

A Study of Pragmatic Strategies in the Spokespersons' Replies at China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regular Press Conferences—From the Perspective of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle

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Abstract: Diplomatic language is a sharp weapon for diplomats to protect their own country's interests in the complex international environment. So that in the practice of diplomatic work, accurate and appropriate use of diplomatic language is the basic requirement. Grice's cooperative principle and Leech's politeness principle are regarded as the norms of verbal communication. However, in the actual process of communication, due to the complexity of social relations and values, spokesmen often violate some of the cooperative principle and politeness principle in order to achieve some kinds of special purpose. Therefore, based on the analysis of 100 responses from Ministry of foreign affairs of China, this paper would like to explore the diplomatic language's strategies from the perspective of the cooperative principle and politeness principle in actual using situation, so as how to better use cooperative principle and politeness principle to guide verbal communication.

1. Introduction

The regular press conference is an important platform for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to release the important information of China's diplomatic activities and elaborate China's foreign policy as well. It is often held from Monday to Friday in the form that the diplomats answering reporters' questions. The regular press conference is a typical expression of diplomatic language and the uniqueness of diplomatic language lies in that it has the following characteristics.

First of all, it tends to use some euphemism to avoid saying some taboos; secondly, it doesn't express their true intention directly but express it implicitly; thirdly, it strives for neutrality to decrease the acrimony; fourth, it can be nonsense and even a lie. In a word, as long as we can achieve the certain diplomatic effects, they will use some specific strategies.

As the basic theory of this thesis, the cooperation principle is one of the principles that the American linguistic philosopher, George Grice, has developed in 1967 for deducing the meaning of a conversation. According to Grice, a successful linguistic communication consists of a series of connected discourses and a successful conversation is the result of the combined efforts of both speaking parties. When people intend to achieve a successful conversation, they often observe the

CP. What's more, Grice divides the CP into four aspects: the maxim of quality, quantity, manner and relation.

Therefore, as the CP and PP are so widely accepted in the studies of how to achieve better communication, this paper classifies the questions in the regular press conference of the Ministry of foreign affairs of China, and then studies the effects of violation and abidance of CP and PP, and finally the strategies and their purposes as well.

Then, through this paper, we will deepen our understanding of question and answer strategies and it will provide some guidance for foreign ministry spokesmen to answer reporters' questions which could have some kinds of important practical significance and theoretical value.

2. Literature review

2.1 Research on Diplomatic Language

As Lu Song [1] summarized, diplomatic language itself is a special language (or working language), which can systematically make people from different cultural backgrounds understand each other in the process of communication. Diplomatic language is a kind of relatively mild language, which strives to solve problems between the two sides of communication without conflict. In most cases, diplomats cannot state an event directly, nor can they express their emotions without reservation, but they must take full account of each other's "face", and express facts, suggestions, claims, and even criticisms and protests in a roundabout way, implicitly and tactfully. And thus it gives rise to a new discipline that involves to the inference of the true meaning of the diplomatic language.

So that there are a lot of studies which concerning with the studies of the diplomatic language, for example in the essay *Miscellaneous on Diplomatic Language*, Guihua Jin [2] suggests seven characteristics of diplomatic language. That is being tactful, implicit, vague, compromised, with nonsense, weave lies and vulgar. And I will discuss it in the following essay.

2.2 Research on Pragmatic Strategies

Verschueren, Brown & Levinso [3] put forward that the use of language is always strategic. (as cited in Zhaoxi Hou [4], p.3). And the domestic scholars also raise on their different opinion about pragmatic strategies. Senlin Liu [5] defines pragmatic strategies as the means used by us to achieve the best communicative purposes, and in his essay he uses speech act theory as a theoretical framework to study pragmatic strategies and he talks about the relationship between pragmatic strategies and CP and PP. Jing Li [6] studies the pragmatic strategies used in the process of oral Chinese communication from the macro and micro two different levels. Above all, there are a lot of former studies which have a faithful talk in the pragmatic strategies in oral speaking English and writing English as well. As a bigger class, it shares both similarities and differences with diplomatic language's strategies. Their relationship is more like a small category contained in a large category. Pragmatic strategies include many other types such as daily communication, discourse or negotiation and so on.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Studies of Cooperative Principle

3.1.1 Domestic Studies

In China, the theory of Cooperation Principle was first introduced by Zhuanglin Hu in 1980 with the book "Linguistics", and then under the influence of many other scholars in China, discussions on the principle of cooperation spread rapidly, and the results were abundant.

