| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

A Study on Language Conversion and Construction of Discourse Power in Chinese Diplomacy

Liu Yangyang
College of Foreign Studies Jinan University; Guangzhou; China
Corresponding Author: Liu Yangyang, **E-mail**: *ksl13435304576@126.com*

| **ABSTRACT**

In the background of globalization, some countries take advantage of the media to send out inaccurate reports in order to promote their political ideology. In this context, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a key role in shaping China's international image through diplomatic means. Based on the critical discourse analysis framework proposed by Fairclough, this study analyzed the international news reports at home and abroad in the past five years. The author found that China's diplomatic response broke the inaccurate understanding of the image of China carried in the question of the reporters from foreign news agencies. The diplomatic response reflected the stance and attitude of the Chinese government and enhanced the power of discourse through the lexical strategy and syntactic strategy.

1. Introduction

China has actively participated in international affairs and established different partnerships. However, the image of our country has been misunderstood or distorted in some news reports. These media discourses are "recontextualized" according to their specified goals and priorities of communication (Caldas-Coulthard, 2003). The English version of Chinese diplomatic conferences of the Foreign Ministry is mainly for the international community, in particular, the international media. Therefore, the English version of meeting minutes not only has the responsibility to convey the original meaning but also consciously build a positive image and strengthen the power of discourse in China.

Within the framework of critical discourse analysis, this research focuses on the relationship between language conversion and the enhancement of discourse power. This paper discusses how the minutes' personnel apply language intermediaries in the interpretation of Chinese and English through specific examples of regular diplomatic press conferences. In identifying the social errors contained in foreign journalists' questions, this research analyzes news excerpts from foreign media to uncover hidden power relations. In the fourth part, the author examines the language strategies used by conference minutes, with emphasis on "Language conversion strategies at the lexical level" and "Language conversion strategies at the syntactic level", to understand how diplomatic conference minutes enhance the power of discourse in China through language mediation.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Foreign Ministry's Conference
As an important part of diplomatic activities, the press conferences of the Chinese Foreign Ministry are an expressive tool to convey a country's foreign policy. During the meeting, the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry answered questions raised by journalists from domestic and international media. Domestic journalists typically focus on issues of citizens' daily lives, while questions from

foreign media sometimes pose factual threats. The English version of the transcript is mainly read by the international community, and if it is not properly recorded, it may damage the image of the country.

2.2 The power of discourse in China
Joseph Nye (1990) defines a country's soft power as derived from "cultural attraction," "ideology," or "international institutions," including "multinational corporations." According to Nye's definition, discourse power can be seen as part of soft power. According to Yang (2016), the right to clarify the stance of a country defines a country's foreign policy and reflects its basic stance. Sun (2019) believes that the power of discourse affects the interpretation of the audience. Ji and Zou (2020) agreed on this point, arguing that the construction of China's institutional discourse power is influenced by language intermediaries.

2.3 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)
After the 1980s, scholars led by Norman Fairclough established the research method of "critical discourse analysis". Previous studies have shown that critical discourse analysis can reveal the relationship between discourse, power and ideology. As a "problem-oriented" approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2009), this research takes CDA as a viable tool to identify social errors that have a negative impact in the Chinese context and propose solutions after careful analysis.

Previous studies by scholars have identified the hidden power relations manifested in discourse from different perspectives and analyzed the importance of discourse power. However, how the power of discourse in China can be strengthened through properly bilingual coverage of meetings has not received widespread attention. Based on the four stages of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and the bilingual conference minutes of the self-established Foreign Ministry, this research explores the following three questions:

(1) How can discourse power be enhanced through language conversion strategies at the lexical level?
(2) How can discourse power be enhanced through language conversion strategies at the sentence level?
(3) How is China's position or attitude presented in the report?

3. Methodology
This research is based on the CDA framework proposed by Norman Fairclough, and data collection and analysis are presented in the following part.

This study adopts the CDA framework of Fairclough, which is divided into four stages: (1) focus upon a social wrong in its semiotic aspects, (2) identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong, (3) consider whether the social order "needs" the social wrong, (4) identify possible ways past the obstacles.

3.1 Data collection
The data for this study are from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China (http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/). The author collected bilingual transcripts of conferences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Table 1 Information of self-built corpus

Corpus	Source	Files	Total tokens	Types
Press Conferences of MFA	https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/	3	149863	2739

Table 1 contains the overall information of this corpus. When compiling the data, the author divides the data into a separate Microsoft Word file, hence a total of 3 files. All the files are transformed into TXT files.

