

A Study on the Construction of Pragmatic Identity from the Perspective of Meta-discourse—Taking General Secretary's Speech at the “Belt and Road” Summit Forum (The Third) as an Example

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Abstract: This paper discusses the pragmatic identity construction from the perspective of meta-discourse theory. Taking general secretary's speech at the Belt and Road Summit Forum as an example, it analyzes how he used meta-discourse strategies to construct the pragmatic identity of the state in his speech and reveals its important role in Chinese diplomacy. Through in-depth analysis and research, this paper finds that meta-discourse plays a key role in shaping image, conveying policy, and constructing international discourse. This study not only enriches the application of meta-discourse theory in pragmatic identity construction, but also provides new perspectives for understanding how leaders shape image through discourse strategies.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, competition between countries is not only reflected in hard power such as economy and science and technology, but also permeates into soft power fields such as discourse power and influence. With the deepening development of globalization, countries are increasingly connected with each other. Language is not only a tool of communication, but also an important tool to express their own views, positions and interests in international exchanges. As an important occasion for international exchanges, the Belt and Road Forum has attracted the attention of politicians and scholars from all over the world. China put forward the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, which has been recognized by more and more countries, and countries have responded positively. The Belt and Road Initiative is China's plan to participate in global cooperation at a deeper level, contribute to improving the global economic governance system, and vigorously promote global common prosperity and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind as a major country, especially at the Third Belt and Road Forum held in Beijing on October 18, 2023. As the largest developing country in the world, China's voice and image construction in the international arena have attracted much attention. As an important theoretical framework of discourse analysis, meta-discourse theory emphasizes the close relationship between discourse structure and function, and plays an important role in guiding, explaining and modifying discourse. This will not only help

countries to deepen their understanding of China's foreign policy and image construction, but also provide important reference and inspiration for China's reputation and influence in the international community.

2. Literature review

2.1 Researches on meta-discourse abroad

In 1959, Harris first introduced the concept of meta-discourse, which is often defined as “discourse about discourse itself.” [1] In this description, the first “discourse” refers to the thematic content of the text, which is used to convey the basic information; The second “discourse” refers to the explanation, discussion and reflection on the content of the subject, namely “meta-discourse” [8]. In 1985, William Vande Kopple[2] proposed a preliminary classification of meta-discourse, distinguishing between textual meta-discourse and interpersonal meta-discourse, which laid a foundation for the later research. After that, Hyland[3] proposed a more detailed classification system for meta-discourse and explored the usage patterns of meta-discourse in different academic fields and cultural backgrounds through extensive interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research.

2.2 Researches on meta-discourse at home

In 1997, scholar Cheng Xiaoguang introduced the term meta-discourse for the first time in his book “Research on Meta-discourse”. Subsequently, many scholars have shown great interest in meta-discourse. Professor Chen Xinren is a representative figure in the research of meta-discourse theory in China. Firstly, he clarified the relationship between meta-discourse and meta-pragmatics, and based on the classification of metapragmatic awareness, attempted to propose a meta-discourse analysis framework different from Hyland. In recent years, with the continuous improvement of meta-discourse theory, the field of meta-discourse application research has become increasingly extensive. The types of research on the application of meta-discourse have expanded from early academic studies to other types of discourse, such as literary works research, external communication, media reporting, etc. Scholars have also continuously expanded the scope of meta-discourse application, examining it from different perspectives.

2.3 Researches on pragmatic identity abroad

The term “identity” first appeared in the 12th century Oxford English Dictionary, referring to the characteristics or facts that distinguish a person or object from others. Currently, identity research is a highly focused topic in the field of humanities and social sciences[7]. The study of the relationship between identity and discourse from the perspective of pragmatics does not focus on identity or its construction process itself, but rather aims to explore how communicators can convey their specific intentions, achieve specific communicative purposes, and maintain, adjust, or strengthen interpersonal relationships in specific communication situations and contexts, in order to achieve the expected communicative effects. This goal differs significantly from the research on identity in fields such as communication studies, sociology, social psychology, and cultural studies[10]. Identity research has undergone a gradual shift from essentialism to constructivism. From an essentialist perspective, identity is seen as a static, fixed, and unchanging concept. However, constructivism provides a more dynamic and flexible interpretation of identity, believing that identity is negotiable, variable, and malleable[11]. Brewer and Gardner[4] divided identity into three levels of representation, namely individual representation, interpersonal representation, and group representation. With the development of pragmatics and discourse analysis, the construction of identity that links identity and

