



# Analysis of President Xi’s Speech at the Extraordinary G20 Leaders’ Summit in light of Systemic Functional Grammar

Xingyuan Cao

School of Foreign Languages, China Three Gorges University, Daxue No.8, Xiling District, YiChang City, Hubei Province, 443002, PRC

Lingling Liu (Corresponding Author)

School of Foreign Languages, China Three Gorges University, Daxue No.8, Xiling District, YiChang City, Hubei Province, 443002, PRC

Email: [liulingling@ctgu.edu.cn](mailto:liulingling@ctgu.edu.cn)

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## Abstract

Politics is a genre of language, and language is the manifestation of politics (Mazrui, 2008). Political discourse not only plays an important role in the process of national external communication, but also conveys certain ideology and political intentions. Based on interpersonal function in Systemic Functional Grammar and using President Xi’s speech at the Extraordinary G20 Leaders’ Summit as the original data, this paper analyzes and explores how this speech can achieve discourse function through personal pronouns, mood and modality. In addition, this paper reveals how various linguistic resources are used to realize interpersonal meaning in political discourse.

**Keywords:** Political discourse; Interpersonal function; Ideology; G20 leaders’ summit.

## 1. Introduction

As an important part of the institutional discourse, political discourse has not only authoritative language characteristic, but also rigorous and objective linguistic features. In addition, political discourse not only plays an important role in the country’s external communication but also conveys certain ideology and political intentions.

In 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic broke out and spread in many places around the world, causing serious political, economic and social impacts. Therefore, the international community is eager to strengthen cooperation to fight the epidemic. At this critical moment, it is of great significance for the G20 to hold a special summit on the epidemic of COVID-19, so as to communicate and coordinate in dealing with the spread of the epidemic and stabilizing the world economy. At the meeting, President Xi made a speech entitled Working Together to Defeat the COVID-19 Outbreak, which not only expressed China’s determination to defeat the epidemic, but also put forward proposals that the international community needs to strengthen cooperation and unite to deal with this struggle. This summit was held on March 26, 2020, when the first stage of China’s fight against the epidemic basically ended. The domestic epidemic prevention and control continued to improve, and the epidemic was effectively under control. The effectiveness of prevention and control work is inseparable from the accurate judgment of the Central Committee of the Party, the timely deployment of various tasks, and the effective measures taken. Therefore, the speech delivered by President Xi at the summit deserves the attention of the whole world.

Systemic Functional Linguists represented by Halliday has constructed functional grammar, which provides a theoretical framework for discourse analysis. It can be used to analyze not only written discourse but also spoken texts (Halliday, 1994). According to systemic functional linguists, in language system, metafunction is expressed through three meaning functions, namely, ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. In addition, Huang (2001) holds that the Systematic Function Grammar is operable and useful in discourse analysis; Fang (2005) pointed out the application value of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar to discourse analysis, which can be used to “reveal the deep meaning of discourses, understand and explain the semantic and stylistic features of discourses”.

By analyzing the interpersonal function of speech, we can better understand the writing process of political style and analyze its implicit language subjectivity. At the same time, it can also reflect China’s tremendous efforts in the process of fighting against the epidemic, as well as China’s attitude and determination to defeat the epidemic.

## 2. Data Collection

This paper analyzed the speech presented by president Xi at the Extraordinary G20 Leaders’ Summit. The English version of President Xi’s speech comes from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC. The website is [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1761899.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1761899.shtml)

Due to the word limit, after the discussion with my partner, we decided to extract a part of the full text. Because of the similarity and repetition of the content, the four proposals about the epidemic in the original text were moved out. Therefore, the total number of words to be analyzed is 367 words, which is also conducive to our further analysis.