3.2 Data analysis
Step 1 Focus on the social wrong in its semiotic aspects. When the foreign media proposes international issues, we should focus on the self-contained social wrong in its semiotic aspects. News reporting is heavily influenced by various factors, such as the wording of editors, the cultural background of readers, and the public opinion of a given period (Caldas-Kuta, 2003). In the background of the rapid growth of China, some countries worried that China's rise would pose a threat to their status; therefore, they falsely hyped the "China threat" theory through news media channels. In order to dispel misunderstanding, the Chinese Foreign Ministry needs to clarify China's attitude and position, highlighting the positive role of bilingual meeting minutes. In this sense, the author theorizes the subject of the study as the following specific object of study: Bilingual statements by Foreign Ministry spokesmen in response to incorrect statements about China's initiatives and policies to strengthen the power of the country's discourse.

Step 2 Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong. The media have the final say in what is reported according to the values and ideologies of the news producers. News producers can choose what to include and exclude from news stories, and readers often consume them passively, unaware of these unequal power relations. Considering this aspect, the research identified the inherent bias in the foreign news media's questioning of established international events.

This research selects texts, focuses, and categories for analysis. As for the statement of the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the questions of Chinese and foreign journalists, this article chooses to analyze the questions of foreign media reports on news events, which will be elaborated on through examples. Finally, this research carries out an analysis of texts, both interdiscursive analysis and linguistic or semiotic analysis. There are various ways a news producer can communicate their intended meaning. For example:

Example 1

>   *Question: Yesterday, the Foreign Ministry announced that State Councilor Shen Yiqin will travel to the <u>Maldives and Sri Lanka</u>. Are these visits <u>concerning debt negotiations</u>?*

Previous international reports claimed that China had signed infrastructure deals with former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, "who now faces financial allegations of irregularities," and listed a litany of problems in the country. This statement includes a fallacy, as the news writer criticizes China's Belt and Road Initiative by stigmatizing it as China's debt trap rather than pointing out the relationship between the agreement and these issues. In fact, China has provided accessible and affordable loans to countries along the Belt and Road without any political conditions. These loans play an important role in promoting infrastructure in these countries.

Step 3 Consider whether the social order "needs" the social wrong. Amidst the tide of globalization, China's economic growth has provided the world with a vast market, creating opportunities for exports from many countries and driving the prosperity of global trade. However, certain unfounded reports attempt to propagate the notion of a "China threat," potentially disrupting the order of global economic development. As international exchanges and cooperation become increasingly interwoven, any irresponsible discourse holds the potential to engender misunderstandings and unnecessary tensions. In this diverse world, understanding and cooperation are key drivers of progress. Therefore, it is imperative to eschew the misinformation and biases propagated by unfounded reports and, instead, dedicate efforts to fostering an open, inclusive atmosphere for international cooperation.

Step 4 Identify possible ways past the obstacles. At the press conference, the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry took questions from journalists from home and abroad. In some cases, they may involve sensitive or threatened issues, such as relations across the Taiwan Straits. In dealing with these issues, the minutes of the meeting will show the position and attitude of the Chinese government through language conversion. This strategy aims to project a positive image, thereby enhancing the power of the country's discourse.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Language conversion strategies at the lexical level
Specific vocabulary and language choices can affect the power of discourse. Some words may be assigned special meanings, and the person who uses them may have an easier time acquiring discourse power. In politics, for example, certain political terms may be used to shape and control discourse. Table 2 shows the language conversion strategies of meeting reports at the lexical level, including "addition", "substitution", and "Preservation(of vagueness)".

Table 2 Language conversion strategies at the lexical level

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Addition	254	37.24%
Substitution	134	19.64%
Preservation(of vagueness)	294	43.12%

The author analyzes how the conference report uses these three lexical levels of language transformation processing with specific examples.

4.1.1 Addition
The following are examples of using the lexical strategy of "addition" in language conversion.
Example 1

去年以来，在双方共同努力下，中日关系重回正轨，呈现出改善发展的<u>良好</u>势头。

Last year, thanks to our joint efforts, China-Japan relations got back on track and showed <u>positive momentum toward improved and stronger ties.</u>

The foreign minister gave a relatively general description, and the translated version employed a supplementary strategy to provide specifics and explain further. As a result, the audience can see the bright future of Sino-Japanese relations, which contributes to the establishment of a positive and harmonious atmosphere in the diplomatic field.

