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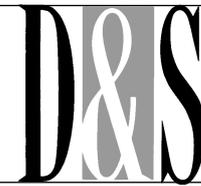
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## *Critical discourse analysis of political press conferences*



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**ABSTRACT.** This study of political press conferences allows a closer look at diplomatic talk to communicate political differences in a positive way to smooth out socio-political and ideological discrepancies that often divide prominent political figures. Taking a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective, this article analyses textual data from press conferences involving the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin and the US President George W. Bush, who come from different ideological backgrounds, also sharing differences in other dimensions such as age, experience, economic status, socio-political influence and political objectives. The findings reveal three major themes: positivity for the reinforcement of mutual trust, respect and progress; influence and power for subtle persuasion; and evasion to hedge or avoid responses to probing and inconvenient questions from the media.

**KEY WORDS:** *critical discourse analysis, evasion, influence, political press conferences, positivity, power*

The multidimensionality of political discourse has attracted a great deal of attention from discourse analysts. The role of evasion in political talk (Harris, 1991), political broadcasts and interviews (Atkinson, 1988; Scannell, 1991), the relationship between politics, the government, and the media (Fairclough, 1998, 2000; Negrine, 1994; Schaffner, 1997; van Dijk, 1998), ideology and political discourse (Hudson, 1978), political language in general (Biletzki, 1997; Chilton, 1985; Collins, 2002; Geis, 1987; Glover, 2002; Holly, 1989; Lakoff, 1990; McCarthy, 2002; Otero, 1988; Wilson, 1990; Wodak, 1989) have all been given some attention; however, political press conferences, though very interesting from the point of view of language use to negotiate ideologies, have rarely been the specific subject of study. Although there have been some studies

reported in the field of presidential press conferences (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2003; Sharp, 1968–9; Smith, 1990) focusing on issues of ‘show business and politics’ and dramatic licence in political broadcasts (Jennings, 1968), broadcast political talk (Davis, 1997; Reinsch, 1968), politicians and media hostility in press conferences (Ryfe, 1999), press conferences and public relations (Manheim, 1979), press and political campaigning (Barkin, 1983), national radio conferences (Sarno, 1968–9), there has been very little work on press conferences between political leaders. This article is intended to fill that gap by focusing on political press conferences involving the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin and the US President George W. Bush.

Press conferences involving well-known political leaders from different parts of the world provide excellent data to study how ideologies are discussed and negotiated, how power relations are asserted, and how political differences on difficult issues are discussed and communicated in a positive way. Over the years, this aspect of political communication has become even more interesting as politicians have been transformed into media personalities as a result of the ‘mediatization’ of politics and government (Fairclough, 2000: 4) and hence the role that media plays in ‘political socialization’ (Wilkins, 2000). The airing of press conferences resulted in the laymen’s creation of the political-social-identity. The public began to learn about what kind of people their leaders were and how they dealt with other countries. The complexities and goings-on of the political scene became public knowledge informed by the media. Politics and media, therefore, began to have a lot more interdependency, sharing a paradoxical relationship whereby one needed the other to survive, or rather thrive, yet each endorsed considerable hostility for the other.

Whatever the case may be, the media play an integral part in political persuasion. They are the medium and mediators of political knowledge. Courting the press and feeding their egos ensures favourable coverage for political leaders, making the introduction of policies or alterations to existing ones easier to accept (Smith, 1990). Political strategy needs to incorporate media strategy because the media have a crucial impact on political efficacy and political trust (see Moy and Scheufele, 2000; Negrine, 1994).

The press can very often either make or break the impression the public has of their political leaders. As a result political leaders become public figures and celebrities, interacting not as individuals but rather as representatives of their government, nation and people (Schaffner, 1997). It is interesting to see a leader of a democracy and another of communism come together to reach a common understanding and express it to win their different audiences. As Fairclough (1995: 80) says:

Discoursal democratization is of course linked to political democratization, and to the broad shift from coercion to consent, incorporation and pluralism in the exercise of power. Synthetic personalization is I think a facet of a concomitant process of the breaking down of divisions between public and private, political society and civil society, as the state and its mechanisms (especially ideological) of generating consent expand into private domains.

The article will take a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective to analyse textual data from press conferences held by leaders from different political backgrounds in order to undertake a detailed investigation of the way political speakers negotiate and maintain face work when interacting with each other in such contexts, while highlighting the nature and function of political press conferences. President Jiang Zemin and George W. Bush are good examples of political leaders with such contrasting ideologies and backgrounds, with the former coming from a single-party communist political system and the latter a multi-party democratic political system. The crux of their contrasting ideologies lies in the political systems they represent. China adheres to a socialist system, trailing Marxist and Leninist ideals. Rather than being a representative or mediator of the institutional and political system, the party is the system, accrediting itself the power over all, engulfing all constitutional matters. On the opposite hand, America, as with most western democracies, is more a capitalist society, in which institutions such as the media provide an intermediary link between the general public and the system. Having said this, it is also possible to say that in recent times America has grown to become more imperialist, imposing neo-conservative policies in a 'democratic' fashion. Nevertheless, because of these differences, disagreements concerning matters such as human rights, proliferation of nuclear weapons, war, terrorism and economic superiority are more widespread.

### *Socio-political ideologies in press conferences*

Following Swales (1990) and Bhatia's (1993) definition of genre we find 'press conference', as constituting a broad category of conventionalized communicative events covering many domains, such as sports, religion, business, law, and medicine, among many others. 'Political press conference' can be viewed as one of the particular subcategories of this genre. However, even if we narrow down the genre of press conferences to a sub-genre, we still cannot give it definite boundaries. The body of knowledge on political press conferences has been thus far more or less limited to single-party presidential press conferences between the president and reporters (see Eshbaugh-Soha, 2003; Manheim, 1979) that begin with a speech by the political leader, followed by a question-answer session with the press. However, this article deals with two-party press conferences, which are concerned with a relatively more international platform, rather than a national-level presidential conference concerned with domestic policies. The comfort and security with which political leaders are able to deal with the press play a larger hand in the occurrence of such conferences than does the political climate (see Eshbaugh-Soha, 2003; Smith, 1990). It is possible that presidential press conferences may be less frequently held if the administration is going through an embarrassing situation; if the political leader is suffering from unpopularity; or if the political leader's tenure in office increases (Lammers, 1981).

However, the occurrences of two-party political press conferences are more dependent on the international political environment. If the government is in

need of multilateral support or is in a potentially controversial foreign policy situation, then they may increase the number of press conferences in an attempt to gain support, make amends, or withdraw the policy, though the latter seems unlikely. In this article I refer to 'political press conferences' that bring together two political leaders in a ritualized communicative event, with the objective of projecting a united front on crucial global political issues. Through the use of knowledge of socio-cultural norms and diplomatic language, both give a joint statement to their audience of predominantly press journalists, who then incorporate this into media reports which will reach lay members of the public.

The televising of two-party political press conferences has become a 'formalized public institution . . . a communication vehicle' (Cornwell, 1960: 389) that has made political figures a part and consequently representative of the general social demographic. Live press conferences are made accessible through the media to international as well as national audiences, drawing laymen from the private into the public sphere.

