A Comparative Study of Interactional Meta-discourse in English Speeches of Chinese and American Stateswomen

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Abstract. By comparing Hillary and Fu Ying’s political speeches from the perspective of interactional meta-discourse, this paper is aimed at exploring the similarities and differences of Chinese and American stateswomen’s employment of interactional meta-discourse in their political speeches, and discussing the possible causes of such similarities and distinctions. This study suggests that interactional meta-discourse are frequently used in English speeches of both Chinese and American stateswomen, but American stateswomen utilize much more interactional meta-discourse than their Chinese counterparts. As for the five sub-categories, engagement marker and self-mention occur the most frequently, whereas booster the least frequently in both corpora. However, Chinese stateswomen use more hedges but less attitude marker, self-mention and engagement marker than American stateswomen. The reasons for such similarities may be the necessity of interacting with the audience in a political speech, while the causes of distinctions may be the different cultural backgrounds and expression styles of China and America.

Introduction

Last few decades have witnessed the boom of studies on interactional meta-discourse, whose primary function is to facilitate the interaction between the speakers and the listeners, thus the connection between them will be established. As a consequence, study on political speech from the perspective of interactional meta-discourse contributes to exploring how politicians get the listeners involved in their speeches, and thus accomplish the targeted effects.

In contemporary international community, stateswomen have played an extremely vital role in politics of many countries, which can be attested by the accomplishments of many distinguished stateswomen, such as Angela Merkel, Fu Ying, Hillary Clinton and so forth. Hence, studies on stateswomen’s speeches can, to a large extent, emphasize female’s significant part in politics.

Accordingly, the study aims at probing the following two questions: (1) what are the similarities and differences between Fu Ying and Hillary’s speeches in the overall employment of interactional meta-discourse, and in the five sub-categories of interactional meta-discourse? (2) What are the causes for such similarities and differences?

Theoretical Framework

According to Hyland \cite{2}, meta-discourse was defined as “aspects of discourse which go beyond the subject matter and signal the presence of the author.” In regard to the classification of meta-discourse, scholars put forward diversified patterns based on their personal research corpus, among which the model of Hyland & Tse \cite{3} and Hyland \cite{4} is most pervasively applied, particularly to studies on academic discourse. Hyland & Tse \cite{3} classified meta-discourse into interactive meta-discourse and interactional meta-discourse that was further divided by Hyland \cite{4} into stance and engagement. Hyland classified interactional meta-discourse into five categories: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers, which is the theoretical framework of this study.
Corpus and Methodology

Primarily, a small-scale corpus of Chinese politicians’ speeches (CCPS) and a corpus of American politicians’ speeches (CAPS) are established. The two corpora consist of Fu Ying’s seven speeches and Hillary’s six speeches. So as to ensure the comparability of these two corpora and the credibility of this research, the total number of words of each corpus is rather similar, CCPS consisting of 11500 words and CAPS 11975 words. Additionally, five sub-categories of interactional meta-discourse based on Hyland’s division model are identified and marked in the two corpora. And the numbers and frequencies of each type are calculated by AntConc, and also the sum of each category in the same corpus will be counted. In order to directly and clearly find the distribution differences of all the sub-types of interactional meta-discourse, the frequencies of each type are calculated in per 1000 words. Then employing Chi-square tests, each sub-categories of interactional meta-discourse in the two corpora are compared to determine whether the differences in the frequencies are statistically significant between corpora and the significance level was established at p < 0.05. Some typical examples are also illustrated to justify the enormous effects of interactional meta-discourse in political speeches. Finally, the causes of such similarities and differences are analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The overall frequency of interactional meta-discourse in CCPS and CAPS are illustrated by Table 1 below.

| Type               | CCPS       |          |          |          |          |
|--------------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                    | R freq.    | S freq.  | R freq.  | S freq.  | χ²        | P value  |
| Hedges             | 96         | 8.35     | 73       | 6.10     | 4.1618    | 0.041    |
| Boosters           | 19         | 1.65     | 22       | 1.84     | 0.1151    | 0.734    |
| Attitude markers   | 59         | 5.13     | 114      | 9.52     | 15.4508   | 0.000    |
| Self-mentions      | 203        | 17.65    | 416      | 34.74    | 66.7134   | 0.000    |
| Engagement markers | 230        | 20       | 632      | 52.78    | 178.1730  | 0.000    |
| Total              | 607        | 52.78    | 1257     | 104.97   | 218.5584  | 0.000    |

(“R freq.”Refers to raw frequency, and “S freq.”Refers to standard frequency.)

