

# Comparative Discourse Analysis between English and Chinese News Texts:

By using functional grammar to analyze the textile dispute report In People's Daily and New York Times

## ANALYSE COMPARATIVE DU DISCOURS DES TEXTES DE NOUVELLE ANGLAIS ET CHINOIS:

EN UTILISANT LA GRAMMAIRE FONCTIONNELLE POUR ANALYSER LE DEBAT TEXTILE RAPPORTE DANS PEOPLE'S DAILY ET NEW YORK TIMES

Gao Su<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Halliday's systemic-functional grammar has been not only applied in English text analysis, but also in Chinese text analysis. This paper aims at comparatively analyzing English and Chinese in two influential newspapers from the perspective of three metafunctions in systemic-functional grammar. It is also hoped that this paper could be a further test for the applicability of systemic-functional grammar.

**Key words:** systemic-functional grammar, comparative analysis, English and Chinese news texts

**Résumé:** La grammaire fonctionnelle systémique de M.K.Halliday sert non seulement à analyser le discours anglais, mais également sert d'un bon cadre théorique pour l'analyse du discours chinois. L'article présent, commençant par les trois méta-fonctions de Halliday, procède à une analyse comparative des différences de modèle entre le discours anglais et le discours chinois dans les médias. L'auteur espère vérifier par cette analyse la faisabilité et l'utilité de la grammaire fonctionnelle systémique.

**Mots-Clés:** grammaire fonctionnelle systémique, analyse comparative, textes de nouvelle anglais et chinois

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis is a young and newly developed branch of linguistics. It didn't take its early shape until the 1960's, and gradually became an individual subject in the late 1970's. Up till now, even after more than 20 years' development, there is still no fixed theory as a guiding principle in this field. However, lots of methods and theories have been proposed to apply to the discourse analysis from different angles, aspects and levels by different linguists. Among them, systemic-functional grammar initiated by M.A.K.Halliday is one of the most notable and valuable theories. He once pointed out clearly: "the purpose of the initiation of systemic-functional grammar is to provide a frame work for the discourse analysis, and this

framework could be applied to any kind discourses, no matter written or spoken." During recent years, with the development and advance of the cross-cultural discourse analysis, many Chinese linguists and scholars proposed that Halliday's systemic-functional grammar can not only be employed for the English discourse analysis, but also provide a reasonable and practical theoretic basis for the Chinese discourse analysis.

In this paper, I'm trying to apply the three metafunctions in systemic-functional grammar to the comparative analysis of both Chinese and English discourse analysis. The paper attempts to select news texts as the target discourses. The texts were chosen from the most politically authoritative newspaper in China and America that are People's Daily and New York Times. As it is required the similar register( politics and business), style( formal and informal) and topic when doing comparative discourse

<sup>1</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Central China Normal University, China.

\*Received 3 March 2007 ; accepted 1 June 2007

analysis, I chose the same affair reported in these two newspapers . The reports on textile imports from China in recent months, therefore, become my target discourses .As this business dispute involves both China’s and America’s economic interests , and may affect the Sino-American relationship, the two newspapers resort different ways to do the report because of different political stances .

From the outset of the dispute affair, the two media had consecutive report about it, I chose seven of the non-commentary reports from the two newspapers, among which there are four reports from People’s Daily and three reports from New York Times.

## 2. GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF THE THREE METAFUNCTIONS

One of the important part of functional grammar is the three metafunctions, the ideational function, the interpersonal function ,the textual function .Halliday insisted that the speaker always express the objective world around him and his own inner world (ideational function )through his coherent utterance (textual function)and the communication with others (interpersonal function)and he once vividly compared this three metafunctions as “three strings ”;he emphasized that the three metafunctions were of equal importance, none is more paramount than others, rather

process type	material	verbal	relational	behaviorial	mental <sup>o</sup>	exsistential
Target texts						
People’s Daily	62.4%	20.5%	9.5%	3.2%	4.1%	0.3%
NewYork Times	45%	34.5%	9.7%	3.9%	6.6%	0.3%

Through the statistics we could find that the material process takes the most proportion in both two newspapers, which indicates that the journalists of the two media want to reflect and report the dispute affair between the two countries as faithfully as possible, as this is the basic requirement for the news report .However, it’s not difficult to find that the material process’s proportion in People’s Daily is higher than that in New York Times. This mirrors that People’s Daily stands on a more pragmatic and just stance when reporting the limits on Chinese textile products; that is, it reflects the affair more objectively.