### 3. Analytical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper is Systemic Functional Grammar. According to Halliday (1994), language has three metafunctions, they are ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. In his point of view, the three metafunctions are semantic concepts, which must be embodied by means of a more specific semantic system. Among them, the manifestation of ideational function is mainly transitivity analysis. The manifestation of interpersonal function are mood analysis and modality analysis. The manifestation of textual function are theme and rheme analysis, information analysis and cohesion analysis (Zhu and Yan, 2001). This paper mainly analyzes President Xi's speech from the perspective of interpersonal function. Interpersonal function refers to the function that people use language to communicate with others, establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, use language to influence others' behaviors, and also use language to express one's views of the world. In language communication, the speaker not only expresses the speaker's identity, status, attitude, motivation and his inferences about things, but also affects the listener's attitude or behavior, that is, the relationship between the speaker and the listener is dynamic. Rozumko (2019) studied the interpersonal functions of English reportable advisors, Caldwell (2020) conducted an interpersonal analysis of the language in sports discourse based on a corpus. In addition, many scholars have done researches on interpersonal functions of political discourse, such as Zheng and Liu (2010), He (2009), Wu (2009), Lu (2012), etc. The research of interpersonal function in this paper will be based on the following aspects: personal pronouns, speech function, clausal mood and modality.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Personal Pronouns

Table-1. Numbers and percent of personal pronouns

	we	us	me	you	it	Total
Number	11	2	1	2	3	19
Percentage	57.9%	10.5%	5.2%	10.5%	15.7%	100%

The use of pronouns can reflect the intimacy of interpersonal relationship to a certain extent. Personal pronouns in political discourse can also help maintain the interpersonal relationship between speakers and audiences. In general speech, the first-person pronouns "we, us and our" are frequently used. However, in this paper, as shown in Table 1, there are 19 personal pronouns in this speech, in which the proportion of first-person pronouns is the largest, and most of them appear in the beginning and ending paragraphs. Among them, the first-person singular "me" and the first-person plural "we" and "us" account for 73.6%. In addition, the second-person pronoun "you" was used less frequently, just accounting for 10.5% in all. Besides, the third person pronoun "it" appears three times in excerpt text, which accounts for 15.8% of the total.

The first personal pronoun "we" in this paper has various meanings, and the speech role changes under each meaning. But the two main semantemes refer to all Chinese and all the G20 members. In other words, "we" can be either exclusive or inclusive. The former does not include other G20 members, but affirms the achievements and efforts made by all Chinese people in this epidemic which you can see in example 1. On the contrary, the inclusive "we" means that the challenges brought by the epidemic need the concerted efforts and solidarity of the international community. In this sense, the use of "we" is conducive to narrowing the distance between speakers and listeners, which has strong appeal and also reflects the great power of China (see example 2). Mankind is not only a community of destiny, only all G20 members can unite their strength and work together to fight against this epidemic.

Example 1

*We have mobilized the whole nation...*

*We have acted according to the overall principle of shoring up confidence...*

*We have put up a strenuous struggle and made tremendous sacrifices...*

Example 2

*We will prevail over this outbreak and we all will embrace a brighter future for mankind!*

### 4.2. Speech Function and Clausal Mood

President Xi's speech contains of 24 sentences, including 23 declarative, which accounts for 95.8% of the whole text. In addition, at the end of this speech, there is an explanatory sentence. Furthermore, the speech function of this speech is statement. In political discourse, the declarative sentence can realize two discourse functions, they are "giving and requesting". On the one hand, the speaker states his attitude and position, on the other hand, he hopes the audience would accept his point of view. The language of political discourse is often influenced by a specific time, purpose of the speech and different social backgrounds.

In 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic broke out and spread in many places around the world, causing serious political, economic and social impacts. Therefore, the international community is eager to strengthen cooperation to

fight the epidemic. At this critical moment, the G20 held a special summit on the epidemic of COVID-19, aimed at communicating and coordinating to deal with the spread of the epidemic and stabilization of the world economy. Through the use of these declarative sentences, President Xi reviewed the efforts made by China in the early stage of the fight against the epidemic, showing that the Chinese government and Chinese people are fearless and confident in defeating the epidemic. But at the same time, as a global infectious disease, global public health security is facing unprecedented challenges caused by COVID-19. In the latter half of the text, President Xi also called on G20 members to take common measures, formulate plans, and make timely communication and arrangements on macro-policy coordination against this epidemic. Political discourse has strong positivity and persuasiveness, so interrogative sentences generally do not appear. The last sentence of President Xi's speech is an exclamatory sentence, which not only shows China's determination to defeat the epidemic, but also shows that China will face global problems and meet challenges together with other countries.

