

Original Paper

A Comparison of the Identity Construction of Foreign Ministers of PRC Regarding the Issues of Territorial Sovereignty and State Relations

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Abstract

The implicature under diplomatic discourse has been an interesting topic for both the media and the public. Foreign minister's response to the media ought to stand for the position of the government and the foreign minister's Question Time is made accessible on the Internet, thus the public may get to know what kind of people their leaders are and how they deal with other countries. However, chances are that spokesmen may react variously when they are confronted with some aggressive questions or some questions that make them feel offended. Additionally, different spokesmen may use different tactics in order to set forth China's position and its attitudes towards territorial sovereignty and state relations. This paper aims to investigate the identity construction of two spokesmen through their responses to the media all over the world and to reveal the implicatures behind these responses. Foreign minister's Question Time will be used as data.

Keywords

discourse analysis, foreign minister, identity construction

1. Introduction

The National People's Congress (NPC) of PRC is held every year. Traditionally, foreign minister will be asked to answer questions regarding China's foreign policy and its attitudes towards some hot issues after NPC. This paper mainly compares the reply of the current foreign minister Wang Yi and that of former minister Yang Jiechi in the Question Time after the National People's Congress in 2013 and 2016. The reason why this paper chooses these two texts as data is that both of the two transcripts contain pointed questions which involve issues about national relations and territorial disputes. To some extent, such kind of questions is tough and may make the foreign minister feel uncomfortable. If

that is the case, something can be seen through the content and the manner of the responses.

Based on the theory of both Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which the author is particularly interested in, this paper will conduct analysis from both linguistic features which cover metaphor and agent verb chosen and discursive strategies which involve the utilization of assumption, assertion, connotation and direct censure. More specifically, Wodak and Meyer's (2009) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) is the major research method for this paper, which is conducted on three levels (i.e., specific topic, discursive strategies and linguistic realization). According to Bhatia (2006), CDA allows us to investigate why the participants say what they say, and how they say it. That is to say, by focusing on critical discourse analysis, the underlying implicatures and intentions of diplomatic discourse will be revealed so that both the media and the public will grasp the understanding of China on the international stage. Additionally, spokesmen may switch from one speaking subject to another when answering questions regarding state relations, which to some extent, shows the degree of intimacy between China and other countries. Furthermore, the utilization of various discursive strategies also shows the purpose of achieving the communicative predominance and that of conveying the promotion of China's image. Moreover, as a method that assist with CDA, CADA pay more attention to the text which can help identifying the linguistic features in foreign ministers' responses such as word frequency of "I" & "We". For the present study, a small corpus comprising 10 questions-answers regarding territorial disputes and state relations in two press conferences will be constructed.

For this paper, it will first collect the data from the government official website, which involves the foreign minister's answers to journalists and transcript the spoken discourse, then it will conduct a critical discourse analysis focusing on foreign minister's answers to journalists using AntConc for linguistic feature analysis and DHA for discursive strategy analysis and finally it will make a conclusion by pointing out the real implicatures behind the answers of foreign ministers and summarize the differences between responses of the two foreign ministers. Before starting drafting this paper, the author has read various studies regarding CDA studies based on political discourse in response to media's questions, such as studies of Bhatia (2006), Harris (2001) and Bull and Wells (2012). It is found that some focus on presidents' responses so as to reveal ideology differences whereas others focus on media's aggressive questioning. For the present study, it will mainly focus on identity construction of two foreign ministers when they are on the reign.

2. Data Analysis

2.1 Linguistic Features

Linguistic feature is the language personality reflected by discourse. The foreign minister's Question Time is often regarded as a "war zone filled with mines" since foreign ministers will never know what kind of questions they are going to answer and what kind of spite they are going to deal with.

During the analysis of the data, it is found that utilization of metaphor and idiom can be traced in the discourse of former foreign minister Yang Jiechi. For example, when a journalist from Hong Kong Satellite TV asked about China's attitude towards its disputes with neighboring countries and its foreign policy towards those countries, Yang utilized one metaphor to shed light on that opinion. "Metaphor plays a central role in the construction of social and political reality and political metaphors are often regarded as integral aspects of argumentative reasoning (Musolff, 2004, p. 32)." Using the metaphor of playing chess, Yang indicated China's views on the international situation.

(1) "When I was a child, I was very fond of playing chess games. I learned both Chinese Go and the Chinese military chess. From that early days on, I have learned that to win in a chess game, you need to have the whole picture on your mind." (Yang)

Through this example, we can see that Yang is confident about China's current situation and it seems like that everything is under control. This particular metaphor helped forming the argument. He also quoted an old Chinese proverb "Yet the tree prefers calm, but the wind refuses to subside" in order to tell the public that China's neighboring countries kept stirring up trouble and the stable situation can not be maintained by China's own efforts. To some extent, this metaphor and proverb achieved some kind of effects of showing that China is a peace-loving country and it is not willing to be embroiled in disputes. Furthermore, the referenced proverb shows that China seems to try to get rid of duty of causing those disputes and it is one of the major victims of territorial disputes. By contrast, answers given by the minister Wang Yi seem to be more objective than Yang since the former preferred to quote President Xi Jinping's words and thoughts, which seems quite persuasive and powerful. (see example 2) Therefore, we can see from the above examples that Wang is less tactful than Yang in the aspect of diction.

