

# The Pragmatics Interpretation of China Diplomatic Language

LIU Yan

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Diplomatic language is one of the important diplomatic methods used by countries to achieve foreign policy goals. Based on the characteristics of China's diplomatic language, this paper starts with the introduction of examples of the speeches of Chinese diplomatic spokespersons, and analyze the characteristics of China diplomatic language from three perspectives: context theory, fuzziness, and euphemism. To explore the causes of pragmatic skills in diplomatic language, summarize the pragmatic features in diplomatic language, find the connection between diplomatic language and pragmatic theory, and use this as an opportunity to deepen the understanding of pragmatics and even linguistics, will be the ultimate goal of this paper.

*Keywords:* China diplomatic language, pragmatics, context, fuzzy language, euphemism

## Introduction

In modern society, international relations are becoming more and more complex. Diplomats' ability to discern, respond to emergencies, and their superb art of argument play an important role in diplomatic activities, and implicit and euphemistic diplomatic language is of high practical value. The art of language is widely used in diplomatic negotiations.

Diplomatic language is a compound language, which can systematically enable people of different cultural backgrounds to understand each other in the process of communication, when a third-party language is very different from the mother tongue of both parties. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the pragmatics of diplomatic language from the perspective of pragmatics, aims to answer several questions as following:

1. What pragmatics features are embodied in China's diplomatic language?
2. What speaking techniques have been used in China's diplomatic speeches? Relatively, what pragmatics theories have been proved in the speeches?
3. What are the causes of pragmatic meaning in China diplomatic language?

With questions about the above-mentioned issues, we can have a clear observation on how pragmatics has become a research field vital to the development of diplomacy through the use of diplomatic language. This explains why language can be used from traditional and non-traditional perspectives in order to achieve the desired effect and the result of deeper cooperation in diplomatic conversation. We can see the role of culture in language. More specifically, this language and culture are the cross-cultural factors behind different diplomatic strategies.

## The Use of Context

Context mainly refers to the time, occasion, location, and other factors on which the language activity

depends, and also includes the preface and context of expression and understanding. In diplomatic activities, diplomats' speeches are often required to respond quickly based on the questioner's speech and context. Diplomats' speeches often represent the government's position and are used in diplomatic situations to discuss major issues of the country and the nation.

This section will take Hua Chunying, spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of our country, as an example to see how she grasps the political position and principle from a pragmatic perspective.

Example 1: Q: Can you explain why Foreign Minister Wang Yi was appointed as a State Councilor? Some people say it shows that the Chinese government attaches more importance to diplomacy. A: The election of the new leaders of state institutions at the First Session of the 13th National People's Congress fully reflects the common aspiration of the entire Party and the people of all ethnic groups. (Hua Chunying, 2018)<sup>1</sup>

In Hua Chunying's speech, there is a gap between the literal meaning and the actual meaning expressed by the subject of the discourse. This requires understanding the actual meaning expressed by the discourse according to the context. The "some people say" in the reporter's question was to put forward the reporter's idea from the perspective of a third party, and indirectly represented the reporter's belief that the appointment of Foreign Minister Wang Yi as State Councilor was a manifestation of the China government's greater emphasis on diplomacy. In her reply, the spokesperson pointed out that it is "the common aspiration of the entire party and the people of all ethnic groups". Although she did not respond directly to the reporter, she expressed the same understanding as the reporter. Meaning is the China government attaches great importance to diplomacy. The reason for attaching importance to diplomacy is to seek happiness for the people. The expectations of the people are first.

Context has a supplementary effect on language understanding, and this principle is often observed at the deep level of language. This reality is inferred from the literal discourse. Meaning is "contextual meaning". Therefore, the meaning expressed by the speaker is often more than the meaning directly loaded by the discourse itself, so the receiver must rely on the context to fill in the meaning beyond the literal meaning of the discourse. The meaning of any sentence in any language is by no means equal to the sum of the meanings of each word, but something more. According to mathematical principles. It can be proved that the application of context theory in Hua Chunying's speech enables us to experience multiple and rich pragmatic meanings.

