

Deliberate Metaphor in Political Discourse

—Based on Xi Jinping’s Diplomatic Discourse

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Since Steen proposed the theory of deliberate metaphor, many scholars have studied this linguistic phenomenon from different perspectives. Deliberate metaphor, based on language and cognition, introduces communication into metaphor research and can be seen as an extension of conceptual metaphor. Deliberate metaphor is essentially a discourse strategy, which uses metaphorical expressions to make listeners consciously compare the target domain with the source domain and establish an online cross-domain mapping. In view of this, the author takes Xi Jinping’s diplomatic speeches published in FMA as research corpora, and systematically analyzes how deliberate metaphors play their persuasive and communicative functions in political discourse, and finally delves into whether deliberate nature in political metaphors affects people’s attitudes and beliefs, thus conducting cross fusion research on cognitive rhetoric and political discourse.

Keywords: deliberate metaphor, political discourse, diplomatic discourse

Introduction

As the second-largest economy in the world, China has received unprecedented and considerable attention. In the new situation of complicated international relations, how to construct the Diplomatic Discourse System of great powers with Chinese characteristics and effectively promote the diplomatic process of great powers with Chinese characteristics is an urgent task. Therefore, the study on Chinese diplomatic discourse has increasingly become a hot issue for researchers at home and abroad. Diplomatic discourse, institutional in nature, belongs to a special kind of political discourse, which refers to the languages and speech acts adopted by diplomatic subjects to express their international strategies and foreign policies in specific situations and times (Hu & Li, 2018). However, the abstractness of political terms often makes people unable to clearly understand the essence of political discourse. Consequently, politicians tend to use metaphor as an important tool to explain complex political concepts and convey their covert political intentions, so that the audience will unconsciously accept and support their viewpoints. Deliberate Metaphor Theory (DMT) is an emerging theory in the academic field of cognitive metaphor, which holds that metaphor is “not only embodied in language and thought, but also manifested in communication” (Steen, 2011a), which has built a bridge for the country’s top leaders to express China’s diplomatic concepts appropriately and vividly. Telling China’s diplomatic story

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through deliberate metaphor is helpful to spread China’s diplomatic voice and promote the “China’s Input” to solve international problems. However, the research related to deliberate metaphor still lags behind in this area. As a new theory based on conceptual metaphor theory and discourse practice, deliberate metaphor theory deserves to be a powerful tool to study diplomatic discourse.

The Origin and Development of Deliberate Metaphor Theory

Deliberate metaphor originated from a metaphor paradox in contemporary metaphor research: British philosopher of science Mmy Hesse put forward the conclusion that “all languages are metaphors”. The latest research has come to a different conclusion. For example, after systematically counting metaphorical words in a large-scale corpus, discourse analysts find that only 14% of the words express metaphorical meanings in specific contexts (Steen et al., 2010). This poses a serious challenge to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT): If only 14% of the words people use are metaphors, are metaphors still what we live by?

However, the assumption that every linguistic metaphor triggers a cross-domain mapping at conceptual level has received much criticism by scholars over the past 15 years (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005; Glucksberg 2001; Glucksberg & Haught, 2006). The fact that not every linguistic metaphor would actually be processed as a metaphor on the conceptual level was termed “the paradox of metaphor” by Steen (2008). Follow-up studies (Gentner & Bowdle, 2001; Bowdle & Gentner, 2005) suggest that some metaphors, especially conventional metaphors which are the kernel for discussion within the frame of CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), are quite often processed by categorization rather than by comparison. To resolve this paradox that language items can be processed as metaphorical on the linguistic level but may not be processed as metaphors on the conceptual level, Steen (2008, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2017) proposed a new model of metaphor that takes a third dimension into consideration to the current two-dimensional model which regards metaphor as a phenomenon of language and thought. The new communicative dimension makes it a possibility to study metaphors in discourse from a pragmatic perspective (Steen, 2008). Some metaphors are just “the way to say it” (Cameron, 2003) and do not exhibit a clear communicative function. In contrast, some metaphors are used deliberately in order to fulfill a particular kind of function in the discourse event and are termed as deliberate metaphor by Steen (2008). Deliberate metaphors are used to change the addressee’s perspective on the referent or topic by the speaker inviting the addressee to look at the target domain from the perspective of the source domain. The theory of intentional metaphor opens a new perspective for the mainstream conceptual metaphor theory, and opens a new chapter for the integration of discourse analysis with cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics (Sun & Chen, 2017).

As a new three-dimensional model of metaphor, deliberate metaphor combines conceptual, linguistic and communicative dimensions, which is a great supplement to the development history of CMT. Metaphors can be divided into deliberate metaphors and non-deliberate metaphors from the dimension of intentionality. Most conventional metaphors are non-deliberate metaphors, while novel metaphors generally belong to deliberate metaphors. Though the concept of deliberate/non-deliberate metaphor is distinguished from conscious/unconscious metaphor, novel/conventional metaphor and direct/indirect metaphor, there is evidence and explanation for their inter-relatedness.