It can be explicitly concluded from Table 1 that as a whole, interactional meta-discourse is frequently used in both of the two corpora, which immediately manifests the widespread application of interactional meta-discourse to political discourse.

Table 1 also indicates that the employment of interactional meta-discourse in CCPS and CAPS are significantly different (p < 0.05). American stateswomen employ much more interactional meta-discourse than Chinese counterparts do, distinctly revealing American politicians’ much more inclination to interact with the listeners in their speeches than Chinese politicians.

Specifically, when it comes to the occurrences of the five sub-categories, hedges, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers have significant differences in both CCPS and CAPS (p < 0.05). In CCPS, the frequencies are ranked from the highest to the lowest are engagement marker, self-mention, hedge, attitude marker and booster, while in CAPS, the sequence of five sub-types are engagement marker, self-mention, attitude marker, hedge and booster. As is shown in preceding description, the similarity of the usage of the five sub-categories in both corpora lies in the fact that in both corpora, engagement markers and self-mentions are the most frequently used types, whereas
booster is the least frequently used category. Nevertheless, the distinction between these two corpora is that in CCPS, hedges are more repeatedly employed than attitude markers, conversely, in CAPS, there are more attitude markers than hedges.

**Hedges**

Hedges are expressions with uncertainty and utilized to diminish the speaker or writer’s commitment to certain discourse. As is shown in Table 1, the distinction in the frequency of hedges in CCPS and CAPS are significant (p < 0.05), which transparently manifests that Chinese politicians are more apt to utilize hedges than American politicians. Such difference may be caused by China’s unique cultural background of moderation and temperate expression, as well as Chinese people’s tendency for prudent attitude when stating individual ideas, so as to augment the acceptability of their standpoints, and mold their gentle and responsible images.

An example excerpted from Fu Ying’s speech at the Political Society of Eton College in 2009 is illustrated as follows:

Example 1: When the world marveled and wondered why and how China could make the Olympics such a perfect success, they may not have realized that this was an effort of 13 billion people, trying to fulfill the dream of their great-grandparents.

In Example 1, Fu Ying uses “may” to demonstrate that the following reason is just her inference, to avoid the refutation and criticism from others and also appear to be objective.

**Boosters**

Boosters, contrary to hedges, are expressions with certainty or expressions marking the source of the information in the propositions. It is shown by Table 1 that the frequency of boosters in CCPS and CAPS are insignificantly different (p > 0.05), indicating both Chinese and American politicians’ cautious attitude towards their remarks. Therefore, they less employs boosters in order to decrease their commitment to their remarks.

**Attitude Markers**

Attitude markers are employed to convey writers or speakers’ affective attitudes towards certain propositions, such as surprise, agreement, importance, obligation, or even frustration. As is indicated by Table 1, frequencies of attitude markers in CCPS and CAPS are significantly different (p < 0.05). It can be concluded that American politicians use more attitude markers than Chinese politicians, which shows that American politicians are more adept at expressing personal attitude than their Chinese counterparts. Americans’ such inclination actually accords with their national spirits of pursuit of freedom, particularly, pursuit of expression freedom. Therefore, in speeches, American politicians prefer to convey their individual attitude towards certain statements. Nevertheless, maintaining a much more prudent attitudes towards their own remarks, Chinese politicians do not regularly express their personal attitude, except under some circumstances where tough and explicit attitude are necessary. This cause also conforms to the reason why Chinese politicians use more hedges.

