Analysis of British Queen's 2019 Christmas Speech from the Perspective of Systemic-Functional Grammar

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Abstract:

Under the guidance of Halliday's Systemic-Functional grammar, this passage makes a discourse analysis of 2019 Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas Speech. In order to investigate Queen Elizabeth II's feeling and thought, this passage will analyze her speech text from the perspective of ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. This passage again proves the applicability and practicability of Systemic-Functional grammar in discourse analysis.

Key words: Systemic-Functional grammar; discourse analysis; the British Queen; Christmas Speech

1. Introduction

Queen Elizabeth II began to deliver the annual Christmas speech which publicized through radio, television and other modern ways to 52 federal countries since 1952. The Christmas speech have certain values to analyze for the speech itself can express Queen's idea without the interference of government.

The way we use Systematic-Functional grammar to analyze discourse called Functional discourse analysis. It aims to figure out how this discourse convey it's sense. This thesis will analyze the 2019 Christmas speech of Queen Elizabeth II from the perspective of three meta-functions of Systematic-Functional grammar and explore as well as summarize it's discourse characteristics and what the Queen want to express.

2. Three meat-functions of language

M.A.K. Halliday put forward the three meat-functions of language including ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Conceptual function refers to the function of language to express various experiences of people in the external world and the inner world. The content is manifested by transitivity, voice and polarity of clauses. Interpersonal function refers to the function of language to express the speaker's status, attitude, motivation and his inference of affairs. It used to maintain interpersonal relationships and is constituted by mood and modality. Textual function refers to the realization of language through the combination of discourse and context. It requires language users combine conceptual function and interpersonal function to make language and context related so as to generate discourse that matches the context. Textual function covers thematic structure, information structure and cohesion system.

3. The application of meta-functions of the 2019 Christmas speech of Queen Elizabeth II

3.1 Conceptual function

3.1.1 Transitivity

In transitivity system, language is divided into six verb processes in the form of clauses mostly. The six processes include material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioral process and existential process.

3.1.1.1 Material process

Material process refers to the process of using language to complete actions which include actor and goal. For example:

(1) Yet this year we marked the 50th anniversary of the famous Apollo 11 mission.

(2) This year we marked another important anniversary: D-Day.

Example (1) and (2) show us that Queen Elizabeth II used "marked" to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Apollo mission to the Moon and the 75th anniversary of Normandy Landing so as to summarize and review the big events of 2019.

3.1.1.2 Mental process

Mental process refers to people's psychological feelings rather than action process. The subject of mental process is sensor and the object is perceived phenomenon. The mental lexicon including think, like, believe, feel, trust, want, etc.

(3) By being willing to put past differences behind us and move forward together, we honour the freedom and democracy once won for us at so great a cost.

(4) The challenges many people face today may be different to those once faced by my generation, but I have been struck by how new generations have brought a similar sense of purpose to issues such as protecting our environment and our climate.

In example (3), Queen Elizabeth II showed her respect toward liberty and democracy which indirectly manifest her political stance. In example (4), Queen Elizabeth II showed her astonishment at next-generation's consensus on environment protecting. It also implies that Queen Elizabeth II is proud and pleased of youngers' common sense of responsibility.

3.1.1.3 Relational process

Relational process refers to the function of language to express the relationship between things.

(5) The path, of course, is not always smooth, and may at times this year have felt quite bumpy, but small steps can make a world of difference.

In example (5), Queen Elizabeth II stated that 2019 doesn't goes well. However, a small step can make big change which is a great way to cheer people up and encourage them to move forward.

3.1.1.4 Verbal process

Verbal process means the information exchange process. The main verbs of verbal process include say, talk, speak, etc.

3.1.1.5 Behavioral process

Behavioral process refers to the action that verbally expresses the physical activity of the actor.

(6) On 6th June 1944, some 156,000 British, Canadian and American forces landed in northern France.

In example (6), The Queen recreated what happened when American and Canadian troops landed in Normandy in 1944 by describing the scene.

3.1.1.6 Existential process

Existential process means state the existence of objects in language without modifying.

(7) Such reconciliation seldom happens overnight.

In example (7), the Queen claimed that reconciliation rarely achieved overnight which indicate

that today's freedoms and democracies are hard-earned.

3.1.1.7 Summary

Table 1 . The distribution of transitivity processes in the text of the Queen's speech

	Material process	Mental process	Relational process	Verbal process	Behavioral process	Existential process
Counts	16	7	2	0	1	1
Frequency	59.3%	25.9%	7.4%	0	3.7%	3.7%

From table 1, the material process and mental process dominate in the Queen's speech. In the sentences for material process, the Queen mainly retrospected the major events in 2019. In the sentences for mental process, the Queen focused on expressing her appreciation for democracy and freedom, for the joy of her family and for the Christmas New Year. The comprehensive use of various processes reflects the logic of the Queen's thinking process.