In this sense it is reasonable to regard political press conferences both as political discourse and media discourse. Political press conferences are a sub-genre of the more overarching concept of press conferences. It is given its recognition from the rules of talk and action: who says what, where, when and why. They have their typical realizations in that the participant contributions are often pre-allocated and the order in which contributions are made is highly conventionalized. Topic boundaries are often explicitly signalled. The whole process of political press conferences seems very much ritualized. We can relate this to Goffman's idea of *footing*, where shifts from one sequence to another and from one topic to another take place almost methodically since:

much depends on the minutiae of the institutional arrangement within which any particular discourse occurs and on the intention of the speakers . . . routinely ritualise participation frameworks.

(Goffman in Burns, 1992: 324–7)

Political press conferences are part of political discourse, which also includes speeches, interviews, reports, analysis and debates by political figures. They can also be recognized as a part of media discourse, since in contemporary times press conferences are held more for the benefit of the general populace and members of the media who construe and attach motive to what political figures say, in part creating the reality we are familiar with.

A press conference is a *mediatization* of political action, which is meant to give voice to a joint statement on the outcome of political meetings, often to tell the rest of the world that the meeting was successful and useful to both the parties engaged in talks. Mass media are an important influence on the setting and objectives, since events are always kept as cordial and passive as possible between the speakers to ensure the appearance of a non-adversarial relationship (see Negrine, 1994).

The participants in a political press conference are not only the people present at the scene itself, but also those whom the messages reach in the end (Hymes,

1974). Here the addressors are predominantly the two politicians, and later on journalists asking them questions. The receivers and hearers are journalists, and other press and media authorities closely watching the developments; however, the ultimate audience is the international community of politicians, and more importantly, the general public who are being represented by their leaders. This indicates complexities of 'speaker'-hood, what Goffman refers to as principals and authors behind actors and animators. Speakers in a press conference come prepared with a speech, and answers to potential questions, written in advance by a team of trained communication diplomats and specialists. This, in one respect, makes the speakers animators rather than authors of the material they use.

One of the main interests in the study of press conferences is the use of diplomatic language, and it is interesting to see what causes politicians to resort to the use of such discourse, which Cheng (2002: 310) describes as 'the tactical usage of rhetoric for diplomatic resolution between both parties'. Diplomatic discourse entails many features, including intercultural communication, media discourse, polite negotiations, manipulative disguises of disagreement, particular turn-types and turn allocations, authority, requiring and engendering trust and socio-political knowledge, often exploiting socio-pragmatic space (Bhatia, 2004) of the political genre. Diplomatic discourse is a solution to ideologically ridden token agreements (see Brown and Levinson, 1990). Ideology, which manifests itself at all levels of society, is a societal and national phenomenon. It goes beyond our habitus, extending to power struggles in society (see Fairclough, 1989). One could say it originates from individual elitists, gatekeepers of society who set yardsticks against which we measure normative behaviour. These values then institute society. The contrasting ideologies of the three countries under study – America, England, and China – cause diplomatic language to take place in the context of press conferences when political leaders from these countries meet and discuss issues, which may be socio-political, economic, or any other. Politicians do not always speak as individuals, but as representatives of their countries, governments and socio-political systems, thus it is necessary to undertake an in-depth critical analysis of their contributions. Critical discourse analysis will help reveal to what extent their statements, claims, assertions, and denials are the product of their own individual and socio-political ideologies, and how these are negotiated when confronted with opposition.

### *Framework*

The most interesting aspect of any discourse is its context, the processes that make its construction possible, and the participants that turn it into real-life action to achieve social objectives. It is difficult to find a single framework that will give a complete and comprehensive analysis of all kinds of discourses. Since political press conferences provide a context for interesting socio-political action, CDA has strong potential for a detailed analysis of the possible motives of the participants. It is particularly suitable for investigating why the participants say

what they say, and how they say it. What are the underlying intentions in the statements they make? To handle these questions, the broader definitions offered by Fairclough (1995) and Fowler (1996) seem relevant and relatively more all encompassing. CDA treats discourse as a social practice and analyses the influences of social, political and cultural contexts on discourse. Since CDA sees discourse as both produced and shaped by ideology, it stresses the essential linguistic characteristics of social relationships, social structures, and the power distributed among them. Van Dijk (1993) elaborates this point when he mentions that CDA examines the way in which powerful gatekeepers in society influence social beliefs and values, and shape ideologies, through the standards they set for what is and is not acceptable, therefore revealing the power asymmetry in discourse. Furthermore, Wodak (1996: 17) explains discourses are multi-layered and CDA studies discourses 'distorted by power and ideology', in order to investigate how they are embedded in cultural forms of life, which they co-constitute.

The analysis presented here makes use of a combination of models in CDA, primarily Wodak's (1996) *discourse historical method*, which stresses that discourse is historical – related to events which have happened or are happening; Fairclough's (1995) unveiling of opaque ideological relations between discourses and socio-cultural practices; and van Dijk's (1993) investigation of the hidden power structures that ideological discourses reflect.

### *Data*

This article presents a critical discourse analysis of the language used by two ideologically opposed political leaders, who, as a result of an increasing amount of international collaboration and cooperation, often need to share the same platform. Press conferences between President Bush and Jiang Zemin provide data to study the role of socio-political beliefs and ideologies in arriving at a negotiated understanding of some of the crucial political issues, such as the threat of terrorism, and the proliferation of nuclear arms in the world. However, despite divergent political views, beliefs, and cultural values, the two presidents make attempts to create a shared or, maybe, compromising vision to agree (or agree to disagree) on such issues. The analysis is based on a corpus of 20 political press conferences between different political leaders dating from 2001 to 2003. In addition, to validate the analysis, a corpus of secondary data consisting of statements, commentaries, news and views expressed in the media by spokespersons, associates, news reporters, political analysts, and academics, from a variety of media sources, has been considered. This data is published in the contexts of the press conferences, therefore proving useful in arriving at informed and reliable judgements about the interpretation of the motives in the press statements given at the press conferences.

## THE GENERIC STRUCTURE OF POLITICAL PRESS CONFERENCES

The format of the modern press conference was developed by Harry Truman (Smith, 1990), creating power asymmetry in the very physical setting of the conference. As Smith mentions, reporters and members of the press took their seats ahead of time, waiting for the president, or in this case both political leaders, who entered from a separate door, and more often than not, stood on raised platforms in front of lecterns looking down on the members of the press.

Moving on to the actual interactional format (see Have, 1999), based on the structural analysis of the primary data of press conferences, in which two politicians are making joint statements, we find the following four major sequences:

1. **The opening sequence** where the participant hosting the event invariably begins the press conference by welcoming the guest politician, and saying how successful their meeting was. Sometimes during the opening the number of meetings both politicians have had previously is recounted, before talking about what was discussed in the present meeting.
2. **The individual voices** where 'individual statements' by the politicians are made, which may include several issues or topics. This sequence allows for individual statements based on the perceptions of the participants. The politician of the host country, who generally invites the guest politician to the conference, always gives the first statement.
3. **The interactional sequence** after which no other statements are given by either of the politicians except in the form of answers to questions by journalists. This sequence is a typical question–answer session (see Clayman, 2001; Drew and Heritage, 1992), controlled by the politicians. This stage is typically characterized by the hybridization of two rather distinct forms of discourse, the individual statements, which are like rehearsed monologues, and the question-answers, which are in the form of a more spontaneous interaction, almost similar to everyday conversation.
4. **The closing sequence**, which is as brief as the introduction, perhaps even shorter, and generally ends with the host politician thanking the audience and journalists.

