



Dialogism in International Communication Texts: From the Perspective of Public Diplomacy

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Abstract

In the new dimension of public diplomacy, the core of international communication texts is a cross-cultural dialogue between domestic communicators and overseas receivers. With Bakhtin's theory as a guideline and dialogism in texts as a breakthrough, this thesis analyzes the monologues and monophony in Chinese international communication texts, explores the linguistic approaches producing dialogism and presents a strategy on building the dialogism in international communication texts.

Key words: Public diplomacy; International communication texts; Dialogism

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INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, public diplomacy is the communication with foreign publics to establish a dialogue designed to inform and influence. In the new dimension of public diplomacy, the core of international communication texts is a cross-cultural dialogue between domestic communicators and overseas receivers. But Chinese international communication texts are usually information

discourse which only provide information and contain single voice. Based on Bakhtin's theory, this thesis analyzes the monologues and monophony in Chinese international communication texts, explores the linguistic approaches producing dialogism and presents a strategy on building the dialogism in international communication texts.

1. INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION TEXTS IN NEW DIMENSION OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

In China, as a new diplomatic dimension oriented at overseas public, public diplomacy is mainly in a form of transmitting Chinese cultures to other countries for the purpose of improving the image of China. It emphasizes that international affairs are not only a matter of two countries' governments but also communications between the public in two countries which shall be enhanced with the help of media and cultural exchange. It's aimed at increasing overseas public's understanding of China. At the press conference of the two sessions in 2010, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said to global journalists that "Public diplomacy has become an important area of endeavor in China's diplomacy. We are of the view that public diplomacy has emerged as our times require and has a big role to play." In the campaign for all-around and multi-level public diplomacy, international communication texts have become a major way of increasing China's profile and building a good image.

In the new dimension of public diplomacy, interpretation of international communication texts is interaction between receivers and authors rather than a unilateral process that receivers are influenced by the texts. The core of such a process is a cross-cultural dialogue between domestic communicators and overseas receivers in written form. As a special type of communication involving equality, freedom and bilateral interaction,

this dialogue fully displays the subject consciousness of communicators and receivers with different standpoints. Mutual perception of communication signals can be achieved in the dialogue when the communicators have understood cultural appeals of overseas receivers and expressed their points of view on the basis of equality. Such a dialogue generates good communication.

2. MONOLOGUES AND MONOPHONY IN CHINESE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION TEXTS

Discourse voice, as a formal marker, is present in semantic level of texts. It represents the identity of communicators and expresses their ideology. If texts are regarded as carrier of information activities, discourse voice can be classified as monologue and dialogue, and monologism and dialogism represent the relationship between information senders and receivers.(Zhang, 2009) While, if texts are regarded as a collection of various voices, discourse voice can be divided as monophonic and polyphonic. When there is only one voice or point of view, the discourse is monophonic; but if dialogic voices or choices on different points of view have been provoked or permitted, the discourse is polyphonic. (Lai, 2011)

Chinese international communication texts are usually information discourse which only provide information and contain single voice. There is neither outstanding linguistic mark requesting response to the information transmitted from receivers, nor linguistic expression welcoming other voices. In this way, information discourses are mostly monologue or monophonic texts rather than dialogic ones. However, information discourse can also be dialogic. As receivers of international communication texts are subjects actually present with stronger consciousness, monologue and monophonic texts will cause obstructed communication. On the other hand, such communication is not helpful for the construction of subjectivity and image of Chinese culture. In one word, dialogic space must be preserved in texts intentionally.

3. DIALOGIC INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION TEXTS BASED ON BAKHTIN'S THEORY

3.1 Dialogue Theory of Bakhtin

According to Bakhtin, penetrated in all things with meaning, dialogue can be interpreted differently in narrow and broad sense. In narrow sense, dialogue is one type of verbal interaction between speakers and listeners;(Li, 2001)while including verbal interaction in different ranges and levels in broad sense, dialogue means not only face-to-face verbal communication between people but also

any conversation and communication for the purpose of realizing human ideology by means of verbal activity. As an open communication process, dialogue involves mutual understanding between subjects and runs through past, present and future contexts. "Bakhtin conceptualized the dialogic nature of the self that simultaneously coexists with 'others'. For Bakhtin, human utterances are never a separate entity from others; what people say in an utterance is part of what others have said in the past, and this is achieved by the socially- and historically-oriented dialogic process. In this conceptualization, the assumption is that multiple voices coexist simultaneously at a given moment of time and place. In other words, the voice of an individual is situated in, and never separated from, the multiple voices of others." (Hatano, 2009)

In Bakhtin's point of view, all mental relations are dialogic. Dialogism represents the penetration of dialogue into monologue and non-dialogic types, provoking such verbal relationships as agreement vs. refutation, affirmation vs. denial, judgment vs. supplementation and questioning vs. answering in these types. So, dialogue can be understood as concurrent existence of various voices. A creative attitude held in language process cannot provoke discourse without voices or belonging to nobody. Various voices exist in a discourse, either quite remote, anonymous or almost non-person voice (e.g. voice existing in vocabulary and style) which is hard to identify, or very close and concurrent voices (Bakhtin, 1998).

