from the perspective of Systemic-functional Grammar.

The status of the head of state is special, and the content of New Year Address often reflects the certain policies of the country, marking the foreign policy and national image, so as to be used to analyze the main achievements and new directions in foreign and domestic policy of the country. Therefore, in recent years, leaders' related speeches have gained more and more attention in academia (Lu, 2016). Alfiyaand *et al.*, (2015) fulfill a detailed analysis of President Hu Jintao's and President Xi Jinping's New Year congratulations as a kind of pseudo-political discourse to learn the domestic and foreign policy trend of the country. Jiang and Yang (2018) analyze genre features of the Russian new year address as a political discourse genre in terms of communication agent, recipient, colloquial-or-writtenness, form, function and information volume.

Guided by the interpersonal function in Systemic-functional Grammar, this paper chooses the year 2022 New Year Address in China as the research data. Qualitative and quantitative methods are both used in the study of the interpersonal function in terms of mood, modality, and personal pronouns. It aims to reveal the distribution of mood, modal and personal pronouns in the year 2022 New Year Address.

3. FINDINGS

The year 2022 New Year Address in China’s translation version is from the Xinhua News Agency. According to the theory of interpersonal function in Systemic-functional Grammar, this part mainly

introduces the findings of the interpersonal meaning behind the speeches.

3.1 Mood in the year 2022 New Year Address

Mood system plays a pivotal role in the realization of interpersonal functions, which is obvious when analyzing discourses. Studying the mood, reflecting the interaction of language, helps to clarify the interpersonal relationship between the two parties. Different mood types can be derived with different forms of Subject and Finite. They are the declarative mood, the interrogative mood and the imperative mood.

As is shown in Table 1, there are altogether 48 sentences. It is obvious to find out that declaratives take up 94%, imperatives 4%, and interrogatives 2% are found in the year 2022 New Year Address in China.

Table 1: Sentence type distribution

Type	Declarative Sentence	Imperative Sentence	Exclamatory Sentence	Total
Number	45	2	1	48
Percentage	94%	4%	2%	100%

3.1.1 The realization of interpersonal meaning by the declarative mood

From Table 1, the majority of New Year Address are declarative sentences, accounting for about 94%, indicating that the contents are mainly focused on stating opinions and facts, which is influenced by Confucianism. Confucianism emphasizes the golden mean and its style is more conservative and introverted, which tends to state the specific situation of things.

Example 1:

From the Yellow River and the Yangtze River, two “mother rivers” of the Chinese nation, to the limpid Qinghai Lake and the mighty Yarlung Zangbo River; from the South-North Water Diversion, known as a project of the century, to the Saihanba forest, shown as a patch of green on the map; from the northward trek and homecoming of elephants in Yunnan Province, to the migration and return of Tibetan antelopes--all these remind us that “If we do not fail Nature, Nature shall never fail us”.

Chinese President Xi Jinping uses three “from...to...” to construct a parallelism sentence structure, making the speech catchy, exerting strong emotional impact on the people, and conveying the idea that “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets”.

3.1.2 The realization of interpersonal meaning by the imperative mood

There exists a small number of imperative sentences in the speech, which are mainly used to express wishes and blessings and can stimulate the atmosphere and arouse the audience’s interest.

Example 2:

Let us all work together for a shared future.

Example 3:

May our country enjoy prosperity and our people live in peace and harmony!

In the whole speech, Chinese President Xi Jinping uses two types of imperative sentences, as it can be seen in Table 1, accounting for 2% of the total numbers. Imperative sentence is used here to tell the audience that we have confidence in the future of the country and the people. What’s more, imperative sentences can be treated as a hint to attract the audience’s attention.

3.1.3 The realization of interpersonal meaning by the exclamatory mood

As can be seen from Table 1, there is only one exclamatory sentence, accounting for 2% of the total mood system. The exclamatory tone makes the speaker’s emotions fuller and his attitude stronger.

Example 4:

The year 2022 is approaching. From Beijing, I extend New Year wishes to all of you!

The above example is about a blessing to the people in 2022. With true feelings to express the cordial greetings and best wishes to the national people, Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2022 New Year Address embodies the people-oriented feelings, and expresses his deep affection towards people, which can close the distance between Chinese President Xi Jinping and the people.