First of all, I would like to discuss about the development of Cooperative Principle in China. The Chinese logician Mr. Liqun Zhou [7], while criticizing Grice's theory of conversational meaning, put forward his own opinions and established his own implicit theory. In his implicit theory, he agrees to adopt Grice's cooperation principle and modifies some of the principles appropriately, and proposes five other cooperation principles, which are:

1) The principle of sincerity (equivalent to qualitative principle). The principle of sincerity indicates that the speaker S thinks his words are true, or the speaker S thinks the listener H can accomplish the answer.

2) The adequacy criterion (equivalent to quantity principle). The adequacy criterion shows that the speaker S is able to provide the greatest amount of information, or that the speaker S requires the hearer H to be able to provide the fullest answer.

3) The relevance criterion (equivalent to relation principle); the relevance criterion indicates that the words spoken by the speaker are related to the topic.

4) The expression criterion (comparable to manner principle); the expression criterion means that the speaker's speech must be clear, concise and coherent.

5) The attitude criterion (not found in the principle of cooperation); this criterion denotes that the speaker's speech must be polite in a communicative context. The content of the conversation is related to the manner in which it is conducted.

What's more, Chinese scholars have also put forward a series of their own propositions on neo-Grice pragmatics including Shengheng Xu [8]. First of all, Mr. Xu Shenghuan agrees with the description of conversational meanings given by Grice and Levinson, that is, the conversational meanings derived from following the cooperation principle and its criterion are conversational meanings, and the special conversational meanings obtained from combining with the context are special conversational meanings.

On the basis of agreeing with their definition, Mr. Xu proposed to combine the conversational meaning, special conversational meaning and non-statutory meaning into a body, collectively called "special meaning", and the relative non-conversational meaning, general conversational meaning and statute meaning into a body, collectively called "general meaning". In his paper, Shengheng Xu defines the "special meaning" and "general meaning" strictly, which helps to understand the difference and connection between classical theory and new theory. And he clarified another important concept - conventional relations.

3.1.2 Studies Abroad

The Cooperation Principle is one of the principles that the American linguistic philosopher, George Grice [9], has developed in 1967. It is a general rule for the mechanism of deducing the meaning of a conversation, first proposed in a lecture entitled "Logic and Conversation" for Harvard University in 1938. According to Grice, normal linguistic communication does not consist of a series of unconnected utterances. A successful conversation is the result of the combined efforts of both parties. When people talk to each other, they often want to understand each other and work

together to achieve a common goal. The principle of cooperation is a principle that is observed. Following Kant's example, Grice divides the principle of cooperation into "quantity", "quality", "relationship" and "manner".

3.2 Studies of Politeness Principle

The first to discuss politeness was Lakoff, who suggested that there are three rules of politeness: first, don't force yourself on others; second, give each other leeway; and third, promote mutual friendship. Politeness is distinguished from non-politeness by whether others feel comfortable. Levinson then developed the concept of face, which is based on the cultural perspective that everyone has a need to save face and that the maintenance of others' face is a sign of politeness.

Based on the former theory, Leech developed the principle of politeness and systematized it into six main guidelines, each of which has its own sub-criterion. Conversation involves both the speaker and the listener, and the speaker's detriment to his own interests makes the listener feel comfortable in the communication, which is the use of the politeness principle. The core of the Politeness Principle is the self-interest and altruism of interest. When the center of interest is "altruistic", the principle of politeness is observed. And it included the following 6 principles.

