

# The Construction of Pragmatic Identity in Political Speech Discourse -- Taking the Keynote Speech by Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022 as an Example

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## Abstract

Pragmatic identity construction is conducive to achieving communicative purposes. And political discourse is an effective means of promoting international communication. While the construction of identity in the field of pragmatics is rarely discussed in political discourse. To better understand the political intention of speakers, the research explores how and what pragmatic identities are constructed in political discourse based on pragmatic identity theory, and takes the Keynote Speech by Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022 as corpus. It is found that this speech included many derived identities from pragmatic identities. And President Xi Jinping chooses and exchanges his derived identities from various pragmatic identities by using the strategies of the personal pronoun and linguistic adaptation theory, which helps him better switch his pragmatic identity and achieve his interpersonal functions or political functions.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic Identity Theory; Linguistic Adaptation Theory; Political Speech Discourse.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there have been more and more discussions on world politics, international security, and national foreign policy from the perspective of language, and more and more attention has been paid to the role of language in constructing international relations (Tang, 2013). Language has a great influence on political life and the political speech discourse constitutes a powerful tool for countries to deal with ever-changing international relations and adjust various international economic activities. In political speech discourses, the speaker's stance and attitude, which can be shown by his identity, are of paramount significance for the final effect of the whole speech.

Identity recently has been a hot research topic in the humanities (Chen, 2013a), especially in the field of pragmatics. It mainly focuses on its definition, classification, and construction (Yang *et al.*, 2017). Different identities need to be chosen and exchanged according to different interpersonal functions on different occasions. In that situation, context-dependent pragmatic identities have come into being. This

research is devoted to enriching the discussion on the pragmatic identity construction by communicators in political discourse.

The important speeches delivered by General Secretary Xi Jinping at home and abroad are all exemplary works of Chinese political discourse. The Keynote Speech by Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022 (hereinafter referred to as "Xi's keynote speech in 2022") is the fifth time that President Xi Jinping has delivered China's strong voice to the world on this occasion since 2013. It presents the world with a new vision for post-pandemic Asian development.

This research discusses the construction of identities in political discourse from the perspective of pragmatics, taking Xi's keynote speech in 2022 as a corpus, and summarizes various pragmatic identities including the Chairman, to explore the influence of pragmatic identity on the realization of political goals. And this research is also conducive to helping speakers in political discourse explore how pragmatic identity, as a pragmatic resource or pragmatic strategy, maximizes

interpersonal functions. Studying the process of speakers' pragmatic identity construction in political discourse can not only internalize their political intentions but also enhance their interpersonal effects (Yang *et al.*, 2017), thus informing the exploration of discourse construction in China.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this research is pragmatic identity, by which communicators manage to achieve their communicative goals. In the following analysis of Xi's keynote speech, the theory of linguistic adaptation and personal pronouns will be mentioned as well.

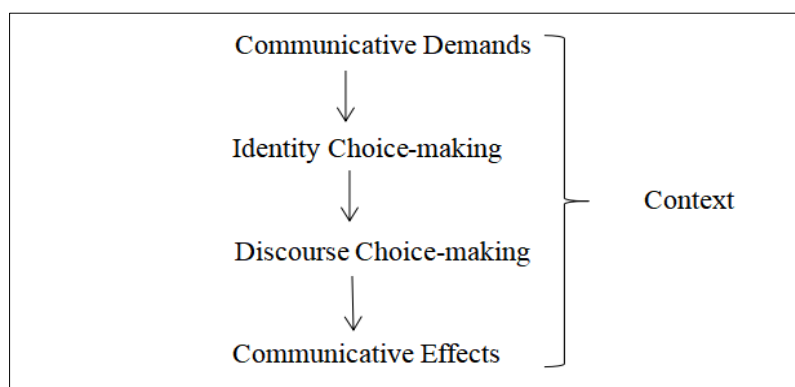
### 2.1 Pragmatic Identity (hereafter referring as PI)

Identity construction is an important topic in the fields of systemic-functional linguistics and critical discourse analysis. In traditional views, identity is originally a sociological concept, referring to social individuals or the social characteristics of the community (e.g. age, gender) (Chen, 2013a), or roles in society (Stryker, 1987), or position or status within a certain social relationship (e.g. origin, qualification) (Marx and Engels, 1997). After going through the shift from Essentialism to Social Constructivism, and with the rise and development of interactive sociolinguistics, conversational analysis, and pragmatics (Chen, 2013), it has now become the focus of pragmatic scholars.