To put it into a nutshell, in the year 2022 New Year Address, declarative sentences are most commonly used, followed by imperative sentences. As we all know, declarative sentences can convey messages and attitudes directly, show the speaker's pride in China and Chinese, and finally, it achieve interpersonal significance.

3.2 Modality in the year 2022 New Year Address

The modality was first proposed by Aristotle, and was extensively and deeply studied. It is one of the four semantic systems that realize interpersonal

functions, and involves evaluation of the role that the speaker's suggestions can play, as well as the speaker's required obligations and wishes (Halliday, 2000). It can be regarded as part of emotions to some extent. Therefore, there is a certain internal connection between the two systems. In terms of modality value, it can be classified into three categories: the high value, the median value and low value. Choosing different values can reflect the speaker's judgment and opinion on a certain topic, and realize different interpersonal meanings.

Table 2: Distribution of modal words

Low			Median			High		
modalities	No.	%	modalities	No.	%	modalities	No.	%
can	3	17.6%						
may	1	5.9%	will	5	29.4%	must	3	17.6%
could	1	5.9%	would	2	11.8%	have to	2	11.8%

According to statistics, there are 17 modal verbs in the year 2022 New Year Address, and their distribution is shown in Table 2. Chinese President Xi Jinping frequently uses low and medium-value modal words. "Will", "can" and "must" turn up frequently to carry on the modality in the speech.

3.2.1 The realization of interpersonal meaning by the low value modal words

"May" means permission, possibility and desire. "Might" is the same as "may", but the degree is slightly lower. As another example, "can" and "could" mainly expresses the ability, possibility, permission and solicitation, which are similar to "may", but stronger in expressing possibility. The low-value modal word "can", "may" and "could" account for 17.6%, 5.9%, and 5.9% respectively of the modal verb system in the whole paper.

Example 5:

Only through unity, solidarity and cooperation can countries around the world write a new chapter in building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Example 6:

Standing on the Tian'anmen Rostrum, one could only marvel at the extraordinary journey traveled by this major Party, a journey of Chinese Communists leading the Chinese people, in their hundreds of millions, in an unyielding struggle against all obstacles and challenges, and scoring spectacular, epoch-making achievements over the past century.

In Example 3, the low-value modal word "might" means Chinese President Xi Jinping's desire for the bright future. In Example 5, the message uses the low-value modal word "can" to express his confidence in a better future. He maintains that people

all over the world should stick together, share weal and woe, endeavor to build this planet for ours into a single harmonious family in that we live in a community with a shared future for humanity. In other words, he believes that the people of the world can unite as one and overcome all difficulties and obstacles, giving people great confidence. In Example 6, Chinese President Xi Jinping uses "could" to commend the Chinese Communists for its achievements in the past century. All the struggle, sacrifice, and creation through which the Party has united and led the Chinese people over the past hundred years has been tied together by one ultimate theme--bringing about the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. By reviewing the past and looking forward to the future, Chinese President Xi Jinping raises people's expectations for the future and encourages them to strive for the future of the motherland, which can realize the meaning of interpersonal function.

3.2.2 The realization of interpersonal meaning by the median value modal words

"Will" and "would" represent the will and determination, requirements, routine things and habits that "must happen" in the future. The median-value modal word "will" and "would" account for 29.4% and 11.8% respectively of the modal verb system in the whole paper.

Example 7:

In just over a month, the Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games will open.

Example 8:

I would ask if they have any more difficulties, and I would remember everything my folks have to share with me.

The median value modal word "will" in Example 7, it means that something is going to happen

or be the case in the future. In the year 2022 New Year Address, in order to achieve interpersonal function, this “will” conveys the message is that China is ready to host the Winter Olympics and spares no effort to present a great Games to the world. It also shows the hospitality of the Chinese people. In Example 8, the median value modal word “would” appears two times, and it means that someone was willing to do something. That is to say, as public servants, they keep the the fundamental tenet of serving the people wholeheartedly in mind all the time. Using the median modal words, Chinese President Xi Jinping makes a promise to the people, which shows his determination and confidence in realizing the great rejuvenation of the China. It not only shortens the distance with the people, but also increases people’s trust in the government.

3.2.3 The realization of interpersonal meaning by the high value modal words

“Must” can be used to indicate commands and speculation. “Have to” means that to be “compelled” to do something by objective conditions or circumstances, emphasizing objectivity. Using these high value modal words can help establish authority.

