

National Image Construction in Speech from Perspective of a Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Abstract: This paper takes the speech (the English version) at the opening ceremony of the 2021 CIIE as data, uses the corpus tool to retrieve the discourse keywords and combines the three meta-functions of Systemic Functional Linguistic. It aims to reveal the national image construction in speech translation from four aspects of transitivity in Ideational function, mood and modality in Interpersonal function, and theme in Textual function. Through the analysis, it is found that in the English version of this speech, China is created as a sharer of economic achievements, a promoter of global openness and cooperation, and a contributor to the world economic development from four aspects: material and relational process, declarative and imperative moods, and median and high modality, and theme.

1. Introduction

The China International Import Expo (CIIE) serves as a global platform for trade and exchanges, attracting widespread attention worldwide. The speeches delivered during the opening ceremony reflect on the achievements and shortcomings of the past year, present China's new plans and arrangements, and express expectations for the future, making it a significant stage for China's external communication of its stance and attitude. As an international event, the official translations of these speeches not only play a crucial role in promoting China's image to the world but also exert a significant influence on the self-construction of the country's national image. In 2021, faced with multiple pressures at home and abroad, China demonstrated its stature as a major country, earning admiration. This year coincides with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China and the 20th anniversary of China's accession to the World Trade Organization. Against this backdrop, the successful hosting of the fourth CIIE holds extraordinary significance. Therefore, examining the speeches delivered during the CIIE opening ceremony under such circumstances can provide a better understanding of the linguistic features of external communication and how they contribute to the construction of China's national image. This study adopts the Systemic Functional Linguistics theory. According to, Systemic Functional Grammar is an operational and practical theory that can be effectively used for discourse analysis^[1]. He also emphasizes that discourse analysis is a focal point in the field of Systemic Functional Linguistics and can reveal the value and communicative function of specific discourses, helping to uncover the specific meanings conveyed in discourses^[2]. Therefore, this paper employs the three major functions in Systemic Functional

Linguistics as the theoretical framework, analyzing the language features of the speeches delivered during the fourth CIIE opening ceremony (English version) from the perspectives of the Subjective System, Transitivity, and Mood and Modality systems, and examining how they contribute to the construction of China's national image.

2. Theoretical Framework

Through searching on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), it has been found that in recent years, the number of articles applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory to discourse analysis has been increasing. Among these articles analyzing the speech, most of them focus on exploring its meaning from the interpersonal function perspective. However, there are relatively few articles that have conducted a comprehensive systemic analysis of speech using the three major functions. Therefore, this paper attempts to analyze the speech discourse from the perspective of the three major functions in order to explore how its meaning is achieved.

The Systemic Functional Linguistics used in this paper is founded by M.A.K. Halliday, and discourse analysis is a key research focus within this theory. One of Halliday's initial purposes in creating the systemic functional grammar framework was for discourse analysis, aiming to discover language phenomena in discourse and investigate how and why discourse expresses its meanings. In systemic linguistics, discourse is regarded as a semantic unit, and it is manifested by clauses, while semantics is realized by the lexicogrammar^[3]. Therefore, Halliday constructed the three metafunctions of language, namely ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function, to observe the meanings or values realized in discourse^[4].

According to Halliday, the ideational function serves as the narrative function of language which is formed through the interaction of human cognition and the language system. It expresses the objective and subjective world, processes of events, and logical relationships between things. Its subsystem mainly includes transitivity and voice system. The interpersonal function of language is concerned with the social aspects of communication. It involves using language to establish, maintain, and influence interpersonal relationships, thereby affecting others' viewpoints, behaviors, etc. It also includes the assessment of the speaker's attitude. This function primarily encompasses the mood system, modality system, and appraisal system as its sub-systems. The textual function comprises three subsystems: theme-rheme system, information structure system, and cohesion system, reflecting how people organize information and the relationships between pieces of information in language use^[5].

3. Corpus Analysis and Research Design

The text analyzed in this paper is sourced from the official English translation (examples in the following text are taken from the English version of China Daily). It is analyzed using the three metafunctions of Systemic Functional Linguistics to explore how China's image is constructed.

The speech in 2021 (English version) consists of 1454 words, 57 sentences, and 14 paragraphs, excluding four instances of greetings. It can be divided into four parts: The text is divided into four parts:

Part 1 (1-2): Greetings to the new and old guests present, and a statement on the implementation results of the opening measures announced at the previous Expo.

Part 2 (3-8): An overview of the current global situation, emphasizing the importance of global openness, and a review of the achievements made in the past 20 years since joining the World Trade Organization through continuous opening, and its contribution to the world's economic development.