Research Methods and Data Collection

As the communication between China and the world has become increasingly frequent, the website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as one of the significant channel to propagating and expressing the political positions of China, has been attached great significance. Therefore, Xi’s diplomatic speeches published on the website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the year of 2022 and their English versions are collected as corpora in this study. Preliminary metaphor identification is performed with the aid of corpus-processing tool Wordsmith 7.0, and deliberate metaphor identification is carried out on the basis of the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU, Steen et al., 2010) and Deliberate Metaphor Identification Procedure (DMIP, Reijnierse et al., 2018) and some deliberate metaphor signals throughout the entire text of the speeches.

In a given text, the basic procedure of the MIPVU to find linguistic metaphors can be summarized in the following steps. Firstly, the researcher examines the text on a word-by-word basis, identifying the contextual meaning of each lexical unit. Then the contextual meaning is compared to the unit’s other meanings by referring to a dictionary (The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary is used in this study). If the lexical unit has a more concrete and basic meaning, it is compared to the contextual meaning. If the contextual meaning is distinct from the basic meaning, but can be related to it by some kind of similarity, the lexical unit is marked as a metaphor related word (MRW, Steen et al., 2010). MIPVU accounts for both direct metaphors and indirect metaphors. Direct metaphors are usually used deliberately, because the lexical unit is always used in order to be compared to a more basic referent or topic in the text and thereby cross-domain mapping is activated. Such direct metaphors may exhibit in the form of a simile (A is like B), as in “Life is like a box of chocolate”. The phrase a box of chocolate in this example directly refers to the chocolate in a food shop, rather than any transferred meaning of it. That is to say, there are no two senses of a box of chocolate in the example. The basic meaning of a box of chocolate is also its contextual meaning. The specific context of this sentence indicates that we are going to compare the literal meaning of a box of chocolate to the topic life. This kind of comparison makes similes as forms of direct metaphors. However, in a sentence like “He attacked my point of view”, the meaning of the metaphorical unit attack can be understood as “to criticize” which is quite different from its basic sense “physically harm”. The basic meaning is not the intended meaning here, but can be used to understand attack in the example via comparison with its contextual sense.

According to Reijnierse et al. (2018, pp. 8-9), the procedure of DMIP can be addressed in the following step: Firstly, read the entire text to get the general meaning of the text; Next, mark all the MRWs in the text using MIPVU; Thirdly, look at the first MRW; Fourthly, check whether the source domain of the MRW is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which the MRW is used. If the answer is “yes”, mark the MRW as deliberate metaphor and explain how it is used in the discourse. If the answer is not, look at the next MRW and repeat the fourth step. To identify deliberate metaphors in a text with DMIP, the author shall analyze from a framework of three dimensions, and then focus on the communication dimension. In this stage, the author shall looking for some contextual cues signaling the presence of source-domain referent from communication dimension. In this procedure, dictionary may be used to provide some facilitation. In such a way, the author can analyze the MRWs in the source text one by one so as to identify all deliberate metaphors.

Analysis of Deliberate Metaphors in Political Discourse

The world today is facing unprecedented changes, with irreversible trends in political multipolarity, economic globalization, cultural diversity, and social informatization. The connections and interdependence between countries are deepening, but they also face many common challenges. President Xi Jinping upholds the firm belief in building the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind and steadfastly exports the diplomatic concept of mutual assistance, cooperation and development to countries around the world. In order to better convey China’s concept of great power diplomacy to audiences around the world, he has repeatedly used deliberate metaphors in his diplomatic speeches. This article will analyze several of the most typical cases from different source domains.

Deliberate Metaphors Related to Natural Environment

Example (1) Human society, like the natural world, has both sunny and rainy days in its development.

人类社会发展和大自然一样，有阳光灿烂的日子，也有风雪交加的时刻。

Ride on the Trend of the Times and Enhance Solidarity and Cooperation to Embrace a Better Future 《把握时代潮流 加强团结合作 共创美好未来》2022.09.16

In Example (1), President Xi compared human development to nature, focused on the inseparable relationship between human beings and nature. Xi frequently used such metaphors in his diplomatic discourse, which gave the original ordinary human activities a brand-new meaning. In recent years, the international economic landscape has undergone significant changes, and competition between countries has become increasingly fierce. China recognizes the international situation and firmly holds onto the direction of the world economy, calling for world cooperation to become a key link in China’s diplomatic activities. In this case, Xi pointed out the relationship between human development and nature, and then outlined the grim world economic situation with two natural phenomena. At the conceptual level, the conceptual domains of “sunny days” and “rainy days” are different from the conceptual domains of the target domain (world politics and cooperation prospects), and the source domain establishes references in the current context. “Like” in Example (1) is a metaphorical signal (Goatly, 1997; Cameron & Deignan, 2003; Nacey, 2013; Steen, 2016), Xi intends to compare the two situations, with a view to all countries in the world facing up to the world political situation, working together to face the challenges and let the haze fade away. To understand this meaning, the audience has no choice but to engage in an online cross-domain mapping.

