

An Analysis of Pragmatic Stance in Drug Negotiation Discourse Concerning National Medical Insurance Catalogue in China

By Hongmei Xi & Pengshuo Wang[‡]*

As a kind of public discourse, negotiation discourse is different from daily discourse, usually involving politics, economics, diplomacy, medical treatment, etc., and it is closely related to the national stance. At present, the studies on negotiation discourse mainly focus on diplomatic and commercial negotiations, with few studies in the context of medical insurance negotiations. Thus, this paper takes the negotiation of the national medical insurance catalogue as the research data, applies the theoretical framework of the Pragmatic Stance Cone, and analyzes the stance construction from three dimensions—the conveyance of information, affection and attitude. The paper aims to deepen the relevant researches of pragmatic stance in negotiation discourse in China and is of important practical significance for its multi-perspective and multi-context research.

Keywords: *National Medical Insurance catalogue, negotiation discourse, pragmatic stance*

Introduction

Negotiation is a communication activity between two or more parties and arises only when the needs of the parties involved are likely to be met through the actions of the other. It is a process of coordinated behavior driven by certain interests and is the antithetical unity of cooperation and conflict. As a special kind of community discourse, negotiation discourse can construct the stances of all parties involved and achieve the purpose of negotiation in the process of interaction (Larry 2015).

Medical insurance is a social insurance system which reduces the burden of

*Professor, Harbin Engineering University, China.

[‡]Graduate Student, Harbin Engineering University, China.

medical expenses and prevents the sick from becoming poor due to illness. The medical insurance catalogue is the standard by which basic medical insurance pays for drugs, that is, the cost of drugs in the medical insurance catalogue will be reimbursed by the government according to regulations. Therefore, the negotiation of drugs in the national medical catalogue is a good thing to meet people's drug needs and benefit people to the greatest extent, reflecting the people-oriented belief and determination of China. For the first time, the 2021 medical catalogue drug negotiation focuses on high-priced rare disease drugs, concerning a small number of rare disease patient groups, thus it is of great significance to analyze the negotiation discourse.

At present, most of the domestic research on this national drug negotiation is from the medical and social perspectives, and the research content is mainly based on the negotiation mechanism, public opinion trend and social significance. For example, Zhang Bo et al. have explained the necessity of the negotiation mechanism and proposed the corresponding implementation plan in *Research on the policy motivation and implementation model of "dual channel management mechanism for national reimbursement negotiation drugs"*; Moreover, the research on negotiation discourse mainly focuses on the commercial, diplomatic and political fields. In *A Review of Business Negotiation Discourse Study Abroad* written by Xie Qun and Zhan Yue, the research progress of business negotiation discourse is summarized and analyzed. Due to its particularity, the negotiation discourse is closely related to the construction of the stances of the two parties involved in the negotiation, which has important practical significance for its multi-perspective and multi-context research. Therefore, from the perspective of pragmatics, this paper adopts the theoretical framework of Pragmatic Stance Cone, and attempts to analyze the pragmatic stance constructed by the negotiators through linguistic characteristics and sub-linguistic features in the negotiation process of the medical insurance catalogue. This paper takes the negotiation discourse as the research data, and analyzes the stance construction from three dimensions-the conveyance of information, affection and attitude.

