

# *Transitivity Analysis under Ideational Function in Systemic Functional Linguistics—Taking Present Xi's Idioms as an Example*

Xiong Zijia

*Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China*

**Keywords:** Systematic Functional Linguistics; Ideational Function; Transitivity; Idiom

**Abstract:** Language is an indispensable tool for people's daily communication, and it has various functions. A well-known British linguist, Halliday, divided the language's functions into three different functions: ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Ideational function includes experiential function and logical function, in which experiential function are mainly embodied by transitivity and ergativity. Transitivity includes six processes: material process, mental process, relation process, verbal process, behavioral process, and existential process. Based on the theory of transitivity in ideational function, this thesis selected some common idioms of Xi's in conferences for analysis, and concluded that Chinese idioms are closely related to Chinese traditional culture, and the ideational function of Chinese idioms is also closely related to the Chinese policies. Therefore, through the transitivity analysis of Xi's idioms, we can explore the ideational function of Chinese idioms and in order to enhance our understanding of traditional Chinese culture and national policies.

## 1. Introduction

Idiom is a special linguistic phenomenon, the essence of national languages, with strong cultural characteristics. With the development and rise of China, Chinese traditional culture has attracted more and more attention from experts and scholars at home and abroad, such as idioms derived from ordinary people, especially because the General Secretary of the President mentioned idioms familiar to us in many speeches. Before that, the analysis of English idioms and Chinese idioms focused on the surface structure, such as phonological analysis, grammatical analysis, rhetorical analysis, etc. There were also discussions on the translation strategies of English and Chinese idioms based on their cultural differences. However, few people have conducted in-depth structural analysis of idioms. Some professors have analyzed and studied the conceptual function of idioms. Although Chinese and English are only 45 percent similar, the transitive system of conceptual functions in systemic-functional linguistics can interpret language into specific process categories. In Chinese idioms, the process of understanding by transitive system also includes six kinds of processes: material process, mental process, relational process, speech process, behavior process and existence process. Based on the above six processes, in-depth analysis can be made. Therefore, this paper uses the transitivity theory under conceptual function in systemic functional linguistics to

try to analyze the idioms commonly used by the President, and then discusses the internal relationship between Chinese idioms under the conceptual function of Chinese idioms and the traditional culture of the Chinese nation, as well as the relationship between the conceptual function of Chinese idioms and national politics.

## 2. Systemic functional linguistics and transitivity theory

The famous English linguist Halliday<sup>[1]</sup> proposed systematic functional linguistics, which includes two parts: systematic grammar and functional grammar. Systematic grammar looks at language from the perspective of system, thinking that language has rules to follow, and the description of language is the system. Functional grammar looks at language from the perspective of its use value and considers language as a tool for people to communicate. Systemic functional linguistics takes the actual use of language as the object of study, and is used to explain the essence and function of language, etc., and is widely used in many fields.

Systemic functional linguistics believes that language, as a tool of human communication, has various functions. According to the pure function of language, Halliday<sup>[2]</sup> divides the pure function of language into three types: conceptual function, interpersonal function and textual function. and the conceptual function includes experience function and logic function. The function of experience refers to "language's expression of people's various experiences in the real world (including the inner world)" <sup>[3]</sup>, which reflects the environmental factors such as what happens in the objective world and the subjective world, the people and things involved, and the time and place related to it. The function of experience is embodied through the transitivity system, which divides what people see, hear and do in the real world into several "processes" and specifies the "participants" and "circumstances" related to the various processes. It is a systematic network about the types of processes expressed in clauses and the actors and environmental components involved. Transitivity system analysis has been attached great importance by scholars at home and abroad. For example, Halliday<sup>[4]</sup> combined it with discourse. This paper focuses more on the analysis of idioms clauses, but also on the contextual meaning of the text, so as to better understand the meaning and function of idioms.