- (1) Tact Maxim: minimizing cost to hearer; maximizing benefit to hearer.
- (2) Generosity Maxim: minimizing benefit to speaker; maximizing cost to speaker.
- (3) Approbation Maxim: minimizing dispraise of hearer; maximizing praise of hearer.
- (4) Modesty Maxim: minimizing praise of speaker; maximizing dispraise of speaker.
- (5) Agreement Maxim: minimizing disagreement between speaker and hearer; maximizing agreement between speaker and hearer.
- (6) Sympathy Maxim: minimizing antipathy between speaker and hearer; maximizing sympathy between speaker and hearer.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 The Classification of "Questions" and Their Strategies

Based on the collected 100 questions from regular press conferences, I found out that the reporter's questions generally consist of two parts, that is, the statement of the background and the question part. According to the form of questioning, I have divided the questioning into four types, which are:

1) The Specific Interrogative Question

In this type, the reporters will asking the speaker to comment on something that has happened, some kind of others statement, or some information has received. It accounts for the largest proportion of questions. The form of it is usually stating a fact and then using one or more questions to ask for the spokesperson's comments, in order to infer their attitude toward the phenomenons. This type accounts for 61 % and the answers they received were mostly detailed information.

For example: Punch reporter: On the 11th, Pompeo reportedly tweeted that as the largest contributor to the UN, I put U.S. taxpayers and U.S. interests first. UN can't do without US leadership. The U.S. cannot afford to return to multilateralism as usual. What does China have to say about this?

The use of padded questions can quickly bring journalists and speakers closer together and provide some background before asking questions. This will make the questions seem more natural, and will not give others a sense of abruptness and rigidity. This also leaves a buffer time for the spokesman, so that the spokesman can answer the reporter's questions more comfortably, so that the communication between the two sides can progress smoothly.

What's more, the spokesmen were also asked to respond to a happened incident.

For example: Beijing Daily: Some western media commented that the Chinese media are comparing the Capitol Hill riot with the violent riot Hong Kong experienced to serve its own propaganda purpose. What is your response?

When journalists use this strategy, they mostly expect the speaker to give the most relevant response according to the question, and they also hope that the speaker can give a more detailed introduction to the event, so that the reporter can get more information related to the event through the speaker's answer.

The use of source questioning strategy can make the reporter's question more evidence-based, more truthful and credible, instead of giving people the feeling that the information is hollow and fabricated and worthless to answer, the reporter's question is based on evidence, the question is more meaningful and valuable.

2) The Exaggerated Questions

It aims to confirm deliberately whether something (usually a rumor) is a fact or not and this type accounts for 5%. When a reporter needs to ask some unconfirmed and possibly offensive questions, it is obviously inappropriate to use the first method to ask questions with untrue information. However, if he does not put forward some specific statements on such occasions, he may not get sufficient information to respond. Therefore, the author uses this method to solve the problem of direct inquiry and questions without a starting point can also arouse the interest of the respondents.

For example: Sky News: Various Chinese officials including very senior Chinese officials have suggested that COVID-19 may have originated outside China. Does the Chinese government agree that the most likely country where COVID-19 originated is still China?

The news itself is unconfirmed, and the reporter is asking for the Chinese side's opinion on the news, so a direct question might make the spokesman feel that the reporter is deliberately telling false information and deliberately violating the principle of cooperation. In order to avoid being trapped in such an embarrassing situation, the journalist takes the initiative to give the source of the news, so as to save himself from being responsible for the unconfirmed news, and to save face, so that the communicative act of asking questions can be carried out more comfortably.

3) The Result Questions

Asking the spokesperson to provide some kind of information as to ask about the outcome of an event, it accounts for approximately 31%. Sometimes, from the perspective of national strategy, the spokesmen will choose the right time to make the public statement and meanwhile conceal some information temporarily. As a reporter, they always hope to dig out more useful undisclosed information as much as possible. Therefore, the spokesman will be asked about the results and details of some diplomatic activities and whether more information can be provided.

