Study on the Attributes of Media's Speech Act in the Communication of International Crisis
Taking the Report of COVID-19 Pandemic as an Example

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ABSTRACT

International crisis events are the focus of news report and are also important dissemination fields involving the images of national security and diplomacy. Throughout the reporting process of incidents, how the media constructs and implements one's own speech act is related to the development of a country's politics, economy, and culture, as well as the shaping of the country's image and international influence. On the premise that the speech act attributes in international crisis communication are restricted by the core elements of speech act, it is ultimately determined by the importance of the crisis communication event itself to national interests and inherent national values. This article conducts research through related theories such as linguistics, communication, and sociology. Based on this recognition, the media's speech act in the spread of international crises has attributes such as authenticity restoration, subject safety, audience interpretation, and public opinion influence.

Keywords: Authenticity restoration, Subject safety, Interpretation, Influence of public opinion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global outbreak and spread of COVID-19 is undoubtedly the most concerned international crisis event in 2020. Its impact on the entire world goes far beyond the mere category of endangering human life. Because of this, in the process of reporting the incident, the media of various countries, in addition to the basic function of screening, deleting, and emphasizing information, put national interests and national security in the most important position from beginning to end. With the continuous development of the incident, the audience not only cares about the basic information of the number of infections, deaths, cures, and effective treatment techniques and methods, but also needs to receive more in-depth related information. Issues such as the cause of the incident, the government's attitude and measures to deal with the incident, the various interest relationships involved, and the possible impact of the incident have all become problems that people need to understand. And explanatory reports on these issues will inevitably involve national interests, image, and even diplomacy and international status. Undoubtedly, interest orientation and value orientation are inevitable in the spread of international crisis events. This requires the media to maximize its explanatory function when constructing and implementing speech act. The particularity of the spread of international crises determines the nature of this explanatory speech act.

2. AUTHENTICITY RESTORATION UNDER THE RESTRICTION OF SPEECH ATTITUDE

The reason why the speech act theory initiated by Austin has become a new perspective for humans to understand language is because it jumps out of the language system and language structure of the language ontology, and regards speaking as a kind of human behavior, that is, the behavior of conducting by word. The focus of his research is

how to inject "human" factors into the process of using language to communicate and what kind of communicative effect will be produced. Speech attitude, as one of the core elements of conducting by word, means that people are restricted by obvious emotions and attitudes at the beginning of constructing words. These emotional attitudes are generated from specific social, historical and cultural backgrounds and specific communicative contexts, and play a tendentious role in the formation of speech act. The media is a communication carrier dominated by ideology. Its behavioral standpoint has a clear attitude tendency, and its speech act also has a clearer and more prominent purpose effect. In the dissemination text of the media, one can feel a certain potential and obvious emotional attitude from the discourse builder. This kind of emotional attitude doesn't need to be deliberately rendered, but it can flow in words and phrases that have no emotional attitude. For example, "What is a promise? In the face of the pandemic, Chinese soldiers shall tell you." "Huoshenshan Military Doctors Helping Hubei Evacuated in a Low-key Manner, Netizen: This Is the Great Wall of Steel Made of Flesh and Blood." Between the lines of such news headlines, there is a clear tendency for the media to deal with news events. This emotional attitude affects the audience's perception of things. Because the audience's understanding of news is not limited to the content covered by the language, but also feels the emotional attitudes from the media language users. And the impact of this emotional attitude is more profound, which will affect the audience's understanding of the event beyond the literal information itself. Therefore, speech attitude is the core element that affects the media's speech act.

In the spread of international crises, speech attitude is a more obvious and definite important being. As scholar Gitlin believes: the existence of a media framework is inevitable. The mass media infiltrate the relatively stable ideology of society into the media content by establishing a news framework, and then by screening, deleting, and emphasizing news information, so as to realize its own role and influence. [1] The media framework mentioned here is set up under the direct constraints of speech attitude. Compared with other news dissemination, international crisis dissemination has the characteristics of wide coverage, high attention, large influence and deep degree, and its speech attitude is more common. That is, the media of any country hope to show the truest and the most objective events in front of the world, at least