It consists of six different process: Material process, Behavioral process, Mental process, Verbal process, Relational process and Existential process.<sup>[5]</sup> Material process is the process of doing; Mental process is the process of thinking, involving the verbs of perception, emotion, cognition and desideration; Relational process is the process of being; Verbal process is the process of saying; Behavioral process is the process of behaving; Existential process is the process of existing.

## 3. Idiom

The equivalent of idiom in English is an idiom, which is defined in Oxford English-Chinese Advanced Dictionary (7th Edition) as follows: idiom is a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words. Idiom is a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words. Idioms are phrases or short sentences extracted by people through long-term social practice in the process of language development. They are an important part of language, have strong cultural characteristics, and are the essence of language and the carrier of culture. In a broad sense, Chinese idioms include idioms, proverbs, allegories, allusions and aphorisms, etc., which are characterized by harmonious tone and vivid image with a strong national color and bright cultural connotation.

## 4. Corpus Analysis

The transitivity analysis in the conceptual function of Chinese idioms shows that the transitivity system of Chinese idioms contains the six processes mentioned above just like English, which provides us with a new Angle to understand the internal relationship between Chinese idioms and Chinese excellent traditional culture. By studying the idioms commonly used by the general secretary of the President, we can find that the conceptual functions of Chinese idioms are closely related to the dissemination of Chinese policies.

Material process

Example 1: Lu Qi Xiu Zi Jia You Gan.

The "Lu Qi Xiu Zi" in this sentence is a dynamic verb, indicating that the sentence is a material process, omitting the "person" as the author, and "Jia You Gan" is the goal of the sentence. The original quote is from the president's 2017 New Year's message: "Rolling up our sleeves and working hard is the mission that The Times have entrusted to our generation, and it is also the promise we have made to the future." We can clearly recognize the goals that the president has given our generation, and we need to keep our feet on the ground. This sentence also reflects the independence of the meaning of the idiom, its meaning is not equal to the literal meaning, it is not really to roll up our sleeves, but to keep us always ready for the state, always maintain a positive attitude to meet difficulties. As soon as this sentence is spoken, it is widely popular, and we ordinary people often say this sentence to encourage ourselves or others, reflecting the intrinsic connection between the conceptual function of idioms and the dissemination of China's major policies.

Mental process

Example 2: Luo Bo Qing Cai, Ge You Suo Ai.

In this idiom, "Ai" is an emotional verb, indicating that the sentence is a mental process. "History tells us that only through exchanges and mutual learning can a civilization be full of vitality. This is what the Chinese always say: radish and vegetable, each to his own liking." In fact, "radish and green vegetables" here is extended to "national cultural differences". The president starts from the selection of the most common vegetables in Chinese culture, and then elevates to the selection of national culture. The use of "Luo Bo" and "Qing Cai" reflects the grounding of the president's language and the close connection between Chinese idioms and Chinese traditional culture. This sentence also reflects the antithesis, rhyming and national characteristics of Chinese idioms. The form of the sentence is neat, the last word rhymes, "Luo Bo" and "Qing Cai" are the most common vegetables of the Chinese people, with national characteristics. The president also made use of this sentence to become an effective way to solve cultural conflicts between countries by means of Chinese culture, reflecting the connection between idioms and national politics.

Relational process

Example 3: Ren Xin Jiu Shi Li Liang.

This sentence embodies the identity-type relationship process in the relationship process, in which "Ren Xin" is regarded as the carrier and "Li Liang" as the attribute. This shows the relationship between "Ren Xin" and "Li Liang". The phrase also reflects the figurative characteristics of Chinese idioms, with the president comparing the human heart to power and emphasizing the support of the people and the relationship between countries, making the phrase easy to understand and vivid. This sentence is simple and effective, implying a profound truth that the human heart can influence the fate of a political party or a country, and can influence the great rejuvenation of a nation. The president's use of this idiom emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the party and the people, and also reflects the relationship between the idiom and national politics.

