The Indexicality Principle and the Discourse Construction of France’s National Image: Instantiated by Emmanuel Macron’s Inauguration Speech

Chunrong Wang

ABSTRACT

The Indexicality Principle is a principle within sociocultural linguistic framework for analyzing identity within linguistic interaction. In interactive communication people consciously or unconsciously sense the relationship between self and others and thus build relating identities through linguistic resources. In a political speech a political leader often builds his identity or identities of others in the interests of his own country, and therefore they are, to a large extent, representative of the national identity or image. This paper takes the newly-elected president of France Emmanuel Macron's 2017 inauguration speech as the data to expound how he employs particular words as linguistic resources to build France's national image. The current study finds out that Macron, by means of overt reference, presupposition and implicature and stance-marking, has successfully constructed France's national image as a strong, solid, clairvoyant and innovative model country that affirms its values and principles of democracy and republic and holds fast to its core cultural values ‘Liberty, equality and fraternity’. ¹

THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The national image is the intangible asset of a country, and its influence can by no means be underestimated. This is because it is not only related to the prestige and

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reputation of the country on the world stage but to the cohesiveness and centrality of
democracy in this country as well [1]. Ever since 1930s and 40s, major countries in
the world have been targeting the construction of national image as the key to
strengthen the national soft power. In more recent years studies on national image
have caught more attention, and are quite fruitful in theory construction, research
methods and cross-disciplinary cooperation.

Unlike such disciplines as politics, international relations and communication
studies, linguistics has contributed relatively less to this research field. However, we
say words not just to convey information but to do things as well [2]. With the
development of modern western linguistics, especially the rise of Structural
Linguistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), people began to rethink the
relationship between original meanings and generative meanings of language. It is
believed that language is not only a symbol of information transmission, but also a
social structure. Discourse is undoubtedly the most basic and important medium for
the construction of national image [3]. Thus linguistics has stepped in and occupies a
place in the study of identity construction and specifically of national image
construction in political discourse.

The Indexicality Principle is one of the five principles in socio-cultural
linguistics to explore identity construction in discourse communication [4]. When a
head of state openly addresses a political speech, his words represent the voice of the
country, and the identity he builds manifests the image or posture of the country.
This paper, taking the inauguration speech of the newly elected French President
Emmanuel Macron as the textual data and the Indexicality Principle as the
theoretical framework of analysis, aims to observe and explore how President
Macron constructs or builds the national image of France in his political discourse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

National Image

The national image is the projection of the objective aspects of the country in the
public opinion. Generally speaking, it refers to the overall judgment and social
evaluation of a country [5]. On the contemporary international stage, the national
image of a country is getting increasing attention from the international community,
and its importance is self-evident. The construction of national image can be divided
into two types: self-image and other-image. The former refers to the construction of
a country's own national identity [6]. The latter refers to the perceived image of a
country in the eyes of other countries [1]. This paper mainly observes how Macron
builds a positive national image of France in his inauguration speech, and thus it
belongs to the first type.

Emmanuel Macron delivered his inauguration speech at the Elysee Palace in
Paris on May 14, 2017 and became the successor of the outgoing President Hollande
as the 8th president of the 5th Republic of France. The full text of his speech contains
1429 words and 40 paragraphs and conveys his promise to restore French men and women's confidence in the future of France. He said that answers must be found to such serious crises they face today as immigration, terrorism and climate change. He promised that during his term of office he would work to promote reconciliation among the French people and to ensure better protection for those who feel being left behind. He argued that the world and Europe now need France more than ever, and that it is a strong France that can make a strong voice for freedom and solidarity.

The Indexicality Principle

The Indexicality Principle proposed by Bucholtz and Hall is one of the five principles of identity construction in communication, the other four being the Emergence Principle, the Positionality Principle, the Relationality Principle and the Partialness Principle. Here indexicality is understood as a linguistic phenomenon in which linguistic forms at all levels (e.g. vocabulary, phrases, grammatical structures, sentences or discourse) semiotically relate to social meanings, cultural beliefs and values. In other words, the Indexicality Principle is the linguistic means for the speaker to employ certain linguistic resources to build either his own identity or someone else's, which can be realized by the following four ways:

OVERT REFERENCE

The overt reference of identity category is the most obvious and direct way that identities can be constituted through talk, as is shown via the derogative use of the word ‘hjira’ when used by the father of the guy who becomes a hjira[4]. Other typical English examples are ‘cockney’ (when used to refer to Londoners from the East End), ‘nego’ (when used by white Americans to refer to African Americans), and ‘whitney’ (when used by African Americans to refer to their white counterparts).

IMPLICATURES AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

Less direct means of instantiating identities can be realized by such pragmatic processes as implicatures and presuppositions. Homosexuals may use implicatures, such as gender-neutral references like the special term ‘gaydar’ to lovers, to avoid openly displaying their sexuality. Such usage can constitute a particular identity within the savvy community while excluding possibly hostile outsiders [4].