Part 3 (9-13): Demonstrating China's determination to expand high-level openness and shared

development, presenting the direction of its own development, and stating a series of relevant measures.

Part 4 (14): Appealing for everyone to work together to build an open economy.

The high-frequency word statistics for the entire text obtained through the corpus analysis tool WordSmith 6.0 are as follows:

Table 1: High-Frequency Words in the Opening Speech of the 4th China International Import Expo (English Version)

Rank	High-frequency Words
1	China
2	Trade
3	World
4	Development
5	Opening
6	International
7	Economy
8	cooperation
9	Foreign
10	Investment

From the top ten high-frequency words in Table 1, it is evident that the focus of this speech at the opening ceremony of the 4th China International Import Expo (CIIE) lies in development, openness, and cooperation. The CIIE is the world's first national-level event with import as its theme, and the successful organization of three consecutive CIIEs reflects China's proactive approach in further opening its market to the world and achieving higher levels of openness, building upon its successful decades of foreign engagement. The China International Import Expo (CIIE) serves as a new window for China's high-level openness, and it functions as a new international public platform that embraces global inclusivity, openness, cooperation, and mutual development. It provides a great opportunity for global enterprises to deepen their cooperation and development. Moreover, by promoting its own openness and cooperation, China also demonstrates its willingness to share the achievements of "New Era" development with the world and work together with other countries to advance global economic globalization towards a more open, inclusive, equitable, balanced, and win-win direction. This showcases China's image as a sharer of economic achievements, a promoter of global openness and cooperation, and a contributor to world economic development.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Ideational Function

Ideational function is mainly realized by the transitivity system, which involves six processes: material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioural process, and existential process.

Table 2: Distribution of Transitivity Processes in the Speech

\	Material Process	Relational Process	Mental Process	Verbal Process	Existential Process	Behavioural process
Number	119	12	3	3	0	0
Percentage (%)	86.86	8.76	2.19	2.19	0	0

In this speech (English version), the quantity and proportion of the six processes are shown in the

table 2.

Hu Zhuanglin believes that a discourse contains various transitivity processes, among which the material process usually occupies a larger proportion. This is mainly because the material world is primary, and human existence naturally leads to activities [6]. Based on the data in the table 2, it is evident that the material process dominates in this English speech with a significant proportion of 86.86%, making it a prominent feature of transitivity in this discourse. The second most prevalent process is the relational process, accounting for 8.76% of the total. The verbal process and mental process are equal in quantity, each constituting 2.19% of the total. Upon closer examination of sentences reflecting verbal and mental processes, it is observed that they are mainly used for announcing the implementation of certain measures or expressing gratitude. Therefore, this paper primarily analyzes the material process and the relational process.

According to the systemic functional grammar, the material process refers to the process of doing something, which typically involves an actor and often includes a goal or target. Based on the data, the high proportion of 86.86% for the material process indicates that in this speech, China's attitude towards the world is very clear: "doing" is crucial. China emphasizes the importance of actions such as openness, cooperation, and initiatives that contribute to economic development. Furthermore, the abundance of material processes also reflects the objectivity and authenticity of the speech content, making it more credible and persuasive to the audience. Examining the specific content of the speech, it is evident that material processes are primarily used to expound on China's implemented openness measures in the past year, achievements over the last 20 years since joining the WTO, as well as future opening measures and policies. Examples are shown in Figure 1.

[1] China has overcome the impact of COVID-19 to achieve innovative growth in foreign trade. As the only major economy to register positive growth of trade in goods last year, China has made important contributions to keeping global industrial and supply chains stable and boosting world economic recovery.

[2] Over the last two decades, China has fully delivered on its accession commitments.The central government has reviewed and revised over 2,300 pieces of laws and regulations, and local governments over 190,000 pieces, which all helped to unleash market and social vitality.

[3] First, China will firmly safeguard true multilateralism. Second, China will firmly share market opportunities with the rest of the world. Third, China will firmly promote high-standard opening up. Fourth, China will firmly uphold the common interests of the world.

