

Systemic Functional Analysis in Political Speeches—A Study on Xi Jinping’s Address at the 16th G20 Leaders’ Summit

Yuxin Zhang* and Xiaolan Lei

Abstract—This thesis makes an analysis of Xi Jinping’s address at the 16th G20 Leaders’ Summit from the perspective of systematic functional grammar. It bases on Halliday’s theory of meta-functions, integrating ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function to analyze the social communicative message of the address. By use of the language skills of three meta-functions, president Xi conveyed his determination to safeguard the interests of the state and the government, call on all countries in the world to jointly practice true multilateralism, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. Also, the thesis reveals the hidden ideological meaning and social structure as well as power control relationship in discourse, highlights the core issues of the current world and emphasizes the global development strategic blueprint in the 21st century, which provides a new analytical method for us to learn about political speech.

Index Terms—Systematic functional grammar, meta-functions-ideational function, interpersonal function, textual function, political speeches

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, with the acceleration of globalization and the in-depth development of reform and opening-up, China is constantly strengthening foreign exchanges and cooperation. Spreading out across the world not only means that we need to learn about the global political, economic and cultural dynamics, but also means that we should share the political, economic and cultural ideas with Chinese characteristics to the world. As a medium of communication, language plays a vital role during the process. In political activities, political speeches shoulder the multiple missions of informing, influencing, persuading and encouraging. Therefore, it is particularly important to have a high level of speech ability in nowadays international community. Although many linguists and stylisticians have turned their focus on English political speeches, there are few studies on the comprehensive and systematic analysis of Chinese political speeches from the perspective of three meta-functions in systemic functional grammar. Based on the three meta-functions of M. A. K. Halliday’s systemic functional grammar, this thesis makes a systematic analysis of Xi Jinping’s address at the 16th G20 Leaders’ Summit, and reveals the unique stylistic features of Chinese political speeches.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. General Overview of Systemic Functional Grammar

M. A. K. Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics is one of the most influential linguistic theories in the late 20th century. Its vitality shows that it deepens people’s understanding of language and will play a greater role in the study of linguistics in the new century. Systemic functional linguistics is a concept put forward by Firth and Jones from 1881 to 1967. Under the influence of his mentor Firth, Halliday made an in-depth study of systemic functional linguistics and carried it forward. In 1961, the main theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics was proposed. In the subsequent process of improvement and development, it has developed into systematic grammar. Martin’s research interests mainly include systemic grammar theory, functional grammar, discourse semantics, register, discourse genre and critical discourse analysis. He published system and structure in 1992 [1].

Chinese scholars began to study systemic functional linguistics after the reform and opening up. In 1980, he published an article on the London School in foreign linguistics, and repeatedly mentioned Halliday. Then Hu [2] published Halliday in 1983. This article has a great influence in the academic circles, because Halliday has never been translated in a wrong way in future journals. In 1989, an introduction to systemic functional grammar co-authored by Hu and Zhu *et al.* [3] was published, which has played an important role in promoting the study of systemic functional linguistics in China. In the last 20 years, many universities have established systemic functional linguistics research institutions. These research institutions have organized different forms of academic activities, including holding international conferences and inviting international scholars for academic exchanges, so that Chinese scholars have more and closer academic ties with international scholars.

B. Political Speeches of President Xi Jinping

Political speech refers to a speech in which people express their positions, clarify their views and publicize their opinions on national internal affairs and foreign relations [4], which has increasingly become an indispensable way in political, economic, international exchanges and other activities of various countries. Cicero once proposed three styles of speech, namely, plain style, middle style and grand style. Among these three styles, “he regards the speech on political subject as the highest status, which is a model of grand style, because it deals with the most noble problems and can determine the fate of the majority rather than the fate of individuals” [5]. As a special type of discourse, political speech discourse has its unique characteristics [6]. First, it

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has the characteristics of speech discourse. It not only needs to have strong interaction and dialogue to arouse the audience's interest and attract their attention, but also needs to be as compact in structure as written language and cannot lack coherence as daily dialogue. In addition, political speech discourse also has political features. It refers to a speech in which the speaker expresses his position, clarifies his views and publicizes his opinions on the country's internal affairs and foreign relations. Its purpose is to convince the audience through the speech so that they can agree with and accept the speaker's political position and views. Therefore, this kind of discourse should also have rigorous logic. Generally speaking, an effective political speech discourse should be highly interactive, dialogic and logical [7].