Besides this from the diagram we could also see that the relational behavioral, mental and existential process take nearly the same proportion in both two newspapers, but the verbal process appears quite imbalanced in two media .Verbal process is that of exchanging information. It is an important element in news report , as adding and inserting some of the speeches made by people who is worth of news value could enrich the information of the report and enhance the authority and objectivity .Generally speaking ,

than other linguists like Lyon’s suggestion that ideational function is the most important .

## 3. SPECIFIC ANALYSIS TO THE THREE METAFUNCTIONS

### 3.1 the analysis of ideational function

The ideational function (experimental and logical) is to convey new information, to communicate a content that is unknown to the hearer. Present in all language uses , the ideational function is a meaning potential, because whatever specific use one is making of language he has to refer to categories of his experience of the world .

The ideational function mainly consists of “transitivity”, “voice”, and “polarity”. Here, I’ll mainly talk about the transitivity. It is simply the grammar of the clause in its ideational aspect .It consists of six different processes: material process behavioral process, mental process , verbal process , relational process and existential process .

Here I’ve made a statistic study about the process type in the seven target texts, the result is presented as follows:

quotation (直接引述) and report (间接引述) are the two ways to fulfill the verbal process .

In both English and Chinese there are many words to mark the verbal process .In terms of their differences in affective meaning, they could be divided into several groups. Among them, the basic verbal markers in English are “say”, “tell” , “speak” , “talk” , “describe” ,etc. and “說, 指出, 告诉, 表示” in Chinese in news texts ,no matter it is the direct quotation or indirect quotation ,the person who did the quotation is always the journalist who did the report , so it is inevitably for the journalist to show his personal tendency in terms of diction, due to their respective political stances and different ideational systems .

Through the target material , I found that in People’s Daily the most frequent quotation markers are those neutral words like “说, 指出, 表示, 提示” while in New York Times , besides “say” as the most frequent verbal markers , there are also some very subjective dictions like “warn”, “argue” etc. We also find when the American journalist quoted the speeches of the

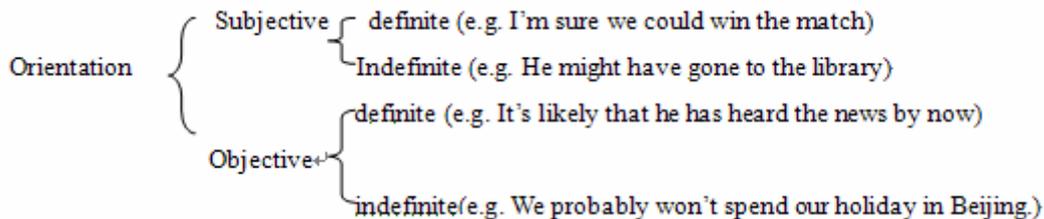
chairman of WTO, he used a word that carries strong emotion, that is “warn”. In contrast, such dictions didn’t appear in people’s daily. It is understandable that if the diction, style, implication of the quotations are different from that of the journalist who doing the report , then most probably he would choose a new word to disguise the reality of the affair. Because the American journalist angles the reports with his own affection and bias and also the report itself is a good opportunity to reveal individual opinions, hence it greatly influences the mode of the whole text.

### 3.2 Interpersonal function analysis

The interpersonal function embodies all uses of language to express social and personal relations, this includes the various ways the speaker enters a speech situation and performs a speech act.

Interpersonal function is realized by mood and modality. Mood shows what role the speaker selects in the speech situation and what role he assigns to the addressee; modality specifies if the speaker is expressing his judgment making a prediction or demanding the obligation that others should shoulder. Here I will mainly talk about the modality system, according to Halliday, modality could be divided into two kinds : modalisation and modulation . Modalisation is mainly to test the reliability of the information from the angle of probability and usuality, and modulation specifies the addresser’s confidence towards the success of the exchange from the aspect of obligation and inclination.

