

A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year Message*

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Guided by the critical discourse analysis theory, this paper analyzes the 2014-2018 New Year message delivered by Chinese President Xi Jinping from the following five aspects: high-frequency words, personal pronouns, transitivity, pragmatics, and rhetoric, so as to further realize the conceptual meaning conveyed by Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year message. At the same time, this paper verifies the value and advantages of critical discourse analysis theory in analyzing political speeches, and appreciates President Xi's speech and leadership style.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, New Year message, high frequency words, personal pronouns, transitivity

Introduction

Leaders of China usually deliver New Year message through the media to express holiday blessings to the people of the whole country on the eve of New Year's Day. At the same time, they also take this form and opportunity to explain the current national conditions and the position and attitude of the government.

At present, scholars in China usually study the speeches or political discourses delivered by leaders of west countries. For example, Lei Zhang (2005), Zeng Yaping (2009), and Wang Meiqing (2017) respectively made critical discourse analysis on the speeches and political discourses of US Presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump. Critical discourse analysis on the speech or discourses delivered by Chinese leaders, especially New Year message, is relatively rare. Such as Wu Qiaoling and Hu Xiaoqiong (2014) only analyzed President Xi's New Year message in 2014 from the perspective of transitivity. Zhao Xin (2016) revealed the comparison and translation of Chinese and English versions from the perspective of transitivity by taking President Xi Jinping's New Year message in 2015 as an example. Li Mingran (2017) made a comparative analysis of two translated versions of Xi Jinping's New Year message in 2017 from the perspective of translation ecology. Pan Rong (2017) analyzed the application of rhetoric strategies in Xi Jinping's New Year message from 2014 to 2017 from the perspective of rhetoric. From those studies, we can find that studies on his New Year message have gradually increased, but most of them focus on translation theories and rhetoric analysis. Therefore, this paper takes Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and the relevant theories and methods of critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework to analyzes President Xi Jinping's New Year message from five aspects: high-frequency words, personal pronouns, transitivity, pragmatics, and rhetoric; this paper aims at examine the

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positive significance of critical discourse analysis theory in political discourse analysis, interpreter the connotation conveyed by the message, and try to reveal President Xi Jinping's discourse style.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), also known as critical linguistics, was proposed by Fowler, a famous British linguist, in his book *Language and Control* (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979). This book takes the function of language form in communicative context as the core research in order to reveal the potential thoughts and beliefs that are not easily felt by readers, and at the same time, this book examines the ideological meaning behind language structure and explores the complex relationship among language, authority, and ideology.

Halliday (1994) pointed out that language has three meta-functions at the same time: conceptual function (describing and summarizing experiences and experiences in the objective world and inner world); interpersonal function (building and maintaining social identity and relationship); textual function (connecting discourse to form a whole and associating relevant context). The analysis of political discourse is actually an interpretation of these three functions of language. Xin Bin (2005) holds that Systemic Functional Grammar is more suitable than other theories in discourse analysis. In this way, we can understand the ideas and ideologies contained in the language structure and content. Therefore, due to the different theories, the methods of critical discourse analysis are different. This paper takes Halliday's meta-function of language as the basic theoretical framework and combines quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis and makes a critical discourse analysis of President Xi Jinping's 2014-2018 New Year message from the following five aspects.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Xi's New Year Message

The analytical text of this paper comes from the New Year message of President Xi Jinping from 2014 to 2018 recorded in the corpus of Xi Jinping's speeches (<http://jhsjk.people.cn/>). Among them, there are 29 sentences and 759 words in 2014 New Year message; there are 32 sentences and 1,371 words in 2015 New Year message; total 31 sentences in 2016 New Year message, 1,247 words; 31 sentences and 1,352 words in 2017 New Year message; 43 sentences and 1,687 words in 2018 New Year message. There are 166 sentences and 6,416 words in total for analysis.

High-Frequency Words

Words have interpersonal functions. The choice of words is based on the speaker's ideology, which can reflect the speaker's views on the real world. In political discourse, the speaker's wording is quite rigorous and worthy of analysis. Speakers will carefully select words to express their views and attitudes on major events and international issues. In this paper, text analysis software, Word-Smith 6.0, is used to count the high-frequency words in President Xi Jinping's New Year message. After removing some unimportant function words, the top 10 high-frequency words are shown in Table 1:

From the Table 1, we have concluded that Xi's speech unveils the situation of China's economic development and people's wellbeing in the previous year, analyzes the current world development pattern and international situation, and also clarifies China's responsibilities and contributions in world development, and his speech expresses his good wishes and confidence to lead the people to a happier life.