Pragmatics redefines identity from the perspective of verbal communication or discourse and puts forward the concept of *pragmatic identity or identity in use*. The pragmatic identity theory was first proposed by Professor Chen Xinren in his lectures and

projects in 2008. Pragmatic identity theory accepts the view of identity construction (Joseph, 2004), which refers to the process by which communicators construct a dynamic identity mainly through verbal symbols. Pragmatic identity is a constructively context-dependent identity. According to Chen Xinren and his student Yuan Zhoumin (2013), identity is a contextual factor, thus pragmatic identity is the pragmaticalization of the communicator's social identity, and they proposed that the communicator serves it as a part of the pragmatic resources and potential context. Jiang Qingsheng (2019) integrates the perspectives of participants and analysts in the last decades, then puts forwards five main research approaches on PI, namely, pragmatic identity as interpretive resources, illocutionary resources, interpersonal resources, explanatory resources, and evaluative resources. These approaches have demonstrated adequate explanatory power, which produces five methodologies (Jiang, 2019).

According to Chen Xinren (2013), pragmatic identity refers to one's contextualized identity chosen by language users consciously or unconsciously, as well as the identity of the other social individual or group mentioned by the speaker or author in his discourse. Yuan Zhoumin (2013) holds that pragmatic identity can be regarded as a dynamic online identity. The following graph, proposed by Chen Xinren (2013), explains the dynamic choice-making of pragmatic identity. It is found that speakers' choices of pragmatic identity are driven by their communicative demands in their current context. And different identity choices would force them to choose different styles of discourses and produce different communicative effects.



**Graph 1: The Dynamic Choice-making of Pragmatic Identity**

Compared with social identities, PI has the following distinctive characteristics: communicative dependence and temporality; dynamics and variability; it can be seen as the use of pragmatic resources; it's subjective and purposive (Chen, 2013).

Although previous studies on pragmatic identity vary across many perspectives at home and abroad, as pragmatic identity proposed by Chen Xinren,

studies on pragmatic identity at home are more productive than those abroad (Zhen, 2019).

Domestic research on pragmatics identity construction is mainly focused on the studies from the aspects of news headlines (Wu, 2014), advertisements (Chen, 2018), adaptation theory (Yuan, 2014), consultants in business conversations (Yuan *et al.*, 2013), oral academic interaction and academic papers

(Ren, 2016; Zhong, 2018), literacy works (Cai, 2019; Yuan, 2020), courtesy expression and other fields, which shows great research potential. However, pragmatic identity in political discourse is rarely discussed. Thus, this research takes Xi's keynote speech as a corpus to analyze the influence of pragmatic identity on the achievement of political intention and communicative goals.

## 2.2 Theory of Linguistic Adaptation

The theory of linguistic adaptation, proposed by Jef Verschueren, claims that context is dynamic and changes with the development of verbal communication, and that language is variable, negotiable, and adaptable, which is also the reason why language users can make appropriate choices in communication. Among its three features, variability provides the possibility for language adaptation (Verschueren, J, 1999).

According to Chen Xinren (2004: 34), linguistic adaptation theory consist of four dimensions, that is adaptation, functionality, variability, and negotiability. Functionality, as a property of language, refers that determines how well language can be used to meet communicators' communicative needs in a particular context (Chen, 2004). Variability means that the identity choices vary from the changeable or dynamic contexts, which can be reflected in the diversity of social identities of communicators on the one hand, and various language resources on the other hand. Negotiability refers that the choice of language form that is negotiable with meaning and function. Under the linguistic adaptation theory, PI is dynamically constructed by strategic negotiation with the interlocutors (Yuan, 2014).

## 2.3 Personal Deixis or Personal Pronoun

As an important pragmatic strategy, personal pronouns are often used to construct the identity of the speaker in speech communication (Ren, 2016). Li Jingwei (1996:10) pointed out that communicators can adjust the relationship such as role positioning, shifting, substitution, and mixing with the help of the specific meaning of personal pronouns, to achieve effective communication.

In political speech, combined with different occasions, the choice of different personal deixis or pronouns can reflect different political attitudes of speakers, which helps to establish a specific interactive relationship between speaker and listener, to realize the interpersonal function of political speech (Wang, 2013:51). Therefore, it is of particular significance to analyze the use and choice of the personal deixis in the

political speech discourse and to explore the reasons behind these choices (Wu D *et al.*, 2019).