discourse has become a research hotspot in humanities and social sciences. Zimmerman proposed the theory of conversational identity from a linguistic perspective, which considers identity as the contextual factor in conversation and distinguishes it into three types: discourse identity, situational identity, and transferable identity. Tracy[5] stated that “conversation is a way of constructing and showcasing personal identity.” According to her research, identity is divided into four categories: primary identity, interactive identity, personal identity, and relational identity.

2.4 Researches on pragmatic identity at home

Compared with foreign research on identity construction, domestic research started relatively late. But still achieved some academic results. Chen Xinren explicitly proposed the concept of pragmatic identity based on previous research in the academic community. This concept refers to the identity chosen and used by the communicative subject in the current communication based on a specific context in interactive communication. Pragmatic identity has significant characteristics of dependency, dynamism, constructiveness, and variability. It originates from a real social identity, but it is also a temporary social identity constructed by communicators during the communication process. According to different classification criteria, pragmatic identity can be further subdivided into various types such as individual identity, relational identity, and situational identity. Chen Xinren’s pragmatic identity theory laid a theoretical foundation for future scholars to study pragmatic identity construction. Overall, research on identity construction in China can be reviewed from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In terms of theoretical research, many scholars in China have defined identity. In terms of empirical research, many scholars have studied identity construction issues in different contexts. Through comprehensive analysis of existing empirical research, it can be classified into the following categories to better understand the development and trends in the research field. 1. Expert authoritative discourse. 2. Academic discourse; 3. Daily conversations; 4. Teacher classroom discourse; 5. News media discourse.

In summary, the research on pragmatic identity construction at home and abroad continues to deepen, and the research results are becoming increasingly rich. However, there are also some shortcomings in existing research. Firstly, in terms of research subjects, there is currently a relative lack of exploration on the pragmatic identity construction of spokespersons, thus there is still significant research space and potential. Secondly, in terms of theoretical framework, there is still significant research space for pragmatic identity construction from the perspective of meta discourse.

3. Theoretical basis

This study refers to the pragmatic identity theory proposed by Professor Chen Xinren and the meta-discourse classification framework proposed by Hyland. Chen Xinren advocates viewing identity as a communicative resource, believing that speakers serve specific communicative goals by constructing specific identities. He further defined the “contextualized self or peer identity consciously or unconsciously chosen by language users, as well as the other identity of social individuals or groups mentioned by the speaker or author in their discourse” as pragmatic identity. Hyland divided meta-discourse into two categories: interactive meta-discourse and interactional meta-discourse. Interactive meta-discourse helps authors organize discourse, emphasizing the logic and readability of discourse, mainly involving the author’s methods of organizing discourse and the author’s evaluation of readers. It has the function of coordinating the flow of discourse information and guiding readers to better obtain and understand information[12]. Interactional meta-discourse refers to the language resources used in a text to guide readers in understanding and participating in the construction of the text. It not only focuses on the expression of text content, but also includes how the author establishes communication with readers, guides readers’ thinking and interpretation

paths. At the same time, by using multiple meta discourse markers, the author not only conveys attitudes and opinions towards the proposition, but also enhances interaction with the reader, allowing them to participate more deeply in the text.

4. Research Design

In the context of globalization, the struggle for discourse power has become an important dimension of competition and cooperation between countries. Specifically, this study aims to reveal how general secretary used meta-discourse resources in his speech to construct image and pragmatic identity, as well as the meaning and impact behind this pragmatic identity construction.

4.1 Research Questions

To explore the identity construction in general secretary's speech, this study intends to answer the following questions:

- 1) From the perspective of meta-discourse theory, examining the text of general secretary's speech and study its use of meta-discourse;
- 2) From the perspective of meta-discourse theory, examining general secretary's speech and exploring the pragmatic identities constructed through meta-discourse;
- 3) From the perspective of meta discourse theory, examining general secretary's speech texts and discussing the reasons and influences of his pragmatic identity construction.