Example 2

<u>日本当政者在</u>这个问题上做得如何，首先请扪心自问，世人也自有公论。70<u>年前，日本</u>输掉了战争。70<u>年后，日本不</u>应再输掉良知。是继续背着历史包袱不放，还是<u>与过去一刀两断，最</u>终要由日本自己来选择。

Those in power in Japan should first ask themselves what they have done on this score. Of course, the people of the world will reach their own conclusions. Seventy years ago, Japan lost the war, seventy years afterwards, Japan must not lose its conscience. Will it continue to carry the baggage of history, or will it make a clean break with <u>past aggression</u>? Ultimately, the choice is Japan's.

The English version of the minutes states that "past" refers to "past aggression". This is not just supplementary background information but shows our firm attitude that we should not forget history.

Example 3

<u>我知道有媒体</u>报道说，中国变得更加傲慢和强硬了。还有人提出所谓"<u>中国必胜论</u>"。

I know that there have been media reports which say that China has got more arrogant and tough. And some have put forward the <u>so-called</u> theory of China's triumphalism.

In the English version, the minutes of the meeting made China's attitude clear by adding the word "so-called" before the noun used to denigrate China in some media reports. Although China has achieved remarkable development in many aspects, such as its economy and military, it does not mean that China will try to challenge or even replace other countries. Nor does the Chinese government try to impose its ideology on others. This foreign policy line has not changed and will never change.

Example 4

<u>我</u>们是一个负责任的国家，对于人民币升值和汇率体制的形成，我们不仅要考虑本国的利益，而且要考虑对周边国家和世界的影响。

China is a responsible country. When we decide upon the revaluation of our currency or reforming our exchange rate regime, we must take into consideration not only our domestic interests but also <u>possible</u> impacts on neighbouring countries and the world.

At the press conference, a Reuters reporter mentioned that the RMB exchange rate issue has been the focus of attention of the international community. In addition, many important trading partners have asked China to adopt a more flexible exchange rate regime for the yuan. When formulating exchange rate-related policies, our country needs to consider the impact on the Chinese economy and the global economy, which is made clear in the spokesperson's answer. Meanwhile, the English-language report added the word "possible" before the word "impact." This shows that regardless of whether the appreciation of the yuan will have a major impact on other countries and the world, the Chinese government is willing to make a responsible decision and will fully consider the possible impact.

4.1.2 Substitution
The following are examples of using the lexical strategy of "substitution" in language conversion.

Example 1

一年来，中印<u>两国政府部</u>门在落实两国领导人共识方面取得了<u>不少成果</u>。

Over the past year, government departments on both sides have made <u>considerable</u> progress in following through on the understandings reached by our leaders.

In order to make interpreting more idiomatic and more consistent with the speaking habits of the target language, the interpreted version sometimes needs to convert the negative statement in the source language into the positive statement in the target language. In this case, the interpreted version substitute<u>s</u> "不少" for "considerable". As a result, the remarkable achievements that were involved are known.

Example 2

一段*时间以来，对"**一带一路**"**倡**议**有<u>不少</u>**质疑和指责，如"债务陷阱论""**地缘政治工具论**"等。*

There has been <u>some</u> skepticism and criticism about the BRl, which is described as a "debt trap" or "geopolitical tool".

Similar to the above example, in this statement, the interpreted version also made a positive-negative conversion. To be exact, the interpreted version translated"不少" into a positive expression "some", which can clarify the extent and scope of "skepticism and criticism" and further demonstrate the effectiveness of the BRI.

4.1.3 Preservation of vagueness
The following are examples of using the lexical strategy of "Preservation of vagueness" in language conversion.

Example 1

对于我们同一些国**家存在的***领土和海洋权益的争议，我们愿意在尊重历史事实和国际法的基础上，坚持通过平等协商谈判，以和平的方式妥善处理。*

As for China's territorial and maritime disputes with some countries, China would like to carry out equal-footed consultation and negotiation and properly handle them by peaceful means on the basis of respecting historical facts and international law.

From"一些" to "some", the interpreting keeps in line with the speaker's intention that he didn't want to give the concrete names of the involved countries in order not to be aggressive. In this way, the impact of using vagueness that can facilitate creating a relatively polite and harmonious atmosphere can be seen.

