



Exploring Language and Diplomatic Thinking through Process Types: A Contrastive Study on Sino-British Diplomatic Thinking Based on the *China-UK Joint Declaration*

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Abstract

The *China-UK Joint Declaration on Building a Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century* is one of the fruits of Chinese President Xi Jinping's recent official state visit to the Great Britain. As a typical and important diplomatic language document, the Joint Declaration deserves scientific research. In this paper, based on the six process types of Halliday's Transitivity system, we attempt to disclose the diplomatic thinking underlying the employment of process types and make a contrastive study of the diplomatic thinking of both China and the UK. The research leads to three findings. Firstly, the high frequency of material process clause in both Chinese and English versions reflects the "Action thinking", a shared diplomatic thinking adopted by the two nations. Secondly, the Chinese version employs more relational process clauses than the English version, which is an indication of the "Relationality thinking" underlying Chinese diplomacy and it is much less emphasized or even absent in British diplomacy. Thirdly, the analysis of the mental process clauses reveals that China has an "Inclusive thinking" in its diplomatic exchange with Britain whereas the UK a "Friendship thinking".

Keywords: process types; diplomatic thinking; contrastive study; Action thinking; Relationality thinking; Inclusive thinking; Friendship thinking

1. Introduction

The past decades witness a reinvented China emerging as the world's second largest economy with tremendous changes in both the country itself and the international environment it faces. In recent years, China's diplomatic readjustment, transformation and reform have always been one of the heated topics researched by scholars in the literature of international relation studies (Wang, 2012: 121). At a critical moment in the transformation of international system and inter-state diplomatic exchanges among great powers, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid an official state visit to Great Britain from 19 to 23 October 2015. This great diplomatic exchange between the two great powers draw broad attention at home and broad, and a lot of agreements on cooperation were signed by the two leaders and a Joint Declaration—*China-UK Joint Declaration on Building a Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century* was issued jointly by the two sides. As an important fruit of this state visit and an excellent example of diplomatic language, the Joint Declaration, covering such topics as Sino-British relation, economy, cooperation diplomacy etc. is worth special research in order to gain an in-depth understanding about the nature of Sino-British diplomacy. Thus the study of the document is both meaningful and necessary.

As an important type of political language and a major carrier of diplomatic activities, diplomatic language forms its own unique features, thus studies on diplomatic language have never been rare. Previous studies on diplomatic language mainly focus on the following four perspectives: stylistic approach, pragmatic approach, functional approach, cognitive approach. First, study diplomatic language from a stylistic perspective. For instance, Guo (1992) in his study attempted to use stylistic theories to analyze the basic features of diplomatic language. With respect to the pragmatic perspective, Wei (2003) illustrated the particular function of pragmatic vagueness in diplomatic language and suggests that "pragmatic vagueness is an indispensable language technique in diplomatic activities". Chang (2011) made an analysis of the violation of CP and its maxims in diplomatic language with the purpose of achieving a better understanding of the vagueness of this particular type of language. Cognitive perspective, especially the conceptual integration theory is also applied to the study of diplomatic language. Song and Xie (2012) discussed the four basic sub-networks of conceptual integration theory and use this theoretical framework to analyze the meaning construction process of diplomatic language with examples. Last but not least, some scholars endeavor to analyze diplomatic language from a functional perspective. Li and Hu (2009) adopted a functional approach to analyze the language features of both Chinese and English diplomatic documents.

