The Projection of China's National Image in President Xi Jinping's Speeches

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In the 21st century, soft power has become an important element to evaluate a nation's comprehensive strength. Meanwhile, as an indispensable part of soft power, national image receives more and more attention on the political stage. Since Chinese President Xi Jinping's speeches have unique features and greatly reflect positive national images of China, many scholars start to analyze them from diversified perspectives. Based on Du Bois' theory of "the Stance Triangle" and the Indexicality Principle, taking President Xi Jinping's speech at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation for example, this paper expounds how President Xi achieves the evaluation, position, and alignment between the subject and object by means of overt labeling, implicature and presupposition, covert evaluation statement, and ideology-laden linguistic structure, in order to establish China's national image. Through the analysis, the author intends to figure out how national leaders use various persuasive methods to achieve their political purpose. And the author hopes this thesis can provide a new perspective for further analysis on national leaders' speeches.

Keywords: Xi Jinping's speech, national image, the stance triangle, the indexicality principle

Introduction

With the development of the world multi-polarization and economic globalization, the political, economic, and cultural ties among countries in the world become ever closer. Since its reform and opening up, China has actively participated in the international cooperation and competition and has opened wider to the outside world. Meanwhile, as an indispensable element of China's soft power, the national image of China plays an important role in increasing China's comprehensive national strength, economic power, and innovation ability, and greatly improves China's international status. In such case, more and more scholars begin to thoroughly analyze texts like political speeches, diplomatic comments, and press conferences to figure out how the speakers have tried to successfully build the positive national image of China. Since political speeches by national leaders significantly present the country's historical background, social ideology, and developing trend,

the author attempts to propose a theoretical framework by integrating "the Stance Triangle" and the Indexicality Principle for the current research into President Xi Jinping's speech at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, in order to figure out how President Xi establishes the profound national image of China.

Theoretical Basis

With the frequent interaction between countries, national leaders become more active in making speeches, whether to push their own points of views or to show their enthusiasm in responding beneficial calls all over the world. "Among various political speeches, national leaders' speeches were characterized as a highly institutionalized speaking scene" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 55). Many Chinese scholars have tried to examine the characteristics of national leaders' speeches with the help of different theories and from different perspectives. For instance, Jiang and Liu (2009) thoroughly analyzed meta-functions of Barack Obama's victory speech in 2008 presidential election; Xu and Zhu (2014) analyzed President Xi's speech within the framework of Kenneth Burke's Rhetoric of Discourse Act; and Meng (2017), in order to make clear how national images of Egypt has been established in national leaders' speeches, analyzed the use of person deixis and appraisal resources in Egypt's President Sisi's speech at UN. These studies have provided great enlightenment for the present study. In this thesis, the author attempts to propose a new theoretical framework by integrating "the Stance Triangle" and the Indexicality Principle together to analyze President Xi Jinping's speech. As the essential theory, John W. Du Bois' theory of "the Stance Triangle" provides a thread for analyzing the speech text, while the Indexicality Principle is taken as an approach for the detailed analysis of the strategies employed to present the positive national images of China.

"The Stance Triangle" Theory

"Stance can be approached as a linguistically articulated form of social action whose meaning is to be construed within the broader scope of language, interaction and sociocultural value" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 139). Du Bois arrived at five conceptual principles defining stance:

> (1) Stance-taking occurs on three levels as physical action, personal attitude/belief/ evaluation and social morality; (2) stance is public and perceivable, interpretable and available for inspection by others; (3) stance is interactional and it is collaboratively constructed among participants with respect to other stances; (4) stance is indexical, evoking aspects of the broader sociocultural frameworks or physical contexts; (5) stance is consequential, leading to real consequences for the persons or institutions involved. (Du Bois, 2007, p. 182)