### 4.3. Modality

Table-2. Numbers and percent of modal verbs

	must	will	Could	Total
Number	1	4	1	6
Percentage	16.7%	66.6%	16.7%	100%

When expressing the interpersonal meaning of discourse, modal verbs and modal adverbs often express the speaker's attitude towards the content, or to concern about the influence of the content on the audience. In this paper, President Xi mainly expresses modalities by using modal verbs, such as "must" (for one time), "will" (for four times) and "could" (for one time), among which "will" is used most frequently. "Must" is a high modal value verb, "will" is a median modal value verb, and "could" is a low modal value verb.

"Will" belongs to the median modal value verb, which can be used to express wishes and intention. It appears four times in the selected text, accounting for 66.7% of the total modal verbs.

#### Example 3

*We will prevent over this outbreak and we all will embrace a brighter future for mankind!*

In this sentence, the modal verb "will" is not only a symbol of the future tense but also plays a modal restrictive role in the sentence. Furthermore, the speaker's attitude and viewpoint on the proposition contained in the sentence, and it also expresses the speaker's prediction and expectation for the future. This sentence is also the last sentence selected from the text, expressing the determination and expectations that China will join hands with other countries to defeat the epidemic.

High modal value verb "must" and low modal value verb "could" appears only one time in the text, each of them accounting for 16.7% of the total. It is worth noting that these two modal verbs appear in the same paragraph. See example 4.

#### Example 4

*We must comprehensively step up international cooperation and foster greater synergy so that humanity as one could win the battle against such a major infectious disease.*

"Must" is an emphatic, non-negotiable, firm word that can be used to assert one's authority. In example 4, President Xi uses "must" to express the necessity and importance of cooperation among other countries. The modal verb "could", in addition to representing a lower degree of modality, expresses "ability" and "skill" semantically. Political speeches often require the speaker to express a strong desire to complete a task, and at the same time call on the audience to have a similar strong desire to give support and complete the task together. According to the context, "could" mainly embodies the meaning of "ability", that is, we have the ability to overcome the epidemic so as to usher in a bright future.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes President Xi's Speech at the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit Based on interpersonal function. And it also explores that this speech enhances the appeal and persuasiveness of the discourse through three ways: mood, modality and personal pronouns. This political discourse mainly uses declarative sentences to explain facts and express affirmation. In terms of modality, this speech mainly uses median modal value verbs to express China's desire and ability, as well as China's determination and expectation to join hands with other countries to defeat the epidemic. In terms of the personal pronoun, the speech mainly chooses the first person plural "we" to narrow the distance with the audience and establish a good cooperative relationship with other countries. In a word, the speech of President Xi uses these language strategies to establish China's image as a responsible country. At the same time, it also shows that China upholds the concept of the community of human destiny and is willing to provide assistance to other countries within its ability and contribute to the stability of the world economy.

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## Appendix: Working Together to Defeat the COVID-19 Outbreak

Your Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud,

Dear Colleagues,

It is good to join you. Let me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to His Majesty King Salman and Saudi Arabia for having done tremendous work of communication and coordination to make this summit possible.

Facing the COVID-19 outbreak that caught us all by surprise, the Chinese government and Chinese people have been undaunted as we took on this formidable task. From day one of our fight against the outbreak, we have put people’s life and health first. We have acted according to the overall principle of shoring up confidence, strengthening unity, ensuring science-based control and treatment and imposing targeted measures. We have mobilized the whole nation, set up collective control and treatment mechanisms and acted with openness and transparency. What we fought was a people's war against the outbreak. We have put up a strenuous struggle and made tremendous sacrifices. Now the situation in China is moving steadily in a positive direction. Life and work are quickly returning to normal. Yet, there is no way we will lower our guard or relax control.