4.2 Data Collection

Through careful reading of the speech script, the author manually identified and marked examples of the use of meta-discourse, including but not limited to inflection points, emphasis words, modal verbs, etc. At the same time, attention was also paid to the language level such as sentence structure and rhetorical devices in the speech. Finally, for the collected examples of meta-discourse, the author classified and encoded them for subsequent statistical analysis. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, the author conducted data validation and review work. On the one hand, by comparing official transcripts and speech videos, the accuracy of meta-discourse instances can be verified; On the other hand, inviting peer researchers to review some of the data to ensure the objectivity and scientificity of the study.

5. Result Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Use of Meta-Discourse in General Secretary's Speech Text

The collected text in this study consists of 3440 words. According to the Hyland meta-discourse classification model, the frequency and percentage of interactive and interactional meta-discourse in the corpus were manually annotated. The overall results are shown in Table 1.

From the table, it can be seen that in the speech at the Belt and Road Forum, general secretary used interactive meta-discourse 21 times and interactional meta-discourse 69 times, accounting for 23.33% and 76.67% of the total number of meta-discourse, respectively. This result reveals the significant advantages of interactional meta-discourse in this speech, while also suggesting relatively less use of interactive meta-discourse. The following will provide an in-depth analysis of this discovery and explore possible reasons.

In communication, people need to adjust their identity and pragmatic approach based on the topic, context, and content of their speech. Appropriate pragmatic approaches can help establish harmonious

relationships, ensuring that the speaker's identity matches the content and context of the discussion, thereby achieving effective communication goals[14]. In important international occasions, the speeches of leaders often carry profound political connotations and strategic significance, and their language expression must be rigorous, authoritative, and influential. In general secretary 's speech at the Belt and Road Forum, taking into account the occasion and purpose of the speech, the speech of the state leader needs to maintain a high degree of formality and authority to ensure the accurate transmission of information and the clear elaboration of policies. Therefore, general secretary may be more inclined to use direct and clear language to express his views in his speech and reduce the use of excessive explanations and transitional language, so as to present the solemnness and seriousness of his speech. This is not only respect for the occasion, but also respect for the audience, but also reflects the rigorous attitude and authority of the leader of a country.

Table 1 The Classification of Metadiscourse in General Secretary's Speech

Types	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Interactive meta-discourse	transition	5	5.56%
	Frame marker	10	1.11%
	Endophoric marker	4	4.44%
	Evidential	2	2.22%
	Code gloss	0	0
	Total	21	23.33%
Interactional meta-discourse	hedge	11	12.22%
	booster	19	21.11%
	Attitude marker	16	17.78%
	Self-mention	7	7.78%
	Engagement-marker	16	17.78%
	Total	69	76.67%
Total		90	100%

In terms of the use of interactional meta-discourse, the essence of interactional meta-discourse is to establish a close relationship between the author and the reader and guide the reader to participate in the construction and understanding of the text through language resources. In general secretary's speeches, he not only simply transmits information, but also needs to make Chinese voices known. Through the use of interactional meta-discourses, such as attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mention, general secretary pulls the audience into the context of the speech and establishes a direct dialogue relationship with them. Secondly, the use of interactional meta-discourse helps general secretary express his personal views and positions in his speech and demonstrate his firm belief in China's development concept and the "the Belt and Road" initiative. For example, by using boosters and attitude markers, he can guide the audience to focus on important information, stimulate their thinking and resonance, so that they can not only understand the content of the speech, but also feel the speaker's emotions and attitude, enhancing the persuasiveness of the speech. From the perspective of the audience, the use of interactional meta-discourse can also enhance their sense of participation and belonging. By using engagement markers, general secretary makes the audience feel their important position in the speech, thereby actively participating in the interpretation and understanding of the speech. This interactive communication method not only enhances the attractiveness of the speech, but also deepens the audience's impression and understanding of the speech content. In addition, the use of meta-discourse is influenced by cultural factors. At international conferences, especially those involving multiple countries, speakers need to consider audiences with different cultural backgrounds and values to ensure accurate and effective

communication of their information. In this context, the speech style may be more inclined to establish a closer and direct connection with the audience through interactional meta-discourse, which together affect the proportion distribution of meta-discourse used in his speech. By delving into the use of meta-discourse, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the speaker's intentions and purposes, as well as the cultural, power, and value implications behind the speech. And it helps to expand our understanding of political speeches and international exchanges, promoting the process of cross-cultural communication and understanding.