3.2 Dialogue Rather Than Monologue

Dialogism of international communication texts means not only interior dialogue but also author-reader dialogue and text-reader dialogue. According to McCarthy & Carter, a discourse with no obvious evidence indicating its consideration of receivers is a monologue. Taking only linguistic statement as its object, monologue neither provokes questions nor expects response to information transmitted from receivers. Nevertheless, dialogic discourse mainly relies on receivers' response or contains assumed receivers' response. It regards interactive relationships between individuals as its object, and pays attention to their changes in the process.(McCarthy & Carter, 1994) In that way, how to increase linguistic marks that request receivers' response to transmitted information so as to improve dialogism of texts from the aspect of encouraging communication interaction between communicators and receivers?

First, make good use of meta-discourse to highlight dialogue between texts and audiences. "Meta-discourse refers to the interpersonal resources used to organize a discourse or the writer's stance toward either its content or the reader. It includes a heterogeneous array of linguistic features that writers use to shape their arguments to the needs and expectations of their target readers, relating a text to its context by assisting readers to connect, organize, and interpret material in a way preferred by

the writer and with regard to the understandings and values of a particular discourse community.” (Tse & Hyland, 2006) As a component exploring that beyond conceptual meaning in texts, meta-discourse has become a dominant lingual means used by authors for organizing texts, arousing audiences’ interest and indicating their attitude to text contents or audiences. Hyland divided meta-discourse into two kinds: communicative and interactive. Hyland stressed that adoption of meta-discourse especially interactive meta-discourse made dialogism of texts prominent. Interactive meta-discourse includes ambiguities that imply authors’ reservations about statements such as *might* and *perhaps*, amplifiers that express the extent of authors’ assurance on statements such as *in fact* and *definitely*, attitude marks that imply authors’ feelings and attitudes towards statements such as *agree* and *prefer*, self-referencing words that refer to authors in first person style, as well as interventional marks that attract audiences’ attention or interest in reading texts such as *you can see that*. (Yang, 2007)

Example 1

If You’re reading this, you’re probably on an amazing outdoor adventure or in the midst of planning one right now. If so, we’ve got a great new tool for you!

--- Guide to Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Words and expressions like *probably*, *great*, *right now* and *if so*, contain a profound meaning and make dialogism prominent in this sentence.

In Hyland’s point of view, conjunction and modality in systemic functional grammar correspond to meta-discourse. A conjunction can be adopted to organize a text and also joint activities beyond textual world. Modality itself cannot be defined as subjective or objective, but it can be subjective within a context. Subjectivity of interaction reflects the attention that authors have paid to audience-self and builds up a relationship of negotiation with audiences.

Example 2

From the east, take I-40 West from Asheville, North Carolina (about 40 miles away), to U.S. 19, then U.S. 441 to the park’s southern entrance near Cherokee, North Carolina. Or, you may take the Foothills Parkway from I-40 at exit 443, then U. S. 321 into Gatlinburg and the Park Headquarters and Sugarlands Visitor Center.

--- Guide to Great Smoky Mountains National Park

With the help of the conjunction *or* and the modal verb *may*, the sentence is logically coherent. Not only does it express the author’s certainty for the statement but also establish a dialogic relationship with the readers.

Secondly, syntactic structure with multiple changes can improve interior dialogism of texts. QA semantic coherence mechanism is one of effective approaches for constructing text dialogue. Authors can apply self-interaction in creating interior dialogism of texts. Questions put forward by authors can give hints about

the following contents, but also provide opportunities for authors finding out answers in the role of audiences. Then questions will be answered by another “self”.

Example 3

Need a machine? TV rentals are available throughout Yellowstone Country.

--- Yellowstone Country Travel Planner

Audiences can be impressed by such a way of solving questions. QA interaction assists to create an imagined dialogue between authors and audiences. With the distance between them getting closer, audiences are feeling a face-to-face conversation with authors.

Example 4

We have the best Nordic skiing in North America! You won’t find a more diverse trail system anywhere. Yellowstone Park offers incredible backcountry skiing as well as a number of trails.

--- Yellowstone Country Travel Planner

Monologue in texts can be also avoided when making good use of changes in sentence pattern and person from affirmative to negative, active to passive style. In this way, audiences get involved in equal dialogue, and thus, dialogism of texts comes into being.

Example 5

I’m really excited about the launch of our new app, as I believe that it’s a useful tool to help millions of park lovers (and prospective converts) to discover places they never knew existed. Spending time in nature is one of the best ways to keep life in balance, which is especially important during a time when natural disasters, health crises, economic struggles and wars loom around the globe. We’re lucky to live in a country that affords us the freedom to choose from so many opportunities, including access to a fantastic variety of public lands. So please download the app (it’s free!), tell your friends and family, and share your feedback. We can’t wait to hear about all the great places you’ll go!

--- Guide to Great Smoky Mountains National Park

This is a paragraph prominent in dialogism. The valid use of meta-discourse and changes in sentence pattern and person not only indicate authors’ evaluation and attitude towards concepts, but also show authors’ awareness of audiences’ existence which is reflected in texts. Only in this way can interaction be created to depict textual meanings effectively in a way acceptable to audiences at the time of transmitting embedded semantics.