At the same time, Xi's speech also shows that China adheres to the road of peaceful development and is willing to build a community of human destiny together with the world. It is worth noting that the word "people"

appears frequently in the five-year New Year message, which fully reflects the importance of Chinese people in his heart. Therefore, as a kind of political discourse, New Year message shows the attitude and position of leaders, and also shows the power of political language.

Table 1

Top 10 Words in 2014-2018 New Year Message

No.	Word	Frequency	No.	Word	Frequency
1	we	84	6	comprehensive	23
2	people	59	7	development	21
3	China	34	8	compatriots	21
4	reform	28	9	social	19
5	world	27	10	life	18

Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns are an important means to realize the interpersonal function of language, which semantically indicate the relationship between the word and its referent, and the choice of personal pronouns is also an important part of the speaker's preparation before delivering a speech. Different personal pronouns can express different attitudes and opinions and reflect the degree of intimacy between the two parties. By analyzing the use of personal pronouns, we can find the speaker's attitude towards the audience, and further analyze the speaker's sincerity and thoughts. In the 2014-2018 Xi's New Year message, President Xi Jinping used personal pronouns as shown in Table 2:

Table 2

Frequency of Personal Pronouns in 2014-2018 New Year Message

Personal pronouns		Frequency	Total
First person	I	29	113
	we	84	
Third person	they	16	16

From Table 2, we can see that President Xi used the first personal pronoun plural more frequently than other personal pronouns in his 2014-2018 New Year message, while the second personal pronoun did not appear. The plural of the first personal pronoun is more inclusive, which can narrow the distance between the speaker and the audience and give people the feeling of equal participation. Like "we", it has a strong emotional effect, which shows that there are common interests and goals between the speaker and the listener, which makes it easier for the audience to accept the speaker's point of view. The author takes "we" as the index word and finds the typical sentences in which this word appears in Xi's New Year message and extracts them as follows:

(1) In the great practice of reform and opening up, we have already made countless spectacular achievements. I firmly believe that the Chinese people will create new spectacles. (2014)

(2) We will continue our efforts to act upon people's expectations and turn their aspirations into reality. (2015)

(3) We should have compassion and sympathy, but also take responsibilities and action. (2016)

(4) We have adhered to the peaceful development while resolutely safeguarding the territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests of China. (2017)

(5) At the significant juncture of the 40th anniversary, we should surmount all obstacles to carry the reform further to its ultimate triumph. (2018)

President Xi has used the first personal pronoun plural number many times to show that he is willing to meet challenges and overcome difficulties with the people, and share the fate with the people, so as to lead people of different classes to a happy and decent life together.

Transitivity

Halliday (1994) pointed out that language has three functions: conceptual function, interpersonal function, and textual function. Among them, conceptual function means that people use language to describe and summarize the experiences in the objective world and in the inner world. Hu Zhuanglin, Zhu Yongsheng, Zhang Delu, and Li Zhanzi (2005) held that transitivity is a semantic system and a part of conceptual function. Its function is to divide what people see, hear, and do in the real world into several kinds of “processes”, that is, to classify experience through grammar, and to indicate “participant” and “environmental elements” related to various processes, and there is no order between them, but they form a circle with their specific functions and meanings. In President Xi's New Year message, by analyzing the process types of verbs in each sentence, we find that there are four processes involved: material process, psychological process, relational process, and verbal process. We counted the number of sentences (unit: sentence) containing the above four process types in 166 New Year message. The results are shown in Table 3:

Table 3

Sentence Four Process in 2014-2018 New Year Message

	In 2014	In 2015	In 2016	In 2017	In 2018	Total	Percentage
Material process	15	19	22	12	24	92	61.3%
Psychological process	3	1	1	3	5	13	8.7%
Relational process	6	6	3	4	7	26	17.3%
Verbal process	7	3	2	2	5	19	12.7%

Material process. Material process is the process of doing something. This process itself is generally represented by dynamic verbs, and actors and targets are acted by nouns or pronouns. It can be seen from Table 3 that material processes occur most frequently exceeding half of the total.

