

A Study of Discursive Strategies in *China: Democracy That Works* Based on Construal Operations

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Abstract: The discourse construction and international communication of whole-process people's democracy are crucial to presenting a true, multi-dimensional and panoramic image of China to the international community. This study, by making a tentative revision on the framework of construal operations proposed by Hart (2014a, 2014b), delves into the major discursive strategies and their construal mechanisms as well as the national image in Chinese democratic discourse based on instances extracted from *China: Democracy That Works*. The findings are as follows. 1) The four discursive strategies consist of structural configuration, framing, identification and positioning strategies. 2) These strategies can be respectively accounted for via schematization, metaphorical frame, metonymy, viewing frame and proximization. The revised Hart's framework of construal operations is expected to provide a systematic and coherent analytical framework for analyzing discursive strategies in Chinese democratic discourse and serve as a beneficial supplement to the cognitive linguistics approach to Chinese democratic discourse. It is also hoped to shed light on telling Chinese democratic stories better.

Keywords: *China: Democracy That Works*; whole-process people's democracy; discursive strategies; construal operations.

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1. Introduction

Democracy and language are intimately intertwined. Discourse constructs the reality, and whoever dominates the notion of democracy will have some say in democracy (Zhang, 2020). So-called "Summits for Democracy" were convened on December 9, 2021, March 29, 2023 and March 18, 2024. With the long-term monopoly of democratic discourse, certain Western countries accuse other models of democracy of authoritarianism arbitrarily, which adversely affects China's image. National image is linguistic in addition to political, economic, and communicational (Hu, 2017). The construction and international communication of Chinese democratic discourse play crucial roles in combating stigmatization and projecting to the international community a true, multi-dimensional and panoramic image of China. President Xi Jinping initially proposed the important and cutting-edge notion of whole-process people's democracy on November 2, 2019. Chinese political science, philosophy, and other disciplines have started to investigate it. Nevertheless, related linguistic studies are conspicuously absent. Although cognition, as a key component of discourse analysis, appears to attract more attention from discourse analysts, cognitive linguistics theories are seldom applied to systematically analyze discursive strategies in Chinese democratic discourse.

As a research focus of cognitive linguistics, construal operations refer to the various ways that language is conceptualized in a situation. In other words, the process of conceptualization is

equivalent to the process of construal operations (Croft & Cruse, 2004), which is a dynamic cognitive thinking process, during which the meaning of a linguistic expression is produced. It is worth noting that the cognition-oriented theory of construal operations proposed by Hart (2014a, 2014b) seeks to probe into the construal process, interpreting the regularity of discursive strategies, thereby providing a new and systematic approach to discourse analysis. In recent years, this theory has attracted more attention from academics both at home and abroad. They mostly applied it to the study of news discourse, but hardly ever used it to explore Chinese democratic discourse. Notably, *Democracy That Works*, as a model of Chinese democratic discourse, released by the State Council Information Office at the end of 2021, not only helps the international community understand the principles, institutional practices, and global significance of whole-process people's democracy, but also serves an important medium of presenting a true, multi-dimensional and panoramic image of China to the world.

Taken together, under the guidance of the revised Hart's framework of construal operations, with a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, this study delves into the relationship between discursive strategies and cognitive mechanisms in *China: Democracy That Works* to uncover such information as values and national image loaded in it. Specifically, three key problems to be solved are as follows.

(1) What are the main discursive strategies employed in *China:*

Democracy That Works?

- (2) What are the principal methods for systematically accounting for the cognitive mechanisms underlying the above-mentioned discursive strategies?
- (3) How is China's national image constructed via construal operations in *China: Democracy That Works?*

2. Literature Review

This part will lay out the primary research findings and gaps after a brief overview of studies on the cognitive linguistics theories utilized in discourse analysis.