According to the tripartite model of context proposed by Verschueren (1999), the context includes the physical world, the social world, and the psychological world (Ran, 2007). According to Ran (2007), the emergence and function of person deixis are mainly influenced by the social world and psychological world and their overlapping influences. In such context, pragmatic empathy and de-empathy have come into being. The former is to achieve interpersonal harmony in the social world and close psychological or emotional distance. While the latter is to expand the social distance with the opposite party.

## 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

In this part, the corpus description and data collection will be elaborated on. The research questions or objectives will be clarified as well. And finally, the research tool will be introduced.

### 3.1 Corpus Description and Data Collection

At present, a century of change and the world epidemic are intertwined and superimposed, and the world has entered a new epic of turbulence and change. Against this background, General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered a speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia on April 22, 2022, whose theme is "The World in COVID-19 & Beyond: Working Together for Global Development and Shared Future". This speech provides insight into the current changing situation and responds to the concerns of the times, which is of great significance to the historical great cause of building a community with a shared future for mankind. The reason why this research conducted and analyzed this keynote speech is that it is a significant political speech discourse delivered by President Xi Jinping, and it is a new material and closely follows current events. The materials collected in this research are all the original political speeches from the Xinhua website.

In terms of the classification of pragmatic identity, combining the study of her doctoral thesis with the classification of identity by Hyland (2002) and Tracy (2003), Li Juan (2006) divided pragmatic identity into three categories: professional identity, social identity, and personal identity (Yang *et al.*, 2017). In this speech, Xi Jinping exhibits his various identities, including social identities and pragmatic identities. The most prominent identity is the Chinese President, who is obliged to perform some specific functions. Here is the classification of pragmatic identities in 2022 Xi's keynote speech.

**Table 1: The Classification of Pragmatic Identities in 2022 Xi's Keynote Speech**

Pragmatic Identity	Social Identity	Chinese President	
		Chinese citizen	
	Derived identity	Economic identity	Economic planner
			Global economic recovery facilitator
		Political identity	Defender of the International Order
			Global governance pioneer
		Identity about People	People-centered advocate
		World Identity	Global development contributor
World Peace lover and builder			

This table shows that pragmatic identities in this speech consist of two kinds of identity--social identities and derived identities. As the discussion on pragmatic identity in political speech discourses is less than that in other discourses, to enrich President Xi's pragmatic identity, derived identity is proposed as a derivation of the identity of the Chinese president from four perspectives, that is the Chinese president's four main political functions in the domestic economy, politics, people and the world responsibilities.

### 3.2 Research Questions and Objectives

This research focuses on answering the following questions:

- 1) In political speech discourse, what pragmatic identities does President Xi construct? And what characteristics of these pragmatic identities have?
- 2) Why does President Xi construct such as specific pragmatic identity? Or what pragmatic functions does he want to perform?
- 3) How does President Xi construct these pragmatic identities in the political speech discourse? Or what strategies does he use to achieve pragmatic functions?

### 3.3 Research Tool

In this research, both qualitative and quantitative methods are adopted. The quantitative method uses a corpus tool to sum data of personal pronouns. While the qualitative approach is adopted in analyzing how the speaker achieves his communicative goals by using one of the strategies --personal pronoun. Recently, with the development of corpus linguistics, #LancsBox6.0, a practical and useful corpus tool, has been increasingly popular. It is a new-generation software package for the analysis of language data and corpora developed at Lancaster University. With the help of #LancsBox6.0, this research figures out the frequency of personal pronouns by searching the keywords "PRONOUN", and finally does a qualitative approach to analyze Xi's keynote speech.

## 4. CORPUS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, Xi's keynote speech is analyzed from two aspects: the theory of linguistic

adaptation and personal deixis or personal pronoun, which are two strategies for constructing and exchanging pragmatic identity as well. In this part, Xi's various pragmatic identities and their derived identities, as the table is shown above, will be analyzed. And their pragmatic functions and characteristics will be clarified as well.

### 4.1 Analysis of the Theory of Linguistic Adaptation

This speech is delivered amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, with sluggish economic recovery and complicated geopolitics. And its target audience is people all over the world. The world stands at a new crossroads. To express his political stance and attitudes, intention, and points of view, Xi needs to choose and change his identities according to different contexts or different communicative goals, which shows the functionality of linguistic adaptation theory. The whole process of choosing is dynamic, due to the diversity of social identities and variable communicative demands. For example, Xi, as the Chinese President, needs to perform his political functions, such as Economic planner; Global economic recovery facilitator; Defender of the international order; Global governance pioneer; People-centered supporter; Global development contributor; World Peacebuilder. Look at the following instances.