Example 1: CCTV: State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi just concluded his visit to Myanmar. What are the outcomes and highlights of this visit?

As one of the national foreign affairs activities, answering reporters' questions will also become a place for spokesmen to provide unpublished information. When the reporters' questions happen to be the information which published by the Ministry of foreign affairs, they will answer the question faithfully. In general, this is the most conventional way to ask about a certain foreign event and show the world all the results.

What's more, they would also ask about the arrangements for a certain event (not happened yet).

Example 2: Reuters: They've arrived in Wuhan. As far as you know, will they be staying in Wuhan for the duration of their mission or will they be invited to go to other locations in China?

This is similar to the former one but they wanted to ask about the process of a particular activity

which haven't happened yet to have a comprehensive understanding in time.

Example 3: China News Service: We have noted reports that many Chinese embassies and consulates are planning to distribute anti-epidemic and Spring Festival supplies among local Chinese students, employees of Chinese enterprises and resident Chinese nationals in need. Could you tell us a bit more about these Spring Festival kits?

Example 4: Reuters: Is China still engaging in communication with the Trump administration now? When was the last time that China was in communication with the Trump administration?

The purpose of this type of question is to ask for more open information, so it is likely to be rejected, so it is often asked with more polite language to increase the probability of the other side answering the question.

4) The Attitude Questions

Asking the attitude of the government. It accounts for 3%. They usually want to test whether China's attitude is friendly or hostile, so as to infer whether the event will be solved or turn out to be a conflict.

For example: Reuters: China previously said that it welcomes the WHO team of experts to Wuhan to conduct investigations. If, come the end of their scheduled visit, they feel they like to stay a bit longer, will China welcome them to stay a bit longer? If, come the end of their scheduled visit, they feel they like to stay a bit longer, will China welcome them to stay a bit longer?

This is a side question to infer the attitude of the Chinese. From this question, we can at least know the Chinese attitude towards the countries who spread false information which claim that New Crown originated in China, so as to infer China's attitude towards these disinformation countries, whether they are convinced that New Crown did not originate in China, so as to infer how far Chinese scientists have studied the origin of New Crown, and whether China's diplomatic strategy is open or closed. However, because of this side questioning, we often do not get the desired results. So that the percentage of such side inquiries is small and they often do not yield all the information desired.

It is interesting to find that when asking questions about attitudes and opinions like that, the journalists basically chose to use adjective questions but rarely used negative tones. I guess for the reason why they want to make a positive presupposition first is because that no one would suspect that the two countries have bad relations.

4.2 The Classification of “Answers” and Their Strategies

By answering journalists' questions, the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs conveys China's diplomatic message to the outside world on the one hand, and makes China's position and attitude clear on the other hand. Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing once said, "The spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is both a 'person' and not a 'person'." It is easy to understand that "the spokesman is a human being", but "not a human being" because he represents a mechanism through which China transmits information to the outside world, answers journalists' questions, and expresses the Chinese viewpoint. In the regular press conferences held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, journalists and spokespersons are the two main subjects of question-and-answer exchanges, with their own purposes and intentions. When a journalist asks a question about the daily affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the spokesperson and the journalist have the same intention, and at this time the spokesperson is willing to release the relevant information to the outside world. However, when the journalist's question involves a sensitive or confidential matter, or when the spokesperson needs to express China's viewpoint, he will answer carefully, because it no longer represents an individual, but the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In general, by analyzing the spokesperson's answers, we can divide the spokesperson's answering strategies into four strategies: direct answering, indirect answering, direct evasion and indirect evasion.

1) Direct Answers

Direct answers which also mean provide enough information. This type accounts for the largest proportion, approximately 56%. In this category, the respondents fully follow the Cooperative Principle and give accurate answers to the raised questions. And under the guidance of the principles, people may have an efficient and reasonable dialogue while the speaker does not have any suspicion and express whatever he wants to say, and he can understand the words swiftly. And what's more, the dialogue guided by the CP is more informative, detailed and relevant to the subject.