This present study attempts to analyze both the Chinese and English diplomatic language from a functional perspective. Although Li and Hu (2009) employ the functional approach to analyze the diplomatic language, their study mainly focused on the characterization of such features of diplomatic language as normalization, evaluation, negation and some particular verbs often used in the diplomatic documents. This analysis is far from satisfactory in that it takes as its core the description of basic features of diplomatic language with examples, which makes it somewhat superficial. Based on the systemic-functional grammar, especially the six process types of Transitivity system in the ideational function as the theoretical framework, this research does quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data collected, namely the *China-UK Joint Declaration on Building a Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century*. What distinguishes this research from others lies in its primary concern on the different diplomatic thinking reflected by the employment of process types in the clauses instead of being solely satisfied with the linguistic analysis and feature description of diplomatic documents that most previous studies regularly do. Furthermore, making use of the China-UK Joint Declaration issued quite recently makes the contrastive study on Sino-British diplomatic thinking possible and therefore the results of the present paper will make a unique contribution to the understanding and study of Sino-British diplomatic thinking and relations. This research discloses three findings. First, material process has a high frequency in both the Chinese version and the English version, which reflects the “Action thinking”, a shared diplomatic thinking adopted by the two nations. Second, the Chinese version employs more relational process clauses than the English version, and this phenomenon is an indication of the “Relationality thinking” underlying Chinese diplomacy and is much less emphasized or even absent in British diplomacy. Third, the analysis of the mental process clauses reveals that China adopts an “Inclusive thinking” in its diplomatic exchange with Britain whereas the UK a “Friendship thinking”.

2. Theoretical framework and Methodology

2.1 Theoretical framework

This present study adopts Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar as the theoretical framework with a focus on the transitivity theory in SFG.

Systemic-functional linguistics is a theory of language that takes as its core the notion of language function. Halliday (2004:31) states, “functionality is intrinsic to language: that is to say, the entire architecture of language is arranged along functional lines. Language is as it is because of the functions in which it has evolved in the human species.” The functional view to language holds that language is fashioned by what language has to do and meaning is simply function in context (Long and Peng, 2012:58). According to Halliday, language not only construe experience and enact interpersonal relationship, but build up sequences of discourse, organize the discursive flow and create cohesion (2004:30). Thus, in his systemic-functional Grammar, Halliday identifies three metafunctions, namely ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function.

In this present research, greater emphasis will be placed on the ideational metafunction and the transitivity system by which this function is achieved. “The transitivity system construes the world of experience into manageable set of Process Types” (Halliday, 2014:170). There are altogether six types of process, i.e. material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Research Method

In this research, we will employ both the quantitative and qualitative methods. Using quantitative techniques, we try to compare and contrast the English and Chinese parts of the data and make a statistical analysis of different process types in terms of frequency and distribution. With regard to the qualitative method, we will compare and contrast the difference between the two parts of the data.

2.2.2 Data

We use the *China-UK Joint Declaration on Building a Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century* as the data of this study. This Joint Declaration is one of the most important products of Chinese Present Xi Jinping’s recent state visit to the United Kingdom from October 19 to 23, 2015. It consists of 29 points concerning different aspects from China-UK relations, economy to diplomacy among others. Serving as one of the most important documents in the history of Sino-UK relations, the joint declaration is a typical example of diplomatic language and since it is the most recent declaration, the systematic study on the declaration is both meaningful and necessary so as to better grasp the deep implications under the surface of the language.

3. A quantitative contrastive analysis on the data

3.1 The distribution of different process types in the data

The China-UK Joint Declaration is composed of 29 paragraphs and each paragraph has both the Chinese version and the English version. For purposes of analysis, we divide the whole declaration into three parts. Paragraph 1-9 forms the first part (paragraph 1 is excluded because it is only the description of the event of President Xi Jinping’s state visit). Paragraph 10-23 constitutes the second part, and the rest of the Joint Declaration forms the third part. In doing the statistical research, we divide every part into clauses according to Halliday’s Transitivity theory. In part 1, the Chinese version is divided into 35 clauses and the English version is divided into 32 clauses. In part 2, the Chinese version is divided into 82 clauses and the English version is divided into 73 clauses. In part 3, the Chinese version is divided into 24 clauses and the English version is divided into 16 clauses. The following three tables are the number and percentage of different process types in the Joint Declaration:

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Different Process Types in the Joint Declaration (Part 1)

Process types	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Behavioral	Existential
Num C	25	5	3	2	0	0
Percentage	71.4%	14.3%	8.6%	5.7%	0%	0%
Num E	24	5	1	2	0	0
Percentage	75.0%	15.6%	3.1%	6.3%	0%	0%

Table 2. Number and Percentage of Different Process Types in the Joint Declaration (Part 2)

Process types	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Behavioral	Existential
Num C	63	8	4	7	0	0
Percentage	76.8%	9.8%	4.9%	8.5%	0%	0%
Num E	53	7	3	9	0	0
Percentage	73.6%	9.7%	4.2%	12.5%	0%	0%