3.3 Polyphony Rather than Monophony

In Bakhtin’s dialogism theory, multi-voicedness shows diversity of life and multiple levels of human emotion. It’s directly related to fundamental issues necessary for human survival. It is defined as polyphony in linguistics of texts. For Bakhtin, the essence of polyphony is integrated with multiple relatively independent voices and ideas incompatible with each other, composed of various valuable voices. The lifestyle Bakhtin has been speaking

highly of is involving multi-voiced dialogues; two voices is the minimum for existence. A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. This is the existence requirement by human beings with multiple ideations. (Chen, 2000)

Integrating multiple voices is one means of avoiding monophony and realizing voice interaction. Each voice has its own semantic potential which is used to indicate individual or group view or ideology. There shall be coexistence of author and other voices in international communication texts.

Example 6

This phenomenon has been discussed both by Volosinov and by Bakhtin, the former calling it “anticipated and disseminated reported speech” and the latter referring to it as “double-accentuated, double-styled hybrid construction”.

---Xin Bin 2000

In this sentence, the voices of Volosinov and Bakhtin are complementary, describing the same language phenomena from different perspectives. A voice of a certain authority involved makes the texts persuasive. Voices from others provide more choices and likeliness to audiences.

Example 7

According to Labor Department, 5 of the 10 occupations expected to add the most jobs through 2016 are “very low paying”, up to a maximum of about \$22,000 a year.

---Where the Jobs Are, The New York Times, 2009-07-023

Authors can also involve voices from agencies like governments, nongovernmental organizations and enterprises, or quote dialogic voices from documents, statutes and regulations, differentiated by formal notations with agency name or information source in the texts. Multiple inclusions of official and credible voices can improve authenticity and reliability of information transmitted in texts. By integrating various voices with mutual interaction and penetration, texts can be presented in full dimensions and polyphony which provokes equal dialogues can be constructed.

Employing speech reporting style is another way of creating polyphony in texts. Speech reporting is the means mainly used for integrating multiple voices in international communication texts. Bakhtin interprets reported references as “our speech is continually cross-crossed with references to others’ speech” and “all living discourse is concerned with representation and transmission of the speech of others.” (Xin, 2007)

Example 8

The president then became serious; taking up a chronology of the events last week after the police received a reporter of a possible break-in at the home of Mr. Gates, a leading authority on African-American history.

“The Police are doing what they should,” he said. “There’s a call. They go investigate. What happens?”

“My understanding is that Professor Gates then shows

his I.D. to show that this is his house, and at that point he gets arrested for disorderly conduct.”

“I don’t know, not having been there and not seeing all the facts, what role race played in that,” Mr. Obama continued.

---Obama Criticizes Arrest of Harvard Professor, *the New York Times*, 2009-07-22

Direct reporting stresses presentation of original speech made by its principal. Direct reporting can be used to indicate the principal’s point of view differentiated from authors’ voices with an effect of objectivity. In order to be loyal to original speech, authors can make good use of direct reporting identifying the belongingness of voice and creating an opportunity for direct dialogue between audiences and the speech principal.

Indirect reporting usually presents author’s interpretation of reported speech after analysis on the original speech, mainly indicating author’s voice. It has a dialogic function of supporting author’s voice. Authors can use either exact name reference to indicate the source of reported speech with a dialogic intent of showing the truth of such a speech, or non-reference without any disclosure of the speech source which mainly intends to stress listeners rather than the principal.

Example 9

The administration’s effort to overhaul the nation’s health care system hit a bump last week after the director of the Congressional Budget Office said a preliminary analysis found that the bills working their way through the House of Representatives would not reduce health costs over the next decade. Controlling such costs is one of Mr. Obama’s goals in his plan to extend health insurance to more than 45 million Americans who lack it.

---White House Less Firm on Date for Health Care Bill, *The New York Times*, 2009-07-19

By integrating various types of speech reporting, authors can implant multiple voices with different semantic potential into their own speech contexts, on the basis of reserving the subjects and general linguistic structure of original speech. Mutual affirmation, debate or supplementation between authors’ and other voices turns polyphony into being in international communication texts.

CONCLUSION

As a role of building and maintaining a good international image for China, international communication text is not only a medium for information exchange, but also an essential intangible asset. It has become one of the important approaches employed by Chinese to execute public diplomacy, strengthen soft power and gain favorable world opinions. Therefore, international communication text must be polyphonic with voices provoking potential dialogue between domestic communicators and overseas receivers.

International communication text, on the basis of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, shall take into account

interaction between communicators and receivers and integrate various voices. It will be no longer a pure approach for information exchange or text monologue. Authors will get rid of monologue thinking pattern at composition and build a question-answer and negotiation relationship with receivers through texts. When texts are exposed to overseas receivers, a dialogic relationship will be formed connecting both the domestic communicators and oversea receivers. Dialogism in international communication texts based on Bakhtin's theory will inevitably transmit Chinese friendly and dialogic voices to the world and play a monumental role in gaining worldwide reputation for China.

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