2.1 Studies on the cognitive linguistics theories in discourse analysis

Some researchers draw on metaphor and frame to analyze political discourse. To emphasize the crucial role of frame in discourse reception and raise public awareness of metaphorical frame, Lakoff (1993, 2002) creatively proposes the framing theory and the revised conceptual metaphor theory based on the concept of frame proposed by Goffman (1974) and Fillmore (1985). Within the context of conceptual metaphor theory and framing theory, Wang (2016, 2017, 2018) examines the conceptual metaphor, surface, and deep frames in American political discourse. He contends that American politicians tend to use the metaphorical frame to sway public opinion and achieve their political objectives. Additionally, Liang (2018) and Li (2020) conduct metaphorical frame analyses of China's image using the articles on China in *The Economist* as the corpus, and discover that the appraisal of China is primarily unfavorable. As a result, the metaphorical frame is crucial to discourse construction and international communication.

There are many scholars conducting discourse analysis from the perspective of metonymy. Metonymy may be more fundamental to conceptual organization than metaphor (Koch, 1999; Wei, 2016). According to Zhang and Zhang (2012), critical metonymy analysis is one of the key research methods to identify and analyze ideologies in discourse. They investigate the viability, necessity, and practical approach of critical discourse analysis based on metonymy. Moreover, national metonymy in Chinese and American media accounts of mergers and acquisitions is compared in Chen and Yu's (2017) study. They discover that national metonymy is utilized by the media not only to create emotive framing and stereotyping but also to direct readers to view cases of multinational mergers and acquisitions from a predefined perspective, shaping the national image in addressees' minds. Yang (2019), concentrating on the trade relationship between China and the United States, investigates how news images generate discourse by delving into the visual metonymic structure and meaning of pertinent images from the news. Consequently, metonymy can influence how discourse is constructed.

Proximization is attracting more attention from the academia. Cap (2013) defines proximization as a discourse strategy of presenting physically and temporally distant events and states of affairs (including distant adversarial ideologies) as increasingly and negatively consequential to the addresser and her addressees.

Proximization is used by Cap (2013, 2014) to examine political discourse, health discourse, environmental discourse, and online discourse respectively. On top of that, Zhang and Guo (2016) investigate the discourse space and national image in political discourse from the spatial, temporal and axiological modals of proximization. They emphasize that establishing discourse space, deploying discourse strategies, and identifying construal operations are all done primarily to reveal coercion and improve the image of the country. Based on proximization, Hu and Chen (2021) delve into the discursive strategies in news discourse, take consensus as the cognitive presumption to achieve proximization, and establish the framework of proximization-consensus. The aforementioned studies demonstrate that proximization offers a unified explanation from spatial, temporal and axiological aspects for people to judge their position relative to others and take reasonable actions.

2.2 Limitations on previous studies

There are still certain research gaps even though previous studies have achieved fruitful results on the cognitive linguistics theories employed in discourse analysis. First off, there are few linguistic studies on whole-process people's democracy. Second, only a few studies examine the discursive strategies in Chinese democratic discourse using a comprehensive and systematic framework of cognitive linguistics. By contrast, a number of researchers favor applying a single theory of cognitive linguistics to discourse analysis, but the explanatory power of the single theory needs to be improved. Third, very few academics examine Chinese democratic discourse using Hart's (2014a, 2014b) paradigm of construal operations. To bridge these gaps, guided by construal operations theory, this study attempts to investigate the discursive strategies and their cognitive mechanisms in *China: Democracy That Works* so as to elucidate the values and national image that are embedded therein. The purpose of this study is to test the feasibility of applying construal operations as the analytical framework of Chinese democratic discourse.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section first presents Hart's framework of construal operations and its shortcomings, and then puts forward a revised Hart's framework of construal operations.

3.1 Hart's framework of construal operations and its weaknesses

Based on the classification of construal (Talmy, 2000; Lee, 2001; Croft & Cruse, 2004; Langacker, 2013), Hart (2014a, 2014b) puts forward his framework of construal operations, which elaborates on the relationship between discursive strategies and underlying cognitive mechanisms, so that addressers' views are more easily understood and accepted by addressees. Hart taps into schematization, metaphor, viewing frame, deixis and other construal operations to clarify the realization of the four discursive strategies of structural configuration, framing, identification and positioning under various cognitive systems composed of gestalt, comparison, attention and perspective (see Table 3-1).

