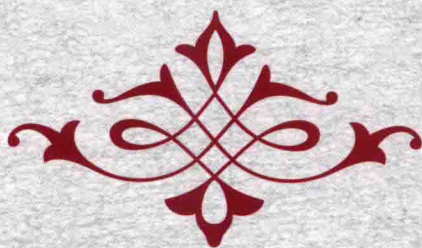


A Cultural Study of Evasive Answers in the Sino-US Press Conference

“闪避回答”的文化研究——以中美新闻发言为例



钱亚旭 张秦 【著】



西南交通大学出版社

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Chapter One Introduction

Fundamentally speaking, diplomacy is a political exchange of the national and international actors. It is universally acceptable for the actor to use the media to disseminate its foreign policies and to shape the international image on the basis of the national identity. Therefore, the diplomatic spokespersons take the responsibility to express its position on major international issues, regional issues, bilateral relations and domestic politics. According to Nicholson (1950), the most universal meaning of diplomatic language is “guarded statement that enables diplomats to say sharp things without being provocative or impolite”. In order to publicize foreign policies and defend the national core interests, spokespersons usually adopt the most appropriate expressions in the complicated context, and in their diplomatic speeches, the evasive answer is one of the strategies in answering those sensitive diplomatic questions.

The impetus toward evasiveness is understandable because if the spokespersons answer a hostile question straightforwardly, such a response may produce negative effects such as inflicting real damage on their public image or their career. Thus, on the one hand, they all do not want to tell the truth which the questioner really wants to know; on the other hand, they have to answer and should also take many factors into consideration, such as the relationship between the actors, the public image and any possible bad results of their remarks, etc. Therefore, they all manage to superficially answer those hostile questions with a proper manner while they still avoid providing the questioner with full information.

The reason of taking diplomatic discourses in the press conference as the research object is related to its own typification. International issues and national interest are often involved in the diplomatic discourse which are crucial to a state, so the context

of it would be most complicated among all kinds of institutional interviews. Thus, when diplomatic spokespersons use evasive answering strategies, they have to take more factors into consideration to evade questions than their counterparts in other circumstances. Hence the evasive answer is pervasive in diplomatic speeches and performs important roles in communication. Through the evasive strategy, spokespersons could, for example, defend their position without threatening others and achieve compromise without damaging their represented interests.

1.1 Research Object and Objective

This book is engaged in the evasive answer just in diplomatic speeches or discourses, not including those in other circumstances such as commercial or entertainment interviews in which evasive strategies are also employed because their underlying motivations are the same, and the diplomatic discourse could better embody mankind's wisdom and linguistic techniques. Therefore, the book aims to take an interdisciplinary perspective to compare and further analyze the similarities and differences of evasive strategies in Sino-US diplomatic speeches by internal cognitive pragmatics and external cultural study, which will definitely broaden the research coverage and deepen our understanding of this particular linguistic phenomenon by offering a more dynamic and thorough survey of the tactful use of evasive answers.

In terms of cognitive pragmatics perspective, on the basis of summarizing and evaluating the existing studies on evasive answers, this study will focus on evasive answering strategies by taking questioning skills into account, put forward the definition and classification of it and explain it from a cognitive pragmatic perspective. In terms of the cultural study, the reason why this book prefers a culturally analytical view as well as the pragmatic research are as follows. For one thing, with the rapid development of China's economy and the improvement of its international status, China's influence and discourse demands in international politics are also increasing. China's international political role is shifting from

“participants” to “responsible powers”.The political position and attitude of the country must also be promoted from “aphasia” and “weakness” to “having sufficient international influence”.

For another, from the perspective of global governance, both China and the United States face global challenges. Without cooperation between the two sides, maintaining rule-based global governance and reshaping new multilateral systems, including the trading system, cannot be achieved. The future WTO reform, the reconstruction of the Asian and world security system, and the reshaping of the world order will depend to a large extent on the strategic interaction and trade-off between China and the United States. Therefore, Sino-US trade wars coming from the escalating trade protectionism triggered by “US priority”, in this circumstance, would also be manifested in their new discourse system, even the discourse hegemony. In both Chinese and American diplomatic speeches, what functions would evasive strategies be served in terms of decreasing or increasing the degree of their conflicts? Not only will it be courteous, but it will often gain the initiative of the right to speak in the question and answer, and receive the desired expression.

The author randomly downloads altogether more than hundred pieces of press conferences via Internet ranging from website of PRC Foreign Ministry (<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn>) and website of States Department of the United States (<http://www.state.gov>). Materials in Chinese will be followed by their English version. Topics in these materials vary from regional and international relations to challenging and sensitive issues, etc.