The speech of Xi Jinping, president of the People's Republic of China at the 16th G20 summit on October 30, 2021 belongs to a very typical political discourse. On the international stage, has put forward a series of new ideas and plans that have a profound impact on the world development pattern. Standing at the height of the times, Xi Jinping pointed out the global development concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind. He advocated "One Belt, One Road" initiative. He also attached great importance to the future trend of mankind and put forward the global governance principle of "extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits" "to solve the economic, security, natural and other problems the world is facing. A series of opinions and propositions of the general secretary in his international political speeches have been widely praised and generally recognized by the international community. Former president of Kyrgyzstan said that Xi Jinping's wonderful speech pointed out the direction of human society and deserved the world's admiration. Also, President of the International Monetary Fund commented that Xi Jinping's speech has added certainty and hope to today's world. The world needs leadership like China. Therefore, through the analysis of the general secretary's speech at the G20 summit in 2021 from the three aspects of ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function, this thesis tries to explore how the speaker use the language skills of the three meta-functions to call on other countries to practice true multilateralism and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

C. Theoretical Framework—Three Meta-Functions of Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic functional school believes that language is the product of social activities and an important communication tool for human beings. It undertakes a variety of functions [8]. Halliday attributed these complex functions to three highly abstract and generalized functions, namely, three meta-functions: ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. The three meta-functions exist at the same time.

1) Ideational function

Ideational function refers to the function of language to describe human activities or experiences, and the transitivity of verbs is an important semantic system to express ideational function. As a product of social activities, one of the important functions of semantics is to reflect the people and things in the real world, as well as the relevant environmental elements such as time and place [9]. Transitivity analysis

generally includes three variables: actor, process and environment. The process changes include six types: material process, mental process, relational process, behavior process, verbal process and existential process as shown in Fig. 1.

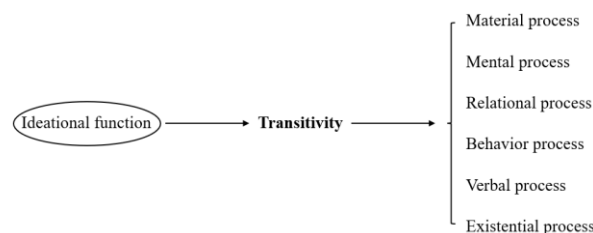


Fig. 1. Ideational function.

Material process is one of the most important process types in transitivity system. It is used to describe the process of doing something or the process of something happening. Halliday also calls this kind of process "action process". The roles involved in the action process include the actor, material process, goal and environmental components, indicating actions such as walking, kicking, playing, beating, eating and drinking. Mental process refers feeling, cognition and emotion of human beings, such as thinking, imagination, liking and other inner world activities. It usually involves two participants: the sensory (subject) and the phenomenon (object). Relational process represents the relationship between objects. It is divided into two types: attribution and identification. The two participants of the process are carrier and attribute respectively. Behavior process refers to physiological activities such as breathing, laughing, crying and dreaming. Generally, there is only one participant—the behavior. Verbal process refers to the empirical process of information exchange through language. Its participants include sayer, verbal process and receiver. Existential process means the existence of an entity. The commonly used verbs are "be", "exist", "arise", etc. There is usually only one existence participant.

2) Interpersonal function

Another important purpose of language communication is to carry out meaningful communication in order to maintain appropriate social connections. The function of language to express the relationship between people is interpersonal function. Interpersonal function refers to the function of language to express the speaker's identity, status, attitude, motivation and inference [10]. It is mainly realized through mood and modality system as shown in Fig. 2.

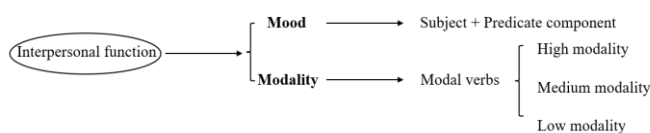


Fig. 2. Interpersonal function.