Table 3. Number and Percentage of Different Process Types in the Joint Declaration (Part 3)

Process types	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Behavioral	Existential
Num C	12	4	3	5	0	0
Percentage	50.0%	16.7%	12.5%	20.8%	0%	0%
Num E	7	4	1	4	0	0
Percentage	43.8%	25.0%	6.3%	25.0%	0%	0%

4. Process types and Sino-British diplomatic thinking: a comparative study

Language and thought are closely interrelated and rely on each other. Therefore, the difference existing between different linguistic forms reflects the discrepancy in thoughts. As the Chinese scholar Lian (2002) puts it, “language is the main instrument of thought, and it constitutes the component of mode of thought. Thought is embodied in a particular form of language in one way or another.” The China-UK Joint Declaration issued quite recently is not simply a diplomatic document for publicity, but also constitutes an important document for further research to discover the diplomatic thinking of the Chinese nation and Britain that underlies the linguistic forms. When using different process types to express meanings, both sides have in mind their own diplomatic thinking, which are their guiding principles in different kinds of diplomatic activities on the global stage. There is no doubt that these underlying thinking are reflected in the language.

4.1 Material process type and “Action thinking”: a shared diplomatic thinking

A major component in Halliday’s Transitivity system, material process is the process of doing-and-happening. Material process clause “construes a quantum of change in the flow of events as taking place through some input of energy” (Halliday, 2004:179). For example:

- a. The boy kicked the door.
- b. They pick the flowers.

Each material clause can be seen as a figure or configuration of participants and process as is shown in figure 1:

Actor	Process: material	Goal
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Figure 1. The process of the material type

From the above three tables, it can be seen clearly that among the six types of process, the material process is the most frequent one in both the Chinese version and the English version in all the three parts of the Joint Declaration. Material process represents the process of “Doing”. The high proportion of material processes in this document reveals that the Joint Declaration is one in which both China and the UK are relating what each side has done in the past and will do in the future on the one hand, and that it is also an indication of the importance of “Doing” in the diplomatic thinking, which is shared by China and the UK on the other. This kind of distribution of the material process is in line with the Chinese President Xi Jinping’s primary purpose of this recent state visit, namely seeking win-win cooperation and new possibilities of cooperation. In order to have an in-depth understanding of the material processes, it is worthwhile to analyze the material clauses from below (i.e. analyzing how they are realized). As is mentioned above, material process has the configuration of the Actor, Process, Goal and Circumstance with Actor and Process being the central element in

exchanges, deeper political trust, fruitful economic cooperation and wider people-to-people contact.

Circumstance

(2) Chinese version: 中英 都是 有全球影响力的国家和联合国安理会常任理事国 都对国际体系和全球

Identified Process: Identifier
relational

事务负有重要责任……

English version: As countries of global and permanent members of UN Security Council, China and the UK

Circumstance

shoulder important responsibilities for the international system and global affairs.

It is clear from the two examples illustrated above that the use of relational processes in the Chinese version and English version is not one-to-one correspondent. Rather some of the relational clauses in the Chinese version become material clauses or circumstantial elements in the English version. In example (1), it can be seen that the Chinese version employs a sequence of relational clauses to demonstrate the close relation between China and the UK. However, in the English version, there is no relational clause. Instead, the sequence of relational clauses becomes only one material clause with its circumstantial elements in the Chinese version. In example (2), the Chinese version employs a separate relational clause of the ‘identifying’ mode to define the identity of the identified, namely中英 (China and the UK). The ‘being’ relation construed is modeled as the figure of “Identified + Process: identifying + Identified” in the Chinese version. Quite on the contrary, the layer of relational meaning is represented by a circumstantial element attached to a material clause in the English version, rather than a separate relational process.