First, the book will take two main scholars’ accounts of the evasive answer as a starting point and evaluate their theories so as to make some refinements and complements which leads to integrating them into an unified framework so that we can better understand the evasive answer in diplomatic discourses, including both the mechanism underlying evasion and the pragmatic effects of it.

Secondly, this book will examine evasive answer from a cognitive pragmatic perspective so that we can see it in a new way differentiating itself from the

approaches used in previous researches, which could enable us to better understand the properties of evasively answering mechanism and to further abstract a model of it. There is a claim that the cognitive context of the questions could be reconstructed by converting cognitive assumptions in the answer for the gaining of expected pragmatic effects.

Thirdly, the relationship between evasive answers and the questioning strategies will also be studied, which has never yet been done in the previous studies. Questioning and answering is an adjacency pair in conversation analysis. Questioning is the first pair part and answering is the second pair part; the occurrence of the first pair part will exert some influence and constraints on the form and content of the second pair part.

Fourthly, this book is finally oriented to take a perspective of cultural study to compare and further analyze the similarities and differences of evasive strategies in Sino-US diplomatic speeches by digging out their own value systems.

Finally, in terms of the data collection, this study methodologically speaking, relies on a qualitative analysis of the data. The present research is both data-driven and theory-driven. With a little enlightenment in mind and some knowledge about cognitive context in advance, the whole investigation begins with the collecting of data, and then experientially categorizes them, and further probes into the inner connection in each category with reference to cognitive theory; at last finds out the reason behind this special language behavior and to generalize the pragmatic functions. To present it in a more concrete way, the present study has been conducted in the following steps:

- a. Having got some interest and enlightenment in the process of reading relevant articles;
- b. Reading relevant books to make certain the object of the research;
- c. Collecting and studying the history research on the research topic and find out what could be further studied;
- d. Collecting data and experientially categorizing them at the same time;
- e. Fixing on what theory should be used to analyze it;

- f. Categorizing the data with the theory in mind;
- g. Probing the underlying cognitive pragmatic functions;
- h. Analyzing the features of both American and Chinese spokespersons' evasive answers and their undying cultural reasons or value differentiation.

1.2 Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Pragmatic evasion takes place frequently in interpersonal exchanges of Sino-US diplomatic discourse and may cause potential conflicts among interlocutors due to its face-threatening nature. At press conferences, government officials may face sensitive or tough questions, which they need to evade tactfully, because how they answer concerns the government's stance and national interests. The book, based upon interdisciplinary study with the theoretical framework of cognitive pragmatic diagram and other linguistic theories including Adaptation Theory^①, Brown & Levinson's Face Theory^② and Hall's the high contextual culture (HC) and low contextual culture (LC)^③, Bull and Mayer's (2003) typology of evasion strategies

① Interpersonal (Interaction) adaptation theory (IAT) is often referred to as a theory of theories. Several theories have been developed to provide frameworks as explanations of social interactions. After reviewing and examining various communication theories and previous empirical evidence pertaining to interpersonal communication, a need to address ways in which individuals adapt to one another in interactions became apparent. The importance of observing both sides of a dyadic interaction lead to the development of the interpersonal adaptation theory. The theory states, individuals enter interactions with expectations, requirements, and desires, which combined establish an interaction position. Once the interaction begins, the difference between interaction position and the other party's actual behavior determines whether the individual will adapt and continue the communication positively or not.

② Politeness theory accounts for the redressing of affronts to a person's "face" by face-threatening acts. The concept of face was derived from Chinese into English in the 19th century. Erving Goffman would then go on to introduce the concept into academia through his theories of "face" and "facework". Although politeness has been studied in a variety of cultures for many years, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's politeness theory has become very influential. In 1987, Brown and Levinson proposed that politeness was a universal concept, which has had some disagreement within academia. Politeness is the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward the listener.

③ Edward T. Hall was an anthropologist who made early discoveries of key cultural factors. In particular he is known for his high and low context cultural factors. In a high-context culture, there are many contextual elements that help people to understand the rules. As a result, much is taken for granted. This can be very confusing for person who does not understand the unwritten rules of the culture. In a low-context culture, very little is taken for granted. Whilst this means that more explanation is needed, it also means there is less chance of misunderstanding particularly when visitors are present.

and Faerch and Kasper's (1989) model of internal and external modification of speech acts, attempts to conduct a contrastive study on linguistic evasion performed by Chinese diplomatic spokespersons and American diplomatic spokespersons. The author collects more than hundreds texts of press conference in, all both in English and in Chinese. Evasive speech acts in the data are identified, classified, marked, and then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Generally speaking, little attention in the previous study has been paid to the mechanism and dynamics lying behind this language phenomenon because of their descriptive method, and no complete research has ever been conducted from a view of comprehensively cultural study. Therefore, this book aims to take an interdisciplinary perspective to compare and further analyze the similarities and differences of evasive strategies in Sino-US diplomatic speeches by internal cognitive pragmatics and external cultural study, which will definitely broaden the research coverage and deepen our understanding of this particular linguistic phenomenon by offering a more dynamic and thorough survey of the tactful use of evasive answers. Before the detailed illustration of the methodology and the theoretical framework in this book, a scrutinization of the previous research approaches to the evasion would be firstly conducted.

