Characteristics of Stance Markers in Political Discourse

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Abstract: This study focuses on the theme of the trade war and builds a political discourse corpus on the Chinese-U.S. trade war. It examines the characteristics and patterns of the use of stance markers (hereafter referred to as "SMs") by both China and the United States, and analyzes the differences in the use of SMs in five categories: vague SMs, forceful SMs, attitudinal SMs, manner SMs, and authorial SMs. The study found that the frequency of SMs used by both China and the United States follows the pattern of forceful SMs > authorial SMs > attitudinal SMs > vague SMs > manner SMs. In addition, there are significant differences between China and the United States in the use of vague SMs, forceful SMs, attitudinal SMs, and authorial SMs, but not in the use of manner SMs. Based on the data from the Chinese-U.S. trade war corpus, this paper aims to enrich the study of SMs in political discourse, increase foreign language learners' understanding of SMs in political discourse, and thereby better grasp the discourse characteristics of political discourse.

Keywords: Stance markers; Political discourse; Chinese-U.S. trade war; Comparative study

1. Introduction

Stance refers to how authors or speakers express their emotions, attitudes, viewpoints, visions, or values through language. Research has mainly focused on comparing different linguistic domains, genres, and native and non-native speakers. There has been little research on the usage characteristics of stance-taking in political discourse in China and the US, especially related to the China-US trade war. This study aims to analyze the viewpoints, attitudes, and opinions of political leaders and spokespersons of both countries and explore the ideological differences behind their discourse using a China-US discourse corpus and analysis tools.

2. Theoretical Framework

Based on the classification of stance markers by Biber, Hyland, and Xu Hongliang, and considering the characteristics of political discourse research, this study divides stance markers into five categories: (1) Vague SMs (such as could, probably, according to), which indicate the speaker's cautious attitude towards their expressed opinions, showing the speaker's awareness and respect for different views and opinions. (2) Forceful SMs (such as will, certain, sure), which indicate the speaker's positive attitude towards their expressed words and are used to emphasize their viewpoint and strongly express their position. (3) Attitudinal SMs (such as agree, hope, successful), which are words used by the speaker to express their emotional attitude or value judgment, reflecting the speaker's stance and attitude. (4) Manner SMs (such as in fact, frankly), which indicate the speaker's evaluation of the proposition or statement style in the text. (5) Authorial SMs (such as my, I), which refer to the first-person pronouns used by the speaker to refer to themselves or their own side, expressing the speaker's authority and responsibility for the argument (Zhang Jidong, 2015).

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

A corpus of political discourse related to the "US-China trade war" will be constructed, and the characteristics and patterns of the use of positioning statements by both China and the United States will be analyzed. Specifically, the following questions will be answered: (1) What are the distribution patterns of the five types of positioning statements in the political discourse of China and the United States? (2) What are the similarities and differences in the use of the five types of positioning statements by China and the

United States to express their positions?

3.2 Research Data

The researcher selected language data for this study from the official websites of the governments of China and the United States, focusing on keywords related to trade and tariffs. They used web crawlers to collect the data and selected language data from January 2018 to December 2020. After text cleaning and manual screening to remove irrelevant text, they ended up with a corpus of 354 Chinese political discourse texts and 103 American political discourse texts. The total word count for the Chinese texts was 118,622 and for the American texts was 118,012.

3.3 Research Method and Procedure

First, the researcher identified 475 target expressions in both Chinese and American language corpora and selected 114 high-frequency target expressions for further analysis. Second, the researcher compared the usage of these target expressions between the two countries in terms of frequency and log likelihood ratio. Third, based on the comparative results, the researcher observed the usage characteristics of political discourse target expressions in China and the United States and summarized their similarities and differences. The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods, with Antconc3.5.9 and Log Likelihood Calculation software being used for frequency and collocation analysis and detecting significant differences in target expressions. The software calculated the log likelihood ratio and P value for the 114 target expressions in both language corpora and provided significance levels to make it easy for readers to understand the results.

4. Research Results and Analysis

From the statistical results, the frequency of the use of stance markers between China and the United States shows forceful SMs > authorial SMs > attitudinal SMs > vague SMs > manner SMs, indicating that both sides tend to use forceful SMs in political discourse related to the trade war, and manner SMs are the least commonly used.