(2) "President Xi has pointed out time and again that when China and the United State work together, we can accomplish great things that benefit our two countries and the whole world." (Wang)

Additionally, in terms of agent word chosen, Wang used plenty of first-person plurals (i.e., we, our) and third-person pronoun such as Chinese government, China, etc., but no first-person pronoun to shed light on his opinions as well as China's views on some issues which form sharp contrast. (see Table 1 & 2) According to CDA, agent word chosen is influenced by the social status and power relation between two parties. In other words, the use of agent word can reflect the relation between two sides. Besides, frequency can be an indicator of markedness (Baker, 2010, p. 125). Answers to some foreign journalists are indirect responses to foreign government and the sequential use of 'we' and 'China' indicated that Wang intended to show that Chinese government is firm enough to deal with problems. However, although Yang adopted 'we' as well, he also incorporated instance of himself, which can, to some extent, shorten the distance between itself and journalists.

Table 1. Word Frequency List for Yang

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	168	the
2	123	and
3	81	of
4	72	to
5	52	in
6	51	China
7	32	countries
8	26	i
9	20	for
10	15	relations

Table 2. Word Frequency List for Wang

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	321	the
2	218	and
3	136	to
4	133	of
5	110	China
6	88	in
7	75	a
8	51	is
9	43	we
10	41	countries

2.2 Discursive Strategies

Proper utilization of discursive strategies is the embodiment of expertise of foreign ministers and it is the mission for them to adopt appropriate strategies in order to maintain the image of government. In the course of this analysis, it is found that both Wang and Yang adopted combined discursive strategies when expressing opinions and among which assumption, assertion, connotation ranked high. Minister Wang preferred to adopt assumptions and connotations in his speech.

(3) *“If the tensions worsen or even get out of control, it would be a disaster for all parties.” (Wang)*

The example is the answer to China’s attitudes towards the situation of Korean Peninsula and the so-called “all parties” refers to the DPRK, Korean, China and America mainly. Additionally, such assumption was posed achieving the effect of calling on America not to harm others (the DPRK & China) without benefit to itself. This assumption was followed by an assertion (see example 4), which shows China’s strong dissatisfaction towards US’s continuous war bully to the DPRK. It is remarkable that many people may say that China’s dissatisfaction is just a matter of indifference and nobody will care about it. However, the fact is there are some diplomatic jargons, which means if the kind warnings have not been accepted and no agreement has been made, then war draws near since there were two such incidents in history.

(4) “We strongly urge the parties to act with reason and constraint and refrain from aggravating tensions.” (Wang)

In addition, Wang made statements in quite a powerful way using assertion and connotation. According to Huckin (2005), connotation refers to the associations and nuances of meaning that go beyond a word’s dictionary definition. For example, one journalist from the Reuters asked him about whether China was trying to hide something in the South China Sea, which involves doubts about China’s territorial sovereignty, he first posed some presuppositions of history which tell the public and the media that the South China Sea belongs to China since ancient times. Then, he started to denounce in an indirect way (see example 5).

(5) “China was not the first country to deploy weapons in the Nansha Islands and was not the country that deploys the most weapons and was not the country that will conduct most frequent military activities. People talked a lot about militarization, I think China cannot be accused of militarizing, this label is more suited to some other countries.” (Wang)

“Connotation (vague deixis) is to prompt the interpreters to relate the uttered indexical expression to various situational features (Chilton, 2004).” In other words, the indirect reference is connected with other subtle features in specific situation. In this example, Wang used a sequence of negation to show that China had to resort to the threat of force for self-defense. Interestingly, ‘other countries’ is an indirect reference to those countries like the US who conducted military exercise regularly. Such indirect reference is a connotation indeed.

(6) “I want to remind some people that the freedom of navigation doesn’t give them license to do whatever they want. If someone want to muddy the water on the South China Sea and to destabilize Asia, China will not agree to it and the overwhelming majority of countries in that region will not allowed that to happen.” (Wang)

Example (6) is another perfect representation of the use of connotation in which “some people” refers indirectly to Japanese officials since Japanese fleet once navigated within the twelve-mile point, which violated the international maritime law. Besides, “someone” signifies the US who posed Asia-Pacific Strategy in order to consolidate its own position and those countries who share the same attitudes with the US.

When it comes to China’s national fundamental interests, Wang showed China’s firm stance in a serenely confident way.