Mood is a grammatical system that expresses different speech functions through the change of grammatical structure. Generally speaking, the declarative function is expressed by the declarative mood, the questioning function is expressed by the interrogative mood, the command function is expressed by the imperative mood, and the exclamatory function is expressed by the exclamatory mood [11]. The mood component includes subject and predicate. Subject is

the starting point and narrative object of the whole proposition. While predication is a part of verb phrases, which can convey three aspects of information to the listener: tense, normalization (positive or negative) and modality (the degree to which the speaker holds certainty about the event). For example, “subject + predicate component” is to give information, realizing the declarative function and form the declarative mood; “Predicate component + subject” is to seek information, realizing the function of asking questions and form an interrogative mood.

Interpersonal function is mainly realized by modality system. Modality refers to the speaker’s judgment on the success and effectiveness of the proposition, or the obligation required of the other party in the request, or the personal willingness to be expressed in the proposal, or the state between “yes” and “no” in the tone, such as the degree of possibility and the strength of willingness [12]. The expression of modality includes: using restrictive modal auxiliary verbs, such as might and should; modal adverbs, such as definitively and probably; mixed limited mood auxiliary verbs and modal adverbs; attribute clauses, such as “it is like...”; cognitive psychological process clauses, such as “I think...”; noun phrases such as possibility and likelihood.

3) Textual function

Only when the ideational function and interpersonal function of the discourse are finally expressed through the textual function can the communicative purpose be achieved. Textual function refers to how the speaker organizes information and constructs a text. The expression of meaning is only the first step to the success of language communication. The speaker also needs to organize the language components into a cohesive, unified and coherent text according to the expansion of information structure, so as to enable the listener to clarify the context of the transmitted information and finally achieve successful communication. As shown in Fig. 3, Theme-rheme structure, information structure and cohesion are the main methods to realize textual function.

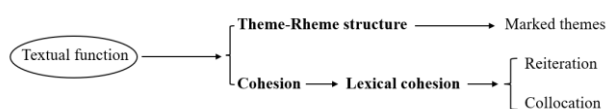


Fig. 3. Textual function.

Theme-rheme structure consists of theme and rheme. Halliday defines this from the function perspective. He believes that theme is the starting point of discourse and the first component of a sentence. And rheme is the words spoken around the theme. It is the narration, description or explanation of the theme, so rheme is often the core content of discourse. Because rheme usually carries new information and promotes communication, it has a higher degree of communicative motivation than theme. The clause theme which simultaneously acts as the clause subject is called “unmarked theme”. If the theme of a clause is not the subject of the clause, but other components such as complement and adverbial, it is called “marked theme” [13].

There are two criteria to judge whether a paragraph can be called a text: whether it has textual features and whether the register of it is consistent. Discourse features include structural and non-structural, structural refers to the structure of the sentence itself, such as thematic structure and information structure. While non-structural refers to the cohesive relationship between sentence components and context. There are various forms of cohesive devices in English, which are mainly divided into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion includes reference, substitution, ellipsis and connection. Among them, reference can be divided into pre-reference, post-reference and contextual-reference. Pre-reference means that the reference point of the language component appears above, post-reference means that the reference point of the language component appears below, and contextual-reference means that the language reference point does not appear in the text, but in the external environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

Based on Halliday’s theory of meta-functions, the thesis integrates ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function to analyze the social communicative message in the address of Xi Jinping.

This study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1. How are the three meta-functions language skills embodied in Xi Jinping’s address?

RQ2. By use of the language skills of three meta-functions, has Xi Jinping conveyed his political purposes successfully?

B. Research Subject

The thesis selects president Xi Jinping’s speech at the G20 Leaders’ Summit as its subject of research. Based on the three meta-functions of systematic functional linguistics, this thesis analyzes president Xi’s various language skills in the speech, such as the choice of material process words, modal words, personal words, marked themes and the choice of articulation. The thesis also try to reveal the deep social communicative significance behind the phenomenon of textual language in president Xi’s speech.