From the analysis of process type above, it is quite noticeable that when dealing with inter-state interactive practice, China tends to put more emphasis on establishing relations than Britain, which can be demonstrated by the higher frequency of relational clauses in the Chinese version than in the English version. The diplomatic thinking behind the linguistic forms is the “Relationality thinking” in China’s diplomacy. This Relationality thinking has deep roots in the traditional Chinese way of thinking. It should be noted that a key concept in traditional Chinese philosophy is the concept of relation, and it has extends its influence to the fields of politics and foreign diplomacy in China. In the Chinese classic *I Ching* or *the Book of Change*, which occupies the first place among Six Classics, the basic opinion is that there exists a yin-yang relation behind the image of the universe and the world (Gao:2010). This traditional Chinese philosophical view from *I Ching* exerts a great impact on Chinese culture and the thinking pattern of the Chinese people. “In Chinese society, individuals are not the basic unit. The way of thinking embedded in Chinese society is based upon groups, i.e. the Family, the Country, and the World” (Qin, 2009:8). Therefore, we have good reason to say that one of the characteristics of China’s social system is relational orientation since it place greater emphasis on the group of individuals rather than individuals. When it comes to diplomatic activities, the influence of relationality in the traditional Chinese philosophy is evident, which can be reflected by the use of relational clauses in the document. Behind the linguistic forms, it is China’s “Relationality diplomatic thinking” at work, which is characteristic of Chinese foreign diplomacy.

However, compared with the Chinese version, there are fewer relational clauses finding their way into the English version. It does not mean that British diplomats do not talk about relations, but it does mean that the concept of “relation” does not play as a crucial role as it does in Chinese diplomatic exchanges. As Fei Xiaotong put it, western countries are based on individuality whereas Chinese society is like continuous circles of ripples on a lake, with each individual being the center of a ripple and spread by social relations (2007).

4.3 Mental process and diplomatic thinking: Inclusive thinking vs. Friendship thinking

Mental process refers to the process of sensing in Halliday’s Transitivity theory. Mental process clause “is concerned with our experience of the world of our own consciousness”, and “construes a quantum of change in the flow of events taking place in our own consciousness” (Halliday, 2004:197). For instance:

- a. She loves the dog.
- b. The award pleased Tom.

In Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar, any mental clause can be analyzed as a figure shown in figure 3:

Sensor	Process: mental	Phenomenon
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Figure 3: The process of the mental type

The numbers in the above three tables show that mental process is less frequent both in the Chinese version and in the English version. However, behind these relatively few clauses of the mental type, and in particular the verbal groups employed in the realization of processes, we can still discover some diplomatic ideas. A careful analysis of the mental clauses unveils that the verbal groups such as “欢迎” (welcome) and “认同” (recognize) are used a lot, serving as the Process in a figure of mental process clause. For instance:

(3) Chinese version: 双方 欢迎 英国和其他一些发达经济体的复苏 有所增强, ……

Sensor	Process:	Actor	Process:
α	mental	β	material

English version: Both sides welcome the strengthening economic recovery in the UK and some other advanced

Sensor	Process:	Phenomenon
	mental	

economies, …

(4) Chinese version: 双方 欢迎 伦敦 积极参与 人民币国际化进程 ……

Sensor	Process:	Actor	Process:	Goal
α	mental	β	material	

English version: Both sides welcome London's active participation in the internationalization of the RMB...

Sensor	Process:	Phenomenon
	mental	

(5) Chinese version: 双方 认同 彼此对自身政治体制、发展道路、核心利益和重大关切的重视。

Sensor	Process:	Phenomenon
	mental	

English version: (The two sides) recognize the importance each side attaches to its own political system,

Sensor	Process:	Phenomenon
	mental	

development path, core interests and major concerns.

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* presents three senses of the verb “welcome”. The third sense is “to be pleased to receive or accept sth.” or “乐意接收, 欣然接受” in Chinese. Apparently, this third sense is the exact meaning of this verb in the Joint Declaration. Therefore, two aspects can be reflected by these mental clauses. On the one hand, it can be indicated that this Joint Declaration is the one to publicize the common stands and common wishes in terms of such bilateral concerns as Sino-UK relations and cooperation between China and UK rather than conflicts and disagreements. On the other, these mental clauses embody the inclusive diplomatic thinking on the part of China and the friendship thinking on the side of the UK.