(6) We have worked together in overcoming a variety of obstacles and challenges, and made new outstanding achievements. (2014)

(7) In the past year, we pushed forward reforms with strong commitment, conquered many hardships and introduced a series of important reform measures. (2015)

(8) We announced China will cut the number of its troops by 300, 000. (2017)

(9) The projects under “One Belt and One Road” Initiative was also pushed forward, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank officially started operation. (2017)

In the above examples, the main material verbs are words of concrete measures and achievements such as “overcoming”, “conquered”, which shows that the country has made great achievements in last year, and has set clear development goals for the future. Through frequent use of these material process verbs, President Xi aims to show the people of China and other countries the image of China as a big country that is developing steadily and the determination to continue to devote himself to building a great China.

Psychological process. Psychological process is a process of expressing psychological activities such as “feeling”, “reaction”, and “cognition”. Verbs such as “like”, “hate”, “believe”, and “hope” are generally used. There are not many sentences in the congratulatory message, only 13 times.

(10) I firmly believe that the Chinese people will create new spectacles. (2014)

(11) We sincerely hope that people of all countries can work together to ensure that all people be free from the torture of hunger and cold. (2015)

(12) I sincerely hope that the international community can work together. (2016)

(13) Their stories touched me deeply. (2018)

Words such as “firmly believe” and “hope” convey President Xi’s full confidence in deepening reform and achieving success and creating brilliance. At the same time, people all over the world can really unite and help each other and build their homes together, thus promoting world peace and stability. “I received many letters from the masses in 2017” is the concentrated expression of President Xi’s ruling for the people and caring for the people’s feelings. The phrase “deeply touched” shows the compassion of President Xi and makes people feel warm.

Relational process. The relationship process is used to show the relationship between things and the speaker’s attitude. Usually, the verb “is” connects the two things that produce the relationship, so as to judge and evaluate the relationship between the two things directly. There are 26 sentences in the New Year message accounting for a considerable proportion.

(14) Life is always full of hopes. Success always belongs to those who keep forging ahead unswervingly. (2014)

(15) We have only one earth, which is the common home of people of all countries. (2016)

(16) To ceaselessly solve those problems, remain an unshrinkable responsibility for the Party and the government. (2017)

President Xi encourages people to be full of hope. Only in this way can our goals and dreams be realized. He clearly described the blueprint for the future and saw the difficulties ahead by encouraging people to be prepared for hard work. This reflects that President Xi is full of hope and confidence in life and success, and at the same time encourages people to have the spirit of “positive progress and unremitting pursuit” and keep a positive and optimistic attitude towards China’s future development.

Verbal process. Verbal process is the process of exchanging information through speech. There are 19 sentences in the congratulatory message.

(17) I wish senior people and children, and every family happiness, peace and health in the New Year. (2014)

(18) At this turn of the year, I wish to extend my New Year greetings to the people of all ethnic groups in China, to our compatriots in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Macao Special Administrative Region, to our compatriots in Taiwan and overseas Chinese, as well as friends in other countries and regions in the world. (2016)

(19) May the chime of the New Year consolidate our confidence and re-ignite our aspiration for an even better tomorrow! (2017)

(20) I would like to extend my New Year greetings to the people of all ethnic groups in China, to our compatriots in the Hong Kong SAR and the Macao SAR, to our compatriots in Taiwan and to overseas Chinese. I would also like to wish our friends in other countries and regions all the very best. (2018)

Through verbal communication with all of you, President Xi expressed his best wishes for all in the New Year, echoed the theme of the “New Year Message”, and expressed his best wishes to the people of the whole country.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics here mainly refers to the use of catchphrases. Generally speaking, political discourse has strong purpose and certain ideology, which is characterized by seriousness and politics, and generally does not use catchphrases. However, in the atmosphere of celebrating the New Year, political discourses like New Year message occasionally use or adapt some popular words in the society, but they will get unexpected results. For example, in the 2015 and 2016 New Year message, President Xi used or adapted the current buzzwords and was widely used by many netizens; examples are as follows:

(21) Officials at various levels have also spared no efforts performing their duty. (2015)

“Spared no efforts” is one of the top 10 online buzzwords in 2014. President Xi used the highly popular online word “spared no efforts” to express the basic working status of Officials at various levels in the past year. “Spared no efforts” became popular overnight and became a hot spot in social interpretation.