### **The Use of Fuzzy Language**

Fuzzy language is often used in diplomatic dialogue or speech to achieve the purpose of diplomatic communication. For example, diplomatic meetings sometimes involve unpleasant topics that embarrass both parties. At this time, if one party does not want to talk about this topic, or does not want to make any comments, the diplomat will use fuzzy expressions without giving any information.

Example 2: If we compare the international order and system centred on the United Nations to a large ship, China was personally involved in its design and construction 70 years ago and was the first country to sign the United Nations Charter at that time. Today, we are on this ship with more than 190 countries, and what we want to do is never to capsize the ship, but to work together with all countries to make the ship sail more steadily and better in the right direction. (Wang Yi, 2015)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying, Regular Press Conference, March 19, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Press Conference held on the 8th of the 3rd Session of the 12th National People's Congress, March 8, 2015.

Wang Yi likened the United Nations to “a large ship” and said that he had participated in its design and manufacturing 70 years ago, and we are all on the same ship now, and we will continue to drive well in the future. This fuzzy context contains a lot of information. He euphemistically told the international community about China’s role and role in the United Nations. He fought back at the reporter. Wang Yi’s usage of fuzzy language is not only reflected in his language characteristics, but also in his language style. Whether it is a speech on a formal occasion or a tit-for-tat debate, he can deal with it calmly.

Example 3: I am reminded of an old Chinese diplomatic predecessor’s assertion on this issue that the more the victimizer does not forget his responsibility for inflicting harm, the more likely the victim will be able to make peace with the harm that has been done ... Whether to continue to carry the burden of history or to make a clean break with the past is ultimately a choice that Japan itself must make. (Wang Yi, 2015)<sup>3</sup>

In the above example, Wang Yi used a large section of fuzzy language to express that the Japanese government should face up to historical issues and solve the problem correctly. He first quoted the words of an old diplomat in China to express his position. Later, it vividly compared the aforementioned problems of China-Japan history to “responsibility”. The entire discourse is euphemistically urging the Japanese government to correctly face the facts, face up to history, and make efforts to solve the problems of Sino-Japanese relations.

As Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated in the above example, fuzzy language is a powerful pragmatic strategy used by diplomatic spokespersons to express their meanings euphemistically, that is, to state facts reservedly. As the relations between countries have become closer, diplomatic activities have become more frequent. Among them, regular bilateral or multi-party negotiations have become an international practice. Of course, bilateral or multilateral negotiations will not necessarily achieve constructive results, and bilateral development will not necessarily achieve desired results. Therefore, at this time, diplomats will use fuzzy language to implicitly express the results achieved after bilateral or multilateral development. On the one hand, fuzzy language can conceal real emotions and avoid direct expression of negative effects; on the other hand, using fuzzy language to evaluate things can provide a certain buffer space for both parties in the conversation and avoid embarrassing feelings.

### **The Use of Euphemism**

Diplomatic euphemism has cultural, historical, psychological, and language components. The paper starts with the linguistic level of diplomatic euphemism, trying to analyze the pragmatic effects of China diplomatic euphemism as completely as possible.

Euphemisms have a restrictive effect on the meaning of words. Appropriate euphemisms enable both parties to successfully achieve their communicative goals. The communicative intent for journalists to obtain new information cannot be realized, and the implicit information that the spokesperson wants to convey cannot be accurately coded and decoded.

At the same time, different ways of discourse have different meanings. Therefore, the way of discourse expression used by the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when communicating with reporters must be carefully considered.

Example 4: Q: Regarding U.S. Barack Obama’s visit to Hiroshima, the site of Japan’s nuclear bombing, has the Chinese government received a relevant note from the U.S. government? A: Are you thinking that the U.S. government should give

---

<sup>3</sup> Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Press Conference for the “Two Sessions of the National People’s Congress”, March 8, 2015.

a note to the Chinese government? (Lu Kang, 2016)<sup>4</sup>

The reporter asked us whether the United States explained to the China government about Obama's visit to Japan. Obviously, the arrangements for foreign affairs visits to relevant countries are the internal affairs of the country, and other countries must not interfere. Regarding the reporter's obvious common-sense error, the spokesperson asked the reporter. Although the use of this question answered the question euphemistically and ingeniously, it also euphemistically suggested the reporter's error on the other hand. In the tone, the questioning component is strengthened; in the semantics, the weakness of the question is directly attacked; the answer is stronger. According to the environment when speaking, Lu Kang pays attention to the wording, reduces the disgust of others, increases the other's understanding of himself, and achieves the best communication destination, which embodies the principle of politeness.