subjectively. Because basic information such as the time, place, cause, progress, general impact, treatment plan and effect of the event are the basic elements of the objective reproduction of the event and the basic meaning of media communication. And crisis communication is obviously not limited to these meanings, but all other extended meaning information is based on basic information. As a result, the authenticity restoration of the speech act of the international crisis communication media has been produced. Objective reality is a requirement for news, but news is to be presented through the conversion of speech act into text. Therefore, the objective requirement of the media's speech act is to restore the truth through the text constructed by language to the maximum extent. If the term "media framework" is borrowed, the true restoration framework of the media's speech act in various countries in the spread of international crises is basically the same. As far as the COVID-19 pandemic report is concerned, the information content of this media framework for restoring the authenticity of the facts generally includes the most objective basic information such as live reports of the pandemic, introduction of the knowledge about COVID-19, promotion of basic protective measures, and publicity of relevant government policies and so on. The basic information is the most basic information in the dissemination of crisis events, and it is also the objective information that is easiest to have authenticity. Because it doesn't involve more ideological levels, nor is it more subjective. Especially in today's world with highly developed media, the objective elements of events are difficult to conceal and tamper with. The international news industry's speech attitude towards reflecting the basic objective information of events is clear and certain. That is, the common point is to present the true original appearance of the event.

3. SUBJECT SAFETY UNDER THE CONTROL OF SPEECH MOTIVATION

In the face of international crisis events, if it is said that restoring the basic facts is the basic principle that every country or media is willing to abide by when performing speech act, then the situation is not always so when it comes to reports that involve deeper meaning in the event. This is determined by the complexity of the spread of international crises and the motivational elements in speech act. The "international" in international crises emphasizes the scope of the incident itself

and the complex deep-seated relationships between countries. Regarding the connotation of "crisis", although different scholars have different definitions, the common cognition emphasizes the threat, widespread influence, harmfulness of the subject's image, and consideration of prevention and control decision-making measures. Among them, the harm of the crisis to the subject's image is the most concerned issue of all countries and groups related to the incident. If a crisis event is not handled properly, it will have a huge impact on the country's politics, economy, and diplomacy, and at the same time damage the country's and government's international and public image. Therefore, one of the most important core tasks of crisis communication is to maintain and restore the image of the national government. The National Research Institute of the United States believes that crisis communication is from the perspective of public relations, exploring how to use active media to resolve emergencies and crisis events for an organization, and to maintain and repair the organization's image. [2] Professor Shi Anbin from Tsinghua University also believes that crisis communication is the process of information exchange among government departments, organizations, media, and the public before and after the crisis and during its occurrence. One of the purposes is to restore the image. [3] It can be seen from this that in the era of highly developed information, the impact of what is reported and how it is reported on the event itself is obvious. Especially for international events with great impact such as COVID-19, the news media of each country will first consider the issue of the image security of the self-subject. Repairing damaged images and maintaining a good reputation is the core purpose of the spread of international crises.

Motivation is the psychological inclination or internal drive that stimulates and maintains the action of an organism, and makes the action toward a certain goal. It is generated on the basis of need, can arouse or inhibit people's desire and intention to act, and is the internal reason that promotes people's behavior. Speech motivation is the subjective purpose and objective inducement of constructing speech act. When language users construct speech act, they have a clear pragmatic purpose, but the impact of this purpose can be large or small. Simple notification and reminder is the purpose, and it is a more demanding purpose to change the attitude and even behavior of the discourse recipient. At the same time, the speech motivation of the language users is based on specific objective inducements.

The core task of international crisis communication is to maintain the subject's image, and the motivation of its speech acts also has a clear purpose. That is to say, the narration and speech of the event will be carried out around the maintenance of the subject safety. This is why the media of different countries produce completely different reports based on different speech motivation for the same crisis event. Regarding the reports of the SARS incident in China in 2003, the performance of the Western media clearly showed their dissemination intentions and tendencies, and their motives were self-evident. Some scholars have comparatively analyzed that when AIDS was born in the United States and spread from the United States to the world, the media often reported from the perspective of hygiene and health. However, when SARS appeared in China, Western media mainly interpreted it from the perspective of ideology and political system. [4] Coincidentally, when COVID-19, a public health event that was more serious than the SARS incident in 2003, broke out at the end of 2019, Western media represented by the United States also showed the same intent to spread. Western media criticized China's handling of COVID-19, suspected that China deliberately concealed the true situation of the pandemic, accused China of being the chief culprit of the spread of COVID-19, and so on. These naturally become the objective incentives for the Chinese media to protect the subject's security, and a series of "counter-attack" related reports have been produced from this. It can be seen that, because international crisis events involve the harmfulness of the subject, the motivation of speech act in the spread of the crisis directly points to the defense of the subject's safety.