(22) The world is so big, and the problems are so many. The international community expects to hear China's voice and see China's plans. (2016)

(23) China will always open its arms to the world and will make all efforts possible to extend our helping hand to the people facing difficulties. Let our “circle of friends” grow bigger and bigger. (2016)

“Circle of friends” is a “relationship circle” composed of acquaintances and semi-acquaintances. In the “friends circle”, there are classmates, family members, relatives, and colleagues. The word comes from WeChat, a social software. President Xi borrowed the online term “friend circle” to express his willingness to cooperate and develop together with more peace-loving countries in the world.

It can be seen that proper quotation of social buzzwords in political discourse will make the language style not monotonous, and at the same time, it will narrow the distance between people and the speaker. President Xi's use of catchwords shows his leadership style of loving the people, the masses and life.

Rhetoric

Throughout the New Year message in recent five years, figures of speech have been used in many places. The most used rhetoric is parallelism. For example:

(24) I wish people and children, and every family happiness, peace and health in the New Year. (2014)

(25) We have advanced reforms with the fundamental purpose of making our nation stronger and more prosperous. We also aim to achieve a higher degree of impartiality and justice in society so that people can live a better life. (2014)

(26) We call for peace and we sincerely hope that people of all countries can work together to ensure that all people be free from the torture of hunger and cold, and all families from the threat of wars. (2015)

(27) We shall establish a spirit to prevail, continue to immerse ourselves in hard work, implement the development concepts of innovation, coordination, green, openness, and sharing. We shall put forth the efforts in promoting structural reform, and reform and opening up, promoting social fairness and justice, as well as creating a green political eco-system. We shall get off to a good start as we advance in the crucial period for China to build a moderately well-off society in all all-around way. (2016)

(28) An occasion to renew our commitment to the comprehensive building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, to the comprehensive deepening of reforms, to the comprehensive advancement of rule of law, and to the comprehensive exercising of self-governance of the Party. (2017)

(29) China will resolutely uphold the authority and status of the United Nations, actively fulfill China's international obligations and duties, remain firmly committed to China's pledges to tackle climate change, actively push for the Belt and Road Initiative, and always be a builder of world peace, contributor to global development and keeper of international order. (2018)

Parallelism is a kind arrangement of sentences or sentence components with the same or similar structure, consistent tone and closely related meanings. In Example (24), wish is used to correspond to three different objects expressing the sincerest blessings to the people and children, and every family in the New Year. The continuous use of the words "let" in Cases (25) and (26) shows strong confidence in the people's better life and social fairness and justice, and strengthens the determination to reform. Example (27) the four "efforts" go hand in hand and exert all-round strength, which gives great impetus and foundation to the realization of a well-off society in an all-round way. Example (28) the four "comprehensiveness" are interrelated and inseparable laying a solid foundation for the realization of the Chinese dream. Example (29) the three promises of "builder, contributor and defender" show that China, as a responsible country, is willing to continue to promote world peace and development while creating a bright future for itself. The use of parallelism in the congratulatory message has enhanced the momentum of the discourse, added the festive atmosphere, and increased people's confidence in a better life in the future, further demonstrating President Xi's good intentions of seeking happiness for the people and making suggestions for social development, and also showing the world the image of a responsible big country.

Conclusion

Ding Suping (2010) thinks that the main function of New Year message is to express the good wishes of the speaker, which mainly plays the role of interpersonal communication, and is a form of emotional communication that welcomes the New Year and wishes each other. The New Year message delivered by national leaders has certain political significance. In addition to expressing blessings to the people of the whole country, the message also analyzes and introduces the domestic economic and social development and the international situation, so that the people can know China's environment at home and abroad, guide everyone to pay attention to all mankind, and jointly promote world peace and development, cooperation and common prosperity. This paper analyzes the contents of President Xi Jinping's New Year message in recent five years from the perspectives of high-frequency words, personal pronouns, transitivity, pragmatics, and rhetoric, which shows President Xi Jinping's unique style as a national leader, and further verifies the application value and advantages of critical discourse analysis in analyzing political speeches with a view to improve readers' ability to interpret such political discourses.

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