Deliberate Metaphors Related to Journey

Example (2) Over the past 16 years, the giant ship of BRICS has sailed forward tenaciously against raging torrents and storms. Riding the wind and cleaving the waves, it has embarked on a righteous course of mutual support and win-win cooperation.

16年来，面对惊涛骇浪、风吹雨打，金砖这艘大船乘风破浪、勇毅前行，走出了一条相互砥砺、合作共赢的人间正道。

Fostering High-quality Partnership and Embarking on a New Journey of BRICS Cooperation

《构建高质量伙伴关系 开启金砖合作新征程》2022.06.23

With the advancement of economic globalization, China adheres to the diplomatic concept of deepening and consolidating the global partnership network, and promoting economic, political, and cultural exchanges with countries around the world has become one of the main themes of contemporary China. In Example (2), “*giant ship*” refers to the collaborative relationship of win-win and mutually beneficial cooperation among the BRICS countries, while “*raging torrents and storms*” refer to the many obstacles encountered on the development path of the BRICS countries. Globally, the haze of Cold War mentality and power politics has persisted, and traditional and non-traditional security threats have emerged one after another. The COVID-19 and the impact of the Ukrainian crisis are intertwined. In this volatile situation, BRICS countries need to “*ride the wind and cleave the waves*” and “*sail forward tenaciously*”, work together to build mutually supportive multilateral relations and practice genuine multilateralism. The basic meaning of these words contrasts with the contextual meaning. At the conceptual level, its conceptual domain (related to journey, “*rough seas*” and “*wind and rain*” refer to the environment, “*giant ship*” refer to vehicles, and “*riding the wind and waves*” and “*courageously moving forward*” are a form of transportation) is different from the conceptual domain of “cooperative relationships”, and the discourse receivers need to use the perspective of the source domain (transportation environment, vehicles, and methods) to understand the storms experienced by the BRICS countries in the process of cooperation.

Deliberate Metaphors Related to Plants

Example (3) Over the past three decades, the giant tree of our relationship has taken deeper roots and grown more exuberant.

30年来，中乌关系的大树愈发根深蒂固、枝繁叶茂。

Working Together for a Brighter Future of China-Uzbekistan Relations

《携手开创中乌关系更加美好的明天》2022.09.13

Metaphor refers to using one thing to think and experience another (Ritchie, 2013, p. 8). People’s experience of plants: vigorous vitality, is favored by the President Xi. Whether it is a sentence expressing friendship or a paragraph reflecting China’s foreign policy, such deliberate metaphors, like flowers, trees and fruits, can be found everywhere in Xi’s worldwide diplomatic discourse. Uzbekistan, as an important diplomatic partner of China, has close cooperation and exchanges with China in politics, economy, culture, and other aspects. The great Silk Road has witnessed more than 2000 years of friendly exchanges between the two peoples. At the same time, as a strong supporter of China’s “the Belt and Road” initiative, Uzbekistan is undoubtedly an important diplomatic partner of China. Moreover, the construction of China Uzbekistan “Economic Corridor” is conducive to the common prosperity of the two peoples, This is a reproduction of the diplomatic philosophy “Sincerity and Benevolence” upheld by President Xi. In Example (3), the conceptual domains of “*giant tree*” and “*China-Uzbekistan relationship*” are different at the conceptual level. “*Giant tree*” activated a source domain reference in the current context. Only from the perspective of the source domain of plant can the listener understand the “*deeper roots*” and “*grown more exuberant*” China-Uzbekistan relations, and further understand the long and wide scope of cooperation between the two countries.

Conclusion

Based on Deliberate Metaphor Theory, this research pays specific attention to the representation and processing of deliberate metaphor in Xi’s diplomatic discourse. The study shows that different forms of deliberate metaphors are used in order to communicate abstract political views to persuade or inspire people. This article extracts typical deliberate metaphors from self built corpora based on MIPVU and DMIP. In order to tell the story of China and achieve global common prosperity and progress, President Xi has vigorously written the diplomatic philosophy of actively participating in global governance, committed to building a more comprehensive global partnership network, and building a community with a shared future for mankind through practical actions. Xi used a large number of deliberate metaphors in the context, which are diverse and mostly deliberate. From this, it can be seen that metaphor is a compass that conveys political intentions and reflects ideology. This study aims to provide reliable reference for correctly conveying China’s diplomatic philosophy in the context of the new era and promoting world peace and development.

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