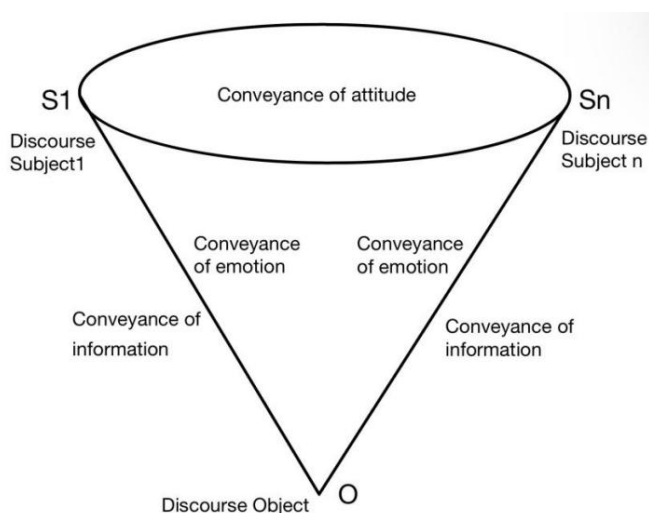
Pragmatic Stance Cone

The most important thing we do when we use language is to express our stances (Du Bois 2007). Stance taking is a public act issued in the form of dialogue, positioning the subjects and evaluating the object (Kostiantyn et al. 2016). Based on this view, Du Bois has proposed the theory of Stance Triangle, that is, the expression of stance contains three elements: stance subject 1, stance subject 2, and stance object. The two stance subjects are the two interacting parties, and the stance object is the event and topic discussed by the two parties involved in the

interaction. These three elements construct positions through evaluating, positioning, and aligning. At present, there are rich achievements in the research on stance, especially in the microscopic study of the role of specific linguistic forms and positions (Luo 2014), such as Miao Qing's negative evaluation stance research in *Negative Evaluation Stance taking from an Interactive Pragmatic Perspective* using *Ni Kan Ni* in Mandarin as a clue from an interactive-pragmatic perspective, which proposes the constructive and deconstructive process of interpersonal relationships (Miao 2020).

Pragmatic stance is the study of stances under the discipline of pragmatics, and different contexts will construct different stances. In Pragmatic Stance Cone (Yuan 2019), 'S' represents the discourse subject, that is, the stance builder in discourse interaction, and discourse communication generally contains two or more discourse subjects, such as two or more negotiators in the negotiation; O represents the discourse object, that is, the object of the discourse constructed by the discourse subject. As the three dimensions of Pragmatic Stance Cone, the conveyance of information, emotion and attitude influence each other, constructing the stance of discourse subject in the process of dynamic contexts.

Figure 1. Pragmatic Stance Cone (Yuan 2019)



As shown in Figure 1, the conveyance of information refers to 'conveying some kind of information to the other party', which is the act of expressing the intention of the discourse in a specific context by describing and evaluating. The conveyance of information, on the outside of OS₁ and OS_n generatrices, indicates that it is the first shown behavior in discourse interaction, which belongs to the explicit dimension; the conveyance of emotion refers to 'a certain kind of emotion caused by the surroundings or the content of the other person's speech', and this emotion is expressed through the language mode or the non-verbal mode as the

emotional stance (Englebreston 2007). Emotional stances are generally divided into positive emotional expression and negative emotional expression (Gong 2014), which can be achieved through different strategies such as emotional words, verbal behaviors, gestures, facial expressions, voice intonation, etc. The conveyance of emotion is located on the inside of the two generatrices of OS_1 and OS_n , indicating that it is the behavior that appears after the conveyance of information achieved by the discourse subjects, and is often contained in the conveyance of information. The conveyance of attitude refers to the ‘attitude to the content of the discourse’. It locates in the bottom position of Pragmatic Stance Cone, that is, the thought, feeling and attitude of the discourse subjects to the objects are constructed through the conveyance of information and emotion.

The distribution of the three dimensions of the conveyance of information, emotion and attitude of the Pragmatic Stance Cone fully expresses the contextualization and dynamic characteristics of stance construction (Yuan 2019). In different contexts, the stances expressed by the discourse subjects and the pragmatic strategies they choose are also different. According to the above definitions, it can be seen that the representative of the national side and the representative of the enterprise side are discourse subject 1 and discourse subject 2 respectively, the price of the medical insurance catalog drug is the discourse object. This paper selects the medical insurance catalog negotiation as the corpus, and analyzes the pragmatic stances in the negotiation context, based on the framework of Pragmatic Stance Cone from the three dimensions of the conveyance of information, emotion and attitude.