For example: The Globe and Mail: The Canadian government has said Canada has obtained to get increased family and consular access for Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. What increased family and consular access has China agreed to provide and when will that begin?

Zhao Lijian: We have repeatedly stated China's position on the cases of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. The Chinese competent authorities handle the cases in accordance with law and fully protect their legitimate rights. After the COVID-19 outbreak, the Chinese competent authorities took timely measures to ensure the health and safety of all detainees including Kovrig and Spavor, and arranged for officials from the Canadian embassy in China to have meetings with them as epidemic prevention and control conditions allow. Recently, at the request of the Canadian side, the Chinese authorities, in a humanitarian spirit and on a lawful basis, have allowed Kovrig and Spavor to talk over the phone with their family respectively during Christmas time. Both Kovrig and Spavor thanked our authorities for the above-mentioned arrangements.

2) Refusal Answers

Refusal answers that are to avoid answering questions directly. This type accounts for approximately 21%. In the regular press conference, when the content of the reporter's questions involves state secrets or sensitive issues, in order to protect China's state secrets, the spokesperson generally adopts avoidance strategy to avoid the questions raised by the reporter. In terms of the quality of information, the reporter cannot obtain any information related to the question points. Direct evasion means that the spokesman explicitly refuses the reporter's questions, does not make any reply to the questions, and does not provide any relevant information to the questions.

For example: Kyodo News: Another question on the WHO expert panel's visit to China. China put the pandemic under control long ago but until now refused to receive the foreign experts for origin-tracing. Why did it take China so long to agree on the foreign experts' visit?

Zhao Lijian: Earlier I talked about China's stance in a very detailed manner. Were you listening? Please listen carefully before raising such a question next time.

In this question, the spokesman pointed out that the reporter did not listen to his question seriously and clearly. His point of view had been clear from the first beginning, and he reminded him to listen carefully to the previous answer. This kind of answer first avoids the inefficiency caused by the second time answering questions, and at the same time, euphemistically puts forward the fact that China has a clear attitude and cannot be doubted.

3) Side Answers

Side answers are to use vague words but state their point of view and stand strictly. This type accounts for approximately 23%. When the background of a reporter's question involves the point of view which is not conducive to China, or it is a false guess about China or even a slander against China, the spokesman will take a direct way to answer questions and fight back, indicating China's firm opposition. This strategy can not only curb the spread of false statements and safeguard China's

international image, but also safeguard China's national interests and sovereignty.

For example: Reuters: The Congressional-Executive Commission on China, a bipartisan commission in the US, said new evidence has emerged in the past year that crimes against humanity had occurred in Xinjiang and possibly genocide. What is the ministry's comment?

Zhao Lijian: I have talked about the true situation in Xinjiang and refuted Xinjiang-related rumors all these days. This so-called commission, which never fails to observe China through a distorted perspective, has long been engaging in groundless accusations against China, and that I regard as beneath refutation.

From the perspective of cooperative principle and politeness principle, the spokesman violated them and used extremely severe words to refuse that rumor which also reflects that forced labor in Xinjiang is nonsense. The spokesman shows our attitude and we only want to be the better China rather than a hegemony. It also calls on people from all countries to come to China, experience it on themselves and reduce their stereotypes.

5. Conclusion

Through the above discussion, I found that certain communicative purposes can be achieved regardless of whether the CP and PP are violated or followed in different contexts. And the spokesperson and journalists of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will use some strategies to make the communication smooth. As for the asking strategies, the journalists will provide enough information or not provide any information or provide some information which they have already known is a fake news to guide the spokesmen to have a further explanation. And in contrast, the speaker will answer them directly or refuse to answer or say something vague but clear in attitude. The questions can be divided into specific interrogative questions, yes-no questions, exaggerated questions and result questions, and the answers can be divided into direct answers, refusal answers and side answers. At the same time, certain diplomatic strategies can be reached on these issues, including maintaining peaceful relations between the two countries, promoting national cooperation and avoiding conflicts; Declare attitude and stand, refuse to infringe on legitimate rights and interests, protect their own interests; And so on.