C. Explanation of the Research Design

The research has employed a mixed design method, which involves both quantitative and qualitative design. Specifically, the mixed design of this study is a balanced/sequential design, which means that quantitative design and qualitative design are equal in importance in the study to answer the research questions. In the research, quantitative design is used to establish research corpus, as well as adopt AntConc software and SPSS 26 to conduct data analysis. While qualitative design is employed to manually identify and annotate meta-functions language in corpus. The qualitative design is also used to analyze three meta-functions language skills embodied in Xi Jinping’s address, and to explore the deep social communicative significance Xi Jinping conveyed. The mixed design is a sequential one for the quantitative design is implemented before the qualitative design at every research stage.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Ideational Function—Transitivity Analysis

According to statistics, there are 151 clauses in the speech of the general secretary at the 16th G20 summit, and the distribution of each process is shown in Table I:

TABLE I: STATISTICS OF CLAUSES

Process	Number	Proportion (%)
material process	132	87.42
relational process	10	6.62
mental process	9	5.96
verbal process	0	0.00
behavior process	0	0.00
existential process	0	0.00

As can be seen from Table I, there are 132 clauses belonging to material process, accounting for 87.42%; the second is the relational process, which has 10 clauses, accounting for 6.62%; the next is the mental process, nine sentences, accounting for 5.96%. In addition, speech process, behavior process and existence process totally account for 0%. This is in line with the needs of language field, because material process reflects everything that happens in the objective world, including what has happened, what is happening and what may happen. Political speech is an important political discourse with its specific political purpose. The president wants to convey his politics thoughts and views through the speech, so he often choose a more objective and persuasive process to express. And the material process and relational process can often express individuals' views towards the objective world and reality.

1) Material process

The choice of material process, the choice of actor and goal, as well as the arrangement of components and the choice of language, all reflect the speaker's ideology. Take the material process in this speech for instance:

TABLE II: MATERIAL PROCESS

Actor	Process	Goal	Environment
We	need to uphold	equity and justice	
China	is conducting	joint vaccine production	with 16 countries
We	should step up	macroeconomic policy coordination	
China	welcomes	the active participation	of G20 members
We	must take	a people-centered approach	
I	proposed	a Global Development Initiative	at the United Nations

Through the analysis of 132 material processes in this thesis shown in Table II, the verbs "uphold", "conduct", "step", "welcome", "take", "propose" express different material processes. Faced with changes and a pandemic both unseen in a century, our president believes that the G20, the premier forum for international economic cooperation, needs to shoulder its due responsibilities, bear in mind the future of humanity and the welfare of the people, uphold openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation. Therefore, he called on all countries to practice true multilateralism, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind in this speech. In the view of president Xi, the foothold for realizing this blueprint is the persisting efforts of all countries in the world. Although the journey ahead may be long and

arduous, with sustained actions, we will eventually reach our destination and embrace a brighter future. Therefore, a large number of material processes can reflect the objectivity and authenticity of the discourse, show the president's firm attitude and pragmatic spirit, improve the credibility and persuasion of the speech, and convince the audience to believe the correctness and feasibility he claims. In a word, the statement not only made his position clear, but also was awe-inspiring.

2) Relational process

There are 10 clauses belong to the relational process, accounting for 6.62% of the whole speech. The general relational process uses predicate verbs, such as "is", "equal", "include", "construct", "representative", "match", etc. In his speech at the G20 summit, president Xi mainly used the relational process word "is", as shown in Table III:

TABLE III: RELATIONAL PROCESS

Carrier	Process	Attribute
Solidarity and cooperation	are	the most powerful weapon
Innovation	is	a decisive factor in promoting economic and social development
Digital economy	is	an important frontier of scientific and technological innovation
Credibility	is	the foundation for interactions with the world

It can be seen from the clauses in Table III that the sentence structure of the relational process "X is Y" mostly reflects the president's firm attitude towards the problems he mentioned, and most of them are the bounden responsibilities and missions of all countries in the world under the severe epidemic situation. By using the positive tone of "is" and "what is what", it can stabilize people's faith. At the same time, the expression of the above relational process is the general present tense, which enhances the objectivity of its evaluation and definition, and can prove that what they say is a generally recognized fact without personal subjective factors. As Halliday said, the relational process expresses a certain point of view or attitude, which is not only in line with the needs of the field, but also in line with the needs of the editorial functional reference, that is, to comment on something.