*Thematic analysis of political press conferences*

Political press conferences in terms of content can be as clichéd as they are dynamic. For an activity, which, in theory, is supposed to be spontaneous, it is incredibly repetitive and formulaic. The speeches are prepared after many round-table discussions and debates, and questions are often pre-selected; as a result answers hold hardly any spontaneity-induced controversy, unpredictability and excitement (Taylor, 1997).

It is not only the content but also the structure of the press conference which is institutionally organized and relatively inflexible, with pre-established turn

and turn-type allocation (Have, 1999). There is also a fixed objective of the press conference, which is to project a diplomatic front; the goals of the press conference, hence, are not negotiable, especially with members of the press or the audience present. The procedures of the press conference are mechanical and the speakers often make sub-textual rather than literal meanings.

Analysis of the corpus reveals the emergence of three broad themes, which I would like to identify as 'positivity', 'influence and power' and 'evasion', illustrating specific strategies that clearly distinguish the corpus as a unique genre, with its own very typical communicative objectives and rhetorical strategies to achieve them.

The most dominant theme is that of positivity, which is used throughout the political press conferences in an effort to depict diplomacy, congruity and mutuality between two diametrically opposed countries. The second theme is that of influence and power, which the speakers utilize in order to pre-determine one another's future behaviour. Influence is applicable not only to the linguistic negotiation between the politicians themselves, but also to the control that is exerted over the audience, press and public. Although influence is evident throughout, it is particularly noticeable in the second sequence, where individual statements are made. Third, we come across the theme of evasion that emerges, though in varying degrees throughout the course of the press conference, but primarily in the third sequence – the questions and answers. Here politicians cannot, or so it is expected, prepare speeches in advance, as a result of which they resort to incredibly evasive and ambiguous answers to avoid saying anything that could possibly be exaggerated to cause a controversy in the media. The above-mentioned themes and their projected rhetorical strategies walk along the lines of political politeness (Harris, 2001), which extends Brown and Levinson's (1990) 'Politeness Theory' into 'institutional contexts and more formal generic types of discourse generates different versions of politeness (and impoliteness), which are closely related but not the same as institutional norms' (1990: 46).

#### (A) POSITIVITY

The press conferences analysed appear to be overwhelmingly dominated by the theme of positivity. In the present corpus, since both Jiang Zemin and Bush would like to convey to the media that they are developing a healthy relationship and have made considerable progress, there is extensive use of positive reinforcement. Positivity embodies four principal strategies:

1. to achieve common ground, or mutual understanding between two ideological opposites;
2. to express praise and politically-motivated appreciation;
3. to propose a promising future relationship; and
4. to express differences diplomatically, to 'cushion the blow'.

### 1. Search for common ground

It is rare that in any political press conference the politicians will directly acknowledge a disagreement, or an antagonistic relationship. Even when negative perceptions are part of common knowledge, attempts are always made to minimize such perceptions. This can be accounted for by Goffman's (1967) ideas of face, which needs to be positively maintained in order to come across as a successful social interactant. This is particularly true in the press conferences between Jiang Zemin and Bush. Both countries are struggling opposites, trying to find common ground, but have for many years been unable to do so in any significant manner.

China and United States have more rather than less shared interests, and more rather than less common responsibility for world peace. The importance of the relationship has increased rather than decreased.

(Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02)

In the statement above there is no clear acknowledgement of whether or not an actual relationship even exists between the two countries. There are a couple of sentences implying the responsibility the two countries share, and there is an acknowledgement of the common interests of the two countries. This is explicitly reinforced by the juxtaposition of opposites, such as *more rather than less shared interests*, and *more rather than less common responsibility for world peace*, and *increased rather than decreased* to emphasize the positive elements. The other important linguistic device used here is what Atkinson (1988) refers to as 'the list of three', which is an effective instrument for eliciting applause in political speeches. In this case, Jiang Zemin uses these devices to signal a positive working relationship with the US. This sort of interactional exchange can be characterized as part of Goffman's distinction between front-stage and back-stage behaviour (1959: 107–28):

The performance of an individual in a front region may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards . . . back-stage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course.

The above extract by Jiang Zemin is a complement yet reflects a contrast to a previous statement made in the same press conference, ' . . . United States will be a steady partner in China's historic transition towards greater prosperity and greater freedom' (Bush, 21.2.02), in which a more definite commitment to China is made by the US. However, subsequent events indicate that this was no more than wishful thinking, as members of the media deduce an opposite interpretation:

. . . a fear that the rise of an economically powerful yet undemocratic China could severely threaten American interests . . . Washington see China as a menacing new power, . . . engagement clearly remains the best policy option for Washington.

(McNally, 8.8.02)

The discourse of manipulation is also evident when the two leaders pre-assume one another's behaviour. There seem to be two functions of the solidarity expression *we*:

We have agreed that under the current complex and volatile international situations, China and the United States, both with significant influence in the world, should step up dialogue . . . We have agreed to intensify high-level strategic dialogue . . . We have agreed to vigorously carry out bilateral exchanges.

(Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02)

Here the use of personal pronoun *we*, made cohesively specific in the text, not only presents a joint front to the public and media, but at the same time it is also a way of preventing the other speaker from acting otherwise, which would cause loss of face, and would mean a denial of such social labelling. The pronoun *we* gives a positive and united image of the two intrinsically incompatible leaders. In addition, the pronoun *we* here is very vague in its meaning, it could refer to the two speakers, or the speaker and the audience, or the speaker as a representative of his country. The list of three, which is a repetitive linguistic feature of this genre, is intended to act as a catalyst for persuasion.

The favourite in the clichéd positivity statements is general coordinated descriptors like *candid and constructive* or *constructive and cooperative*. The term 'cooperation' is mentioned at least seven times in the 25 October 25 2002 press conference, in conjunction with adjectives like 'productive', 'candid', 'constructive'. These general forward-looking coordinated adjectives are further made less threatening by the use of verbs that focus on future promises rather than past achievements. 'So to build a constructive and cooperative relationship serves the desire of not only the people of the two countries, but also of the people throughout the world' (Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02) There is an acknowledgement that such a constructive relationship should be developed, all of which may indicate that as of yet there are no strong ties, or even a candid relationship between the countries; it is being built, in progress. All it indicates is that there may be a desire to develop a cordial, cooperative and constructive relationship.

## 2. *Expression of praise and politically motivated appreciation*

Positivity is also reinforced in the 'sweet talk' incorporating praise, or as Mao (1994) says 'complimentary feedback' to consolidate one's positive face, and politically motivated appreciation to portray a friendly picture, although this is not always possible, as political players may have their own agenda and also different perspectives on international issues. It is a struggle in itself to present a joint front: 'Negotiation is quintessentially a linguistic act. It involves the use of language to cajole, persuade, threaten, induce, drive, blackmail, intimidate, and flatter' (Bell, 1995: 50).