5.2 Types of Pragmatic Identity Construction in General Secretary's Speech Text

According to the corpus, general secretary constructed three pragmatic identities: a promoter of initiative and cooperation, an international envoy of peace and friendship, and a practitioner of practical construction. Next, the author will analyze in detail the pragmatic identities constructed through meta-discourse resources.

5.2.1 Pragmatic Identity Construction of Promoters of Initiative and Cooperation

General secretary used meta-discourse resources to express his enthusiasm and confidence in the "the Belt and Road" initiative, encourage and guide international cooperation, thus shaping his identity as an advocate and cooperation promoter, and highlighting China's positive role in promoting international affairs.

Example 1: Today, we (self-mention) are here... at the opening ceremony. I (self-mention) ... and in my personal (self-mention) name... warmly welcome! This year is the 10th anniversary of my (self-mention) proposal to jointly build the "the Belt and Road" initiative... strengthen with countries (engagement marker) ... create a new platform.

Example 2: We (self-mention) deeply realize... I (self-mention) once said that the reason why the ancient Silk Road became famous in history was not because of war horses and spears, but because of (transition) camel caravans and goodwill; It's not about strong ships and sharp guns, but (transition) treasure ships and friendship. What we practice is..., and we also (transition) do not engage in... and (transition) oppose "decoupling and chain breaking".

In the above example, general secretary mainly uses three meta-discourse resources: self-mention, engagement markers, and transition to construct the identity of a promoter of initiative and cooperation. First of all, through self-mention, he clearly mentioned himself and China in his speech, expressed his determination and firm belief in the "the Belt and Road" initiative, and clearly pointed out China's status and identity as a leader in launching the "the Belt and Road" initiative. The use of words such as "I" and "we" emphasizes China's leadership role in promoting initiatives and its role as an advocate and practitioner, highlighting China's positive role in promoting global cooperation and common development. In addition, using the first person perspective of "we" for reference not only has a significant "empathy" effect, but also effectively connects the two sides of the discourse closely together. This expression not only enhances resonance and understanding between both parties, but also significantly increases the persuasiveness and infectiousness of the discourse, making communication more profound and effective[15]. This self-mention not only highlights China's influence and sense of responsibility, but also highlights the Chairman's mission and responsibility as a leader.

The use of engagement markers is also an important means for general secretary to establish contact and interaction with the audience. Hyland starts from the perspective of interpersonal interaction and uses engagement markers to attract the attention of the audience, viewing them as participants and creators of the discourse, thereby promoting their better understanding of the author's intention and enhancing the readability and comprehensibility of the discourse[16]. By engagement

markers, he introduced the roles of audience, partners, and other participants in the speech, emphasizing the importance of joint cooperation and mutual benefit. For example, words such as “countries” and “everyone” guide the audience to participate in the topic, emphasizing common interests and a vision for cooperation. The use of engagement markers also helps to narrow the distance with participating countries, enhance the affinity and persuasiveness of discourse. In addition, by attracting the audience’s attention, engagement markers can also help the audience better understand and accept general secretary’s views and initiatives.

Identity, as a flexible and adjustable pragmatic resource, plays a crucial role in conversation. As communicators, speakers often cleverly invoke these pragmatic resources based on the needs of their communication goals, thereby generating corresponding pragmatic power. Through this strategy, the speaker strives to seek a balance between pragmatic power and communicative needs to ensure the smooth achievement of communicative goals[9]. General secretary used the transitional phrase structure of “not... but...” in his speech. Through the comparison of “not warhorses and spears, but camels and goodwill” and “not strong ships and cannons, but treasure ships and friendship”, it can be seen that the true strength of the ancient Silk Road lies not in war and conflict, but in peaceful communication and cooperation. As a symbol of commercial exchanges, the camel caravan represents mutual benefit and interdependence among countries along the route, and it denies the use of force and hegemony to promote cultural exchanges. The treasure ship represents the open and inclusive spirit of the ocean, while friendship emphasizes the friendly relationship and deep friendship between countries along the route. Through these two comparisons and emphasis, he successfully constructed his pragmatic identity as a promoter of initiative and cooperation.