Example 9:

To ensure that everyone leads a better life, we must never rest on what we have achieved, and there is still a long way to go.

Example 10:

Thanks to the sustained efforts of the Chinese people from generation to generation, those who once lived in poverty no longer have to worry about food or clothing, or access to education, housing and medical insurance.

In Example 9, Chinese President Xi Jinping puts forward that for the happiness of the people, Chinese Communist should not only be satisfied with their present achievements, but also continue to strive for the future. In 2020, China completed the building for a moderately prosperous society in all respects. In 2021, China still made commendable achievements in many areas. Therefore, in the year 2022, Chinese Communist needs to make continued efforts to serve the people, which is in accord with the original aspiration and the mission of Chinese Communists, to seek happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation. And that is what inspires Chinese Communists to advance. In Example 10, Chinese President Xi Jinping’s discourse fulfills two interpersonal functions. Firstly, he praises the people who have made sacrifices for the better life of the people. Secondly, it reminds people to learn to cherish the good life now they have.

In brief, the use of median modal verbs is high in the modal system, because the median modal verbs

can convey an approachable attitude, so as to achieve the purpose of calling on and inspiring the public.

3.3 Personal pronoun in the year 2022 New Year Address

Personal pronouns are often used in verbal communication to construct the identity of the speaker or author (Ren Yuxin, 2016). They can be divided into various forms according to person, number, gender and case. By choosing different personal pronouns, speakers can bring different influences to listeners and realize interpersonal meaning. *I* indicates the individual who utters the text; *you* refers to the individual addressed in the present instance of text; the third person pronouns *they*, unlike the first or second pronoun, refer to the other party or parties in the situation but not the participants in the speech event.

Table 3: Distribution of personal pronouns

Person	Pronoun	No.	%
First-person	our	18	27.7%
	we	15	23.0%
	I	14	21.5%
	my	5	7.6%
	us	3	4.6%
	me	1	1.5%
Second-person	you	3	4.6%
	your	1	1.5%
Third-person	their	4	6.2%
	they	1	1.5%

3.3.1 The realization of interpersonal meaning by the first-person pronouns

The first person can show the sincerity of the speaker and bring people closer to each other. As is shown in Table 3, the most frequently used pronoun is “our” (18 times). Then “we” (15 times) ranks the second place. “I” (14 times) ranks the third place in the year 2022 New Year Address.

Example 11:

To accomplish our great mission, we must always remain true to our original aspiration.

In Example 11, Chinese President Xi Jinping uses the word “our” and “we” to represent the Communist Party of China. As a matter of fact, Example 11 has been put forward by the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Through vigorous and determined endeavor, the Communist Party of China can fulfill their responsibility to history, prove worthy of our times and live up to people’s expectations. That’s what they have been doing.

3.3.2 The realization of interpersonal meaning by the third-person pronouns

The third person refers to someone other than the speaker and the audience. As can be seen from

Table 3, “their” appears four times and “they” appears only once.

Example 12:

As we speak, three Chinese astronauts are on duty in outer space; our fellow compatriots overseas are still working very hard; our people posted to diplomatic missions and businesses abroad as well as overseas Chinese students are bravely holding on; and our numerous dream-chasers are keeping up their good work. I salute all your great efforts, and extend to you best wishes for the New Year.

Here, the third person plural “their”, refers to the Chinese people who are striving to achieve Chinese Dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The third person emphasizes rational facts, which can improve the persuasion of communication and contribute to the realization of interpersonal relationship.

To sum up, first-person pronouns shorten the distance between Chinese President Xi Jinping and the people, help to clearly state his position and attitude, enable Chinese people to get clear information and establish an intimate relationship with the people. Third person pronouns can make the content of speech more convincing and realize the interpersonal function of the text.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, the research so far shows that, from the perspective of the interpersonal function, compared with the other two, declarative sentences dominate the year 2022 New Year Address in China; “will”, “can” and “must” turn up frequently to carry on the modality in the speech; the first personal pronouns turn up mostly in the year 2022 New Year Address in China.

The interpersonal function is to use language to express opinion, interact with others and establish the relationship with others. There are different ways to express the speaker’s feelings, attitudes and judgments. In a word, this kind of analysis helps us to improve the appreciation of language ability to better respond to today’s language in a variety of social activities.

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