At another point Bush expresses the importance of China in order to gain Jiang Zemin's support: 'I've come to Shanghai because China and other Asia Pacific nations are important partners in the global coalition against terror' (Bush, 19.10.01). These appreciations of achievements and compliments by

Bush are a stark contrast to his oft-repeated scathing criticism of China as an undemocratic and anti-humanist country. Such interpersonal appreciations are useful in creating intimacy and a positive rapport in press conferences.

Media hawks have construed a similar interpretation, based on the hard-hitting rhetoric when Bush first assumed office, placing China in the position of a competitor and a dangerous threat; however, since the war on terrorism began, America has tried hard to restore military ties, and doubled the efforts after learning about North Korea's weapons programme, in an effort to gain China's support and cooperation. This is evident in the language of concession, goodwill and evasion: 'Gone is the talk of China as a "strategic competitor". The country is now an ally in the war against terror' (Zakaria, 2002–3).

The strategy of politically motivated appreciation can be viewed in two ways: the positive reinforcements given about the talk itself, and also about the other speaker: 'President Bush and I had a very good conversation' (Jiang Zemin, 25.10.02), or 'We have just concluded some very candid and positive talks' (Bush, 21.2.02). Here both the leaders are positively reinforcing the success of their talks by using adjectives such as *good*, *candid* and *positive*, all of which have a kind of slippery quality that hide any differences of opinion on critical issues. Bush and Jiang Zemin are an interesting example of two contrasting leaders coming together to illustrate this kind of sincerity: 'There is a firm commitment by this government to cooperate in intelligence matters' (Bush, 19.10.01). Bush gives very general, generic praise, not specifying what *intelligence* matters are drawing cooperation. This can be compared to what he says about Tony Blair, with whom he shares a more optimistic and affable relationship: 'I'm extremely grateful for the Prime Minister's courageous leadership since September the 11th . . . I appreciate dealing with him on this issue . . . he's got very good advice' (Bush, 6.4.02). He praises Blair, the person, not just his government. He is appreciative of Blair's advice because it seems consistent with his own agenda.

Media perceptions also confirm that trust between Bush and Jiang Zemin is more fragile than it is between Bush and Blair, where we notice more use of personal pronouns, joint statements, praise and emotive language: 'United States and its trusty sidekick, Britain' (McGuire, 18.11.02). While Bush and Blair are perceived as strong allies and friends, Bush and Jiang Zemin are seen more as competitors among 'growing levels of threat and suspicion' (Editorial, *South China Morning Post*, 2002). They are more reserved and non-committal in their statements.

### *3. Prospects for constructive relationship*

Positivity is also used to proposition a bright future, which the leaders will build by strengthening their relationship. It implies that the present conference was so successful, that future communication is definitely a possibility. 'The United States and China . . . are deepening out economic relations' (Bush, 25.10.02), which may also indicate that as yet there is no solid economic link or foundation between the two countries. Similarly, statements such as 'constantly move our

constructive and cooperative relationship forward' stress the candid and constructive political ties between the two countries, invariably giving the impression that the speakers are trying hard to convince the media and public that their relationship is emerging or developing, thus just managing to cover up the deep divisions that go back a long way. This is similar to Ekman's (2001) 'Othello error', where if one is suspected of deceit, one tries harder to seem convincing, inadvertently, then, displaying intensely the very signs that make him suspicious.

It is interesting to note that in the last few years we have seen nothing but an initiation of a constructive relationship between the two countries. In 2001, they said, 'China attaches importance to its relationship with the United States and stands ready to make joint efforts with the US to develop a constructive and cooperative relationship' (Jiang Zemin, 19.10.01); in 2002, 'The Chinese side is ready to join the US side . . . increasing exchanges and cooperation and enhancing understanding and trust' (Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02); and at the end of 2002, 'The United States is building a relationship with China that is candid, constructive and cooperative' (Bush, 25.10.02). There is always an ongoing commitment towards development in the relations between the two countries, but nothing ever develops. The frequent use of 'a list of three' (Atkinson, 1988) is likely to bring applause in political discourse, without necessarily convincing a non-committed audience.

#### 4. Underplaying differences

Positivity is also used to lay out differences as gently as possible, minimizing any possible negative impact. Conflict of interest refers to the disagreements between the two speakers and how these are disguised politely to prevent loss of face, or stir any feelings of antagonism in the press. Language is manipulated to achieve various effects – deception is especially the effect that politicians subtly strive for to disguise any conflicting attitudes. 'It is inevitable that nations of the size of the United States and China will have differences . . . we need to resolve our differences through mutual understanding and respect' (Bush, 25.10.02). The differences between the two countries are justified on the basis of their natural conditions. The use of *inevitable* to refer to the predictability and unavoidability of differences is a powerful device to 'cushion the blow', so as to dull the emphasis on perceptions of deep divisions. However, non-controversial issues and agreements are used to balance more macro-scaled disagreements, to present a joint front:

My government hopes that China will strongly oppose the proliferation of missiles and other deadly technologies. President Jiang and I agreed that the United States and China could cooperate more closely to defeat HIV/AIDS.

(Bush, 21.2.02)

In the example above, the difference of opinion on serious matters like proliferation of nuclear arms in North Korea and Iraq is underplayed and balanced with an agreement on a more non-controversial issue of less political importance like AIDS. In this way, a picture of common ground and mutual

understanding between the two leaders is highlighted. This is interesting since the whole world agrees about the seriousness of AIDS and its implications, so if the two leaders hold similar views on this issue, it hardly makes them more intimate as allies. Similarly, in the case of international terrorism, no political leader or country can afford to support it, so highlighting a general consensus about the evils of terrorism can hardly be considered a significant achievement in political press conferences. In this context, the use of the verb 'hope' to hedge the claimed agreement on 'the proliferation of missiles', whereas a categorical verb 'agreed' to signal the claim about cooperation on a non-controversial issue such as the fight against HIV/AIDS, is significant, though it also signals a future possibility of cooperation.

Certain terms and phrases are used repetitively, not just in one press conference, but also through others to emphasize a general statement, while highlighting the mechanical and prescriptive nature of political press conferences:

China and the United States are different in their national conditions, so it's normal that there are certain disagreements between us.

(Jiang Zemin, 19.10.01)

We live in a world of diversity. Given the differences in national conditions, it is not surprising that there are certain disagreements between China and the United States.

(Jiang Zemin, 19.10.01)

We're living in a world of diversity. As two major countries with different national conditions, China and the US have indeed, had certain disagreements.

(Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02)

Given the differences in the national conditions of the two countries, it is natural for China and the United States to disagree on some issues

(Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02)

Given their different national conditions, it is only natural for China and the United States to disagree from time to time.

(Jiang Zemin, 25.10.02)

In these extracts we can see a pattern of repetition running through different press conferences, all at different times. Political press conferences are packed with such predictable, clichéd statements, which are used almost verbatim by the leaders, to make the press conferences as insipid and sedate as possible in order to give the media little chance to publicize any hostile feelings between the politicians. This is a very powerful strategy typical of this genre, which helps them to complete a contribution without offering any significant new input. This also suggests that press conference speeches are not spontaneous but scripted in advance.

#### (B) INFLUENCE AND POWER

Influence is the exertion of power used to steer an adversary's future actions in a particular direction. Van Dijk refers to such influence and power as dominance, defining it as (1993: 249–50):

...the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups ... process may involve such different 'modes' of discourse – power relations as the more or less direct or overt support, enactment, representation, legitimation, denial, mitigation or concealment of dominance, among others.