Figure 1: Examples of Material Process in the Speech

Indeed, examples 1, 2, and 3 in figure 1, containing "has overcome," "has made," "has delivered," "has reviewed," "has revised," "safeguard," "share," "promote," and "uphold," all represent material processes and are sequentially present in the first, second, and third parts of the speech, respectively. This further highlights the characteristic of material processes being pervasive throughout the entire discourse. And in examples 1 and 2, the material processes are expressed using the perfect tense. Example 1 illustrates China's overcoming of the great pressure and promote global economic recovery. Example 2 showcases China's commitment to fulfilling its promises over the past 20 years since joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) by adopting various measures to achieve multidimensional and comprehensive opening-up, leading to progress in the country's economic development. Then, in example 3, the material processes are expressed using the future tense, which effectively presents China's propositions and plans in a clear and organized manner. China advocates adhering to genuine multilateralism, expanding imports and mutually beneficial cooperation with the world to share market opportunities. China aims to promote high-level opening-up, injecting new impetus into high-quality human development, and safeguarding the common interests of the world, enabling the benefits of development to reach more countries and people. This use of the future tense highlights China's forward-looking approach and its

commitment to future actions and contributions. In this discourse of the English version speech, these specific material processes objectively showcase to the audience and the world what China has done and what it plans to do. By highlighting these material processes, the speech demonstrates China's strength while also conveying its commitment to shared development and mutual benefit with other countries around the world. It depicts China's willingness to share and seek common development through open cooperation, reflecting its dedication to jointly building an open world economy. This portrayal creates a positive image of China as a major player that is eager to contribute to global development and foster an open and cooperative international community.

In system functional linguistics, relational processes refer to the relationships between events, indicating an object's attributes or belonging to a certain category, as shown in the examples in Figure 2:

- [1] China is a firm believer in honoring its words with actions.
- [2] Opening up is the hallmark of contemporary China. This year marks the 20th anniversary of China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- [3] The multilateral trading regime with the WTO at its core is the cornerstone of international trade.

Figure 2: Examples of Relational Process in the Speech

In this text, these twelve relational processes mainly use the "be" verb as the main verb. Among them, two of the relational processes appear in the translation of Chinese classical text into English, as in example 1. The remaining relational processes mainly describe China's understanding of openness, multilateral trade, and so on, as in examples 2 and 3. Example 1 portrays the image of China as a trustworthy and reliable partner, whether it is fulfilling the recently announced opening measures at the third CIIE (China International Import Expo) or the commitments made 20 years ago upon joining the WTO (World Trade Organization). China has fulfilled each of these promises, injecting new vitality into the world economy and presenting a satisfactory answer sheet. Examples 2 and 3 appear at the beginning of their respective paragraphs, using relational processes to emphasize the importance of openness and the multilateral trading system. China, drawing on past experiences, summarizes its development and achievements over the past 20 years of integration into the world economy. By adhering to international multilateral trade rules and continuously expanding its opening-up to the world, China has embraced the tide of global economic globalization, achieving rapid development and becoming the world's second-largest economy and the largest goods trading nation. The achievements made in the past 20 years have increased China's confidence in upholding multilateralism and further strengthened its determination to pursue high-level opening-up for high-quality development. At the same time, the Chinese nation has always been a grateful nation, understanding the importance of being grateful for the sources of their prosperity. As China's position in the global economy becomes increasingly prominent, its contribution to world economic growth has also been increasing year by year. Embracing high-level openness, China shares market opportunities with the world and firmly upholds the international order, improves the multilateral trading system, and opposes unilateralism and protectionism. Through concrete actions, China is driving the world economy towards a more inclusive and open direction. Initiatives like the "Belt and Road" and the China International Import Expo (CIIE) serve as crucial platforms and windows for China to practice multilateralism and promote open development. They contribute to promoting openness and cooperation in the economies of various countries worldwide. Over time, China has transformed from being an adopter, participant, and learner of economic globalization to a sharer, promoter, and contributor, demonstrating its commitment to global economic openness and cooperation.

4.2 Interpersonal Function

The interpersonal function is mainly used to express social and personal relationships, and to convey the speaker's identity, status, attitude, motivation, and judgments on various matters^[7]. This section analyzes the language of the English speech from the perspective of the interpersonal function, focusing on the mood and modality systems that reflect the interpersonal function. It aims to showcase the constructed national image.

4.2.1 Mood System

The two fundamental roles of language, namely giving and demanding, combined with goods and services, form four speech functions: statements, questions, commands, and exclamations. These functions are achieved through corresponding moods in sentences^[8]. According to the statistics, the most frequently used mood in this speech is the indicative mood, with only a few imperative sentences and no exclamatory or interrogative sentences. As illustrated in the figure 3, the examples are shown:

[1] Opening up is the hallmark of contemporary China. This year marks the 20th anniversary of China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Over the last two decades, China has fully delivered on its accession commitments. Its overall tariff rate has been cut from 15.3 percent to 7.4 percent, lower than the 9.8 percent accession commitment. The central government has reviewed and revised over 2,300 pieces of laws and regulations, and local governments over 190,000 pieces, which all helped to unleash market and social vitality.