Example 2

中拉合作是*发展中国家之间的相互帮助和相互支持，不针对和取代谁，也无意动谁的**<u>奶酪</u>**。*

China and Latin American countries are helping and supporting each other as fellow developing countries. Our cooperation does not target or seek to replace anyone, and China is not going to move anyone's "<u>cheese</u>".

The foreign minister likened one country's internal affairs and national interests to"cheese" and adopted the concept of cheese commonly used in Western countries. The interpreted version has retained this vague expression, which can make the foreign audience better understand what is said, show respect for the other side's culture and enhance the discourse power of China.

4.2 Language conversion strategies at the syntactic level
The use of syntactic structure can also construct discourse power. Choosing the purposive sentence pattern in the specific situation may make the utterance more convincing and thus enhance the speaker's authority.

Table 3 Sentence patterns used to enhance the discourse power of speech

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Passive sentence	49	27.07%
Sentences with inanimate subjects	132	72.93%

4.2.1 Passive sentence
The use of passive sentences allows the author to avoid direct responsibility or reduce the emotional factirs, thus maintaining objectivity and neutrality. In addition, passive sentences provide objective descriptions, especially in scientific, academic or formal writing, and this objectivity helps to enhance the authority of the discourse.

Example:
Q: The US Ambassador to Japan has called China's reaction to the Fukushima water release "economic coercion" and said that China is creating a ring of conflicts with its neighbors. What is your comment on this?

A: China has made clear its position on Japan's ocean discharge of nuclear-contaminated water on multiple occasions. There has been no precedent for such discharge since humanity began using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. <u>The international community is widely concerned over this.</u> The measures China has adopted are justified, reasonable and legitimate.

In the first sentence, the spokesperson expressed China's attitude and position on the action of Japan's nuclear national community, as well as the rationality of the measures taken by China, thus enhancing the authority of the discourse.

4.2.2 Sentences with inanimate subjects

Sentences with inanimate subjects usually take the following forms: inversion sentences and sentences with infinitives as subjects, and so on. Since the subject of the inanimate subject sentence does not refer specifically to a specific individual, it is more universal and objective, making the speaker's expression less personal. In some formal writing, such as academic papers or formal statements, the use of inanimate subject sentences can make the language more formal and rigorous and enhance the authority of the discourse.

Example 1:

I am not aware of the reported internal review in Nepal. <u>What you mentioned is inconsistent with facts.</u> The Chinese government always asks our companies to strictly abide by laws and regulations in doing business overseas. Pokhara International Airport is an important infrastructure project in China-Nepal cooperation and hailed in Nepal as a project of national honor.

The inanimate subject statement "what you mentioned is inconsistent with facts" directly points out that what the reporter mentioned is untrue. This direct and clear way of expression emphasizes the author's objective position and pursuit of accurate information, thus enhancing the authority of the discourse. In the following sentence, "The Chinese government always asks our companies to strictly abide by laws and regulations in doing business overseas. ", the author further emphasized the Chinese government's requirements for the company, highlighting his own authoritative point of view. This structure makes the speaker's views more convincing and authoritative because they are based on objective facts and government policies. Finally, the speaker reinforced his argument by referring to the supporting message of "a project of national honor." This structure makes the discourse more powerful and, at the same time, more authoritative.

Example 2:

The Hangzhou Asian Games is yet another prestigious large-scale multi-sport event hosted by China since the Beijing Winter Olympics. As the host country, China welcomes athletes from all countries to the Games using legal identification. <u>Never has the Chinese government recognized so-called "Arunachal".</u> The area of Zangnan is Chinese territory.

The English version of the minutes put "never" at the beginning of the sentence, highlighting the negative form of the assertion that "the Chinese government recognized so-called "'Arunachal'". Combined with the previous content, the speaker stressed the attention to the facts, supporting China's sovereignty, and directly refuted possible objections or misunderstandings, thus enhancing the authority of the discourse.

5. Conclusion

The author conducts an analysis focusing on lexical-level strategies and syntactic strategies used in language transformation. This research conducts a four-stage critical discourse analysis of social wrongs. In the last stage, through the typical examples of bilingual reporting by diplomatic spokespersons, the strategies used in the process of language conversion are analyzed. The author discussed how language mediation by government-linked translators can help external propaganda, thereby enhancing the power of the discourse of China.