(7) “The Philippines’ action, on the other hand, is unlawful, unfaithful and unreasonable... Its stubbornness is clearly the result of behind-the-scenes instigation and political maneuvering. This so-called arbitration has become tainted and gone astray, and China is not going to humor it.” (Wang)

The above example is the answer to the arbitration case of Philippines against China. Wang adopted three derogatory expressions in succession to completely negate that case. In China’s view, such arbitration case is just “a political farce under the cloak of law”, which will not pose any threats to

China. Additionally, China is indifferent to those who maneuvered the case and ostensibly support Philippines out of its own interests.

In comparison, former minister Yang tended to adopt assertion and direct censure when confronting with questions regarding the doubts and denials of territorial sovereignty.

(8) “The Diaoyu Islands and its affiliated islands have been China’s territory since ancient times. The root cause of the Diaoyu Islands is Japan’s illegal seizure and occupation of China’s territory. And the current situation was caused by the Japanese side single-handedly.” (Yang)

Yang used words like ‘illegal’ and ‘single-handedly’ to express China’s standpoint towards Diaoyu Islands disputes and its strong condemn towards Japanese provocative acts. We can also see from the example that Yang intended to indicate that Japanese side should make dialogues and consultations with China, otherwise the relationship between China and Japan will get worsen.

Nevertheless, when talking about Sino-US relations, Yang switched into another strategy, which is less direct and seems more gentle.

(9) “The US side, in particular, needs to properly handle Taiwan and other sensitive issues.” (Yang)

This example presupposes that the US did not stand together with Chinese side in dealing with Taiwan issue, which in other words, indicates that the Taiwan is the inherent part of China and China called on the US to face this point squarely. Otherwise, the relationship of two states may get affected. In this example, we can notice that presupposition is entailed. “Presuppositions are not made explicit unless they are being challenged or rejected (Chilton, 2004).” That is to say, Yang presupposed that Taiwan belongs to China since ancient times grounded on history knowledge and he tried to gain some discursive predominance to persuade the media and the public to accept it.

Integrating example 8 & 9, the reason why former minister Yang adopted two different strategies here lies in the differences between Sino-US relations and Sino-Japanese relations. The former is called ‘cooperative partnership based on mutual respect and mutual benefit’, which means we cooperate with each other since we have common interest in various fields despite of the fact that we originally belong to rival camps. However, the latter is called ‘strategic relationship of mutual benefit’ where there is no cooperation at all. Yang avoided criticizing the US pointedly in view of such kind of relatively intimate relationship and tried to be polite as well.

3. Discussion

Based on the segments that have been discussed, similarities and differences do exist and can be captured through the above data analysis. Other than the various relations between China and other countries, the other reason lies in both of the foreign ministers tried to adopt an appropriate amount of politeness (Flowerdew, 2012, p. 106) in order to maintain image of China and show friendliness. The only difference is that unlike former minister Yang, Wang adopted more assumptions and connotations, which are regarded as indirect discursive strategy. The reason behind this might be that China are incrementally concerned about its international image and the foreign minister is trained to show

politeness.

With the above findings and analysis, this paper may help the media and the public better understand why foreign ministers react in such ways and what the underlying implicatures so as to provide guidelines for them to interpret. Besides, this paper may also be beneficial for those who devoted himself/herself into the filed of public relations. Notwithstanding, this paper has some limitations as well. Firstly, in terms of the analysis of linguistic features using corpus, the small number of representative examples can not capture all the features that foreign ministers' statements covered. Therefore, the small sample of texts should be investigated into a bigger corpus. Secondly, the analysis of discursive strategies may need further investigation with more profound understanding. Thirdly, the inevitable problem for doing critical discourse analysis is that the conversational implicature that this paper obtained is based on the author's knowledge of sociology so that it is too deterministic in its interpretations and bias exists. However, the interpretation is not the end and further research may be required in order to work out the limitations as much as possible.

4. Conclusions

This paper strives to compare different communication styles of China's former foreign minister Yang Jiechi and current foreign minister Wang Yi through the language features of their words and the discursive strategies they have chosen when answering journalists' varied questions. What's more, the implicatures behind those answers are investigated as well. Similarly, identity is constructed in discourse in spite of its broad meanings (Michael Bamberg, Anna De Fina & Deborah Schiffrin, 2011). Based on the findings and analysis, this paper reveals that the identity constructions of the two are quite different. We can conclude that the former minister Yang preferred to adopt "I" as subject and to cite himself as examples which show that his identity seems not to be connected with the government closely despite of the fact that spokesmen are representatives of their countries, governments and socio-political systems (Bhatia, 2006). Besides, the utilization of assertion and direct censure are common in his speech, which indicate that he is straightforward and frank and he showed his outrage in front of doubts and denials towards Chinese territory. However, unlike Yang, current minister Wang Yi used "we", "our", "China" regularly and quoted President Xi's words to declare his stance. Additionally, he preferred to adopt indirect strategies such as connotation and assumption to express his views, which suggests that the stance and attitude conveyed by current foreign minister are more in line with the government's policy than the previous one.

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Appendix

Data 1

http://news.xinhuanet.com/video/2016-03/08/c_128783089.htm

Data 2

<https://wenku.baidu.com/view/95edfd2d0722192e4436f600.html>