In terms of the theoretical framework, the present conceptual framework intends to explain how answerers can successfully use evasive strategies via the Relevance Theory. According to Cooperative Principle, the answer can fulfill an evasive act by violating the maxims of Cooperative Principle to be concrete, through violating the quantity, the answerer can provide more or less information so as to evade what the questioner demands; by violating the quality maxim, the answerer can provide untrue information, but it rarely happens in serious political contexts; through violating the relation maxim, the answerer can deliberately make the answer irrelevant to what the questioner expects; via violating the manner maxim, the answerer can deliberately be ambiguous by his or her remarks. But Cooperative Principle dose not further explain how to violate those maxims, so we adopt Relevance Theory to explore the underlying mechanism of evasive answer.

According to Relevance Theory, communication is an ostensive-inferential process that includes both the ostensive nature of the communicator's behavior and the inferential nature of comprehension. In terms of speakers it is an ostensive process in which they should show their intention explicitly, and as for listeners, it is an inferential process in which they should infer the speaker's intention from their ostensive act and the context. But in fact, communicators are not always expected to give the most relevant possible information, or present it not in the least effort-demanding way, as a principle of maximal relevance would suggest. On the content side, the speaker may not have the information that the hearer finds most relevant. The evasive answer is one of the cases, and the book is intended to handle such a case. The concept of cognitive context in Relevance Theory will be attempted to develop by the application in analyzing evasive strategies in diplomatic discourses. Thus, we can further analyze the mechanism underlying evasion in it.

In accordance with Relevance Theory, we assume that the respondent can evade a question in two general ways: one is reconstructing the cognitive context of the question in the answer, the other is taking advantage of the cognitive context of the question instead of reconstructing it. To reconstruct the cognitive context, there are three methods, i.e. adding, reducing and changing cognitive assumptions. In terms of adding and reducing cognitive assumptions, these methods could be taken as two complementary ways because if respondents add more irrelevant assumptions of the questioner's intention in their answer, they can also reduce the optimal assumptions. In fact, those two probably take place at the same time in the process of evasion. In terms of changing cognitive assumption, it means to change the optimal assumption of the questioner's intention into other irrelevant assumptions in the answer. Therefore, the underlying mechanism of evasion in the diplomatic discourses will be further manifested especially from the perspective of cognitive pragmatic discussion.

Besides, it is known to all that diplomacy is interests-oriented since its basic function is to be a bridge between the government and the public. In the foreign press conference (FPC), the spokespersons address publicly with wide audience including not only journalists on the spot but also interest groups and institutions, even sovereign countries. The spokesperson is a symbol of certain government, so he

should pay attention to his speech and behavior in order to save the face of represented government as well as maintain the friendship with journalist. Therefore, another pragmatic theory, i.e. Adaptation Theory will also be borrowed in the analysis on functions of diplomatic evasions, namely, adaptation to national core interests, adaptation to settings and adaptation to politeness.

Finally, after knowing the linguistic and pragmatic feature of evasion in the diplomatic discourse, the comparative study of Sino-US diplomatic evasions will be conducted, and the cultural analysis will also be followed up since any manifestation of the evasive answer itself roots in the deeper cultural differences. Through careful analysis and comparative study of the Chinese text and American text, we draw a conclusion that both Chinese and American spokespersons employed the evasive strategies; Chinese spokespersons prefer to employ covert evasion while American counterparts tend to use overt evasion; such factors as context diversity, rhetorical philosophy, religious origin, face theory and thinking pattern all those can be taken into account to explain these dissimilarities to some extent, which will be further illustrated in detail in the final conclusion part.

1.3 Research Significance

Based on international law and international practices, diplomacy refers to sovereign states and other international actors to safeguard, realize and promote their own interests through the official representation of the country's top leadership and the central government department with the full-time diplomatic service as the core. It includes actions and processes for handling international relations and international affairs in a peaceful manner, such as communications, visits, talks, negotiations, and signing agreements. Diplomatic activities are official contacts between governments, especially in the political field. Therefore, the executors of diplomacy are mainly institutions that formally represent the state (or international organizations), including the central government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and permanent mission abroad. However, in some countries, semi-official and non-official

institutions, social groups and even individual activities under government leadership can also be considered diplomatic activities. Therefore, no matter big or small, anything matters in diplomatic discourses.