5.2.2 Pragmatic Identity Construction of International Envoys of Peace and Friendship

General secretary demonstrated China’s firm position of willingness to work with other countries for common development and mutual benefit and win-win results with a friendly attitude and spirit of cooperation. By advocating the concept of win-win cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, he successfully built a peaceful and friendly international image, promoting mutual understanding, trust and cooperation among countries around the world.

Example 3: The achievements made in the past 10 years are invaluable, and the experience is worth summarizing. We have a deep understanding of (attitude marker) ... through the joint construction of the “the Belt and Road”... China has become a major trading partner of more than 140 countries and regions... All of them demonstrate (booster) friendship and cooperation, and (booster) confidence and hope.

Example 4: China will continue to deepen (booster) ... increase (booster) on the green development of the “the Belt and Road”

Example 5: We deeply realize (attitude marker) that the Silk Road spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit is the most important source of strength (attitude marker) for the joint construction of the “the Belt and Road”.

Communicators in social and cultural contexts will face various needs in specific communication situations. The speaker will carefully choose the content and expression of their words, striving to meet their own communication needs with the other party. By maintaining a balanced state of communication, speakers can more effectively achieve their communication goals. In this process, they focus on balancing personal wishes with the expectations of the other party, ensuring smooth communication and achieving the expected results[17]. As a leader, he mainly uses two meta-discourse resources, booster and attitude marker, to construct the pragmatic identity of an international envoy of peace and friendship. Through booster, general secretary can emphasize their level of confidence in a certain viewpoint or proposition, highlighting their determination and firmness. For example, the strong statements of “demonstrating friendship and cooperation” and

“reflecting confidence and hope” mentioned in the above examples emphasize the friendly and cooperative relations between China and other countries. Through this emphasis, he constructed the image of China as a friendly and cooperative country, as well as his own image as an international leader advocating peaceful development. In addition, the President repeatedly used strong words such as “continuous deepening” and “increased support” in his speech, expressing the Chinese government’s firm support and commitment to the “the Belt and Road” and the call for green development, and demonstrating China’s determination and action in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development. This meta-discourse resource showcases China’s sense of responsibility on the international stage and the image of the President as an active promoter and friendly leader of international cooperation.

Attitude markers are important tools used by speakers to express their attitudes and emotions towards a certain proposition. In the process of verbal communication, communicators cleverly construct and showcase their identity by using specific discourse and language techniques. These strategies and means play a crucial role in communication, helping communicators effectively convey information, express viewpoints, and shape identity images that are in line with the context and communication goals[18]. The above example emphasizes the speaker’s firm and profound understanding of the viewpoint that “humanity is an interdependent community with a shared future” by using the attitude marker of “profound understanding”. It reflects general secretary’s high importance of international cooperation and common development, and ultimately successfully conveys China’s sense of responsibility and sense of responsibility, thus constructing a peaceful and friendly international ambassador identity. “Very precious” expresses the appreciation and recognition of the achievements made in the past 10 years. Through this marker, he emphasized the importance and value of these achievements, while also implying that they are hard won and need to be cherished even more. In addition, in the attitude marker of “the most important source of strength”, it emphasizes the position and role of the spirit of the Silk Road in the process of jointly building the “the Belt and Road”, shows the President’s attention to the Silk Road, and also conveys China’s determination to jointly uphold these spirits and promote cooperation and development with countries along the line, further consolidating the pragmatic identity of an international envoy of peace and friendship.

5.2.3 Pragmatic Construction of Practitioner of Practical Construction

General secretary demonstrated China’s actual achievements and contributions in the construction of the “the Belt and Road” through specific examples, thus building a pragmatic identity of a practical builder, and reflecting China’s efforts in promoting international people to people and cultural exchanges and practical cooperation.