Stance plays a critical role from written texts to talk-in-interaction. Du Bois' theory of the Stance Triangle came out as the major theoretical contribution for the analysis of stance in discourse. Being a triangle, this theory mainly comprises three key entities—the first subject, the second subject and the (shared) stance object, and three subsidiary acts—evaluation, position, and alignment. However, these three subsidiary acts do not evenly apply to those three entities; they play different roles to analyze the subject and stance object. According to Du Bois' definition of the stance triangle, "stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 163). Obviously, the first or second subject evaluates the stance object, which is considered as the standard to

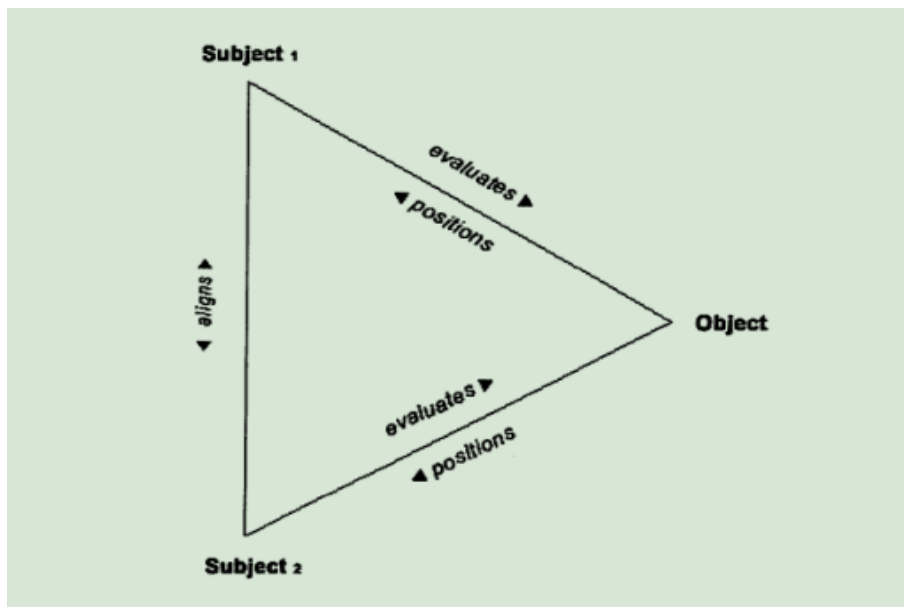reflect the subject's position. Meanwhile, the two subjects align with each other, converge or diverge.

Figure 1. Image of "the Stance Triangle" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 163).

According to Hunston and Thomposon, evaluation in discourse performs three functions: (1) It expresses the speaker's or writer's opinion, and in doing so it reflects the value system of that person and their community; (2) it constructs and maintains relations between the speaker or writer and hearer or reader; (3) it organizes the discourse (2000, p. 241). In general, evaluation is the most salient approach to analyze the stance, because stance-takers can evaluate the object through various forms, such as tone, intonation, body language, lexical and syntactic devices.

Positioning can be defined, provisionally, as "the act of situating a social actor with respect to responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value" (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 50). Positioning closely relates to subjectivity, a simple self-position. Subjectivity is similar to the concept of "stance"; however, its range is smaller than stance, that is, subjectivity only contributes to people while the stance can point to people's emotion, value, attitude, and organizations' behavior, proposal, and statement. "To articulate this kind of subjectivity, what is required is an orientation to a specific object of the speaking subject's stance, combined with specification of a particular intentional relational, such as desiring, hating, liking, not liking and so on" (Searle, 1983, p. 110).

Alignment usually happens between two stance-takers. Take the sentence "I agree with you" as an instance. In this sentence, the two different stance-takers are the first subject (I) and the second subject (you), and the predicate (the verb agree) greatly shows alignment that I support what you say or what you do. Until now, there are several ways to show alignment between stance-takers, such as, "by stance markers like yes or no, or gestures like a nod or a headshake, or any number of other forms that index some degree of alignment" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 144).

The Indexicality Principle

While the Stance Triangle we have discussed characterizes the stance of the stance-takers, the Indexicality

Principle is concerned with the identity of the stance-takers.