STANCES

The link between linguistic forms and social identities can be indirectly mediated by stances. Stances such as evaluative, affective or epistemic orientation can become the resources for the speaker to construct his identity. Elinor Ochs argues that the indexical connection between a given linguistic form and a particular
social identity is not direct but can be interpreted through such stances as forcefulness, uncertainty, etc. which in turn may be associated with particular social categories such as gender [7]. In this paper stance is mainly about the attitude or affective orientation of the speaker in the construction of his identity, and another theoretical framework, namely the Appraisal Theory, will be borrowed to assist our analysis of the current investigation.

LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

At the macro level, languages and dialects may also be indexically linked to identity categories. For instance, code switching may be used by the speaker to convey particular social identity at a particular point of time of communication.

Regarding the textual data we are about to investigate, we will mainly explore the first three ways of indexicality and interpret how Macron uses particular linguistic forms/resources to build the positive national image of France.

**Attitude in the Appraisal Theory**

The aforementioned stance reminds us of the well-known Appraisal Theory (AT) [8] in SFL which holds similar theoretical claims in terms of evaluation orientation, and thus it is interestingly relevant to the current investigation of identity construction. The AT is an approach to explore, describe and explain the way language (e.g. words and grammatical structures) is used to evaluate, to adopt stances, to construct textual personas and to manage interpersonal positionings and relationships. It consists of three systems: attitude, engagement and graduation. The attitude system has three aspects: affect, judgment and appreciation together with several subdivided items. Currently only the attitude system will be adopted in our study of stance marking, as is illustrated in Table I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Judgment</th>
<th>Affect</th>
<th>Appreciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>social esteem</td>
<td>social sanction</td>
<td>inclination</td>
<td>reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normality</td>
<td>veracity</td>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capacity</td>
<td>propriety</td>
<td>security</td>
<td>valuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenacity</td>
<td></td>
<td>satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE II. TYPICAL EVALUATIVE RESOURCES OF ‘TENACITY’.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenacity</th>
<th>Positive (+)</th>
<th>Negative (—)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>brave/cautious/meticulous/</td>
<td>timid/impatient/weak/disloyal/inconstant/stubborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>loyal/dependable/flexible...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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TABLE III. FRENCH TRANSLATION OF SOME POSITIVE EVALUATIVE RESOURCES IN ENGLISH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>brave</td>
<td>brave, courageux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cautious</td>
<td>prudent, précautionneux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meticulous</td>
<td>méticuleux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loyal</td>
<td>loyal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dependable</td>
<td>fiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flexible</td>
<td>flexible, souple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each subdivided item can be realized through the use of typical words, the so-called evaluative resources. Evaluation can be either positive (marked by +) or negative (marked by —). Thus each item is made up of both positive and negative evaluative resources. Let’s take the item ‘tenacity’ in judgment for example. Typical evaluative resources can be illustrated in the following table [8].

Though the AT is originally proposed in English, it can be universally applied in other languages. English and French belong to different branches of the Indo-European language family, but many English and French words enjoy a high degree of similarity in both spellings and meanings. Therefore we hold that the AT can also be applied to French. Let’s take the positive evaluative resources listed in Table II for instance and translate them into French, as is shown in Table III.

To briefly recap, the Indexicality Principle, together with the helpful attitude system in the AF, serves as the theoretical framework for us to investigate the inauguration speech of Macron to see how the national identity is indexed and built through the use of particular linguistic resources.

CASE STUDY: MACRON’S 2017 INAUGURATION SPEECH

Overt Reference

The overt reference usually takes the French grammatical structure ‘X être Y’ (X is Y), in which the linking verb ‘être’ (be) directly introduces particular identity categories for the construction of the national image. In example (1), the speaker uses ‘La France’ (France) as the subject and ‘un modèle pour le monde’ (a model for the world) as the object as well as ‘exemplaire’ (exemplary) as the predicative, both of which are introduced by the linking verb ‘est’ (is, the conjugation of ‘être’ in the present tense). Such direct and overt reference serves to build the proud national image of France. Macron intends to show the world that the prosperity and strength of France is a model and example for the rest of the world to follow.

(1) La France n’est forte que si elle est prospère. La France n’est un modèle pour le monde que si elle est exemplaire.
(France is not strong unless it is prosperous. France is not a model for the rest of the world unless it is exemplary.)

Besides the speakers can also use the first person pronoun ‘nous’ (we) as the subject to include himself and his fellow countrymen. In other words, ‘nous’ refers to both the speaker and the hearer(s). Such inclusiveness of first person pronoun clearly marks the identity of the speaker and the hearers (i.e. the French nation or the whole French people), which is conducive to the construction of the national image of France.