4. AUDIENCE INTERPRETATION UNDER THE CHOICE OF SPEECH STYLE

International crisis communication, like other types of news communication, requires the realization of communication intentions through texts, oral language, images and other language symbols. How these communication symbols are combined and used forms the way of language use. The formation process of the communication language is the processing process of language symbols. In this process, language users selectively use language expressions based on their subjective intentions, and convey semantic content through specific language forms. All news texts are scattered and disorderly before they enter the

audience's field of vision, and they need to be "produced" by the active actions of the communicator. Although the creation of news texts is not allowed to be as literary as literary works, since it is text production, there must be subjective color, value orientation and even cultural spirit. Therefore, the presentation of information in news dissemination is also a subjective speech act. It selects and processes language on the basis of the language socialized symbol system and basic combination rules, and then forms an organizational system with national power, and at the same time displays the inherent cultural spirit.

To some extent, the practice of discourse in the spread of international crises is also a discourse game. The interactive process of communication, dialogue, and expression in communication is a statement process of self-recognition of the event, a process of continuous reinforcement of the communication intention, and a process of continuous revision and persuasion. Studies have shown that, at the national level, politicians tend to use effective rhetoric in crisis events as a way to gain and maintain legitimacy and credibility, and improve communication with the public by using attractive discourse to deal with crises. [5] Ritchef and Edelta's research on the 2011 British World News Corporation telephone wiretapping scandal found that the subject of the crisis is based on three dimensions: speech structure, semantics, and position attribution and it persuades or manipulates stakeholders through discourse rhetoric, changes their perceptions of crisis events and impacts, and maintains their public image. [1] The interpretability of the audience under the choice of the language mode of the media's speech act in international crisis communication refers to the expression mode selected by the media to achieve a certain pragmatic effect for the pragmatic subject itself on the one hand, and on the other hand, for the audience, different ways of speech will affect audience's interpretation of the event information. Because of the different methods, the meaning information and emotional feelings conveyed by the symbols will also be different for the audience. For example, the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a worldwide media crisis war. The media of various countries are using different speech methods to make a variety of different voices. Among them, the most striking is nothing more than the various accusations and blame made by the United States against China. Recently, Fox female anchor Jeanine Pirro accused China of being the chief culprit for the outbreak of

the U.S. epidemic and even the out-of-control anti-epidemic situation in the show on April 19, 2020 with the "utterly discomfited" and "hysterical" manner, like a shrew shouting abuse in the street. She used threatening words to make China pay the price and pay for the U.S. fighting against the pandemic. She said on the show: "China is the one out of control. We will not let you destroy this country or our way of life." "You politicians want to show your strength, so start thinking about your punitive measures, like expulsion, isolation, and economic sanctions. Let China be responsible for everything they do to us and the rest of the world, but please don't get involved with us." (see "Figure 1") Such an almost crazy roaring speech method and exaggerated emojis bring to the audience not only the acceptance of information, but also the emotional reactions. Therefore, some U.S. netizens praised Pirro's expression of "affording general satisfaction". However, many people are also angry at the malicious show effects that Pirro has slandered China with ulterior motives, transferred the domestic out-of-control fighting against the pandemic in the United States, and ignored the hardships of low-level people to seek to survive. Chinese netizens are extremely outraged. "Disgusting, hypocritical, dangerous. She should be expelled." "She looks crazy, is she drinking too much again?" "Go slow and wait for your people." These all express the irony of netizens and the anger in their hearts. Similarly, when the pandemic spread across China, the Chinese media also adopted various methods to express the party and government's firm determination to take active measures to resist the pandemic, expressing the strong will of the people of the whole country and the people of Wuhan to build the great wall of steel against the pandemic. A group of hand-painted newspapers of fighting the pandemic together and fighting the "pandemic" and "Go, China" adopt a very down-to-earth and life-like expression method. They convey courage, perseverance and determination to the audience in the most straightforward way. In the picture, the doctor's strong arms, the eye-catching words of "Go, China", the warm loving heart, and the bright sun all make the audience feel the richer semantic and emotional information conveyed by the symbols. (see "Figure 2") It can be seen from this that the speech way of news dissemination is not only a way of presenting information, but also a representation and spread of national cultural connotations. It affects the audience's interpretation of the event, and guides the audience to form a cognitive concept of dealing with things. Over time,

it may even affect the development of national   character.