[2] Let the Breeze of Openness Bring Warmth to the world.

Figure 3: Examples of Mood System in the Speech

The function of the indicative mood is to provide information and indicate a certain attitude or assertion. In Example 1 of the speech, two declarative sentences objectively inform the audience that China has reduced tariffs, fulfilling its commitments upon joining the World Trade Organization. Moreover, China has provided assistance to other countries in many aspects, demonstrating concrete actions in fulfilling its promises and exemplifying its sense of responsibility. The first declarative sentence primarily focuses on tariffs. Reducing tariffs is one of China's significant measures to expand openness. Data shows that as early as 2010, China had already fulfilled its commitment to tariff reduction upon joining the World Trade Organization, and China's tariff rates have not remained unchanged since then. In recent years, with the advancement of the "Belt and Road" Initiative and the development of the China International Import Expo as an import trade platform, China's import tariffs have shown a downward trend, indicating a continuous expansion of openness. This measure not only serves as strong evidence of China's commitment to high-level openness but also demonstrates China's willingness to share development opportunities with the world, allowing more global enterprises to access the Chinese market.

The function of the imperative mood is not to provide information but to offer suggestions and prompt actions. Example 2 is a typical imperative sentence starting with "let," and expresses China's determination to continue implementing open measures and also urges the audience to take action together. It conveys the message that global economic development and the construction of an open global economy require collective efforts and actions from people of all countries. It also expresses China's expectation for open cooperation with other nations to achieve common development.

4.2.2 Modality

In the modal system, participants express their attitudes and the degree of involvement in the

practice ^[9]. Modal verbs can be classified into three degrees of meaning: high, medium, and low. The statistical results of the usage of modal verbs in the speech are presented in the following table 3.

Table 3: Statistics of Modal Verbs Usage in the Speech

\	Modal Verbs	Number of Occurrence	Percentage (%)	Total Number	Percentage (%)
Low	can	1	3.57	2	7.14
	may	1	3.57		
Media	will	22	78.58	23	82.15
	is/ was to	1	3.57		
High	must	2	7.14	3	10.71
	has/ had to	1	3.57		

According to the Table 3 above, it can be seen that the media-value modal verbs are used the most frequently, while the low-value and high-value modal verbs are used very sparingly. Upon examining the specific contexts in which these modal verbs are used, it is observed that the two low-value modal verbs "can" and "may," as well as the high-value modal verb "has to," are all used in expressions from ancient Chinese texts. They reflect the attitudes inherent in the ancient texts themselves. Therefore, this paper primarily focuses on analyzing the most prominent modal verbs "will" and "must" among the high-value modals, as illustrated in the Figure 4.

[1] We must stay on top of the prevailing trend of economic globalization, and support countries around the world in opening up wider while rejecting unilateralism and protectionism.

[2] For any country or nation to thrive, it must follow the logic of history and develop in line with the trend of the times.

[3] China will open more demonstration zones for creative promotion of import trade, optimize the catalogue of retail imports via cross-border e-commerce, encourage the on-site processing of imported goods from trading between border residents, and increase imports from neighboring countries.

[4] As for China, we will not change our resolve to open wider at a high standard; we will not change our determination to share development opportunities with the rest of the world; and we will not change our commitment to an economic globalization that is more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial for all.

Figure 4: Examples of Modality in the Speech

Indeed, examples 1 and 2 in the Figure 4 are the only sentences in this speech where the high-value modal verb "must" is used. High-value modal verbs are more forceful compared to the other two types. However, upon examining the specific context, it is observed that "must" appears in the speech in two instances: first, to emphasize the importance of grasping the trend of economic globalization; second, to convey the message that national rejuvenation must align with the development of the times. In the context of these two sentences, the momentum of the times signifies that countries should engage in more extensive and profound open cooperation to promote global development and inject new vitality into the sluggish world economy. Therefore, the use of the high-value modal verb "must" in these sentences makes the audience aware of the seriousness of anti-globalization actions while emphasizing that cooperative openness is the optimal solution for global economic development. On the other hand, this also indirectly showcases China's attitude towards globalization and open cooperation to the world, demonstrating that China respects and adapts to the momentum of the times, continues to open its market, and collaborates with other countries to contribute to global economic development. You are absolutely right. The moderate modal verb "will" is the most frequently used in the translated speech, accounting for 78.58% of the total. Compared to other modal verbs, the moderate mood of "will" is more gentle, which helps to bring the speaker closer to the audience and fosters good interpersonal relationships. By observing

