

# **Difference of discourse systems and cross-cultural communication: Observing Chinese politicians' speeches in other cultural settings**

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In the context of globalization where cross-cultural communication becomes more essential than ever, the study of the ways in which people of different cultures communicate has been a key issue for cultural studies. There is a tendency, then, that cultural studies has been a constituent part of the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and social sciences with writers arguing that language is the central means and medium by which people understand the world and construct culture (e.g. Barker and Galasinski 2001). This paper will go one step further in this direction, investigating how people of different cultures deploy discursive strategies of different discourse systems in their cross-cultural communications.

Discourse system is a concept we raise in comparison to language system. Starting from the conceptualization of language as a self-contained system of its components (morpheme, lexicon, words, etc.), discourse system can be understood as more open in that it includes not only text and talk, but also values, status, and other social elements people who use this text and talk hold in themselves. Discourse system is a concept that is in essence no different from discourse, but it brings salient the difference of people (their values as well as their language) in cross-cultural communication.

Hall (1997: 2) once points out that culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and making sense of the world. To interpret this proposition, we can hold that, among others, people in different cultures may 1) experience different world, and then 2) have different ways of interpreting this world. This may justify our concept of discourse system: as the happenings around them are different, people of different cultures may have different concepts in their languages, as well as different ways of interpreting. The concept of discourse system then highlights that cross-cultural communication is not merely a matter of language, but discourse, discourse in the sense of Foucault (e.g. 1972, 1984) and Fairclough (e.g. 1992, 2003).

We then further explore the breakdowns of discourse system, and identify word, clause, style, register, format, etc. on the language part and knowledge, value, norms, affiliation, experience, etc. on the social part. Projecting this identification to observation of Chinese politicians' speeches in other cultural settings, we discuss discursive strategies in cross-communication in terms of mutual understanding, promotion, and conflict.

In a somewhat friendly setting of mutual understanding, for example, the politicians borrow words/expressions in other culture to express his proposition/value. Once he wants to promote his policy, he applies words/expressions that are new to other culture. In both cases of mutual understanding and promotion, the newness of words and expressions is a matter of degree. In the case of conflict, however, the politician can completely use words/expression unique to his culture.

This data-based observation tells that cross-cultural communication is primarily a matter of language, but it involves social values. The research is to reveal some principles by which people of different cultures understand what and how social values work in cross-cultural communication on the one hand, and to provide some guidelines by which people of different cultures promote mutual understanding and reduce conflict in cross-communication.

## References

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