B. Interpersonal Function

1) Modal verbs

In a speech, modal verbs are one of the ways to express the speaker's views, attitudes, proposals, requirements, wishes, etc. And the speaker's tone is determined by the distinction between high, medium and low modality [14]. The specific modal values are as Table IV:

TABLE IV: GRADES OF MODALITY

High Magnitude	Medium Magnitude	Low Magnitude
must, ought to, need, has to, is to	will, would, shall, should	may, might, can, could

According to statistics, seven modal verbs "need", "would", "can", "must", "should", "will" and "may" appeared in president Xi's speech at the G20 summit, and their specific distribution are shown in Table V:

TABLE V: DISTRIBUTION OF MODAL VERBS

Modal Verbs	Number	Proportion (%)
need	5	15.15
would	1	3.03
can	1	3.03
must	2	6.06
should	13	39.39
will	9	27.27
may	2	6.06

As can be seen from Table V, the most used modal verbs in the whole speech are “should”, followed by “will” and “need”, among which “should” and “will” are medium magnitude modal verbs. In other words, from the statistical results, medium and low magnitude modal verbs are used most in this speech, while high magnitude modal verbs with high degree of certainty are rarely used. The reason is that the use of medium and low magnitude modal verbs can reveal the sincere emotion of the president as a speaker. He did not impose his ideas on the audience, by which can arouse the trust of the audience and form a better emotional interaction with it. It is conducive for the audience to accept his position. From the expression of the most frequently used modal verb “should” in the text, “should” almost depicts China’s sense of responsibility, its belief in the new era and its commitment to the world to work together. For example:

(1) The G20 should continue to provide political guidance on the reform of the WTO.

(2) We should keep the industrial and supply chains safe and stable, and ensure the smooth functioning of the world economy.

(3) Advanced economies should fulfill their pledges on official development assistance (ODA) and provide more resources for developing countries.

2) Personal pronouns

The choice of personal pronouns reflects the speaker’s attitude. It is also very important for the choice of appellation in political speeches [15]. The choice of personal pronouns is related to many problems, such as how much responsibility they are willing to take from their own perspective, how much responsibility they need to share with their colleagues, how confident they are to make the public accept and believe their views, and how much responsibility they are prepared to take after failure [16].

According to the statistical results of personal pronouns used by president Xi at the G20 summit, the distribution of main personal pronouns is shown in Table VI:

TABLE VI: DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Personal Pronouns	Number	Proportion (%)
I	7	21.21
we	23	69.70
he	1	3.03
it	2	6.06

It can be seen from the statistical results that the proportion of the first person plural “we” and the first person singular “I” is larger, 69.70% and 21.21% respectively. When the speaker uses “we”, it implies that the audience is included in the text, which can shorten the distance between the audience and the president himself. It is conducive to creating a friendly atmosphere and making delegates feel more cordial. At the same time, it expresses China’s belief that China is willing to work with other countries in the world to tide over the difficulties of the epidemic. The first person “I” expresses the president’s determination to jointly build a better future with

other countries. With the help of the personal pronoun “I”, the audience can also feel that they are included, and the distance between China and other countries can be reduced rapidly. Moreover, personal pronouns often appear in parallel sentences, which makes the president’s speech quite imposing, as if it were done at one go.

C. Textual Function

1) Theme-rheme structure

According to statistics, there are 30 marked themes in the speech of president Xi of the G20 summit. The main components of marked themes are relational words, modal words and conjunctions, which have their own emphases. The distribution of main components is as follows:

TABLE VII: DISTRIBUTION OF MARKED THEMES

Component	Number	Proportion (%)
relational words	2	6.67
modal words	1	3.33
conjunctions	27	90.00

It is not difficult to find that the conjunctions in President Xi’s speech include 10-time conjunctions, accounting for 33.33% of the full text. As in the following sentence:

(1) At the early stage of the pandemic, I called for COVID-19 vaccines to be made a global public good.

(2) To date, China has provided over 1.6 billion doses of vaccines to more than 100 countries and international organizations, and will provide over two billion doses to the world in the course of this year.

(3) At the same time, we should take a long-term perspective, improve the global economic governance system and rules, and make up for the relevant governance deficit.