> Disparate indexical process of labeling, implicature, stance taking, style marking, and code choice work to construct identity formation at multiple indexical levels rather than focusing on only one, we can assemble a much richer portrait of subjectivity and intersubjectivity as they are constituted in interaction. (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 595)

The Indexicality Principle works through four main related indexical approaches: overt labeling, implicature and presupposition, covert evaluation statement, and ideology-laden linguistic structure with specific personas and groups.

Overt labeling means the overt mention of identity categories and labels in the discourse, which can be positive or negative. Overt labeling is the most direct way to express the subject's identity and helps the readers make a better understanding about the information. The simplest syntactic structure of overt labeling refers to "A is/are B". Also, some linguistic elaboration, such as predicates, adjectives, adverbs can deeply explain and support the identity.

While overt labeling is regarded as a direct way to find the identity, the implicature and presupposition is considered as indirect, implicit, and beyond the literal words. Sometimes overt and precise utterances might easily and directly hurt others; the most appropriate way to handle this situation is using euphemism and implication. Take the personal pronoun "we" as an example. The same word "we" includes two different meanings, inclusive me and exclusive me. Inclusive me means the speakers or writers are willing to regard themselves and listeners as the same species, in order to make a close psychologic empathy. Otherwise, exclusive me means the speakers or writers distinguish partial listeners from themselves and disagree with partial listeners' manner, so as to intensively indicate their own positive identity.

Covert evaluation statement is different from the overt labeling, since the evaluation statement sometimes do not include some overt modifiers to help the audience recognize the speakers'stance and identity. The evaluation statements are formed connecting with some events, fact, and developing trends, which are the main symbols to find the identity.

Actually, the core of the ideology-laden linguistic structure is citation, also quotation. There are various ways for citing, like proverbs, allusion, idioms, and celebrity quotations. Here, we divided citation into two parts, "the overt citation, directly quoting the original citations with quotation marks and covert citation, expressing the citation through writers' own words without quotation marks" (Chen, 1976, p. 213). "When use overt citation, speakers are strongly responsible to the accuracy and authenticity of the citation" (Buttny & Williams, 2000, p. 120).

The Projection of China's National Image

"Country image is the interpretation, cognition and evaluation gaining from the counterpart and social public in the process of mutual exchanges in international politics, economy, culture, military science, technology, education and many other aspects" (Fang & Cai, 2007, p. 32). Obviously, country image plays an important role in the development of a country; therefore, the ways to project a positive country image become indispensable. There are two essential approaches to project a country image. The first aspect, the perceived image, is projected by foreign countries through news medium, public relationship, and so on. "This perceived image, especially towards some developing countries is partial, prejudiced, unreal and even damaged" (Xu,

1996, p. 36). Thus, countries begin to find ways to project their own positive image proactively and consciously, namely the second aspect, self-projected image. Countries can project their self-image via political speeches, news conferences, and economic strength.

The current study tends to find out how the speaker employs discursive strategies to actively establish national image of China. The text analyzed is President Xi Jinping's speech in the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Based on the previously introduced theories, it can be figured out that in the speech the first subject refers to President Xi Jinping, and the second subject refers to people all over the world, and the shared stance object refers to the ancient Silk Road, the road for peace, prosperity, opening up, innovation and civilization, the great undertaking of the Belt and Road Initiative, and the contribution to global development.

The first subject President Xi evaluates some great achievements and the great spirit of the ancient Silk Road, some positive and far-reaching influence of the road for the peace, prosperity, opening up, innovation and civilization, the importance of injecting strong impetus into the Belt and Road Initiative, and the benefit of contributing to the global development. Through these evaluations, President Xi shows his high respect toward history and his dedication and responsibility to develop the Belt and Road Initiative and to benefit countries all over the world. All evaluating results position President Xi's stance that is to make great effort to promote China's great undertaking and global development, and establish China's national images as a leader of bearing in mind and respecting history, a builder of the road for peace, prosperity, opening up, innovation and civilization, a practical actor engaging in the great undertaking of the Belt and Road Initiative, and a contributor to global development. To manifest the positive national images of China, President Xi adopts different ways. Some typical examples are illustrated with the help of the indexicality principle mentioned before.