Figure 1 Foreign Media Reports on China's Epidemic.

a   The picture comes from the official website of Beijing Evening News.

Figure 2 Resistance to disease.

a   The picture is from Tencent Video.

5. THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION UNDER THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SPEECH PURPOSE

The influence of public opinion on crisis events is undoubtedly huge. In the era of highly developed communication technology, the power of the media to create public opinion is unstoppable. Especially with the continuous growth of new media represented by the Internet, WeChat, MicroBlog, Micro-video, and APP mobile clients, the crisis communication environment has undergone essential changes, and the clamor of public opinion and even rumors has flooded the entire communication field. For sudden crisis events, the audience has fear, panic, and perplexed feelings about what to do. The audience has no time or method to distinguish the complicated and uncertain event information, and to a certain extent can only accept the information content with trust in the source. Although the mainstream media has always assumed the responsibility of safeguarding the truth and curbing rumors, in the face of massive amounts of chaotic information, and in the era of freedom of information dissemination where everyone can be an information publisher, the pressure and heavy responsibilities of the mainstream media can be told. In addition, crisis events are unpredictable, and information is advanced and lagging (For example, when it comes to the spread of rumors, the rumors must be released before, and then there may be information to refute the rumors.) On the one hand, the mainstream media must release relevant information guided by the will of the government, and on the other hand, they are busy dealing with improper and unhealthy information from all sides. It is easy to spread rumors, but it takes more time and energy to break the rumors. [6] Therefore, in the dissemination of international crisis events, public opinion has a great influence when the measures and strengths to stop and correct such behaviors are insufficient once the purpose of speech acts is achieved. Based on this, the speech act of the media in the dissemination of international crises has the influence of public opinion under the fulfillment of the speech purpose. The spread of the COVID-19 crisis is full of voices from different media from different countries, including many rumors. And the influence of the source of some rumors is very powerful, and the influence of public opinion can't be underestimated. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, the accusations and doubts against China by some

countries represented by the U.S. have been uninterrupted. When the pandemic situation in China was severe, the phenomenon of "anti-Chinese" appeared abroad, and even the phenomenon of assaulting foreign students appeared. While the pandemic situation in China has improved and China has provided various aids to other countries, politicians and people in some European countries have also expressed doubts about China's aid. They question that these rescue teams have been infected and claim to send these people back. The appearance of these voices is the influence of public opinion after the purpose of the speech act is achieved. In the case of the COVID-19 crisis, the U.S. was undoubtedly the first to question China. Words and opinions such as "Chinese Virus" and "Wuhan Pneumonia" come from Trump and the U.S. Secretary of State. Due to their special status and identity, coupled with the publicity of the media, the influence of public opinion produced by their speech and behavior is worldwide. In addition, public opinion behaviors such as taking the lead in claiming compensation from China and falsely claiming that China is concealing the pandemic in order to develop a vaccine firstly have affected the attitude of the world media towards China. When an international crisis occurs, there will be many independent and incompatible voices and consciousnesses, but these different voices and consciousnesses will eventually be affected by strong voices and generate strong public opinion. Due to the harmfulness of international crisis events to the subject, the media of various countries will continue to enlarge and strengthen the public opinion that is beneficial to them, and finally form a public opinion field that maximizes self-interest. Therefore, understanding and paying attention to the impact of the media's speech act in a crisis event is an important part of crisis public relations, and it is also the basis for the national mainstream media to respond to the crisis speech communication behavior.

6. CONCLUSION

The spread of international crises involves many complex social issues, and their speech acts have greatly exceeded the simple scope of mere language to convey information. Among them, because of the existence of factors such as subject interests, cultural background, the public, public opinion, etc., crisis communication has become a dynamic communication process with complex context, multiple subjects, and multiple discourses.

This leads to the complexity of the media's speech act. Understanding the attributes of media speech act in international crisis communication has theoretical and practical guiding significance for enhancing the effectiveness of social media through better dialogue and symbolic expression. Facing the new communication environment, it is necessary to promote the effective integration of information resources and communication channels, realize the re-aggregation of audience attention resources under the new communication paradigm, further strengthen the authority of mainstream media, and provide certain thoughts. At present, research on the spread of international crises is not yet mature and complete, and the research results are not yet fruitful enough. This article intervenes from the linguistic analysis framework, analyzes the context of crisis communication and the subject's choice and expression of utterance from the entry point of media speech act, and tentatively provides a research perspective for future crisis communication research.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Teng Zhu.

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