Table 3-1 Hart’s framework of construal operations

| System | | Gestalt | Comparison | Attention | Perspective |
|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Structural Configuration | Construal Operations | schematization | | | |
| Framing | | | categorization | | |
| | | | metaphor | | |
| Identification | | | | focus | |
| | | | | granularity | |
| | | | | viewing frame | |
| Positioning | | | | | point of view |
| | | | | | deixis |

However, Hart’s framework of construal operations exists some drawbacks. For one thing, it does not encompass some construal operations that play significant roles in constructing discourse, such as metonymy and proximization. For another, his framework does not reflect the cognitive mechanism at the psychological and social levels.

3.2 Revised Hart’s framework of construal operations

This study modifies Hart’s framework of construal operations. First off, categorization and frame both demonstrate people’s aptitude for categorizing objects into various groups. Hence, categorization can be replaced by frame, and frame and metaphor can be combined to form a single dimension known as a metaphorical frame. Furthermore, metonymy can shift people’s attention by highlighting different elements, so it can take the role of focus and granularity. What is more, the spatial, temporal and axiological modals of proximization, not only incorporate the two construal operations of point of view and deixis, but also reflect addressers’ ideologies and values at psychological and social levels.

Table 3-2 demonstrates a revised framework, revealing the relationship between construal operations and discursive strategies, specifically the structural configuration strategy based on schematization, framing strategy based on metaphorical frame, identification strategy based on metonymy and viewing frame, and positioning strategy based on proximization.

Table 3-2 Revised Hart’s framework of construal operations

| System | | Gestalt | Comparison | Attention | Perspective |
|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Structural Configuration | Construal Operations | schematization | | | |
| Framing | | | metaphorical frame | | |
| Identification | | | | metonymy | |
| | | | | viewing frame | |
| Positioning Strategy | | | | | proximization |

4. Analysis of Discursive Strategies in China: Democracy That Works Based on Construal Operations

By analyzing adequate instances from *China: Democracy That Works*, this part will apply revised Hart’s framework of construal operations to demonstrate the relationship between discursive strategies and construal operations.

4.1 Analysis of structural configuration strategy based on schematization

Structural configuration strategy is realized via schematization. Image schema offers a structure for people to understand abstract concepts, construct meanings, and make inferences. Since SPACE schema and FORCE schema appear most frequently in *China: Democracy That Works*, they are to be discussed in detail with instances below.

4.1.1 Analysis based on SPACE schema

This section will exemplify two representative SPACE schemas: the CONTAINER schema and the CENTER-PERIPHERY schema. Consider the following examples:

- (1) Political parties in all countries should be open and inclusive, put people first, seek common ground while setting aside differences, and demonstrate mutual respect.
- (2) Committed to people-centered development and ensuring their principal status to run the country, the CPC governs for the people and by relying on the people.

Example (1) employs a CONTAINER schema. Example 1 utilizes the concrete CONTAINER schema to understand the abstract notion of diplomatic relations by conceptualizing political parties in all countries as containers and various models of democracy in these nations as items in these containers. It means that political parties in all countries should take an open and inclusive attitude towards the models of democracy different from their own countries, and learn from each other. Example (2) capitalizes on a CENTER-PERIPHERY schema. The term “people-centered” is a representative of the CENTER-PERIPHERY schema. People are the center of all the work, but the CPC places itself in a marginal position, demonstrating unequivocally that the CPC serves people without regard for personal gain and ensures people’s principal status to run the country.

4.1.2 Analysis based on FORCE schema

This section will present two typical FORCE schemas: BALANCE schema and ACTION-CHAIN schema. Consider the following examples:

- (3) As a populous country long plagued by weak economic foundations, China strives to strike a balance between democracy and development.
- (4) Whether people have been given verbal promises in elections, and more importantly, how many of these promises are fulfilled after elections.