In this sense, diplomacy is an official and peaceful use of foreign activities by international actors such as countries and international organizations on the basis of international law and diplomatic practices in order to safeguard, strive for, develop their own interests or achieve specific goals. It plays an important role in coordinating international relations, peacefully resolving international disputes and maintaining order in the world system. Thus, diplomacy is the unification of science, art and skill. Diplomacy needs to abide by objective laws and respect the rules of the game, but it also requires diplomatic personnel to have extraordinary imagination and artistry. In the specific diplomatic activities, such as negotiations and talks, creatively combine principles and flexibility. According to the development of the situation and the changes in the situation, the countermeasures are flexibly formulated, and the interests are coordinated through mutual compromise and concession. Under such a circumstance, evasion strategies could be conducive to the spokespersons in the foreign press conference because of its pragmatic functions, such as to be polite, to hold national secret in a quiet way, to show the mutual respects, to restrain the emotions, etc.

Therefore, diplomats, politically or strategically, fulfill the covert evasion with their unambiguous rhetoric on the basis of their principled positions. By relying on a broadly vague language, diplomatic spokesperson could make their conversations somewhat flexible and in any case invulnerable. Vagueness and precision are two concepts that are contrary to meaning, but whether they are “fuzzy” or “accurate”, they are relative and can be transformed into each other. The ambiguity is just right, which could bring about advantage for the spokesperson to further attack or retreat. That’s why in diplomatic situations, it is often inconvenient to say too precise. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger believes that excessive language accuracy may jeopardize the success of negotiations. When the two sides disagree, he may seek what he calls constructive ambiguous language.

As seen from the arguments above, the further research of the evasiveness in the diplomatic discourses is conducive to the diplomats and the governmental officials, which of paramount realistic significance. The tentative research focus still shed light on the similarities and differences between Chinese and American diplomatic discourse in the foreign press conferences, which will manifest deep cultural structure of the two cultures. Besides, the book aims to conduct such a research from a interdisciplinary study combing cognitive pragmatics and cultural studies, which will definitely enrich the related theory and conceptual construction, which is of great theoretical significance.

1.4 Outline of the Book

This book is engaged in the comparative study of evasive answers both in Chinese and in American diplomatic speeches or discourses within the theoretical framework of cognitive pragmatics and cultural study. The whole research consists of ten chapters:

Chapter one is an introduction to the present research, generally describing the object and the objective, the rationale and the significance of the book, the problems of the present study on the topic, the methodological issues and structures of the whole book. The reason of taking diplomatic speeches as the research object is related to its own typification. International issues and national interest are often involved in the diplomatic discourse which are crucial to a state, so the context of it would be most complicated among all kinds of institutional interviews. Thus, when diplomatic spokespersons use evasive answering strategies, they have to take more factors into consideration to evade questions than their counterparts in other circumstances. Hence the evasive answer is pervasive in diplomatic speeches and performs important roles in communication. Through the evasive strategy, spokespersons could, for example, defend their position without threatening others and achieve compromise without damaging their represented interests. Therefore, the further research of the evasiveness in the diplomatic discourses is conducive to the

diplomats and the governmental officials, especially with the comparative perspective towards Sino-US tie, which of paramount realistic significance. Besides, the book aims to conduct such a research from a interdisciplinary study combing cognitive pragmatics and cultural studies, which will definitely enrich the related theory and conceptual construction, which is of great theoretical significance.

Chapter two is the literature review part with a detailed discussion of the conceptual construction since any systematic and logic research should follow up a clear presentation of terminology issue.

In terms of terminology, a thorough scrutiny of the relevant literature reveals that the definition of evasive answer has always been evading and confusing to pin down. The distinctions and relations between evasive answer and other relevant notions are still ambiguous. It is necessary to make some efforts to clarify them. Different studies examine different components of evasive answer based on research interests; as a result, the outcome of research is sometimes incomplete. Besides, the classification of evasive answer is also not clear. Some studies just give a simple static description of evasive answer without paying attention to its dynamics, that is, although the existing studies classify and explain the evasive answer from different aspects, they do not probe into the relation between the evasive answering and the questioning. Thirdly, since questioners sometimes do set a trap for respondents with the implicational leading question that can hypothesize a wrong logic for them. In this sense, diplomatic respondents have also to take the questioning characteristics into consideration. Therefore, this chapter makes a relevant literature review of the study on questioning types and approaches to evasive answers, and then the working classification of questions in diplomatic discourses and the working definition of evasive answer are presented.

Chapter three sheds light on the research methodology. Generally speaking, little attention in the previous study has been paid to the mechanism and dynamics lying behind this language phenomenon because of their descriptive method, and no complete research has ever been conducted from a view of comprehensively cultural study. Therefore, this book aims to take an interdisciplinary perspective to compare