(2) Parce que nous aurons su dépasser ensemble nos craintes et nos angoisses, nous donnerons ensemble l’exemple d’un peuple sachant affirmer ses valeurs et ses principes, qui sont ceux de la démocratie et de la République.

(Because we will have overcome our fears and worries, we will altogether provide the example of a people capable of affirming their values and principles that are of the democracy of the Republic.)

In example (2) the speaker uses such clearly defined identity category as ‘l'exemple d'un peuple’ (the example of a people) to mark the identity of ‘nous’ (we), which refers to the French nation. By doing this, the national image has been successfully established, namely a nation confident in its political and cultural systems.

(3) Aujourd’hui, Mesdames, Messieurs, le temps est venu pour la France de se hisser à la hauteur du moment. ... car le monde attend de nous que nous soyons forts, solides et clairvoyants.

(Today, ladies and gentlemen, it is time that France should scale the height of the times ... for the world expects us to be strong, stable and clairvoyant.)

In example (3) it is observed that the linking verb ‘soyons’ (should be, the conjugation of ‘être’ in subjunctive) is followed by three qualitative adjectives ‘forts, solides et clairvoyants’ (strong, stable and clairvoyant). The speaker endows France represented by ‘nous’ with these qualities, which is also another means of overt reference in the construction of national image.

Implicature and Presupposition

Implicature is a technical term in the pragmatics linguistics, which refers to something that is understood from what is said but is not stated directly. It is highly dependent on the context of situation. Also in pragmatics presupposition is an implicit assumption about the world or background belief relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted. A presupposition must be mutually known or assumed by the speaker and hearer for the utterance to be considered appropriate in context. Both implicature and presupposition are sensitive to the context of utterance, and are closely related to the speaker's and/or the hearer's beliefs, attitudes and intentions.

The use of person deixis is a typical case of pragmatic inference in which the speaker's intention is indicated. In the following example Macron's use of the first
person pronoun ‘je’ (I) and demonstrative adjective ‘mon’ (my) is worth our exploring their implied meanings.

(4) La culture et l’éducation, par lesquelles se construit l’émancipation, la création et l’innovation seront au cœur de mon action.... Car je crois aux institutions de la Vᵉ République et ferai tout ce qui est en mon pouvoir pour qu’elles fonctionnent selon l’esprit qui les a fait naître.

(Culture and education, on which is established emancipation, creation and innovation will be at the core of my action ... for I believe in the institutions of the 5th Republic and will try my best so that they function according to the spirit on which they are established.)

In many cases political leaders are liable to use the first person pronoun plural form in their political speeches so as to put themselves and their addressees within the same group and get psychologically closer to each other. Generally speaking such inclusiveness usage shows leaders want to be closer to the people and connect themselves with the interests of the people. In addition, such usage is seemingly safer than the use of the singular form when leaders express their personal ideas, thoughts and attitudes, because the implication is that it is the will of the people and the collective wisdom of the nation rather than their personal ideas.

However, in example (4) it is observed that Macron uses three times the first person pronoun singular form ‘je’ (I) and the possessive adjective ‘mon’ (my) with the implication that he is ready to take on heavy responsibilities and the people of France can trust him. By this he intends to reassure the people that he will abide by his campaign promise, carry it out by actual efforts and shoulder the responsibility of revitalizing France. In turn Macron’s sense of responsibility and emphasis on practice contribute to the construction of France’s national image, i.e. a nation of confidence, responsibility and practice.

(5) La mission de la France dans le monde est éminente.... Nous sommes tous interdépendants. Nous sommes tous voisins.

(The mission of France in the world is eminent ... We are all interdependent. We are all neighbors.)

In example (5) the use of first person pronoun plural form ‘nous’ (we) is also a usage of inclusiveness and its reference extends to all the peace-loving people and nations including France and the French people. Unlike example (4), the extended reference of ‘nous’ implies that Macron is devoted to building a mutually beneficial and cooperative and intimate community of shared future for mankind. With such underlying tone, the image of a friendly and cooperative France has been successfully established and it is easily accepted by all.

(6) Tout ce qui forge notre solidarité nationale sera refondé, réinventé, fortifié. L’égalité face aux accidents de la vie sera renforcée.

(All that forge our solidarity will be reconsolidated, reformed and restrengthened. Equality of the people in their life changes will be reinforced.)

Another linguistic phenomenon worth our attention is that Macron uses many times in his speech the re/ré- prefix indicating certain actions will be done anew. In
example (6) the three verbs ‘refondé’ (reconsolidated), ‘réinventé’ (reformed) and ‘renforcé’ (reinforced) presuppose the fact that the previous administrations has done relevant works and these will be reconsolidated, reformed and reinforced during Macron's time in office. Such presupposition conveys Macron's communicative intention that the previous achievements are acknowledged with gratitude and his strenuous efforts will be made to improve what has been done for the people. His use of these verbs is not only a positive evaluation of the French government but also a construction of France's national image, i.e. an efficient and practical nation.