At the lexical level, three language conversion strategies of "addition", "substitution", and "preservation of vagueness" are used. First, in detail analysis, when coping with messages carrying vagueness and under the premise of affecting the overall interpreting accuracy, the meeting recorders can add certain information according to particular cases to explain the talked topic in a more informative manner. So as to avoid that and to eliminate misunderstanding, extra explanation is needed to help the audience better understand the original meaning. Second, with regard to substitution, language transformation mainly clarifies the ambiguity of the reporter's description of a specific event. The vagueness is mainly in the service of Chinese foreign policy, and China does not make promises easily. The "substitution" happens when the social errors are identified. The authors only analyzed news articles discussing initiatives proposed by China, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and friendly relations between

neighboring countries. In this case, the translated version can break up the social wrongs in news articles from foreign media that distort and misrepresent facts about China. Third, In the process of language conversion, translators use the reservation strategy mainly to accurately indicate China's position and diplomatic attitude. These vague expressions mainly include quantifiers, adjectives, adverbs and other special examples.

At the syntactic level, linguists have proposed that certain sentence structures can enhance the persuasiveness of speech. In this study, due to the limitations of the author's knowledge and the lack of research ability, only two sentence structures are summed up temporarily: passive sentence and inanimate subject sentence.

To sum up, critical discourse analysis is often used to reveal hidden relationships between discourse, ideology, and power, especially unequal power relations. This research analyzes only meeting reports of the Foreign Ministry, identifying possible ways to overcome the obstacles. In future studies, similar analyses could be conducted for different types of texts or discourses, which may yield different results and conclusions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

[1] Alameda H, A. (2008). Discursive Strategies in the Construction of National Identity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Gibraltar Issue in the Printed Media. *National Identities 10* (2):225-235.

[2] Caldas-Coulthard, C. R. (2003). Cross-Cultural Representation of "Otherness" in Media Discourse, In G.Weiss & R. Wodak (Eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory Interdisciplinarity* 272-296. and Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230514560_13

[3] Chafe, W. (1986). Evidentiality in English Conversation and Academic Writing. Norwood NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

[4] Chan M. (2012) The discursive reproduction of ideologie and national identities in the Chinese and Japanese English-language press [J]. *Discourse &Communication, 2012, 6(4)*: 361-378.

[5] Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical Discourse Analysis and Marketization of Public Discourse: The Universities. *Discourse and Society 4* (2):133-168.

[6] Fairclough, N. (1995). Media Discourse. London: Edward Arnold.

[7] Fairclough, N. (2007). Discourse and Contemporary Social Change (Vol. 54). Berlin: PeterLang.

[8] Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and Engagement: A Model of Interaction in Academic Discourse. *Discourse Studies 7* (2):173-192.

[9] Hyland, K.(2005a). Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing. London: Continuum.

[10] Hyland, K. (2008). Disciplinary Voices: Interaction in Research Writing. *English textconstruction 1* (1):5-22.

[11] Ji, H. B. & Zou, C, Q. (2020). From WTO to SDR: the Construction of Institutional Discourse Right in China and Its Significance. *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, (01), 93-98

[12] Nedopil, C. (2021). China's Investments in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2020 International Institute of Green Finance, CUFE https://greenfdc.org/wp- contenuploads/ 2021/01/China-BRI-Investment-Report-2020.pdf

[13] Nye, J. (1990). Soft power. Foreign Policy, 80, 153-171. htps://doi.org/10.2307/ 1148580

[14] Sun, J.S. (2019). China's Approach to Shape and Improve Its International Discursive Power: Diplomatic Practice Since the 18h Party Congress as Example. *World Economics and Politics*, (03), 19-43+156

[15] Weiss, G., & Wodak, R. (2003). Introduction: Theory, Interdisciplinarity and Critical Discourse Analysis, In G. Weiss & R. Wodak (Eds.), Crilical Discourse Analysis Theory and Interdisciplinary (pp.1-32). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/ 10.1057/97802305145601

[16] Wodak, R, & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.), Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis (pp.1-33). Sage. https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/26740

[17] Yang, J. (2016). Constructing Discourse Power in Major - Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics: Mission and Challenges. *China International Studies 61* (6), 38-55. doi: CNKI:SUN:CISY.0.2016-06-004

[18] Zhao, K. (2016). China's rise and its discursive power strategy. *Chinese Political Science Review, 1* (3), 102-120. https://doi.org/1007/s41111-016-0027-x