Example (3) makes use of a BALANCE schema. A system can function better as a coherent and meaningful whole only when the elements in it remain balanced (Johnson, 1987). In this case, China is regarded as a system, and democracy and development are indispensable elements for the well-being of the Chinese people. Only by maintaining a balance between democracy and development can they bring more benefits to the people. One reason is that democracy cannot provide people with high-quality resources in an underdeveloped country. Besides, if one country lacks democracy, a small number of individuals control a vast amount of money. Example (4) draws on an ACTION-CHAIN schema. Hart (2014b) argues that energy is transferred from an agent to a patient, sometimes via instruments, resulting in the change of state of the patient in an ACTION-CHAIN schema. Of particular note is that agentless construction is utilized in this case. Omitting the agent highlights the actions “give” and “fulfill”, and the beneficiary “people”. Figure 1 depicts the ACTION-CHAIN schema for this type of agentless construction. The arrow means the direction of the energy transfer between participants. “A” and “P” in the circle represent the agent and patient respectively. The dotted circle indicates the implicit use of the agent.

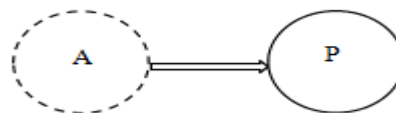


Figure 1 ACTION-CHAIN schema

4.2 Analysis of framing strategy based on metaphorical frame

The metaphorical frame serves as the cognitive mechanism of the framing strategy. Lexical expressions can activate metaphorical surface frames, that is, conceptual metaphors. The surface frame reactivates the deep frame, namely, moral values.

4.2.1 Analysis based on metaphorical surface frames

Table 4 displays four metaphorical surface frames: journey frame, architecture frame, family frame and organism frame. This section uses the MIPVU (Steen, 2010) approach to identify metaphorical expressions, and then calculates their frequency (freq) and percentage (pct) with the AntConc 4.2.0 program. The following will display metaphorical surface frames in turn.

Table 4 Metaphorical surface frames

| Frames | Metaphorical Expressions | Freq | Pct |
|---------------------------|---|------|--------|
| Journey Frame | lead/leadership/leader (43); progress (23); path (17); channels (17); towards (8); goal (8); follow (8); explore (7); pursue (6); together/work together (4); forward (4); challenges (4); difficulty (3); partner (2); rough times and the smooth (1); set out (1); journey (1); rocky and tortuous (1); along (1); direction (1)... | 160 | 43.01% |
| Architecture Frame | build(13); establish(13); implement/implementation(12); strengthen(12); plan (11); foundation(10); support(10); structure(6); solid (5); stable (3); reinforce (3); design (2); consolidate (2); cooperative/cooperation (2); enhance (1); infrastructure (1); bedrock (1); teamwork (1)... | 108 | 29.03% |
| Family Frame | unit/unity (24); discussion (8); exchanges (7); neighborhood (3); mutual respect (3); mutual learning (3); home (2); communication (2); mutual understanding (1); mutual assistance (1); family (1)... | 55 | 14.79% |
| Organism Frame | prosperity/prosperous (10); grow/growth (8); root (6); vitality (5); thrive (4); fruits (3); vibrant (3); nourish (3); soil (2); vigor (1); absorb (1); garden (1); cultivate (1); mature (1)... | 49 | 13.17% |
| Total | | 372 | 100% |

1) Journey frame

| Source domain: Journey | Mapping | Target domain: democracy |
|------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| Travelers | ————→ | China and partner countries |
| Transportation | ————→ | Economic development |
| Distance | ————→ | Progress |
| Obstacles | ————→ | Difficulties |
| Destination | ————→ | Goal |

Figure 2: Mapping between Journey domain and democracy domain

- (5) The CPC is willing to work together with other political parties and political organizations around the world to increase exchanges, learn from each other, and promote human progress.
- (6) In today’s China, the goal of ensuring the people’s status as masters of the country has grown richer in content, wider in channels, and greater in impact, driving democracy in China onward.
- (7) In promoting democracy, China has undergone a difficult process of selection, experimentation, practice and development.
- (8) Today’s world is facing challenges of excessive democracy, democracy implemented in great haste, democratic deficit and fading democracy.