Overt Labeling

(1) 丝路精神是人类文明的宝贵遗产。
The Silk Road spirit **has become** a great heritage of human civilization.
(2) 如今很多地方却成了冲突动荡和危机挑战的代名词。这种状况不能再持续下去。
Yet today, these places **are** often **associated with** conflict, turbulence, crisis, and challenge. Such state of affairs **should not be allowed** to continue.
(3) 和平赤字、发展赤字、治理赤字，是摆在全人类面前的严峻挑战。这是我一直思考的问题。
Deficit in peace, development, and governance poses a daunting challenge to mankind. This is the issue that **has always been on my mind**.

In the above examples, it is clear to recognize that the method of overt labeling has been applied. In the first example, the structure "…has become…" reveals that the Silk Road spirit, which develops from the ancient silk routes, plays an important role in the human civilization, and President Xi shows his high respect for the achievement of the ancient Silk Road. In the second example, by using structures like "…are associated with…" and "should not be allowed to…", President Xi strongly expresses his hope to change the terrible situation into a peaceful one, like the past. In the similar way, in the last example, "has always been on my mind" reflects that President Xi has been aware of the tense situation which will impact the world and will be harmful to the mankind, and he has dedicated to find out some solutions to transform this challenging situation.

Implicature and Presupposition

    (4) ……我们的先辈筚路蓝缕，穿越草原沙漠，开辟出联通亚欧非的陆上丝绸之路。

        ...**our ancestors**, trekking across vast steppes and deserts, opened the transcontinental passage connecting Asia, Europe and Africa, known today as the Silk Road.

    (5) 我们的先辈扬帆远航，穿越惊涛骇浪，闯荡出连接东西方的海上丝绸之路。

        Our ancestors, navigating rough sea, created sea routes linking the East with the West, namely, the maritime Silk Road.

    (6) 我们要乘势而上、顺势而为，推动"一带一路"建设行稳致远，迈向更加美好的未来。

        We should build on the sound momentum generated to steer the Belt and Road Initiative toward greater success.

These simple examples are similar in that they both use the personal pronoun "our" or "we", which exactly refers to the method of implicature and presupposition. Here, "our ancestors" mainly points to Chinese ancestors who opened the Silk Road and maritime Silk Road and suffered from a lot of difficulties but still persisted their way to the destination. President Xi, one of the Chinese people, is proud of our ancestors' achievement and reminds Chinese people to keep them in mind and to learn from their great spirit. In Example 6, the subject "we" refers to people all over the world, and the speaker President Xi shows his great responsibility towards the development of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Covert Evaluation Statement

The method of covert evaluation statement mainly reflects in some positive verbs, such as opened, adding, embody, won, spurred, witnessed, brought, and boosted. All of these verbs are related with the subject "the ancient silk routes" to present its giant positive impact, which is beneficial for both China and other countries. For instance, the ancient silk routes play a positive role in friendly engagement among nations, the exchange of goods and know-how, and the bustling scenes of visits and trade. President Xi exerts these positive words directly to show his high respect towards history. Also, these positive verbs can quickly motivate listeners' empathy with President Xi so that listeners can catch speaker's feeling as soon as possible to better understand the content of the speech.

    (7) 古丝绸之路，和时兴，战时衰。

        The ancient silk routes **thrived** in times of peace, but **lost** vigor in times of war.

    (8) 中国愿同世界各国分享发展经验，但不会干涉他国内政，不会输出社会制度和发展模式，更不会强加于人。

        We **are ready to** share practices of development with other countries, but we have no intention to interfere in other countries' internal affairs, export our own social system and model of development, or impose our own will on others.