As marked themes, the conjunctions such as “at the early stage of”, “to date” and “at the same time” can emphasize the changes and reforms in the form of the world over time. Through the comparison between the present and the past, on the one hand, President Xi highlighted the reality and pointed out the current situation. On the other hand, he expresses his construction of the world development blueprint and its feasibility. Taking time as a clue and as a thematic marker plays an important role, which can clearly express the speaker’s focus through comparison, thus it is conducive for the audience to grasp the core more accurately.

In addition, the marked theme of conjunctions such as “and”, “but” and “so” reflects the important characteristics of political speech. The use of turning conjunctions “but” makes the tone have a lot of ups and downs, and stimulates the interest of the audience without being too monotonous. The use of the juxtaposed conjunction “and” is a supplementary explanation and emphasis on the current situation of the facts, which is conducive to persuading the audience. The subsequent results of the conjunction “so” are based on the analysis of objective facts, which is conducive to interaction with the audience. Therefore, the use of conjunctions makes the speech transition naturally. They are rare effective words for the speech text.

2) Lexical cohesion

Various cohesive devices, especially lexical cohesive devices, were used in the speech of president Xi at the G20 summit. Therefore, this part will mainly discuss lexical cohesion, that is, to make the text coherent through the relationship of word repetition, synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms. Halliday and Hassan divide English lexical cohesion into two categories: reiteration and collocation [17].

In discourse, the relationship of reiteration is generally divided into four types, namely, the reiteration of original words, the reiteration of synonymous words, the reiteration of upper and lower meaning words and the reiteration of general words. In president Xi's speech, the following words were repeated for different times: "pandemic", "community", "policy", "economy", "world", "cooperation", "country", "coronavirus", "politics", "emergency", "institution", "difference", "Conference", "equity", "justice", "Technology", "vaccines", "future", "organizations", "security", "financial", "global", "responsibility", "challenge", "sustainable" and so on. Thus, the relationship of word meaning reiteration appears. In this text, many synonyms also appear, such as "emergencies", "financial" / "economic", "proposal" / "call on", "urgent" / "important", which forms the reiteration relationship of synonyms.

In discourse, collocation refers to the tendency of words to appear at the same time. Especially words related in meaning often will appear at the same time. In president Xi's speech, he talked about the blueprint of the world development plan in the 21st century, so a series of relevant words appeared frequently and played a connecting role in the text. For example, words related to "work in solidarity to combat COVID-19", such as "vaccine", "diagnosis", "treatment", "WTO", etc. Words related to "strengthen coordination to promote economic recovery", such as "rising inflation", "mounting debts", "exchange rate adjustments", etc. Words related to "promote harmonious co-existence to achieve green and sustainable development", such as "climate", "emissions reduction", "carbon neutrality", etc. It can be seen that the vocabulary related to the coordinated development of the world runs through the full text and is also the core of the president's speech. It reflects president Xi's confidence in practicing multilateralism.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on Halliday's three meta-functions, this thesis analyzes Xi Jinping's speech at the 16th G20 summit from ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Starting from president Xi's speech at the G20 summit, this thesis highlights the core issues of the current world and emphasizes the global development strategic blueprint under the epidemic in the 21st century. By skillfully using various linguistic methods, such as the choice of material process words, modal words, personal words, marked themes and cohesion [18], president Xi conveyed his determination to safeguard the interests of the state and the government, call on all countries in the world to jointly practice true multilateralism, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. In short, this analytical method reveals the hidden ideological meaning as well as social structure and power control relationship in discourse from the perspective of context, which provides a new analytical method for us to learn about political speech.

However, there are still some limitations of this thesis. Analyzing the characteristics of President Xi's language use only from his address at the G20 summit can not reflect the general style and skill of his speech. Therefore, in the follow-up research process, the three meta-functions of the

system function theory should be used to compare the styles' differences between this address and other speech of president Xi's, thus observe the outstanding characteristics of his address, which provides a new analytical method for us to learn about political speech.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yuxin Zhang conducted the research, analyzed the data, and wrote the paper; Xiaolan Lei was responsible for conceptualization, review and editing, and supervision; all authors had approved the final version.

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