On occasions, such as the press conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the spokesperson's words represent a country. The views, positions, attitudes, and comments are not only publicly expressed to reporters at the scene, but also include the general public and the governments of other countries. Therefore, the words strive to be cautious and serious in your expression, especially when it involves sensitive issues or causes tensions in national relations. At this time, the clever use of euphemisms can effectively dissolve the questioner's sharpness.

Example 5: President Xi Jinping met with President Al-Bashir of the Sudan, who is currently visiting China. Al-Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court. What is China's comment on this?

A: I think it is a bit out of place for you to raise this question. China is not a party to the Rome Statute, and has always had reservations about the prosecution of Sudanese President al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC), and hopes that the ICC will deal with the issue in a prudent manner. China and the Sudan are friendly countries. (Hua Chunying, 2018)<sup>5</sup>

The spokesperson euphemistically expressed her dissatisfaction with the reporter's question with "somewhat untimely". However, the spokesperson did not have a dialogue with the reporter on his dissatisfaction with this issue. Instead, he expressed China's protection and support for Sudan's reasonable rights. It is conducive to the development of Sudan and is conducive to maintaining friendly exchanges with Sudan, which embodies the principle of politeness in diplomatic euphemisms.

### **Causal Analysis of Applying to Pragmatic Methods**

As the most important communication tool for human beings, language plays a role in spreading information, coordinating interpersonal relationships, and communicating emotions. The language used in diplomatic occasions should be frank and precise. However, in the actual application process, due to the euphemisms and twists of the language, a large number of and rich pragmatic meanings have been generated, which makes us have to think about the reasons and proceed from the following two aspects.

The internal cause is the analysis of the generation of pragmatic meaning from the two perspectives of the essential characteristics of language and its basic attributes. It is mainly manifested in three aspects: the linear elements that the language signs can refer to, the arbitrariness of language signs, and the fuzziness of language. The external causes of the pragmatic meaning of diplomatic language are mainly manifested in government public relations factors and media communication factors.

<sup>4</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesman Lu Kang, Regular Press Conference, May 12, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying, Regular Press Conference, September 3, 2018.

### Conclusion

Diplomatic language has a very strategic nature. Because of this fact, it fills the gap between language and interlocutors of different cultures. Therefore, diplomatic language has a unique characteristic. The strategy is earlier than the strategy, and the talks are earlier than the excerpts, because it is formed by reaching a consensus in the negotiation and dialogue between the two parties. This means that the interlocutor must have a broad understanding of the context of the dialogue, should consider using different languages in different scenarios, and understand the different meanings of the same language in different scenarios. This means that diplomatic methods have shaped the use of diplomatic language.

Considering that more and more linguists and other language-related research are affecting the interests of diplomacy, we should use more methods to conduct diplomatic language research.

### References

- Chen, X. R. (2016). Contextual conformity and interpretation methods for diplomatic ambiguities (Doctoral dissertation, Fujian Normal University).
- Grice, H. P. (1975). *Logic and conversation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- He, Y. M. (2018). A contrastive analysis of two English versions of the diplomatese in *Zuozhuan* from the perspective of pragmatic equivalence. In *Proceedings of 5th International Conference on Education, Language, Art and Inter-cultural Communication* (pp. 376-381). Dordrecht: Atlantis Press.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Ning, Y. (2010). A study of linguistic ambiguity in Chinese foreign ministry spokespersons' answers to reporters' questions (Doctoral dissertation, Jinan University).
- Song, X. Y. (2012). The analysis of pragmatic meaning in diplomatic rhetoric (Doctoral dissertation, Wenzhou University).
- Zhang, H. Y. (2007). Analyzing the virtual phenomenon in diplomatic language. *Journal of Qiqihar Teachers College*, 27(7), 44-46.
- Zhang, L. (2014). Research on the implied meaning of diplomatic fuzzy language (Doctoral dissertation, Central China Normal University).