The conceptual metaphor DEMOCRACY IS A JOURNEY is produced through the mapping of experience from the journey frame onto the democracy frame. According to Figure 2, travelers are mapped onto the CPC and other political parties and organizations (example 5); the destination corresponds to the goal of whole-process people’s democracy, specifically, people’s status as masters of the country (example 6); the transportation is mapped onto economic development (example 3); the distance traveled refers to the democratic progress of selection, experimentation, practice and development (example 7); and obstacles are mapped onto the difficulties in democratic process, such as excessive democracy, democracy implemented in great haste, democratic deficit and fading democracy (example 8).

2) Architecture frame

| Source domain: Architecture | Mapping | Target domain: Democracy |
|-----------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|
| Building | ————→ | Tower |
| Foundation | ————→ | Economic development |
| Structures | ————→ | Policies and measures |
| Builders | ————→ | The CPC and the Chinese people |

Figure 3: Mapping between architecture domain and democracy domain

- (9) China’s tower of democracy was built on strong foundations and stands tall.
- (10) This ensures that the lifelines of the Chinese economy remain firmly in the hands of the people, providing solid economic and material foundations for the people to run their own country.
- (11) The CPC united and led the people in establishing the system of people’s congresses, the system of CPC-led multiparty cooperation and political consultation, and the system of regional ethnic autonomy. The political structure, economic foundation, legal principles, and institutional framework for the people to run their country were all put in place and have since developed steadily.
- (12) These principles and policies are implemented through cooperative and effective efforts by governments at central, provincial, city, county, and township levels, through the division of work and teamwork of departments...

Such words as “build”, “foundation”, “support” and “solid” tend to give rise to a conceptual metaphor, that is, CHINA’S DEMOCRACY IS A TOWER (example 9). In light of Figure 3, the stable and high-quality development of China’s economy is conceptualized as a solid foundation for whole-process people’s democracy (example 10). The indispensable structures of the tower encompass a series of systems and measures, and the builders of the tower are the CPC and the Chinese people (example 11). What is more, builders need to work together during the construction process, and this is mapped onto the cooperation and teamwork among governments and departments at all levels (example 12).

3) Family frame

| Source domain: Family | Mapping | Target domain: Democracy |
|-----------------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| Family | ————→ | China |
| Family members | ————→ | People of all ethnic groups |
| Environment | ————→ | Neighborhood |
| Communication | ————→ | Meetings and exchanges |

Figure 4: Mapping between family domain and democracy domain

- (13) Communication and exchanges between ethnic groups, and socialist ethnic relations characterized by equality, unity, mutual assistance and harmony, have expanded.
- (14) The Chinese people have explored and initiated numerous popular and pragmatic grassroots practices – residents councils, residents workshops, democratic discussions and hearings, courtyard discussions, neighborhood meetings, offline roundtables and online group chats.

The conceptual metaphor of CHINA IS A FAMILY results from the mapping of the family frame onto the democracy frame. According to Figure 4, people of all ethnic groups are considered as family members who assist each other (example 13). Their places of residence are regarded as a large neighborhood (example 14). Family members exchange ideas and solve problems via communication, likewise, the Chinese people settle matters through discussions and meetings (example 14).

4) Organism frame

| Source domain: Organism | Mapping | Target domain: Democracy |
|-------------------------|---------|--------------------------|
| Plant | → | Democracy |
| Sprout | → | Beginning of Democracy |
| Growth | → | Development of Democracy |
| Blossom | → | Prosperity of Democracy |
| Fruits | → | Benefits of Democracy |

Figure 5: Mapping between organism domain and democracy domain

- (15) A new model grown out of the soil of China, it also learns from other countries and absorbs the fruits of their political achievements.
- (16) Whole-process people’s democracy is rooted in this vast land, nourished by the culture and traditions of the Chinese civilization, and draws on the achievements of human civilization.
- (17) China’s democracy is thriving alongside those of other countries in the garden of civilizations.

Two conceptual metaphors emerge, namely, DEMOCRACY IS A FLOWER or DEMOCRACY IS A TREE. A plant usually goes through several development stages: sprout, growth, blossom, and fruits. These stages hold for democracy as well. As illustrated in Figure 5, whole-process people’s democracy is rooted in China’s soil, and is nourished by the prolonged culture and traditions of Chinese civilization as well as outstanding political accomplishments from other nations (examples 15 and 16). In the garden of civilizations, China’s democracy is blooming gloriously alongside those of other countries (example 17).