the sentences with "will," we can see that in this speech, the subject preceding "will" is mostly "China" or "we." Examples 3 and 4 are instances of the usage of this moderate modal verb. In Example 3, the subject before "will" is "China," clearly and specifically informing the audience that China will further open its market and expand imports, using the Import Expo as one of the platforms to share development with the world. This concrete plan demonstrates that China's advocacy of "sharing the market" and "open cooperation" is not mere rhetoric or a passing fancy but a well-planned and arranged effort to implement ideas and genuinely promote its own development and global economic development. Example 4 uses a parallel sentence structure starting with "we will," expressing a resolute and powerful commitment from China to shoulder the responsibilities and obligations of a major country and make the necessary contributions to global economic development. Although the "we" in this sentence appears to refer to China itself, as the parallelism progresses, it easily allows the listeners to align themselves with the speaker, working together to build an open, cooperative, and innovative global economy, creating a better future collectively. From another perspective, this also reflects China's hope and vision for cooperation and openness with all countries in the world to achieve common development.

4.3 Textual Function

The discourse function is primarily manifested through the thematic system, which includes theme and rheme. The theme serves as the starting point for discourse analysis and represents the object of attention in the sentence, while the rheme provides the statement or description of the theme^[10]. According to Halliday, the topic of the speaker's discourse is mainly expressed through the theme. Therefore, analyzing the choice of theme helps to grasp how the speaker achieves the meaning of the speech. As depicted in the Figure 5, the examples are presented.

- [1] The negative list for cross-border trade in services at the Hainan Free Trade Port has been introduced; reform and innovation for pilot free trade zones are making steady progress; foreign investment access continues to expand; business environment continues to improve;China has made important contributions to keeping global industrial and supply chains stable and boosting world economic recovery.
- [2] China will support the fair distribution of and unimpeded trade in vaccines and other key medical supplies across the world. China will promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation so that more countries and peoples will benefit from its development opportunities and real outcomes. China will actively join in global efforts to tackle climate change and safeguard food and energy security, and provide more assistance to fellow developing countries within the framework of South-South.

Figure 5: Examples of Theme-rheme in the Speech

By observing the translated text, it can be noticed that the main themes of different sections in the speech are quite distinct. In the first and second parts, when discussing the achievements made during the Third CIIE and the 20th anniversary of China's accession to the WTO, the main themes are mostly concrete measures that have been implemented. However, in the third part, which focuses on the future prospects and specific plans for further development and opening up, the first themes of the sentences predominantly use "China," "we," and "the central government" as the main subjects. In example 1 in the Figure 5, which is located in the first part of the speech, the main themes of the sentences are "the negative list for cross-border," "reform and innovation for pilot free trade zones," "business environment," and "China." The first three sentences present specific measures of opening up, objectively and truthfully informing the audience that China's new initiatives announced during the Third CIIE are continuously being implemented. The last sentence, positioned at the end of this paragraph and starting with "China" as the main theme, provides a brief summary of the preceding sentences. It not only emphasizes China's high regard for the CIIE and high-level opening up but also clearly demonstrates that China uses the CIIE as a platform to share

development opportunities with the world through practical actions, while also promoting open cooperation among countries to contribute to the development of the global economy together. In example 2 in the Figure 5, located in the third part of the speech, all sentences start with "China" and form a parallel structure. This creates a clear and coherent presentation to the audience, demonstrating China's commitment and determination to uphold the common interests of the world. It also describes China's aspirations for shared development with countries around the world and the desire to build an open global economy, aligning with the theme of looking forward to the future in this section.

5. Conclusion

This paper takes the perspective of three major functions and analyzes the image of China presented in the keynote speech of the Fourth China International Import Expo (CIIE) in English. The analysis is conducted from four aspects: transitivity, mood, modality, and theme, by incorporating high-frequency words in the discourse. Through our analysis, we have observed that the translation utilizes a significant number of material processes, declarative mood, and modal verbs of medium strength. It also includes a smaller portion of relational processes, imperative mood, and modal verbs of high strength. This combination effectively and truthfully communicates to the audience the series of achievements made by China in terms of openness, which have injected new vitality into the global economy. Indeed, the example of the China International Import Expo (CIIE) serves as a trade platform that demonstrates practical actions to showcase China's commitment to further high-level openness. It reflects China's willingness to share development opportunities with the world and its determination to expand openness. By doing so, China calls upon other countries to work together in promoting cooperation through openness, ultimately building an open world economy. This portrayal highlights the Chinese people's eagerness to share, pursue open cooperation, and strive for common development. It vividly showcases China as a nation that shares its economic achievements, promotes global open cooperation, and contributes to the development of the world economy.

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