As the United States didn’t have hard evidence to show that Chinese textile exports has really disturbed its market .On the contrary , the limits on Chinese textile quota violated the WTO rules and regulations . It’s reasonable and natural for the Chinese government to condemn the United States for its wrongdoings, and also demand the American government remove the limits as soon as possible, so expressions expecting and demanding the US government to fulfill its obligations as a WTO member teem in People’s Daily, for example:



From the diagram above we could see definite subjective and objective orientation are implied, they’ve fulfilled by clauses. While the indefinite orientations are expressed by the modal verbs and adverbs, thus it is not implied.

Somehow, in the practical interpersonal communication, the speaker has the tendency to imply the definite objective orientation, so that he could

1st. 因此對部分紡織品貿易數量激增的問題，發達成員政府自身應對此負全部責任。(From People’s Daily , May 16<sup>th</sup> ,2005)

2nd. 如果是一個標準，是一個真正的自由貿易，發達國家應讓發展中國家紡織服裝業釋放生產能量，其實這也無傷發達國家市場。(From People’s Daily May 31<sup>st</sup> ,2005 )

3rd. 他說（他指薄熙來，中國商務部部長）發達國家把最緊俏，大家最關心，發展中國家最有出口潛力的那些配額保留到最後一刻，美國保留了 90%，以至到今年 1 月 1 號一體化時，給外界印象是中國紡織品激增，所以美國是失職的，沒有盡到應盡的責任。(From People’s Daily, May 31<sup>st</sup> ,2005)

But on the other hand from the very beginning of the dispute America argued that China should shoulder full responsibility to the flood of its textile products on American market. It tries to defend itself that the limits set is to keep its own market orderly. Naturally, there are lots of expressions to justify the rationality and necessity to set limits .Take the following sentences for example:

*Last week, the national council of textile organizations said that 17,000 American jobs had already been lost this year after 11 textile and apparel plants were chosen because they could not compete.*(From New York Times April 4<sup>th</sup>,2005 )

*Among the early loser in the textile trade so far are Mexican and several central American nations ,which have began to see their share of textile and apparel trade with the united states eroded by china.* (From New York Times April 4<sup>th</sup> ,2005 )

Modality would also be conveyed in both objective and subjective ways .Halliday called it as “orientation”(Halliday ,2000:357)thus , orientation could be divided into four types ,which is illustrated in the following diagram ,

disguise his individual viewpoint, as the objective orientation seems to state the objective reality or facts rather than personal ideas .In New York Times, there are examples like this:

*It is possible that the figures are certain to heighten trade tensions between the countries and also to renew calls for the United States government to place restrictions on some Chinese imports.*( From New York

Times April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005)

*It was not uncommon for the china manufactures to flood on American market by using cheap labors and relying on government subsidies. ( From New York Times May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005)*

From the examples we could see that American journalists usually choose the definite objective orientation to report the dispute affair so that on one hand to justify the American government, on the other hand, to disguise its subjective ideas, to mislead the readers that what they read is true rather than subjective judgments.

### 3.3 Textual function analysis

The textual function refers to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken or written discourse into a coherent and unified text and make a living passage different from a random list of sentences. The textual function fulfils the requirement that language should be operationally relevant.

Textual function mainly involves theme system. In practical purpose, I will mainly discuss the theme system in the 7 texts I have chosen.

In Halliday's view "sentence" is more a unit in writing and he prefers to use the term clause as a basic unit of structure, consequently, theme is defined as a function in the clause as a message together with rheme. The theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message, it is that with which the clause is concerned, the remainder of the message, the part in which the theme is developed, is called in Prague School terminology the rheme.

In functional grammar theme is the point of departure of the message, so it will be of great help to reveal the distribution of key information in the text through the analysis of the theme, and it can also aid to find out where the departure is and what kinds of things have something to do with the information to be delivered.

Here, I will have a general analysis of the different theme systems in both People's Daily and New York Times.

Through the statistics in New York Times, the themes are mainly the American government, officials and its citizens, which obviously indicates that American government only considers its own interests and takes no consideration of the interest of our china's government. The following examples could evidently reveal this:

(1) *"The fast action to reimpose quotas by the Bush administration today have saved thousands of textile jobs in this country and we're extremely grateful" said Cass Johoson, president of the national council of textile organization s. ( From New York times May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005)*

(2) *Trade groups representing American workers want the federal goenment to step in because they think Chinese manufacture s unfairly dominate the textile trade by using cheap labor and relying on government subsidies. (From New York times April 4<sup>th</sup>)*

It is really courageous for the official to express his great joy while taking no consideration whether the reimposition of the quotas is reasonable or not. He only takes his people into account but shows indifference to our Chinese textile workers, and so did the trade groups.