4.2.2 Analysis based on metaphorical deep frames

Metaphorical surface frames can activate deep frames, and the latter is loaded with addressers’ moral values and ideologies.

- 1) The following deep frames are deduced from the journey frame. China is willing to collaborate with other countries to set out on a journey of exploring democracy and take proactive measures to address the challenges that arise along the way. More importantly, there is no single road to democracy. Every country should uphold the principles of equality and nondiscrimination while also respecting other democratic models.
- 2) The deep frame of architecture frame is endowed with positive connotations. China’s tower of democracy is inseparable from the meticulous planning and collaborative effort of the Chinese people. China has formulated a series of policies and procedures to support the tower of democracy. However, China’s tower of democracy cannot be constructed overnight, which resembles how a building is constructed and calls for the patience of builders.
- 3) Political views are inferred from the family frame. China encourages more exchanges and interactions among different ethnic groups, helping them remain closely united like the seeds of a pomegranate that stick together. When making decisions, all

ethnic groups should exchange views and discuss solutions that meet the common interests of all the people.

4) Moral values in the organism frame are inferred as follows. Democracy rooted in a country’s unique social environment has proven to be reliable and effective, and can thrive and progress. The organism of whole-process people’s democracy grows well, indicating this model fits the Chinese path to modernization and has vast potential for future development.

4.3 Analysis of identification strategy based on metonymy and viewing frame

Metonymy and viewing frame bring the identification strategy into effect. The identification strategy reflects people’s ability to adjust the focus. Addressers can employ the two construal operations to highlight different aspects of discourse.

4.3.1 Analysis based on metonymy

Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same domain (Kövecses & Radden, 1998). In light of the degree of abstraction, metonymy falls into low-level metonymy and high-level metonymy (Ruiz de Mendoza & Dez Velasco, 2001), namely, referential metonymy and situational metonymy. The former means utilizing a concept to represent another concept, and these two concepts are in the same cognitive domain; while the latter refers to the use of highly prominent elements in a particular context to represent the entire event. These two types of metonymy will be elaborated. Consider the following examples:

- (18) Strong, decisive measures have struck down corruption like thunder, forming a powerful deterrence that has helped to consolidate China’s sweeping victory in the fight against corruption.
- (19) Electronic voting has replaced “bean voting”, people no longer need to deliver their demands to government departments in person, but can turn to online channels.

Example (18) capitalizes on a referential metonymy PRODUCT FOR PRODUCER, namely, substituting “strong and decisive measures” for the true agent “the officials who draw up the measures”, so that strong and decisive measures occupy the position of the subject even though they serve as the patient. By

doing this, addressees can transfer more cognitive resources onto the measures rather than the policy-makers, indicating that Chinese people’s viewpoints are valued during the policy-making process. Example (19) draws on a situational metonymy ELEMENT FOR EVENT. The most salient element of the election process, “beans”, is utilized to substitute the entire election event. Bean voting, a popular democratic election method used in the 1930s and 1940s, helps illiterate people choose their satisfactory candidates. The candidate who gets more beans would win the election. Addressees can realize that the CPC made great efforts to protect the voting rights of every citizen.

4.3.2 Analysis based on viewing frame

Viewing frame pertains to the degree of granularity, or the inclusiveness of elements within a discourse (Hart, 2014b). Viewing frames of different sizes produce different conceptualization effects. The bigger the viewing frame, the more things it holds, and vice versa. Three viewing frames: long shot, medium shot and close-up will be displayed. Consider the following examples:

(20) [It is no easy job for a country as big as China to fully represent and address the concerns of its 1.4 billion people _{reason}]. [The CPC _{agent}] [plays to the full its role _{action}] as overall leader and coordinator in all areas of endeavor in every part of the country, to [ensure that [the people _{agent}] [run _{action}] [the country _{patient}] effectively and the people’s democracy is an overarching philosophy, principle and policy in the country’s political and social life _{result}].