At the most difficult moment in our fight against the outbreak, China received assistance and help from a lot of members of the global community. Such expressions of friendship will always be remembered and cherished by the Chinese people.

Major infectious disease is the enemy of all. As we speak, the COVID-19 outbreak is spreading worldwide, posing enormous threat to life and health and bringing formidable challenge to global public health security. The situation is disturbing and unsettling. At such a moment, it is imperative for the international community to strengthen confidence, act with unity and work together in a collective response. We must comprehensively step up international cooperation and foster greater synergy so that humanity as one could win the battle against such a major infectious disease.

Dear Colleagues,

Now is a crucial moment, a time for us to rise up to challenge and act with swiftness. I am convinced that through solidarity and mutual assistance, we will prevail over this outbreak and we all will embrace a brighter future for mankind!

Thank you.

Link: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1761899.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1761899.shtml).

## Appendix

### Details of Transitivity Analysis: original tables

#### Ideational metafunction

##### 1. Transitivity

Type of process	Number	Percentage
Material process	24	63.16%
Existential process	2	5.26%
Relational process	8	21.05%
Verbal process	1	2.63%
Mental process	2	5.26%
Behavioural process	1	2.63%
TOTAL	38	100%

## Interpersonal Metafunction

1. Mood  
All sentences are **declarative** except the last exclamatory one.
2. Speech Function  
Statement
3. Modality

Types		Number	Percentage
High modal value	must	1	16.67%
Median modal value	will	4	66.66%
Low modal value	could	1	16.67%
TOTAL		6	100%

4. Pronoun use

Types of personal pronouns	Number	Percentage
we	11	57.89%
me	1	5.26%
us	2	10.53%
you	2	10.53%
it	3	15.79%
TOTAL	19	100%

5. Address system
  - 1) Dear Colleagues
  - 2) His Majesty King Salman

### Textual metafunction

NO.	Theme	Rheme
1	<b>It</b>	is good to join you
2	Let	me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to His Majesty King Salman and...
3	Facing	the COVID-19 outbreak that caught us all by surprise
4	<b>The Chinese government and Chinese people</b>	have been undaunted as we took on this formidable task.
5	From day one of our fight against the outbreak,	we have put people's life and health first.
6	<b>we</b>	have put people's life and health first.
7	<b>We</b>	have acted according to the overall principle of shoring up confidence...
8	<b>We</b>	have mobilized the whole nation, set up collective control and treatment mechanisms and acted with openness and transparency.
9	What we fought	was a people's war against the outbreak
10	<b>We</b>	have put up a strenuous struggle and made tremendous sacrifices.
11	Now	the situation in China is moving steadily in a positive direction.
12	<b>Life and work</b>	are quickly returning to normal.
13	Yet, there is no way	we will lower our guard or relax control.
14	At the most difficult moment	in our fight against the outbreak, China received assistance and help from a lot of members of the global community.
15	<b>China</b>	received assistance and help from a lot of members of the global community
16	Such expressions of friendship	will always be remembered and cherished by the Chinese people.
17	Major infectious disease	is the enemy of all.
18	As we speak, the COVID-19 outbreak	is spreading worldwide...
19	<b>The situation</b>	is disturbing and unsettling.
20	At such a moment,	it is imperative for the international community to strengthen confidence, act with unity and work together in a collective response.
21	<b>We</b>	must comprehensively step up international cooperation and foster greater synergy so that humanity as...
22	Now	is a crucial moment, a time for us to rise up to challenge and act with swiftness.
23	<b>I</b>	am convinced that through solidarity and mutual assistance,
24	<b>we</b>	will prevail over this outbreak and we all will embrace a brighter future for mankind!

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Marked theme	12	50%
<b>Unmarked theme (bold parts)</b>	12	50%
TOTAL	24	100%