Similarly, Bell (1995) describes three primary constituencies of *political action language*: power, influence and authority. Influence is too broad a category to label with a set meaning. Bettinghaus and Cody (1994) distinguish between six types of influence: informational, referent, expert, reward, coercive and legitimate (power generated from status quo). In the case of these political press conferences, we will be focusing on a combination of reward, expert and legitimate influences, which enable the speaker, using their political positioning, their interdependence and rights as members of an international community, to determine to some extent one another's behaviour. In talking about influence and power we walk vaguely along the lines of Grice's (1975) notion of 'implicatures', especially conversational implicatures 'derived from a general principle of conversation plus a number of maxims' (Brown and Yule, 1983: 31), whereby information that cannot be made explicit in speeches following diplomatic discourse is implied through various means (Wilson, 1990). Influence is exercised in the following three ways:

1. By pre-determining the behaviour of the other party to ensure desired action,
2. By justifying one's own actions and beliefs to persuade the other to act likewise, and
3. By expressing any disagreements diplomatically.

#### *1. Pre-determination of behaviour*

In the present corpus, Bush and Jiang Zemin are aware of differences in each other's agendas, and effectively use this knowledge to their advantage in the form of 'emo-political' blackmail, in order to influence each other to behave in a certain manner, or rather in their individual interests. This form of influence is utilized repeatedly by Jiang Zemin:

I'm confident that so long as the two sides keep a firm hold of the common interests of the two countries, properly handle bilateral ties, especially the question of Taiwan, in accordance with the three Sino-US joint communiqués, the relations between China and the United States will continuously move forward.

(Jiang Zemin, 19.10.01)

Once again, the implication in the above extract is that Jiang Zemin is sending an indirect warning to Bush, by placing a condition on the growth of the relationship between the two countries. As long as the US does not lose sight of their part of the deal, there is possibility of a good alliance; the adjective *firm* intensifying the necessity of abiding by the condition placed. This, according to Bell (1995: 44), is a *power statement*, in which the speaker shows the ability to manipulate the behaviour of the other. Similarly, Bush also exercises a subtle version of emo-political blackmail, in order to pressure Jiang Zemin into

behaving in a certain manner. The ideologically generated yet subtle implicatures in talk in the instance above can best be understood by the two parties involved in the exchange. The lack of explicitly stated conditions and effects is intended to mislead the audience about the context of diplomatic exchange.

Pre-determination of one another's behaviour is relatively more aggressive when Bush meets Blair. Since both the leaders are pro-unilateral disarmament of Iraq, it is acceptable for them to use extreme forms in each other's presence. There is a reduced feeling of unilateral bias, or irrational behaviour, which the media interpret as follows:

From the standpoint of Washington's hard-liners – those who insist that you can't get rid of the threat from Saddam's weapons of mass destruction without getting rid of Saddam – just going to the UN has risks. Diplomatic negotiations, with their shuffled compromises and ambiguous texts, are not the favourite terrain of the moral-clarity crowd, who need no fresh justification to get rid of Saddam.

(Elliott, 16.9.02)

There is the implication that if two powerful nations are agreeing on something, then they must be morally right and justified. It would seem as if Bush is hinting, or 'guilt-ing' other nations into acting a certain way, by implying that any nation, not willing to lend unconditional support lacks moral clarity, like China for example, which is pressing for a more active role of the UN.

Going a step further, Bush raises the stakes even higher by declaring 'All civilized nations must join together to defeat this threat' (19.10.01), thus connoting that any nation that does not join America's war against terror is uncivilized; the *must* taking almost an instructive stance, turning the statement into a moral obligation. Although Bush seems to portray himself as the force of good, the whole political world is ideologized into different factions; consequently, some parts of the media react rather differently:

Moral absolutism in any leader – Bush calls it 'moral clarity' – is worrisome. Especially if he wields near-absolute military power on the world stage, as Bush does . . . Bush's strategy requires that the globe see America as he does: as a force of good. Only much of the globe doesn't.

(Hirsh, 2002–3)

Modal verbs can also be useful indicators of ideological differences and expectations, when hidden in manipulated utterances: 'no nation's efforts to counter terrorism should be used to justify suppressing minorities or silencing peaceful dissent' (Bush, 25.10.02). In this utterance the modal verb *should* softens what could have been a more offensive and instructive 'can' (see Leech, 1983). These subtle strategies, the disguises of which are controlled very carefully in order to project a consistent positive front, are not disregarded by the media:

This was seen as an indirect criticism of the way Beijing had muzzled all anti-government and nationalistic activities among Muslim Uygurs in Xinjiang under the name of cracking down on the outlawed East Turkestan Islamic Movement.

(CNN, 26.10.02)

Since relations with Jiang Zemin were still fragile, Bush could not afford to use too many imperatives and become domineering by interfering too much in local matters; instead he preferred to be tactful resorting to what Goffman (1969: 23) refers to as 'the language of hint'.

In comparison, Bush displays frequent signs of unilateral and commanding behaviour with his friend Blair, who is America's most reliable ally:

. . . I expect Israel to heed my advice, and I expect for the Palestinians to reject terror in the Arab world . . . I don't expect them to ignore. I expect them to heed the call.  
(Bush, 6.4.02)

The contrast is relatively obvious in Bush being far more daring, exploiting far too much power as an unquestioned leader of the world. He is freely stating his expectation of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, who have a lot less power when compared with America's superpower status. The extract is an example of what Bell (1995) calls authority; it is an explicit directive with a strong sense of responsibility, obligation and expectation attached.

## 2. *Justification of actions*

Influence is also displayed in the justification of one's actions; this is especially true in the case of Bush, who uses his power as a political leader in order to defend what he believes and how he behaves. Related to the concept of emopolitical blackmail is the discourse of morality, where an attempt is made to persuade the other speaker by bringing in an element of morality.

These are evil people and the deeds that have been conducted on the American people are evil deeds. And anybody who would mail anthrax letters, trying to affect the lives of innocent people, is evil.

(Bush, 19.10.01)

The extract illustrates how through the use of emotive vocabulary like *evil* in a persuasive list of three, and the portrayal of America as a victim of terrorism, one is given the impression that Bush is trying to stir some passion and gain support in the war against terror, by 'guilt-ing' China, and simultaneously the rest of the international community, into it. One interpretation can be that by portraying America as a victim, Bush is trying to muster some sympathy; America is the innocent victim of anti-American hate groups, like the al-Qaeda, and the governments that support such networks. He subtly cloaks his unilateral behaviour as self-defence, which media reports also note: 'the administration is prepared to make it clear it believes it has authority to act unilaterally under a "self-defence" clause in the UN charter' (VandeHei, and DeYoung, 20.9.02).

Although, when in interaction with Jiang Zemin, Bush, it seems, moderates his speech since China is, or was an ally of Iraq and since China and America are not the best of friends, use of excessive emotive lexis will appear biased and might dissuade Jiang Zemin. This is a contrast to when Bush and Blair come together, where both are highly emotionally charged and make use of much emotive lexicon and state many unfounded accusations:

We both recognize the danger of a man who's willing to kill his own people . . . Saddam Hussein, is leader who gasses his own people . . . willing to murder his own people . . . The thing I admire about this Prime Minister is he doesn't need a poll or a focus group to convince him the difference between right and wrong . . . refreshing to see leaders speak with moral clarity.