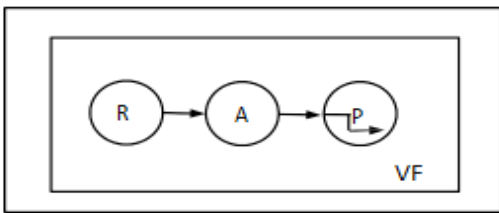


Figure 6 Long shot viewing frame

(21) [The Chinese people _{agent}] [take part in the management _{action}] of [state affairs and social, economic, and cultural affairs _{patient}] in an extensive manner.

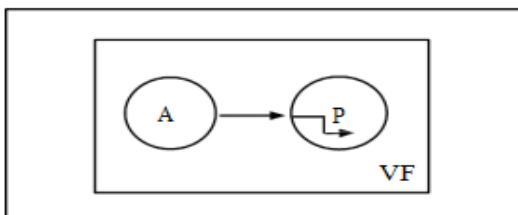


Figure 7 Medium shot viewing frame

(22) [China _{patient}] descended into [a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society _{result}] [after the Opium War of 1840 _{adverbial}].

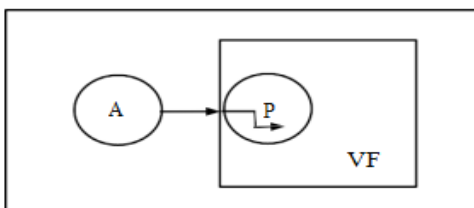


Figure 8 Close-up viewing frame

Example (20) draws on a long shot viewing frame, which is comprised of agent, patient, action, reason and result. Elements such as agent (the CPC, the people), patient (country), a series of actions (play to the full its role, run) and result (ensure that people run the country...) are all covered in this case. Additionally, it specifies the cause (it is no easy job...). This is displayed in Figure 6, where the circle “R” means reason, “VF” refers to the present viewing frame, and the curved arrow represents the result or effect of the interaction on the patient. The reason and result coexist, making people fully aware of the challenges the CPC faced in leading 1.4 billion people to accomplish the current democratic achievements.

Example (21) utilizes a medium shot viewing frame, which consists of agent, patient, and action. Agent (the Chinese people), patient (state affairs and social, economic, and cultural affairs) and action (take part in the management) are included in this case, which activates a full action chain by manifesting the kernel sentence, as illustrated in Figure 7. The full action chain of the medium shot clarifies the democratic rights of the management of national affairs.

Example (22) employs a close-up viewing frame, which is made up of patient and result. As seen in Figure 8, this example does not specify who caused China to fall into a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. Only patient and result lie in the viewing frame, which avoids the Chinese people’s hostility and revenge against those countries. Concealing the agent also demonstrates that China cherishes peace and never launches a retaliatory war. It is noteworthy that this example draws addressees’ attention to a specific period by mentioning the adverbial of time (after the Opium War of 1840), therefore addressees can better grasp the miserable situation in China at that time.

4.4 Analysis of positioning strategy based on proximization

The final positioning strategy is performed via proximization. Addressers tend to regard actors, situations or events as threats to themselves from the three dimensions of space, time and axiology so as to help addressees realize that addressers’ behaviors are reasonable. Addressers and their values are inside deictic centers (IDCs), which represent positive images, while other entities are conceptualized as outside deictic centers (ODCs), which may exert a negative impact on the IDCs. This section will illustrate how positioning strategy is realized via the three aspects of proximization.

4.4.1 Analysis based on spatial proximization

Spatial proximization is a construal operation of ODCs encroaching physically upon IDCs (Cap, 2014). Based on the analytical framework proposed by Cap (2013), this study identifies four types of spatial proximization.

- 1) Noun phrases (NPs) indicating justice, democracy and freedom are recognized as elements of IDCs, such as the CPC, China, the Chinese people, the Chinese government, we, I. They are roughly separated into two categories: some nouns that represent country names and first-person pronouns.
- 2) NPs denoting evil and prejudice are treated as elements of ODCs, such expressions as certain Western countries and old political parties. These ODCs may pose serious threats to IDCs’ territories.
- 3) Verb phrases (VPs) of motion are construed as markers of

movement of ODCs towards IDCs. These VPs, such as splitting apart, provoking, manipulating, instigating, and affecting, denote progressive threats brought by ODCs. The territories of IDCs might be encroached upon by ODCs unless IDCs take some reactive or preventative measures.

