

A STUDY OF XI JINPING’S SPEECHES BASED ON THEMATIC PROGRESSION PATTERN - TAKE KEYNOTE SPEECHES AT THE BELT AND ROAD FORUM FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

The Belt and Road Initiative has opened new windows of opportunity and is of far-reaching significance. The speeches of President Xi Jinping at the two Belt and Road Forums for International Cooperation were crucial in demonstrating China's attitude. Thematic progression theory are very important for discourse analysis. Most existing studies analyze important speeches of President Xi from the perspectives of political science, sociology and translation studies, but few scholars conduct discourse analysis on them. Therefore, this paper takes Zhu Yongsheng's thematic progression theory as the theoretical framework, selects two keynote speeches that President Xi delivered at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation as the corpus, and uses quantitative and qualitative research methods to analyze the themes and thematic progression patterns in the selected corpus. Through the analysis, this study finds out what TP patterns are used in the important speeches of President Xi Jinping, how many percentages of TP patterns are in those important speeches, and how those TP patterns realize their social functions. Especially, the use of the pronoun we as the constant theme, is an exquisite design of the discourse. It realizes its own social functions.

Keywords: President Xi’s speeches, The Belt and Road Forum, Thematic Progression Patterns

1. Introduction

The important speeches of President Xi Jinping belong to the type of the political speech, which plays a crucial role home and abroad. The speeches at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation show people all around the world the attitude of China towards the Belt and Road Initiative. China will inject strong impetus into the Belt and Road Initiative and create new

opportunities for world development. In order to express viewpoints effectively and engage the audience, it is necessary to have a clear structure and evocative language. Therefore, the important speeches of President Xi are usually well organized and effectively expressed. This paper selects two keynote speeches that President Xi delivered at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation as the research objects and uses TP pattern theory to analyze the internal structure of President Xi's speeches.

In recent years, under the guidance of thematic theory and thematic progression theory, a lot of research has been carried out on different types of discourse home and abroad. The notions of thematic progression patterns were first proposed by Frantisek Danes, a Czech linguist. Then M.A.K. Halliday and Mona Baker further developed the theory, making it be widely used for discourse analysis. Later, many Chinese scholar, such as Huang Yan and Zhu Yongsheng started to discuss this theory in detail. In 1983, Peter Fries argue that TP patterns vary from genre to genre. For that reason, as a special genre, the important speeches of President Xi will adopt the distinguished TP patterns. According to Zhu Yongsheng (1995), there are in total four TP patterns, including parallel progression, focused progression, continuous progression, and overlapped progression. This paper analyses the distinguished TP patterns of President Xi's important speeches in terms of Zhu Yongsheng's TP patterns theory, summarizes the general principles of political discourse, and tries to gain an insight into the real topic and find out the social functions of the speeches.

2. Sample Analysis

This paper uses several extracts from the two keynote speeches as the examples to display the analyzing process. The theme-rheme structure exists in every clause. By analyzing the theme-rheme structure in the text, it is much easier for readers or listeners to know what the structure of the discourse is and how the information flows in the text, so as to better understand the author or speaker's intention. According to Zhu Yongsheng's TP patterns theory, some of the extracts are analyzed in detail as follows.

Extract 1: "The ancient silk routes (T1) were not for trade only (R1), they (T2) boosted flow of knowledge as well (R2). Through these routes (T3), Chinese silk, porcelain, lacquer work and ironware were shipped to the West, while pepper, flax, spices, grape and pomegranate entered China (R3). Through these routes (T4), Buddhism, Islam and Arab astronomy, calendar and medicine found their way to China, while China's four great inventions and silkworm breeding spread to other parts of the world (R4)."

T1-R1

T2(=T1)-R2

T3-R3

T4(=T3)-R4

Obviously, in this extract, the parallel pattern is used, occupying an important position: T2=T1, T4=T3. Those clauses have identical themes but different rhemes. The theme here are “silk routes” and “through the silk routes”, which is closely related to the background of the keynote speech. By adopting the parallel pattern, the concept of silk routes is stressed over and over, making readers or listeners quickly grasp the idea of the discourse. Also, it continually strengthens the impression of silk routes on readers or listeners. The latter two clauses are explanations of the preceding two. In this way, people get to know the silk routes and get to learn what silk routes have done in the aspects of trade and knowledge flow.