Just as mentioned above no matter it is direct quotation or indirect quoaation, the person who wrote the report is the journalist himself, the report naturally could also reveal his own opinion. From the analysis of the topic theme in New York Times, we could see the media is not so objective. To some extent, we could say it is irresponsible or even shows a certain hegemony. Besides this, lots of other irrelevant things could also be found as the theme. For example:

(1) *European officials are also weighing some form of trade restriction the equally large flood of Chinese textile and apparel imports into the European Union. ( From New York Times April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005)*

Then, if we study some of the rhemes which is irrelevant to the affair the America's

(2) *Mr.Reonard(secretary of commerce for textiles apparel and consumer goods )said that American and Chinese trade officials had not engaged in any substantive talks over the weekend about the value of the Yuan ,which the bush administration contends is undervalued. ( From New York Times June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005)*

By mentioning European official's restriction, it seems to enhance the rationity, whereas the intention to overvalue Yuan is totally the violation of China's sovereignty.

All in all, from the analysis of the themes and rhemes of the reports in New York Times, we can see that the media is always standing for its country's own interests, and to fulfill this obligation, it could even violate the truth.

On the contrary, in People's Daily, the whole report just revolves around the textile affair itself; none of the irrelevant content can be found in the report. The theme found in the report are mainly the Chinese officials, the American government, and it stands on a more just and responsible way. So on one hand, Chinese government condemns America's irresponsible protectionism. On the other hand, it expresses its sincerity to have a dialogue with the United States to solve the dispute as soon as possible. It not only considers our own interests but also heeds that of America's and shows Chinese government's great responsibilities when dealing with this dispute affair. Take the following example to illustrate this;

這位發言人指出(中國國務院商務部新聞發言人)解決當前紡織品問題的根本出路是各國應以負

責任的態度和行動，加強溝通與合作，實現優勢互補和共同發展，確保一體化的平穩過度，維護一體化的成果。(From People's Daily, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005)

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Up till now, I have made a general comparative analysis of both the Chinese and English news text by employing Halliday's functional grammar and more specifically the three metafunctions. Through the analysis, we could see that there are big disparities when reporting the same affair due to different political stances and

respective economic interests, and the differences mainly lie in macroscopic structures and dictions. The way to analyze discourse by Halliday's functional grammar has opened a new door to reconsider the way of the Chinese and American media to give report and its political influence. Through this paper, we could see that Halliday's systemic-functional grammar is a kind of discourse analysis mode that can be applied to both Chinese and English texts. However, as the shortage of the target news texts, this paper does not suffice to illustrate the disparity between the English and Chinese news text mode. But, as long as it could demonstrate some of the differences between them, then the aim of this paper is achieved.

#### REFERENCES

- Halliday.M.A.K.. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* [M] London: Edward Arnold, 2000.  
New York Times [J]. *New York*, 04/04/2005, 05/13/2005,05/14/2005,06/07/2005.  
Thompson.G. *Introducing Functional Grammar* [M] London Arnold .Beijing: Foreign language teaching and research press, 2000.  
胡壯麟, 朱永生, 張德祿. *系統功能語法概論* [M]. 湖南: 湖南教育出版社, 1989.  
黃國文. *語篇分析的理論與實踐--廣告語篇研究* [M]. 上海: 上海教育出版社, 2001.  
黃國文. 功能語篇分析縱橫談 [J]. *外語與外語教學*, 2001, 12.  
彭宣維. *英漢語篇綜合對比* [M]. 上海: 上海外語教育出版社, 2000.  
楊自儉, 李瑞華. *英漢對比研究論文集* [C]. 上海: 上海外語教育出版社, 1996.  
朱永生, 嚴世清. *系統功能語言學多維思考* [M]. 上海: 上海外語教育出版社, 2001.  
人民日報 [J] 2005/05/16, 2005/05/31

#### THE AUTHOR

Gao Su, School of Foreign Languages, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, Hubei, 430079, P.R. China.  
E-mail: hellogareth88@yahoo.com.cn