To begin with, inclusiveness is one of the four elements of China's great periphery diplomatic principle, the other three being amity, sincerity and mutual benefit. These new concepts were put forward by President Xi Jinping on a forum on diplomacy with neighboring countries. These brilliant summaries vividly display the strategic thinking of China as a responsible major country. By inclusiveness is meant “openness, tolerance and the pursuit of common ground, all of which are normally associated with broad minded, major countries” (Wang, 2014:37). As is shown in examples (3), (4) and (5), the verbal groups represented by “欢迎” (welcome) or “认同” (recognize) are a reflection that both China and the UK respect each other's development and look forward the common development by cooperation. The rising China is an open country valuing the mutually beneficial cooperation in its diplomatic work. “The report to the 18th Party Congress points out that mankind has only one earth to live on and all countries share one world and reiterates that China will unswervingly follow the open strategy of mutual benefit” (Lu, 2013:43). Based on the analysis of the mental process clauses and the reality of China's development and its current close ties with Britain, it is not difficult to see that “Inclusive thinking” is also a strategic diplomatic idea underlies the China's diplomatic exchanges with the UK.

On the part of UK, it is known that the UK has regarded the bilateral cooperation and a rising China as an opportunity to boost its own development. For quite a long time, there is always criticism in both the diplomatic fields and academia that Britain lacks “strategic thinking” and a “national-interest-oriented” diplomacy. However, in recent years, the mainstream idea in Britain is to set up the core status of national interest. That is to say, when dealing with China, Britain has a full awareness that China and Britain is closely bound up with in terms of realistic interest. Britain Prime Minister Palmerston once stated that a country does not have permanent friends, only permanent interests, which has been a strategic conception in British diplomacy and generates great impact on British external work. It is clear that cooperation with a rising China is in line with Britain's national interests. Cameron, British Prime Minister, declared to make his country “China's strongest advocate in the west.” It is not an exaggeration to say that Britain generously offer help to China during China's development. For example, “Britain is the first western country to issue treasury bonds denominated in the Chinese currency, the yuan. The UK is also the first European country that announced joining the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank” (Qu, 2015: 23). These actions provide ample evidence to show Britain's diplomatic attitude towards China. Based on the property of the mental process clauses and the aforementioned evidence, we have good reasons to state that Britain adopts a “Friendship-toward-China” diplomatic thinking, which is an important strategic thinking for Britain.

5. Conclusion

Taking the *China-UK Joint Declaration on Building a Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century* as an example, this research attempts to explore language and diplomatic thinking by using Halliday's theory of six process types. We first did statistical analysis of the document to discover the distribution of different process types. It can be found that throughout the whole document, material process is the most frequent process types in both the Chinese version and the English version. Processes of the relational type are the least frequent in the document and there are no behavioral process and existential process types in both of the two versions. Then, we probe into the correlation between different process types and the diplomatic thinking underlying the linguistic forms and a contrastive study on the diplomatic thinking of China and Britain is conducted. In the first place, the large proportion of material process clauses in both the Chinese version and the English version clearly reflects that both sides adopt the "Action thinking" when dealing with their external work with each other. Furthermore, the statistics show that the Chinese version employs more relational process clauses than its English correspondence does. This finding can be illustrated by the "Relationality thinking" in the Chinese diplomacy, which is deeply rooted in the Chinese traditional philosophical thinking. However, "Relationality thinking" is not emphasized and come as a priority in the British diplomacy. Last, we analyze the mental process clauses and in particular study the verbal groups in the mental clause. It can be found that there is an "Inclusive thinking" beneath Chinese diplomatic exchanges with Britain and a "Friendship thinking" underpinning the British diplomatic work with China.

Xi's official state visit to the UK opens a golden era in China-UK relations featuring enduring, inclusive and win-win cooperation as is stated in the document. It is appropriate to say that China needs the UK in its development and the development of the UK needs China. Both sides see each other as their complementary partner and this complementary relation between the two powers means even more close ties between them. That being said, it is quite necessary and urgent to fully understand the new thoughts, new ideas and new concepts underlying the diplomatic exchanges between the two nations. This present research, taking Halliday's process type theory as an perspective, analyze the feature of the linguistic forms of the Chinese version as well as English version on the one hand and go further to probe into the diplomatic thinking of the two nations through the analysis of the process types. Therefore, the study is of both theoretical significance and contributes a lot to the research on the Sino-British relations.

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