Example 1: "We should stay committed to building an open world economy, stay on top of the dominant trend of economic globalization, increase macro policy coordination, keep global industrial and supply chains stable...."

Example 2: "We need to work together to promote economic recovery."

Example 3: "We should seize these opportunities to foster a more open Asia-wide market."

The three examples above have shown Xi's derived identities on the aspect of the economy. Example 1 expresses President Xi and the Chinese people's commitment to making a blueprint of the world economy, and their detailed measures, showing Xi's pragmatic identity as an economic planner. Both example 2 and 3 conveys President Xi's urgency and

suggestion for promoting economic recovery, showing his pragmatic identity as a global economic recovery facilitator. The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a major blow to past achievements in global poverty reduction, and the Ukraine crisis has put further pressure on the recovery of the fragile world economy, posing severe challenges. In this context, President Xi's proposal to plan for the future economy and promotion of the recovery of the world economy conforms to the current situation, which reflects the dynamic nature of pragmatic identity and the functionality and variability of linguistic adaptation theory.

Example 4: "We need to firmly safeguard the international system with the UN at its core and the international order underpinned by international law."

Example 5: "The Global Development Initiative (GDI) I proposed last year has been echoed..."

Example 6: "We need to work together to tackle global governance challenges."

Example 7: "Instead, we need to embrace a global governance philosophy that emphasizes extensive consultation."

Example 8: "For the ship to navigate the storm and sail toward a bright future, all passengers must pull together."

Example 9: "Second, we should vigorously advance Asian cooperation."

In today's world, unilateralism and extreme egoism will never work. Only by strengthening international cooperation can we achieve win-win outcomes. In example 4, President Xi advocates that all countries should be a defender of the international order, following the chapter of the UN and the rules of the international community. In example 5, at this year's Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference, President Xi Jinping put forward The Global Development Initiative (GDI) for the first time, which systematically explains China's solutions to global security challenges and enriches the connotation of China's new security concept, thus it was warmly received by the international community. In examples 6 and 7, President Xi suggests that the countries in the world embrace global governance challenges as global governance pioneers. In today's era, Asian countries need to work together and support each other to properly respond to global challenges. Therefore, he also emphasizes the importance of cooperation. In example 8, President Xi uses a metaphor to tell all the people are passengers on the same ship. All the people need to enhance international cooperation, and so does example 9. By following the linguistic adaptation theory, President Xi constructs derived identities as a defender of the international order and global governance pioneer, to appeal to all countries to take specific measures to build a better world.

Example 10: "We should follow a people-centered approach, place development and people's well-being high on the agenda."

Example 11: "when policies are implemented, measures adopted, and actions taken, always give top priority to bettering people's lives."

Example 12: "We need to work together to defend people's lives and health."

As the world pandemic threatens the lives and health of people over the world, China first managed to fight against Covid-19. China is a socialist country that advocates putting people first unswervingly. In example 10, President Xi follows a people-centered approach and is concerned about people's well-being, taking a people-centered supporter or guardian of human health as his derived identity, which successfully expresses his points of view of giving top priority to the people.

Example 13: "We must keep COVID vaccines a global public good and ensure their accessibility and affordability in developing countries."

Example 14: "China has provided over 2.1 billion doses of vaccines to more than 120 countries and international organizations."

Example 15: "We need to work together to maintain peace and stability in the world."

Example 16: "First, we should resolutely safeguard peace in Asia."

As the greatest developing country, China has made a great contribution to the world in many fields and has made great progress in improving its public health system and response mechanism. What's more, China upholds the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. Examples 13 and 14 embody China's specific measures and achievements in providing anti-epidemic assistance to the world and its responsibility. In these two examples, President Xi constructs his pragmatic identity as a global development contributor, which is conducive to conveying a good image of the great country and a sense of responsibility, and demonstrates the outstanding wisdom and aspiration of leaders of the great country.

Against the background that Asia has become an important region for big-power politics, maintaining peace, cooperation, and solidarity in Asia is of vital importance to world peace and stability. In such context, President Xi appeals to all the countries and people in the world to keep and cherish peace and stability in examples 15 and 16.

All the examples mentioned above follow the theory of linguistic adaptation, in which speaker makes choices from various identities based on their communicative goals or political intentions. These derived identities show the characteristics of

communicative dependence, dynamics, and variability of pragmatic identities. In the process of constructing pragmatic identities, speakers take PI as a pragmatic resource to achieve certain purposes.

#### 4.2 Analysis from Personal Deixis

Here, personal deixis is conducted by personal pronouns including the first personal pronoun, the second personal pronoun, and the third personal pronoun. The following table is the distribution of personal pronouns in Xi's keynote speech.