3.1.2 Voice

Voice means that one participant establishes a relation with one process. According to Halliday, the voice is mainly divided into the middle voice and the non-middle voice. The middle voice represents a clause with only one participant, and non-middle voice indicates a clause with two or more participants. The non-middle voice can be further divided into active voice and passive voice.

Table 2. The distribution of voice in the Queen's speech

	Middle voice	Non-middle voice	
		Active voice	Passive voice
Counts	8	16	3
Frequency	29.6%	59.3%	11.1%

From table 2, it's clear that the active voice and middle voice have a greater share. The heavy use of active voice is conducive to the Queen's expression of her views, but also makes it easier for the audience to understand the Queen's thoughts.

3.1.3 Polarity

Polarity makes a proposition evaluable. It shows that a proposition is positive or negative.

Table 3. The distribution of polarity in the Queen's speech

	Positive polarity	Negative polarity
Counts	22	3
Frequency	88%	12%

From table 3, it's evident that the positive polarity is far outnumber than the negative polarity.

(8) As a child, I never imagined that one day a man would walk on the moon.

(9) The path, of course, is not always smooth, and may at times this year have felt quite bumpy, but small steps can make a world of difference.

The example (8) and (9) are two of the few sentences using the negative polarity. The Queen used the negative polarity to express her own feelings and the summary for the past year which polish the whole speech.

3.2 Interpersonal function

3.2.1 Mood

Halliday believes that in accordance with linguistic roles and commodity exchanges, language can be divided into four functions: provide, state, order, question.

As a result, there are three moods include declarative, imperative and interrogative. However, the Queen adopted a declarative tone throughout her 2019 Christmas speech. The declarative sentence which used to convey information is often adopted in political speeches. By using declarative language, the Queen delivered her summary of 2019 and her best wishes for the New Year. The Queen avoided using the imperative and interrogative sentences for the command sense and informal characteristics each mood contain respectively.

3.2.2 Modality

Halliday pointed out that the modality composes of modalization and modulation. The modalization refers to the probability and usuality when the commodity for exchanging is information. The modulation can be found in suggestions which consists of obligation and inclination.

Table 4. The distribution of the values of modal verbs in the Queen's speech

Value	Modal verbs	Counts	Total number	Frequency
Low	could	1	3	60%
	may	1		
	can	1		
middle	would	2	2	40%
High		0	0	0

From table 4, the Queen is disposed to use low-value and mid-value model verbs. It states that most of the Queen's Christmas words include a summary of the previous year and her New Year's greetings. The use of such verbs can cater to the Christmas atmosphere and make it more acceptable to readers and listeners.

3.3 Textual function

Textual function refers to the function of organizing language components into discourse. It consists of three sub-systems: thematic structure, information structure and cohesion system. In thematic structure, theme refers to the starting point of the information, which is generally known or old information, while the rheme is a statement of the theme, which is generally unknown information or new information. Information structure refers to the order in which known information and unknown information appear. Cohesion system refers to semantic relations between linguistic components.

The thematic structure plays an important role in discourse analysis. In the course of discourse expansion, there is a certain connection and change between themes and rhemes in surrounding sentences, which is called thematic progression. There are several modes of thematic progression in English：A. Constant Theme Pattern. (under this pattern, every clause shares the same theme, different rhemes.) B. Constant Rheme Pattern. (under this pattern, the themes in individual clauses are different; these different themes all end up in the same rheme.) C. Linear Theme Pattern. (under this pattern, the rheme or one part of the rheme in the former sentence becomes the theme for the next clause.) D. Cross heme Pattern. (under this pattern, the theme in the first sentence will become the rheme in the second one. And then the theme in the second sentence will become the rheme in the third one, and so on.) In the Queen's speech, there are Constant Theme Pattern. Such as "Such reconciliation seldom happens overnight. It takes patience and time to rebuild trust, and progress often comes through small steps." There are also Linear Theme Pattern, such as "On 6th June 1944, some 156,000 British, Canadian and American forces landed in northern France. It was the largest ever seabourne invasion and was delayed due to bad weather."

The whole speech text achieves the semantic interrelation and text coherence through the comprehensive use of various modes of thematic progression.

4. Summary

As the symbol of spirit, the Queen's anniversary Christmas speech not only have the political sense but also endow with the encouraging function. Through the analysis of the 2019 Christmas speech of Queen Elizabeth II from the perspective of systematic-functional grammar, it's found that in ideational function, the Queen use material process, mental process, middle voice, positive voice and positive polarity in major to enhance the objectivity and authority of the speech. In interpersonal function, the Queen mainly adopt the declarative sentence and low-value as well as the mid-value verbs to narrow the distance with citizens. In textual function, the Queen are

dedicated to purse the logic and integrity. Through the above analysis, this thesis again demonstrates the great effect of Halliday's systematic-functional grammar on text analysis, which not only shows the stylistic features of the text itself, but also reveals the deep meaning of the text.

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