    (9) 不会形成破坏稳定的小集团，而将建设和谐共存的大家庭。

        We have no intention to form a small group detrimental to stability, what we **hope to** create is a big family of harmonious co-existence.

In Example 7, words of opposite meanings like "thrived" and "lost", and "peace" and "war" are used to prove that peace plays an important role in the development of the Belt and Road Initiative. In Examples 8 and 9, "…are ready to…" and "…hope to…" help President Xi greatly express his great determination and his hope to promote a peaceful and harmonious cooperating circumstance in the world, showing that China takes great

responsibility for a peaceful world. Moreover, "…have no intention to…" and "…will not…" indicate that although there still exists some unfair behaviors and policies in the world, China will consistently insist its own positive stance to protect the fair and equal international environment.

Ideology-Laden Linguistic Structure

> (10) 筚路蓝缕。
>   Endure great hardships in pioneer work.
> (11) 凿空之旅。
>   A daring undertaking.
> (12) 桃李不言，下自成蹊。
>   Peaches and plums do not speak, but they are so attractive that a path is formed below the trees.

It is known that the above sayings are classic quotes and ideology-laden linguistic structure. The allusion in Example 10 originally means the hardship of entrepreneurship, and here, President Xi uses this overt statement to reflect the sufferings that our ancestors have conquered when explored the ancient Silk Road, and reminds people of the great accomplishment they have made. Also, President Xi takes this opportunity to propagate classic Chinese ideology to the listeners. Example 11 refers to Zhang Qian, the pioneer that opened an overland route linking the East and the West, breaking the tradition of self-isolation. The word "daring" expresses Zhang's patriotism, selflessness, and boldness. The idiom in Example 12 not only shows the charm of the Belt and Road Initiative, but also reflects the great contribution that China makes.

From the analysis above, it is obvious to see that the four indexical approaches contribute a lot to the projection of China's national image.What needs to be emphasized is that person deixis and appraisal resources play an important role in the process, such as the frequent use of "our" and "we". From President Xi's perspective, "our" mainly refers to Chinese people and "we" involves people all around the world, which demonstrates his high responsibility to promote China's development as a leader and emphasizes his determination to build a better future together with people all over the world. Also, these two words realize the empathy between President Xi and the listeners, so that they will align themselves with him, which to a great extent promotes the popularization of Chinese policies. Appraisal resources mainly include some positive verbs and the present tense. Throughout this speech, positive verbs can be easily recognized such as foster, create, encourage, and so on. These positive verbs not only show President Xi's high respect towards the ancient Silk Road, but present his confidence towards the future developing trend of the Belt and Road Initiative. Meanwhile, most of these verbs were employed in the present tense. "Present tense is a method to express objective truth or regular behavior; also, it presents the mentioned behavior has happened or will happen later" (Meng, 2017, p. 3). Thus, present tense in this speech explains China will continue those beneficial strategies and propose more constructive suggestions; also, China will resolutely resist those harmful policies to keep a harmonious circumstance for future.

Conclusion

The study on the projection of China's national image in the political speech context reveals that in President Xi's speech, types of linguistic approaches can be applied to evaluate, to position, or to reach an alignment. However, there still exist some limitations that should be improved. For instance, when analyzing

President Xi's speech under the frame of the stance triangle, the author mainly discusses the relationship between the first subject and the stance object, connecting with two subsidiary acts—evaluating and positioning, but merely figures out the main stance of the second subject. The main reason is that speech is a little bit unidirectional and in the speech process, the speaker is the major role to express his/her idea and opinion while the listeners hardly have the opportunity to express their thought. Although sometimes the listeners' body languages like applause and snooze can reflect their feelings, those expressions are limited and vague. Therefore, the suggestion to change this embarrassing situation in the future is to analyze some materials that include the interaction between the speakers and listeners; it might be effective to find the video relating to the text analyzed to probe into listeners' reactions.

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