4) VPs of action are regarded as markers of the impact of ODCs upon IDCs. These VPs including endanger, subvert, sabotage and harm, stress the consequences of threats caused by ODCs.

To summarize, spatial proximization constructs China as an active proponent of democracy diversity, while certain Western countries are seen as representatives of hegemonism and power politics, posing threats to China's international image.

4.4.2 Analysis based on temporal proximization

Temporal proximization is defined as a construal of the present time as the deictic center. The conflict may not occur in actual scenarios, but is envisaged by the addresser and his addressees as a result of conceptual shifts of time, specifically, past-to-present shift and future-to-present shift (Cap, 2013). Two types of temporal proximization have been found.

1) Discourse forms with different tenses indicate the influence on now and future from a disastrous event that occurred in the past. Consider the following examples:

(23) Democracy in China has always put the people first and improved their well-being.

(24) The Chinese people will continue firmly on the path they have chosen to achieve greater democracy.

In examples (23) and (24), the underlined tense markers denote past-to-present shift, reminding addressees of the bitter experience of the Chinese people in the past undemocratic societies. These negative impacts are durative in that they can be treated as continually existing between the now and the future, thereby requiring immediately responsive actions. That is the reason why China endeavors to lead the people to pursue democracy, and will continue to do so.

2) Discourse forms with parallel contrast manifest opposite situations between the now and the future. Consider the following example:

(25) Its success today would have been impossible without the people's determination to run their own country and create a better life for themselves.

Example (25) emphasizes the necessity of people's determination for whole-process people's democracy by comparing the current situation with the possible future scenario. The word "would" specifies that without the Chinese people's determination to develop democracy, the present success would not be possible, thereby construing China as a united country.

In summary, temporal proximization exhibits that the influence of unsuitable democratic systems extends from the now to the future, and constructs China as a responsible nation by supporting the independent choice by every country of its own path to democracy.

4.4.3 Analysis based on axiological proximization

Axiological proximization refers to a construal of gathering ideological clash between the values of IDCs and the antagonistic values of ODCs (Cap, 2014). Three types of axiological proximization will be discussed in detail.

1) NPs convey positive ideologies of IDCs. Expressions, such as freedom, equality, civility, unity, harmony, peace, fairness and

justice, representing positive values, are assigned to IDCs.

2) NPs convey negative ideologies of ODCs. Some NPs, such as evil, instability, tensions, antagonism, secession, social unrest, party competition and hegemonic mindset, are assigned to ODCs.

3) Discourse forms with a linear arrangement of lexicogrammatical phrases convey ODCs' negative ideologies in IDCs' space. Consider the following example:

(26) Unchecked power is always likely to run out of control, sabotage democracy, and harm the people.

In example (26), the spatial distance is from far to near, namely, from abstract threat to concrete threat, which shows that ODCs are progressively threatening IDCs' territories, thereby prompting people to take action immediately.

Through axiological proximization analyses, China is regarded as a nation that endeavors to supervise the exercise of power, thereby ensuring that public power is and will always be exercised for the public good.

5. Conclusion

Based on the revised Hart's framework of construal operations, this study probes into the major discursive strategies and their construal mechanisms as well as the national image in *China: Democracy That Works*. It is found that: 1) the four discursive strategies consist of structural configuration strategy, framing strategy, identification strategy and positioning strategy; 2) these strategies can be respectively accounted for via schematization, metaphorical frame, metonymy, viewing frame and proximization. Theoretically, the revised Hart's framework of construal operations not only provides a systematic and coherent analytical framework for analyzing discursive strategies in Chinese democratic discourse, but also serves as a beneficial supplement to the cognitive linguistics approach to Chinese democratic discourse. On a practical level, this study contributes to telling Chinese democratic stories better. Although there are some findings, some limitations still remain. Since this study only focuses on Chinese democratic discourse, future studies should pay attention to other types of Chinese political discourse, and justify the feasibility of the revised Hart's framework of construal operations in Chinese political discourse.

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