**Stance Marking**

Stance is the attitude people hold to a particular matter or event. People always stand in a particular position when they understand things, and more specifically they always evaluate things in the interests of target groups. State leaders always evaluate events, affairs or situations in their political speeches from the perspective of the nation’s interests. In other words, their stance represents the national position, which builds a corresponding national image as well. Upon our observation of the data, there are seemingly two ways for Macron to achieve stance marking, i.e. the use of evaluative resources (evaluative vocabulary) and the use of key words of cultural values. The former is theoretically in accordance with the AT while the latter triggers the cognitive context commonly shared within a particular cultural community so as to mark culturally preferred stance.

(7) Le monde et l’Europe ont aujourd’hui, plus que jamais, besoin de la France. Ils ont besoin d’une France forte et sûre de son destin. Ils ont besoin d’une France qui porte haut la voix de la liberté et de la solidarité. Ils ont besoin d’une France qui sache inventer l’avenir.

(Today the world and the Europe need France more than ever. They need a strong France that is sure of its own destiny. They need a France that holds high the banner of liberty and solidarity. They need a France that knows how to invent the future.)

When it comes to what kind of France the world and Europe need, Macron uses such evaluative resources as ‘inventer’ (invent), ‘forte’ (strong) and ‘sûre’ (sure). These three positive evaluative words fall respectively into the three aspects of the attitude system in the AT, as is shown in Table IV.

There are three aspects in the attitude system, namely judgment, affect and appreciation. Capacity, one subdivided item in judgment, is the evaluation of the ability or capability of the person or event in question. The adjective ‘forte’ is a positive evaluation of the overall national strength, i.e. a strong nation in every way. Security, one subdivided item in affect, is the sense of security towards the person or thing in question. The adjective ‘sûre’ is a positive evaluation of the national security, i.e. a nation capable of protecting itself, Europe and the world. Valuation, one subdivided item in appreciation, is the evaluation of the social significance of the person or thing in question. Valuation is closely related to specific fields (e.g.
arts, politics, etc.) and is used to evaluate the truthfulness, creativeness and timeliness of things or matters. The verb ‘inventer’ is a positive evaluation of the future of France: a nation that focuses on innovation and keeps pace with the times. Thus it can be seen that Macron's use of these three positive evaluative resources helps to orient his audience towards the national image he intends, i.e. a strong, steadfast and innovative France.

In addition, the speaker can turn to key words of cultural values to promote the national image. To some extent, the cultural values of a nation is an important representation of the nation's basic beliefs, mainstream ideology, ethnic cohesiveness and history [9]. It can be said without exaggeration that core cultural values represent the value orientation of the nation. Therefore political leaders often emphasize the core cultural values which in turn contribute to manifest the time-honored cultural image.

(8) Le monde a besoin de ce que les Françaises et les Français lui ont toujours enseigné : l’audace de la liberté, l’exigence de l’égalité, la volonté de la fraternité.
(The world needs what French men and women have always taught it: the audacity of freedom, the demand for equality and the desire for fraternity.)

In this example Macron uses such key words of core cultural values as ‘liberté’ (freedom), ‘égalité’ (equality) and ‘fraternité’ (fraternity), all of which directly orient his audience to the most central values and worldview of the nation. When hearing these key words, the French people (as members of the same cultural group) will unconsciously associate them to the slogan of freedom, equality and fraternity originally dating back to the era of the Enlightenment. In other words, certain cultural features of the cognitive context commonly shared among members of the same cultural group have been activated and become the background knowledge necessary for the interpretation of the speaker’s communicative intention. By doing this, Macron intends to show to the world and Europe the image of the national character, a country where everyone can enjoy the freedom of choice, try to be themselves and safeguard men's sense of equality with the fraternal love and the will of freedom.

### TABLE IV. THREE ASPECTS OF THE ATTITUDE SYSTEM.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>capacity</td>
<td>security</td>
<td>valuation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forte</td>
<td>sûre</td>
<td>inventer</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSIONS

This paper observes the newly-elected French president Emmanuel Macron's inauguration speech from the perspective of the Indexicality Principle in sociocultural linguistics. The current study finds out that Macron, by means of overt reference, presupposition and implicature and stance-marking, has successfully constructed France's national image as a strong, solid, clairvoyant and innovative model country that affirms its values and principles of democracy and republic and holds fast to its core cultural values ‘Liberty, equality and fraternity’. He intends to boost the national image of being a member within the community of shared future for mankind. Therefore it can be seen that linguistic theories can become an edge tool in the discourse construction of national image. The Indexicality Principle, rich in its content, can be further employed to study the discourse construction of national image of other countries, making linguistics truly serve the interests of the nation.

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