An example from Hillary’s concession speech in 2016 is illustrated as follows:

Example 2: And, we should ban discrimination against LGBT Americans and their families so they can live, learn, marry, and work just like everybody else.

In Example 2, Hillary uses “we should” to appeal to all American people to solidify together to boycott discrimination and inequality, and to gain a rosy future for Americans from all classes and of all social status.

**Self-Mentions**

Self-mentions are expressions referring to the author or speaker himself or herself. As a matter of fact, self-mentions occur relatively repeatedly in speeches of both Chinese and American politicians. And as is shown in Table 1, there exists significant difference in these two corpora (p < 0.05) that American politicians utilize much more self-mentions than their Chinese counterparts, which can also be explained by the different theme of speeches in two corpora. Exactly, speeches in two
corpora are designed for different purposes. Fu Ying’s speeches in CCPS aim at presenting the history, current situation, and development prospect to the whole world, accordingly, her statements, by and large, center on China instead of herself. Conversely, Hillary’s speeches in CAPS are intended for obtaining the audience’s support, so she tries to shape an image of being close to the civilians.

Here is an example from Hillary’s speech in which she proclaims that she will run for the President in 2015:

Example 3: My brother and I are starting our first business. After five years of raising my children, I am now going back to work.

In Example 3, Hillary uses several “I” and “my” to portray her ordinary family life to convince the audience that rather than a superior leader, she is merely as common a woman as all the American civilians, hence, to close the gap between her and the audience.

Engagement Markers

Engagement markers are expressions directly addressing listeners or making them focus their attention on the discourse, in order to attract the readers or listeners to involve in certain discourse. Shown by Table 1, engagement markers are the most frequently utilized sub-categories of interactional meta-discourse in both corpora. However, the distinction in engagement markers between these two corpora is significant (p < 0.05) that American politicians use much more engagement markers than Chinese politicians. It may be due to American politicians’ great mastery of using the audience’s empathy to shorten the distance between them and the audience, and consequently strengthen the interaction between them. In both CCPS and CAPS, “you” and listener inclusive “we” are most frequently used. The application of “you” may make the audience feel invited to engage in the conversation, moreover, the utilization of “we” can create an atmosphere of joint participation of both the speaker and the audience. It follows that the audience become more willing to accept the speakers’ ideas.

Here is an example from Fu Ying’s speech at the Political Society of Eton College in 2009.

Example 4: We are all in one and the same boat of the world economy and we should all work together if we are to ride out the storm of the financial crisis safe and sound.

In Example 4, Fu Ying uses three “we” to illustrate the close relations between China and the entire world in economic development, and highlight the significance of unity and solidarity of the whole world in order to overcome the financial crisis.

Conclusion

This paper makes a comparative analysis of Hillary and Fu Ying’s speeches from the perspective of interactional meta-discourse, and it primarily discusses the similarities and differences between their speeches in the overall usage of interactional meta-discourse and in the distribution of five sub-categories of interactional meta-discourse, and the causes for such differences. The research findings suggest that in both corpora, interactional meta-discourse are frequently used to enhance the interaction between the speakers and the audience. Besides, inside the interactional meta-discourse, in both corpora, engagement marker followed by self-mention occur the most repeatedly, whereas booster the least frequently. However, American stateswomen utilize much more interactional meta-discourse than their Chinese counterparts. As for the five sub-categories of interactional meta-discourse, Chinese stateswomen prove to merely use more hedges but less attitude marker, self-mention and engagement marker than American stateswomen. The causes of such similarities may be the necessity of interacting with the audience in a speech in order to accomplish certain effect, and the tendency of political speeches of different countries towards internationalization. On the other hand, the potential causes lurking underneath such distinctions may be the different cultural background and expression styles of China and America.

Nevertheless, there are definitely some limitations in this study, because it is actually not easy to find Hillary and Fu Ying’s speeches with similar themes, due to the slight distinction in their main political identities, one as the presidential candidate of the US, and another as Ambassador of China.
It follows that the corpus resources are not representative enough. In conclusion, this study is merely tentative, so approaches of remedying such limitations are anticipated in future research.

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