(Bush, 6.4.02)

### 3. *Expression of disagreement*

The third strategy through which influence and power are exercised is the discreet expression of disagreement or a non-committal stance held by the speakers. Urges and stresses are a more direct and predominant form of influence and good indicators of the transpiring ideologies of Jiang Zemin and Bush. 'I stressed the need to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology' (Bush, 19.10.01). Here *stress* is a way of convincing the other to behave in a particular way. This form of urgency can be compared to a more passive 'I shared with the president my views on the importance of China freeing prisoners of conscience . . . and preserving the rights of Hong Kong citizens' (Bush, 25.10.02). In the latter, because Bush is discussing a matter more local to China, he cannot afford to be too persistent or instructive. As media hawks note, 'Mr Bush was expected to raise the human rights issue with Mr Jiang, but this is low priority compared with North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and a tough UN resolution on Iraq' (Chan, 2002a). Also, by downgrading the seriousness of the Hong Kong issue, Bush manages to assign higher priority to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Stresses and urges illustrate the rigidity of speaker opinions and their disagreements with each other: 'I told President Bush that democracy and human rights are the common pursuits of mankind and that China's human rights situation is at its best' (Jiang Zemin, 25.10.02). One could assume that in this case Jiang Zemin can be forceful because he is discussing the local issue of the treatment of citizens and religious minorities.

While acknowledging that China has come a long way in the past two decades of economic reform, 'China's leaders still do not respect fundamental international standards on many rights for the Chinese people' . . . China has dismissed US criticism saying Washington should not meddle in its internal affairs.

(Nairne, 15.10.02)

With regard to modal verbs, they can be useful in identifying trust issues between speakers – for example, 'should step up dialogue and cooperation, properly handle their differences' (Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02). Here Jiang Zemin seems to be admitting the importance of enhancing communication between China and the United States, but the modal *should* is just an acknowledgement of this importance; it is more than likely that both leaders will continue to be suspicious of each other.

Coded cautions are given in the form of imperatives and sometimes in the form of statements of responsibilities (statements outlining moral and socio-political obligations), demonstrating the divergence in views of the two leaders.

Let me conclude by quoting a Chinese proverb: 'More haste, less speed.' Despite the fact that sometimes you will have problems that cry out for immediate solution, yet patience is sometimes also necessary . . . One cannot expect to dig a well with one spade.

(Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02)

Jiang Zemin makes use of emotive language in the form of subtle imperatives, proverbial expressions being a classic example of indirect speech (see Searle, 1975). The truth in proverbs is often seen to have universal appeal, whereas in fact it is the context of when and how they are invoked that articulates force. It is possible to interpret the utterance as a warning to America that attacking Iraq is not the best solution; Jiang Zemin, it is possible, could be making a comment on Bush's rash decision on pre-emptive strikes on Iraq, and a rally for a regime change in North Korea, thereby conveying his disapproval. As a member of the media notes:

On Iraq, although Mr. Bush has courted Mr. Jiang's backing for a US-authored resolution before the United Nations . . . Mr. Jiang apparently remained non-committal, merely reiterating Beijing's position that the issue should be resolved through the UN.

(Chan, 2002b)

The use of power and influence in two-party press conferences is an important tool in the hands of experienced politicians. This often leads to the creation of power asymmetry between the two parties, which may be the function of ideological differences, economic disparities, differences in socio-political status, or some other critical political issue of importance to one and not the other. However, there is another kind of power asymmetry between laypersons and politicians displayed mainly through the use of technical vocabulary, which in one sense constitutes a political register on its own: 'one China policy', 'coalition', 'APEC Summit', 'strategic dialogue', 'WTO', 'Sino-US joint communiqués', 'Kim-Jong il', 'Vice President Cheney', and so on. Names and technical terms and phrases are stated with no explanation; it is expected that the target audience, the interacting participants of the conference and the media, will know what they mean.

### (C) EVASION

Evasion is control, or what Holly (1989: 122) calls 'non-communication' of content; it is not simply confined to what one says (or does not say), but also how one says it. It is one of the most important tools in the hands of political leaders to make statements without necessarily giving any information. Press conferences are an obvious context for the use of evasive language, as politicians often need to manage and control the type and extent of information divulged when they face the media. As Orwell (1974, in Cheng, 2002: 310) correctly points out, 'political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible . . . political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness'.

Evasion, in the data analysed, was used to achieve the following.

1. To prioritize and lessen the crisis-element of certain events;
2. To minimize negative reactions;
3. To deflect moral and political blame; and
4. To assert control over laymen and journalists.

#### *1. Prioritization of events*

Ambiguity in language is used to subtly express differences in ideologies and agendas, when issues and events of less interest are softened in terms of their urgency by the speakers. In answer to the question 'do you agree with President Bush that there should be a regime change in Iraq?' (21.2.03), Jiang Zemin replies: 'You asked about Iraq. Iraq is not as near. But I think, as I made clear in my discussion with President Bush just now, the important thing is that peace is to be valued most' (21.2.02). It would seem that he uses the expression *Iraq not being 'near'*, probably in terms of time or priority, to avoid answering the question, since he does not agree with the US going to war with Iraq. This sort of evasion brings into focus Grice's (1975) maxims of relevance.

Jiang Zemin, on the other hand, makes use of a generalized statement for evasive purposes about anthrax, 'I'd like to make a comment on anthrax. I've also heard about it. And with regard to this problem, all countries should take a unanimous stand, because it's a public hazard' (19.10.01). Jiang Zemin, one can construe, is equivocal, not at all as active or passionate as Bush sounds when he is talking about anthrax, which for him is *evil*, or even as determined as Jiang Zemin would have sounded, had he been talking about Taiwan. Bush's use of the term *evil* has moral implications, while Jiang Zemin's *hazard* is more rational. The inequality in the emotion of both words is evidence of the speakers' stances on the issue – anthrax is more a domestic issue for America, not so much a problem for China. The modal *should* softens the priority of the event, making it less urgent, marginally evading the invitation to be more closely involved. This sort of noncommittal stance expressed by speakers in lieu of a solid agreement can be understood in Brown and Levinson's (1990) terms as a *token agreement*, which is a pact to appear to agree, or pretend to agree, by manipulating utterances to disguise disagreement.

#### *2. Minimization of negative reactions and attitudes*

The second strategy often employed by speakers for evasive purposes is to minimize negative reactions by the press and public, which might be caused as a result of the ideological differences between the two countries. Control, in the form of restricted and vague speech, is often exercised in order to keep contradictions and ideological contrasts to a minimum. One way to do this is to pre-select the questions and the journalists before the press conference (see Have, 1999). Eshbaugh-Soha (2003) claims that in presidential press conferences the president can strategically avoid reporters he feels will ask controversial

questions. Though not confirmed, there are hints in the political press conferences analysed that this strategy is adopted.

. . . make sure that the questioners would only ask one question, if you know what I mean Mr. Fournier. (Laughter).

(Bush, 25.10.02)

We'll start with Ron Fournier, a fine man who works for AP – got a couple of kids, cares deeply about the future. (Laughter).