Extract 2: “I (T1) have said on many occasions that the pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative is not meant to reinvent the wheel (R1). Rather, it (T2) aims to complement the development strategies of countries involved by leveraging their comparative strengths (R2). We (T3) have enhanced coordination with the policy initiatives of relevant countries, such as the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, the Bright Road initiative of Kazakhstan, the Middle Corridor initiative of Turkey, the Development Road initiative of Mongolia, the Two Corridors, One Economic Circle initiative of Viet Nam, the Northern Powerhouse initiative of the UK and the Amber Road initiative of Poland (R3). We (T4) are also promoting complementarity between China's development plan and those of Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Hungary and other countries (R4). China (T5) has signed cooperation agreements with over 40 countries and international organizations and carried out framework cooperation on production capacity with more than 30 countries (R5).”

TI-R1

T2(=R1)-R2

T3-R3

T4(=T3)-R4

T5(=T3)-R5

Similarly, in the second extract, the parallel pattern is still used frequently: T4=T3, T5=T3. Again, the theme is emphasized repeated, so that the audiences are able to know more about the status and position of the given speech. Also, we can find that T3 and T4 are identical, but T5 is different from them. Although there are some differences, they refer to the same thing, that is to say, “we” represent China. As we can see, this is an extract from the keynote speeches of

President Xi at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, so definitely China is the theme here. In addition, one of the reasons why President Xi uses the word “we” twice instead of the word “China” is that he wants to show his authority and representativeness. Furthermore, there are some pronouns used in this extract, such as I and we. One of President Xi’s purpose of his important speeches is to show the world the attitude of China towards some affairs or projects. Therefore, “we”, as a pronoun, represent China. And the reason why he uses the pronoun instead of the name of the country is that he would like to shorten the distance between the audiences and him. Also, in terms of the union, the use of “we” shows the whole world that President Xi and all Chinese people are united, it tells the audiences all over the world that China is a nation that is full of solidarity. In addition, there is another thematic progression pattern in this extract: the continuous pattern. In this pattern, the rheme of the preceding clause or a part of the rheme is the theme of the following clause, i.e. T2=R1. By using this pattern, the information flows smoothly and the structure of the discourse is well-knit. It is easy for the audiences to grasp the idea of the speaker so that they are able to better understand the point of the speech.

Extract 3: “A solid first step (T1) has been taken in pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative (R1). We (T2) should build on the sound momentum generated to steer the Belt and Road Initiative toward greater success (R2).”

T1-R1

T2-R2(=R1)

The focused pattern is used in this extract, which means that themes are different from each other, but both clauses have the same rheme. In the extract above, the rheme are continuously the Belt and Road Initiative. This is an extract from the keynote speech that President Xi delivered at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, so the constant presence of the Belt and Road Initiative is necessary and crucial.

Extract 4: “We (T1) should build the Belt and Road into a road of innovation (R1). Innovation (T2) is an important force powering development (R2).”

T1-R1

T2(=R1)-R2

This is a typical continuous pattern. The rheme of the preceding clause or a part of the rheme is the theme of the following clause in this pattern. In this way, the readers or listeners can know the main idea of this paragraph: the innovation. They can follow the footprint of the author or the

speaker easily.

The above four extracts are all from the keynote speeches of President Xi at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Obviously, it can be found that the parallel pattern takes up higher percentages than the others. Also, there are few overlapped patterns in the above four extracts. This part is just a sample analysis based on four extracts of the keynote speeches, which shows the analysis process in detail. By analyzing the samples, we can see how often each pattern appears in the selected speeches. In the following, some statistics for these patterns will be presented in tables, so that the readers are much easier to see the results.

3. Statistics of TP Patterns

The above segment shows the analysis process of the thematic progression patterns in the keynote speeches given by President Xi at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Based on the above four extracts, through the analysis process, the readers get to know how the statistics are counted. In the following, the statistics of the thematic progression patterns used in the two keynote speeches that President Xi delivered at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation will be presented in the form of tables, so that the readers can see the percentages directly and find out the frequency of each thematic progression patterns.

The first table presents the number and percentage of the four thematic progression patterns in the first keynote speech in 2017 based on Zhu Yongsheng’s four thematic progression patterns.

Table 1

TP Patterns	Number	Percentage
Parallel Pattern	57	64.77%
Focused Pattern	4	4.55%
Continuous Pattern	21	23.86%
Overlapped Pattern	6	6.82%
Total	88	100%

The statistics of the four thematic progression patterns of the keynote speech delivered by President Xi Jinping at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2019 are presented below in detail.