After collecting and sorting out the data, I found some implications. I will explain them from the perspective of characteristics of diplomatic language, the types of questions and answers and their effects.

From the perspective of the characteristics of diplomatic language, I have summed up the following three characteristics of diplomatic language:

1) Be vague and illocutionary. Sometimes they will give back the reporters' questions and let them think about the illocutionary meaning to avoid conflicts.

2) Be firm. Once the spokesman wants to say something tough, they have to consider it carefully and once said they will not change it easily. It is usually in the face of some malicious conflicts so that they should stand firmly and not waver.

3) Be formal. It will use some languages that are not commonly used in spoken language but are often used in written language to show formal. In addition, the language is usually beautiful to maintain a good image of the country.

From the perspective of questioning strategies, I divide them into the following 4 types which include specific interactive questions, yes-no questions, exaggerated questions and result questions. Each of them moderately abides by the cooperative principle and politeness principle, but there are also some cases that violate the cooperative principle and politeness principle to achieve better results.

① Specific interrogative questions abide by the cooperative principle and politeness principle,

which not only provide sufficient information, but also pay attention to the expression of language to make the other party accept, so it can achieve the best effect. Therefore, it accounts for the largest proportion and it belongs to a conventional type of questions.

② Yes-no questions is to ask whether something is true or not, and let the respondent choose between two kinds of answers. But unlike the first case, the question he raised can be true or a rumor they heard. Therefore, to some extent, the violating of the politeness principle may cause the other party's dissatisfaction, but from the perspective of cooperative principle, he also follows the four principles of cooperative principle. So communication can go on smoothly. But in the face of some false information, the respondent will take the strategy of refusing to answer or not answering directly, which is a failure of communication on the surface. However, it can express a kind of attitude on the side.

③ Exaggerated questions. In exaggerated questions, the questioner will use some exaggerated rhetoric or tone to arouse the interest of the respondent. From the perspective of cooperative principle, it violates the principle of manner. From the perspective of politeness principle, it violates the principle of appropriateness. But it can also produce special effects, such as enlivening the atmosphere, impressing the speaker and so on.

④ Result questions is to ask the result of a specific activity and ask the speaker to show the result. This type requires the speaker to provide enough information, and the highest requirement is in the principle of quantity. The spokesman can choose to public it or refuse to answer it, thus producing two completely different effects. Therefore, this kind of problem accounts for the smallest proportion in the actual use.

The answer methods can be divided into direct answers, refusal answers and side answers:

① Direct answers. This type not only follow the principle of cooperation, but also follow the principle of politeness. Though the communication is successful, but it has to be under certain conditions. The Respondent must know the information the questioner needs and think the communication is meaningful. The result is a smooth dialogue.

② Refusal answers. This type doesn't follow the principle of cooperation or politeness. In this cases, the spokesman usually face some unreasonable, malicious, meaningless and time-consuming questions. So that they tend to use refusal answer to reflects attitude and as well saves time.

③ Side answers. This type doesn't follow the cooperative principle, but it follows the politeness principle. They didn't refuse to answer the question directly because of politeness, but they didn't provide enough information, or the information was irrelevant to the questioner's pursuit as well. The effect is that although the questioner does not get enough information, it will not threaten face.

In a word, both adaptation and violation of CP and PP are the communicative means that communicators choose to use in order to achieve their own communicative purposes. Only by fully understanding the effectiveness of communicative principles in various communicative environments can we choose a more appropriate way to achieve communicative purposes according to the context.

From my perspective of view, this paper is still lacking in some aspects. First of all, there are few research materials available for reference. Secondly, as the CP and PP are specified according to Western values, whether they are completely suitable for Chinese society has not been fully determined. And in China, the CP may have different meaning in explaining the maxim of quality, quantity, relation and manner. Thirdly, the understanding of theoretical knowledge is not deep enough for me yet. However, I will devote myself to the future study in order to deepen my understanding.

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