(Bush, 6.4.02)

In both extracts, Bush is directly addressing the American journalist by name, and in the second he even displays his knowledge about Fournier's personal life and seems to be on a good friendly basis with him. One wonders whether journalists are chosen depending on what kind of political support they show.

When journalists and questions are not prearranged, one finds that speakers ignore the questions altogether, especially if they are seen to 'accentuate such negative factors as sensitive subjects, revelations, credibility problems, or inconsistencies' (Manheim, 1979: 60; see Clayman, 2001; Heritage, 2002).

Q: . . . President Bush, are you willing to negotiate with North Korea, while North Korea maintains a nuclear weapons program?

And President Jiang, could you tell us, do you think North Korea's nuclear weapons program is a threat to your country and, if so, how do you plan to stop it?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Our first step, to make sure we resolve this peacefully, is to work with our friends, is to remind our friends of the dangers of the nuclear regime. . . .

PRESIDENT JIANG: . . . China will always hold the position that the Korean Peninsula should be nuclear weapons free . . . problems should be resolved peacefully.

(25.10.02)

The questions asked in the above extract by the journalist require two different sets of answers to two different questions. However, since the views of the leaders on Asia Pacific security diverge, Jiang Zemin only provides an extension to Bush's answer, ignoring the question asked to him altogether. Media reports confirm such an interpretation:

And while Jiang reiterated China's commitment to helping to keep the Korean Peninsula nuclear-free, he did not mention any action the Chinese government would take to oblige Pyongyang to stop its nuclear program.

(CNN, 26.10.02)

Here, the CNN report picks up on what I mentioned earlier on *token agreement*, expressing a 'supposed' agreement, though it is merely a face-saving 'no'. Or as Hudson (1978: 58) cites:

. . .with a good performer there can be a certain sporting interest in watching the central figure fending off his questioners and keeping the proceedings under his control . . . the news conference gives a splendid opportunity for cultivating the art of saying nothing in an agreeable and interesting way.

Here, we can also visit Goffman's (1959) concept of back-stage and front-stage again, which reiterates the 'performative' nature of political leaders in press conferences.

Repetition can occur in its literal sense, where one thing is said a number of times where it serves the function of evasion:

We have agreed to step-up consultation and cooperation on the basis of reciprocity and mutual benefit, and beef up bilateral mid- and long-term mechanism for counterterrorism exchanges and cooperation. The two sides have also exchanged views on a series of major international and regional issues, and decided to enhance communication and coordination.

(Jiang Zemin, 21.2.02)

In the extract Jiang Zemin repeats himself, saying the same thing in three different ways. As mentioned before, the main purpose of repetition of this sort is to make the press conference seem as placid and uncontroversial as possible; referring to Grice's (1975) maxims of quantity, both avoid saying more than planned. It is to enable the leaders to present a diplomatic picture. However, in some cases repetition serves the object of reinforcement.

### *3. Deflection of moral and political blame*

Evasion is also useful in the deflection of moral and political blame. A case in point is when Jiang Zemin evades a question regarding the violation of human rights in China, more specifically, the persecution of religious groups, which left something to be desired, when members of the Falun Gong were jailed, and Catholic bishops arrested. Jiang Zemin, by stating that China is a multicultural country (which does not explain why the bishops were arrested); claiming he himself does not have a religion he adheres to (thereby deflecting moral blame); and lastly, saying that he has no say in judicial matters (deflecting political blame and placing detachment due to a lack of expertise in the matter), succeeds in not answering any part of the question, while giving the appearance of doing so (21.2.02). Cheng (2002: 315–16) summarizes the instance above as a 'face-saving formula of "creative diplomacy" . . . making tactical use of ambiguous terminology'.

### *4. Asserting control*

Lastly, evasion is also used to assert control in political press conferences when power asymmetry is enhanced between journalists and lay members of the public, and for obvious reasons, the presidency status ranks high in the social hierarchy.

This power asymmetry is expressed in the way questions seem so controlled and journalists are selected by the speakers. The leaders can choose which questions they want to answer, how they want to reply and who has the right to address them.

There will be two questions from each side . . . make sure that the questioners only ask one question . . . You tried to violate that rule but I'm not going to let you.

(Bush, 25.10.02)

We have now agreed to take three questions a piece. We'll start with Ron.

(Bush, 6.4.02)

In the extracts above, imperatives are used to limit the number of questions, rules are prevented from being broken, and even journalists are selected by Bush, all illustrating power asymmetry. The ways in which the participants are addressed also betray this power play. While journalists are addressed by first names, the leaders are addressed as *Mr President* or with a respectful *Sir*, achieving both depersonalization and respect in the form of negative politeness (Harris, 2001).

In any other dyadic conversation in institutionalized contexts, such as TV interviews, the interviewer asking questions has more control over the selection and initiation of topics, turn-taking, and so on, whereas in political press conferences, we find such control swaying in the opposite direction.

### *Discussion*

The political press conferences analysed in this study reveal that they are hardly the spontaneous and dynamic events they are meant to be in principle. They are highly controlled and diplomatic, using language as a way of concealing reality. Press conferences are constructions of socio-political ideologies, and political speakers use various strategies in order to accomplish joint goals of diplomacy, thus proving that language is essential in the formulation of any political strategy (O'Barr, 1976).

It is obvious in the data that language is used to choreograph a game of cat and mouse between the two diametrically opposed speakers, Jiang Zemin and Bush, in an attempt to negotiate their individual agendas. Conflicting objectives are usually a result of contrasting socio-political ideologies, political situations, pursuing of individual political agendas: 'China and US have different agendas and preferences even as they share some common interests in developing and maintaining bilateral military ties' (Yuan, 14.10.02).

The use of subtle rhetorical devices to accomplish such objectives do not go unnoticed by the media, who skilfully report the subtextual meanings of political talk to offer relevant explanation of political statements in the light of political press conferences. This is common in what Fairclough (1995) calls socio-cultural practice in such contexts. However, there is considerable overlap in the use of linguistic resources employed to achieve the communicative goals typical of press conferences, as well as recurrence of certain rhetorical themes, which are exploited by clever politicians to accomplish successful diplomacy. The theme of positivity combined with other themes like evasion and influence enables the speakers to disguise some of their obvious ideological differences. Similarly, expressions showing consensus, such as the use of the inclusive 'we' to indicate

solidarity, while at the same time using qualified assertions to signal reservations, are quite common in this political genre. Intimacy, humour, and informality are induced into speech through the use of personal pronouns and emotive lexicon to convince the media that the two leaders are indeed building a bilateral relationship.

The theme of influence is achieved through the manipulation of technical register, imperatives, statements of responsibility, personal pronouns, modal verbs and urges and stresses. Some of these typical linguistic features are used by experienced political participants to realize rather dynamically some of the contradicting goals of political press conferences, as in their concern to show a common front on issues of public interest, while at the same time underplaying their ideological and other socio-political differences, as indicated through positivity and conflicts of interest. Similarly, the use of qualified statements to realize hedges in their utterances of seeming solidarity seems quite typical of the genre. Yet another linguistic device often used for positivity – that is, indicating mutual agreement and understanding – serves at the same time evasion, by raising the level of generality of such statements. The main reason for overlaps in the use of themes and linguistic features is that the nature of press conferences requires what is commonly understood as the diplomatic use of language, through which political participants can say what serves their purpose, and yet conceal what they think can go against their beliefs or interests. The experienced and seasoned politicians seem to use these features of language much like basic primary colours in a paint palette, which can be mixed together in different amounts to achieve new results that serve their purpose.