Table 2

TP Patterns	Number	Percentage
Parallel Pattern	56	74.67%
Focused Pattern	4	5.33%
Continuous Pattern	13	17.33%
Overlapped Pattern	2	2.67%
Total	75	100%

From the statistics above, it is found that the number of the parallel pattern is the most. Not surprisingly, the parallel pattern also takes up the highest percentages among the four thematic progression patterns. Definitely, the constant use of this pattern has its own reason due to its social functions, and it will be analyzed further in the next part. In addition, the continuous pattern also promotes the discourse to develop logically. It is really helpful to build a well-knit structure of the discourse. Finally, it is also obvious that the numbers of the overlapped pattern of the focused pattern are less than the others, which means that in a keynote speech, it is not necessary to use these two patterns frequently. As for the reasons of the above results of the thematic progression patterns and their corresponding social functions, the next part will explain them in detail.

4. Social Functions Realized by TP Patterns

Through the above statistics, it is easily found that the parallel pattern is the most powerful thematic pattern used in political speeches, especially keynote speeches. The number of this pattern is the most among the four thematic progression patterns, and its percentage is the highest among them. In terms of the flow of information in the discourse, it repeatedly emphasize the theme, telling the main idea of the discourse to the audiences directly over and over. Moreover, the most frequently used themes are “we” and “China”. More specifically, the pronoun “we” represent “China”. In this kind of political speech, it is pretty necessary to tell the audience the status and position of the speaker. In the two keynote speeches of the research, definitely our country is the thing that needs to be stressed vividly and directly. Also, President Xi, the leader of our country, needs to illustrate the links between China and him. This is truly a good way to show the union of our country, and to shorten the distance between the speaker and the audiences.

The continuous pattern is used less frequently, but it also plays an important role in the discourse.

As for the continuous pattern, which looks like a ladder, the rheme of the preceding clause or a part of the rheme is the theme of the following clause. By using the continuous pattern, the information of the discourse flows smoothly, making it comfortable to listen and easy to recite.

However, in the keynote speeches, the focused pattern and the overlapped pattern are not used quite often.

The focused pattern means that the rhemes in the clauses are the same or semantically same with each other, but the themes are different. So the emphasis is on the rheme. To some extent, it plays the same role with that of the parallel pattern. However, they indeed have some slight differences. For instance, the function of the rheme is to carry the new information, therefore, when using the focused pattern in the discourse, the new information is probably less conveyed than the parallel pattern. So, possibly, this is the reason why the number of the focused pattern is less than that of the parallel pattern. However, the focused pattern has its own advantages. By using the focused pattern, the same rheme repeats constantly, so that the speaker is able to arouse the interest and attention of the audiences easily. In the keynote speeches of President Xi, it is pretty important to communicate with the audiences. Therefore, by using the focused pattern, something important is emphasized and stressed repeatedly. The speaker discusses or illustrates the mentioned important thing from different aspects, making the audiences learn about the object at a deeper level.

In the light of the overlapped pattern, the theme of the preceding clause is the rheme of the following one. Maybe it is a little complex in a speech, because it indeed requires some time for the audience to understand. So it is a little unsuitable to appear in such kind of speeches.

5. Conclusion

Based on Zhu Yongsheng's thematic progression theory, this study finds out what TP patterns are used in the important speeches of President Xi Jinping, how many percentages of TP patterns are in those important speeches, and how those TP patterns realize their social functions.

As for the types of TP patterns used in the research objects, there are three: the parallel pattern, the focused pattern, as well as the continuous pattern. But there is no overlapped pattern in such kind of speeches. Maybe because it is a little complex for the audiences to understand the content immediately.

Correspondingly, the parallel pattern takes up the highest percentages among all the patterns. In the light of the flow of information in the discourse, it repeatedly emphasize the theme, telling the main idea of the discourse to the audiences directly over and over. Also, the continuous pattern plays an important role in the speeches.

The last finding is about the social functions realized by each thematic progression pattern used in the given keynote speeches. For example, the parallel pattern, the most distinctive feature is that it often uses the pronoun “we” as the constant theme. This is an exquisite design of the structure. As we all know, “we” represent China, and these two words appear in the discourse frequently. This is truly a good way to show the union of our country, and to shorten the distance between the speaker and the audiences.

Indeed, there are some limitations of the research. They are presented as follows. First, the number of the data here is limited. To some extent, it affects the authority of the research’s results. Second, in the light of the data analysis, its display process is not complete. There are only some samples listed.

On the basis of the limitations of this research analyzed above, there are some suggestions for further studies in the following. First, the scale of the research can be larger, and the scope of the research objects can become more. In this way, it will strengthen the objectivity and reliability of the research. Also, it will be better if the display of the analysis process is shown fully. So, the research is more objective and convincing. Finally, based on this research, a comparative study is also recommended for further study.

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