**Table 2: The Distribution of Personal Pronouns in Xi's Keynote Speech**

Personal pronoun	The first person				The second person		The third person			
	we	us	our	I	you	your	They/them	China	Asia	it
Number	26	2	7	2	0	0	2	14	11	10
Percentage (%)	35%	3%	9%	3%	0%	0%	3%	19%	15%	13%

From the Table 2, it is found that President Xi mainly used the first person and the third person, which accounts for 50% and 47%. "Asia" and "China" are also included in the third person. In the first person, "we" is used most frequently, by which Xi managed to construct his various derived identities. There are some examples as follows.

Example 17: "I want to begin by extending, on behalf of the Chinese government and people and also in *my* own name..."

Example 18: "Faced with the many challenges, *we* must not lose confidence, hesitate or flinch. Instead, *we* must firm up confidence and press ahead against all odds."

Example 19: "*We* humans are living in an indivisible security community."

Example 20: "*We* should pay due attention to the pressing needs of developing countries...."

The frequency of personal deixis is determined by the identity of the hearer and the communicative purpose of the speaker (Yang *et al.*, 2017). In example 17, the social identity activated by Xi Jinping is the Chinese President. As this is a speech whose target audience is the people in the whole world, at the beginning of his speech, the speaker must point out his identity directly, to tell the audience that he was delivering the keynote address as the identity of the Chinese President. In examples 18 and 19, Xi regards himself as a common Chinese citizen, which is a social identity as well. Under the context of the world pandemic and other international challenges, he, as a common citizen who lives in the shared community, urges people all over the world to build up confidence and overcome the challenges. In example 20, "we" represents all the developed countries and those countries with strong economic strength and appeals to them to help those countries indeed, which shows China's spirit of contribution and aspiration of devoting to the whole world.

By using the first pronoun "I" and "we", Xi conveys a sense of community and equality and shortens the distance from the audience, which finally can create a natural and harmonious atmosphere.

As for the third person, President Xi used several kinds of subjects, among which "China" and "Asia" made up the largest portion. There are some examples as follows.

Example 21: "*China* will fully apply its new development philosophy, accelerate the establishment of a new development paradigm, and redouble efforts for high-quality development."

Example 22: "To promote security for all in the world, *China* would like to propose a Global Security Initiative as follows."

Example 23: "*China* will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, and always be a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of the international order."

Example 24: "*People in Asia* deeply cherish the value of peace and understand that development gains do not come easily."

The examples shown above demonstrate various and dynamic pragmatic identities, such as economic planner in example 21, global governance pioneer in example 22, and World peace lover and builder in examples 23 and 24. According to Ran (2007), functions of personal deixis with pragmatic empathy and de-empathy are mainly the first and third-person deixis. Here, to strengthen the authority of the government and make his discourse more credible, inspiring, and motivating, President Xi uses the third personal deixis "China" as his identity to show that he represents China at the moment. The third personal deixis shows an attitude of objectiveness. As the Boao Forum for Asia is an important bridge connecting China and the world, and an international exchange platform with Asian characteristics and global influence, the countries in Asia have a particularly important responsibility and mission to build a better world. President Xi uses the third personal deixis "Asia" as his identity to show his prospects to the world, that is adhering to high-quality development, implementing the GDI, and sticking to the path of peaceful development.

By using the strategies of personal pronouns or deixis flexibly, President Xi has expressed successfully

his political appeals and achieved his communicative purposes. The process of exchanging identities shows the dynamic and purposive nature of pragmatic identity. It turns out that pragmatic identity can be seen as a pragmatic resource to help communicators to achieve their various communicative functions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of pragmatics and with the help of the corpus tool -- #LancsBox6.0, this research takes a speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia on April 22, 2022, delivered by President Xi as a corpus, discusses the pragmatic identity construction in such political discourse and the influence of pragmatic identity on the realization of the speaker's political purpose, which can better enrich China's political discourse construction.

The results show that in Xi's this keynote speech, various derived identities are developing from pragmatic identities, and linguistic adaptation theory and personal deixis or personal pronoun are the two strategies for constructing pragmatic identities. The process of constructing pragmatic identities is dynamic, context-dependent or communication--dependent, and purposive. Pragmatic identities can be regarded as a pragmatic resource to achieve communicative or political intention. That is, the speakers will find the most beneficial and suitable identities to help achieve certain communicative goals, to make the interaction continue smoothly.

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