Evasion, positivity, influence and power create coded utterances, spoken, understood, and appreciated by the political parties and target audiences. Their subtleties and hidden implications give discourse a ritual quality. Use of standard expressions, statements, artificial tokens of friendship and successful relations, and veiled expressions of caution all lend the discourse of the political press conferences analysed a ritualized, clichéd quality. Some of the typical uses of linguistic forms to fulfil the objectives of press conferences are summarised in Table 1.

The role of political press conferences in a socio-political context is to present a joint and united front between two leaders. This is crucial considering the social role that political figures have come to play through the mediatization and dramatization of politics and government. Political leaders are representatives of their population, and thus answerable to them. It is therefore an increasing necessity to engender support and trust in their leadership and administration abilities by ensuring the public and media of a positive front. As Smith and Smith (1994: 192) reiterate, 'For successful presidents trust, competence, and consistency are a troika of horses pulling together . . . when one of those horses comes up lame . . . the president driving the wagon is in crisis.'

The emerging picture, nevertheless, indicates that the discourse of press conferences interestingly represents an complex interplay of opposites: so far as

TABLE 1 *Typical lexico-grammatical features of political press conference*

<i>Rhetorical Function</i>	<i>Linguistic Realization</i>	<i>Example</i>
Searching common ground 'Positive recapitulation' (Wodak, 1989: 143)	Juxtaposition of opposites	More rather than less shared interest. . . Importance of the relationship has increased, rather than decreased. . .
	Lists of three	We have agreed to intensify high level . . . dialogues We have agreed to . . . step up dialogue We have agreed to . . . carry out bilateral exchanges. . .
	Inclusive we to express solidarity	We. . . We. . . We. . .
Emphasizing solidarity Positive face work (Goffman, 1967)	Co-ordination of personal pronouns	President Bush and I. . .
	Bi- and multi-nomials Complexity of Verbal and Nominal Phrase (Wodak 1989: 143)	Candid and constructive; . . . Mutual respect and seeking common ground, while shelving differences, with a view to deepening understanding and enhancing consensuses; . . . extensive and in-depth exchange of views . . . ready to work with the US . . . increase our exchanges and cooperation, enhance understanding and trust, and develop a constructive and cooperative relations between us. . .
Cushioning the blow Political politeness (Harris, 2001)	Sentence initial hedges	Regarding our differences. . . It is inevitable. . . Given the differences in national conditions. . . I hope that. . . My government hopes. . .
Pre-determining behaviour (Statements of responsibility)	Emotive language 'Emo-political blackmail'	These are evil people . . . evil deeds . . . trying to affect lives of innocent people, is evil. . .

TABLE 1 *Typical lexico-grammatical features of political press conference*

<i>Rhetorical Function</i>	<i>Linguistic Realization</i>	<i>Example</i>
Conversational Implicatures (Grice, 1975)		Weapons of mass destruction deal with the appalling brutality and repression. . .
	Bell's (1995) Power statements (urges and stresses)	All civilised nations must join together. . . I stressed the need to combat. . . I expect Israel to heed my advice . . . I don't expect them to ignore. . . . . . I emphasized that no nation's efforts. . . I told the president. . . I made it clear to the president. . . I urged President Jiang. . . I shared with the president my views. . . I also spoke of. . . I expressed. . . I agree that. . . I pointed out. . . I have discussed. . . I encouraged that. . . I did bring up. . .
	Use of qualifications to hedge	. . . so long as the two sides bear in mind . . . so long as the two sides keep a firm hold of the common interests. . .
	Clauses indicating prerequisite fulfilment of expectations	To properly handle the Taiwan question is vital to the stability and growth of China-US relations. . . In the long run the advance of Chinese prosperity

TABLE 1 *Typical lexico-grammatical features of political press conference (Continued)*

<i>Rhetorical Function</i>	<i>Linguistic Realization</i>	<i>Example</i>
Diplomatically stating disagreements Indirectness (Searle, 1975)	Proverbial expressions	depends on. . . . . . so long as the three signed US joint communiqués . . . are adhered to. . . More haste, less speed. . . One cannot expect to dig a well with one spade. . . Not do unto others what you would not like others to do unto you. . .
Describe process Soften instructive language Reduce crisis-element of events	Use of modal verbs	The two sides should increase exchanges. . . . . . all countries should take an unanimous stand. . . We should all unite. . . . . . Korean Peninsula should be nuclear weapon free. . .
Power asymmetry	Technical vocabulary (political register)	Coalition; APEC summit; WTO; strategic dialogue; Taiwan Relations Act; UN resolution; one-China policy; Sino-US joint communiqués
	Address forms	Holland. . . Sir, do you feel. . . Thank you, Mr President, for your hospitality. . . President Jiang. . . Mr Prime Minister. . . We'll start with Ron Fournier, a fine man. . . Andy Meyer. . . I don't know you well enough Adam. . .

TABLE 1 *Typical lexico-grammatical features of political press conference*

<i>Rhetorical Function</i>	<i>Linguistic Realization</i>	<i>Example</i>
Evade controversial issues	Expressions of generality	. . . we're working with all the countries. . . . . . take a long-term perspective. . . You asked about Iraq. Iraq is not near. . .
	Repetition of phrases or expressions:	We live in a world of diversity. . . Given the differences in the national conditions. . . China is a staunch force dedicated to the maintenance of peace. . .
	a) of general principles	. . . Korean Peninsula should be nuclear weapon free. . . Maintenance of peace in Asia-Pacific region. . . . . . important to resolve the problems through peaceful means. . .
	b) about the talks	We had candid and constructive talk. . . This meeting has been constructive and productive. . . . . . we had a very good meeting. . .
	c) stated policies	. . . United States upholds one-China policy. . . . . . abide by the three Sino-US communiqués. . .

the two main participants (politicians) are concerned, we see positivism versus conflict of interests; deep ideological divisions versus constructive, cooperative face; controlling specific and transparent contributions from other participants, especially the press, on the one hand, and diplomatic, vague, evasive, often non-communicative statements from the politicians. Every contribution by any of the participants in press conferences can be interpreted as a loaded statement, having one value on the surface, and quite the opposite implied. The very nature of political press conferences seems to be a contradiction in terms. While the 'press' signifies 'going public' the evasive nature of the content of the conference is a negation of it, leaving one to wonder why would politicians decide to make a public statement, if all issues are treated secretly?

In order to make this relatively more multi-perspective research, CDA proved to be a useful tool in the analysis of the political press conferences because it allowed for the realization of the interdependency of language and ideology; ideology and socio-cultural practices; and socio-cultural politics. It also made it possible for the research to excavate meaning from underneath the surface level of utterances, enabling more accurate and informed interpretations of press conference statements. In order to balance the subjective interpretations of ideology and socio-political beliefs of political leaders, it was necessary to bring in the role of secondary data from a number of other media resources, which made it possible for the researcher to take more objective and informed decisions about interpretation and thus offer more balanced explanations.

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