Example 6: More than 150 (hedge) countries and more than 30 (hedge) international organizations signed the “the Belt and Road” cooperation document, held three “the Belt and Road” international cooperation summit forums, and established more than 20 (hedge) professional multilateral cooperation platforms.

Example 7: China will continue to implement the “the Belt and Road”..., hold the first (frame marker) “the Belt and Road” Science and Technology Exchange Conference, expand the number of joint laboratories jointly built with all parties to 100 in the next five years (framework marker), and support young scientists from all countries to work in China for a short time. China will propose a global initiative on artificial intelligence governance at this forum and is willing to strengthen exchanges and dialogue with other countries to promote safe development.

Fully considering the needs of communication when choosing a discourse style is a prerequisite for successful communication[13]. In his speech at the “the Belt and Road” Summit Forum, general secretary used hedges as a meta-discourse resource, thus successfully building the pragmatic

construction practitioner identity. As a type of interactional meta-discourse, hedging can help speakers express their views and policies in a more flexible and tactful manner by adjusting the content and communication methods of the discourse.

Firstly, the use of hedges makes general secretary's speech more inclusive and open. When describing the progress and results of the "the Belt and Road" initiative, the President used hedges such as "more than 140" and "about 150", rather than clear numbers. These words avoid absolute expressions, making the data more flexible and able to cover more possibilities and changes. This expression emphasizes the global and multilateral nature of the "the Belt and Road" initiative, demonstrates the participation and support of many countries and international organizations for the initiative, helps highlight the global influence and wide participation of the "the Belt and Road" initiative, and avoids the narrow impression that too specific figures may bring. In addition, the use of hedges not only demonstrates China's extensive participation and remarkable achievements in the construction of the "the Belt and Road", but also reflects a modest and pragmatic attitude, and constructs China's pragmatic identity as a practitioner of practical construction.

Professor Chen Xinren pointed out that verbal communication is essentially a process of choice. In this process, people not only choose suitable language forms, but also choose appropriate discourse strategies. The fundamental purpose of this choice is to better adapt to different contexts and meet specific communicative intentions. Through clever choices, people can engage in more effective verbal communication, achieve information transmission and understanding[6]. In order to construct the identity of practitioners of practical construction, he used a total of ten frame markers in his speech, which is the most frequently used meta-discourse resource in interactional meta-discourse. As an important component of interactional meta-discourse, frame markers have the function of expressing information order and implying discourse purpose. In the examples cited, the term "every year" clearly defines a long-term and sustainable initiative of China in the construction of the "the Belt and Road".

This frame marker not only demonstrates China's emphasis on the development of digital trade, but also indicates China's long-term planning and commitment in this field. In addition, through the frame marker of "first session", general secretary demonstrated China's leading role and pragmatic attitude in this field, thus constructing its pragmatic identity as a practitioner of practical construction. In addition, the "next five years" set a clear time frame, demonstrating China's specific plans and goals in scientific and technological cooperation. Such specific time planning and quantitative objectives reflect the President's pragmatic spirit and execution in promoting the construction of the "the Belt and Road", and further enhance the identity construction of practical builders. These frame markers not only demonstrate China's specific actions and plans in the construction of the "the Belt and Road", but also highlight its pragmatic identity as a pragmatic construction practitioner by emphasizing the timeline and specific goals. These examples fully demonstrate the importance and role of frame markers from a meta-discourse perspective.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzes general secretary's pragmatic identity construction in his speech at the Third the Belt and Road Summit Forum from the perspective of meta-discourse. Through in-depth analysis of the speech text, it was found that he successfully constructed three pragmatic identities in his speech: a promoter of initiative and cooperation, an international envoy of peace and friendship, and a practitioner of practical construction. However, this study also has certain limitations, as the analysis of pragmatic identity involves subjective interpretation and interpretation of speech texts. Although researchers try to analyze objectively, different researchers may have different interpretations, making it difficult to avoid a certain degree of subjectivity. Future research can further expand the

scope of the corpus, including general secretary's other public speeches and speeches in different occasions, to more comprehensively reveal the characteristics and rules of his pragmatic identity construction, providing a richer and deeper perspective for pragmatic identity construction research.

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