Overall, From the classification perspective, there are significant differences between China and the United States in the use of vague SMs, forceful SMs, authorial SMs, and attitudinal SMs (all P values are 0.000), with the largest difference being attitudinal SMs, with a log likelihood ratio of 790.99, and there is no significant difference in the use of manner SMs (log likelihood ratio of 2.27, P value of 0.303 > 0.05). In addition, Chinese discourse uses fewer stance markers in all five categories than American discourse.

Table1 The results comparison of stance markers between China and U.S

Data SM		Fre. (China)	Std. Fre. (China)	Fre. (U.S)	Std. Fre. (U.S)	Log-likelihood	P value	Signific-ance levels	Chinese fre.> U.S. fre
Vague SMs		1786	1506	2790	2364	196.26	0.000	***	-
Forceful SMs		4184	3527	5498	4659	162.93	0.000	***	-
Attitudinal SMs	emotional	1209	1019	1142	968	1.06	0.303		+
	evaluative	790	666	1538	1451	302.21	0.000	***	-
	total	1999	1685	2680	2419	135 .80	0.000	***	-
Manner SMs		26	22	40	33	2.27	0.132		-
Authorial SMs		2694	2271	5375	4555	790.99	0.000	***	-
Total		10689	9011	16383	14030	1128.13	0.000	***	-

*P<0.05, **P<0.01, ***P<0.001

4.1 Characteristics of the Use of Vague SMs

Discourse Based on the data analysis, words with a logarithmic importance display of *** (i.e., with values are shown in Table

3. The table shows that there are significant differences in the use of vague terms between China and the United States, and the words with significant differences include "think" "much" "based on" "according to," "probably," "a lot of" "just" "about" "pretty" "almost" and "advise". Among them, the United States commonly uses vague terms such as "think," "much" "a lot of" "probably" "just" "pretty" "almost" etc., while China commonly uses vague terms such as "based on" "according to" "as...said," etc. Therefore, it can be seen that in the China-US trade war discourse, the US tends to use verbs and adverbs to express its position, while China prefers to use phrases to indirectly express its stance by citing the opinions of third parties or relevant materials.

4.2 Characteristics of the Use of Forceful SMs

Overall, both China and the US use forceful SMs most frequently, but the frequency of standardized use in China is significantly less than in the US (3527 vs 4659). There are significant differences in the use of forceful SMs between China and the US. The differences include "so," "very," "really," "will," "a lot," "know," "look," "sure," "mean," "actually," and "believe," among others. The data shows that China tends to use strong positioning statements such as "will," "believe," while the US tends to use "so," "very," "really," "a lot," "know," "look," "sure," "mean," "actually," among others. Overall, the US is more inclined to use strong positioning statements than China, and the top 5 most frequently used positioning statements are "so," "very," "really," "will," and "a lot."

4.3 Characteristics of the Use of Attitudinal SMs

In this study, the frequency of attitudinal stance markers used by the US is higher than that of China. Specifically, the US uses evaluative stance markers far more frequently than China (log=302.21, P=0.000). The commonly used evaluative stance markers in US political discourse related to the trade war include great, sure, well, good, incredible, bad, significant, and beautiful. The US tends to use words such as great, sure, well, good, and incredible, while China prefers to use necessary. Moreover, the US tends to use adjectives and adverbs more frequently for evaluative stance markers, while China mainly uses verbs and nouns.

4.4 Characteristics of the Use of Authorial SMs

Overall, the frequency of explicit authorial stance markers is second only to forceful stance markers, and it is one of the most commonly used types of stance markers in political discourse in both China and the United States. However, there are significant differences between the two countries in the use of explicit authorial stance markers, which is the largest category of stance markers with the most significant difference between them. The overall frequency of explicit authorial stance markers in Chinese discourse is much lower than that in American discourse. Specifically, in the retrieved stance markers, "we" is the most frequently used in both Chinese and American discourse, followed by "I."

5. Conclusion

Overall, both China and the United States use stance markers reasonably to express their stance, views, and attitudes and to build their national image in political discourse. However, the number of stance markers used by China is much less than that of the United States, especially in the three types of vague, forceful, and authorial stance markers. This also indicates that compared to the United States, China is not yet proficient in the application of stance markers in political discourse, whether in expressing attitudes indirectly or in expressing a strong national stance. Therefore, the use of emotional stance markers should be reduced appropriately to enhance the objectivity, authority, and persuasiveness of the discourse.

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