Behavioral process

Example 4: Lao Xiang Jian Lao Xiang, Liang Yan Lei Wang Wang.

This idiom consists of two processes, "Jian" is the perceptual verb in the mental process, and "Liu Lei" is the behavioral process, because "Liu Lei" is considered to be a human physiological activity. Saying this to overseas Chinese compatriots helps to strengthen their sense of national identity. It embodies the connection between Chinese idioms and Chinese culture and national politics. Since ancient times, the Chinese nation has been a nation that attaches importance to roots and leaves, sources and flows, so the president said to the overseas Chinese compatriots, not only can let them understand our Chinese culture, but also let them increase their sense of identity and pride, reflecting the connection between Chinese idioms and Chinese culture and national politics.

Verbal process

Example 5: Kong Tan Wu Guo, Shi Gan Xing Bang.

This idiom contains two processes, "Tan" indicates that it is a verbal process, "Gan" indicates that it is a material process, both of which omit the subject "man", "Wu Guo" is the goal of the verbal process, and "Xing Bang" is the goal of the material process. Through transitivity analysis, the content of the exchange here is empty, and the general talk is not effective, which requires the majority of young people to seize the time, study hard, take a practical attitude, reflecting the close connection between Chinese idioms and Chinese traditional culture.

Existential process

Example 6: Jun Zi Wu Ben, Ben Li Er Dao Sheng.

This idiom includes two processes: "Wu Ben" reflects the material process, "Dao Sheng" reflects the existential process, this sentence means that the gentleman should concentrate on the fundamental things, the fundamental establishment, the principle of governing the country is also produced, reflecting the relationship between idioms and national governance. The president uses this idiom to express that we must face challenges together, meet opportunities, adhere to the fundamentals, and the principles of governing the country are also produced, reflecting the relationship between idioms and national governance.

## 5. The practical significance of the conceptual function of Chinese idioms

1) The relationship between the conceptual function of Chinese idioms and Chinese traditional folk culture

In fact, the popular idioms among Chinese folk are also part of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. Idioms are constantly developing and changing with the changes of The Times, and because of the different geographical environment and lifestyle, they have strong local and national characteristics. Thus, it can be seen that Chinese idioms are crucial for the preservation of traditional culture. The idioms quoted by the president at various conferences are also conducive to the spread of idioms to a certain extent, which not only makes us better understand our own culture, but also makes Chinese traditional culture spread in the world.

2) The relationship between the conceptual function of Chinese idioms and national politics

National politics has always been rigorous and highly professional, while the president's language is plain and fresh, profound and easy to understand, especially when the president speaks, he often uses popular and down-to-earth language expressions, such as idioms, so that the people are willing to listen to, understand and listen to and it provides a populist route for ordinary people to understand national politics. Furthermore, the use of idioms can help people better understand national politics.

## 6. Conclusions

Through the analysis of idioms commonly used by the president, we find that we can also use the transitivity system of English to analyze the conceptual function of Chinese idioms, but in the process of analysis, Chinese idioms have the characteristics of Chinese traditional culture. This paper attempts to analyze the conceptual functions of Chinese idioms from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, and concludes that Chinese idioms are closely related to Chinese traditional culture, and the conceptual functions of Chinese idioms are also closely related to national politics. Therefore, we hope to enhance our understanding of Chinese traditional culture and national politics by exploring the conceptual functions of Chinese idioms through the transitivity analysis of presidential idioms.

## References

- [1] Halliday M A K et al. *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* [M]. London: Longman, 1964.
- [2] Halliday M A K. *Explorations in the Functions of Language* [M]. London: Arold, 1973.
- [3] Halliday M A K. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* [M]. London: Edward Arnold, 1985.
- [4] Halliday M A K. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* [M]. London: Edward Arnold, 1978.
- [5] Geoff Thompson. *Introducing Functional Grammar (3rd edition)* [M]. Routledge, 2014.