Corpus and Research Questions

In November 2021, the national drug reimbursement list negotiation, a national on-site negotiation held by the National Health-care Security Administration, attracted much attention. The previous “2021 National Drug Reimbursement List Adjustment Work Plan” announced the list of drugs having passed the preliminary form review, and a total of 74 drugs were newly added to the list, of which 7 were rare disease drugs. Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) is a rare disease and ranks the first lethal genetic disease among children under 2 years old. The drug Nusinersen Sodium Injection to treat this rare disease is also among this year’s National Drug Reimbursement List. Nusinersen Sodium Injection is the world’s first precisely-targeted therapy SMA drug developed by Biogen Idec Ltd., which was approved in the United States in December 2016 and launched in China in April 2019. In the United States, Nusinersen Sodium Injection is a dose of \$125,000 (about 870,000 yuan), which belongs to the high-priced drug. Officials said that Nusinersen Sodium Injection is the first time to participate in health insurance negotiations

and is the first high-value rare disease drug to be included in the National Drug Reimbursement List.

On November 11, 2021, the national side and the enterprise side conducted eight rounds of one-and-a-half-hour negotiations on the quotation of Nusinersen Sodium Injection into the medical insurance catalogue. The negotiator of the National Health-care Security Administration is Ms. Zhang Jinni, director of the Pharmaceutical and Equipment Procurement Supervision Department of the Fujian Provincial Medical Insurance Bureau, and the negotiator of the enterprise side is the relevant personnel of Biogen Idec Ltd. The negotiation was reported on CCTV13 news channel. This paper transcribes the discourse in the negotiation with a total of 1064 Chinese characters and attempts to explore two questions through the analysis of corpus: first, what stances have been expressed by the national side and the enterprise side in the national medical insurance catalogue negotiation and why; second, how the two sides of the negotiation can construct their respective stances through verbal expression and non-verbal expression.

Results and Discussion

Conveyance of Information

The conveyance of information is to indicate the intention, and in the context of the negotiation, it aims to express the stance and purpose of the negotiation of the discourse subjects. In the context of face-to-face negotiations between the two sides, both language mode and non-verbal mode play an informational role. Language mode is discourse, and through speech interaction it can convey certain information to each other or evaluate the discourse object. This interaction is the expression process between the discourse subjects and between the subject and the object. The non-verbal mode includes a series of modes such as gestures, distance, eyes, speech, etc. With the combination of hearing and vision, the conveyance of information can achieve more comprehensive and accurate effects.

On the one hand, from the perspective of the national side, Ms. Zhang Jinni, as the negotiator of the National Health-care Security Administration, first grasped the floor to speak in the negotiation, expressing the purpose of the negotiation. For example (said by Ms. Zhang Jinni):

Example 1: "... The goals are the same, and neither of us wants routines. We ask the enterprise negotiator to quote the first round ... We hope that the enterprise will show the greatest sincerity in the first round of quotations".

Example 2: "From the perspective of our negotiation team, we are guiding the enterprise to quote this reserve price before we can negotiate".

Example 3: “I believe that there is no market in the world that is more determined than the Chinese government to negotiate this price on a global scale, and I think you should be able to understand it”.

First of all, Ms. Zhang Jinni put forward the negotiation premise of “same goal”, that is, to remind the enterprise side that the purpose of this negotiation is to promote the entry of Nusinersen Sodium Injection into the National Medical Insurance Catalogue in China and achieve win-win cooperation between the two sides. Secondly, the words “hope” and “guide” further indicate the leading voice of the national side: in the negotiation, enterprises should try their best to meet the reserve price of drugs proposed by the national side through their discourse interaction. In addition, Ms. Zhang Jinni proposed that the China’s determination to include high-priced rare disease drugs in the national drug reimbursement list be strong. The stance of the national side she represented was intuitively and clearly expressed, that is, to strive to promote the success of this negotiation.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the enterprise side, the analysis of the non-verbal modality can concretely reflect its informational stance. It is mainly reflected in two aspects: behavioral activities and facial expressions.

Figure 2. *The Eighth Consultation of the Enterprise Side*



As shown in Figure 2, in the one-and-a-half-hour negotiation, the enterprise side left the table to discuss and ask for instructions eight times, reflecting the attitude and stance of the enterprise side. That is, it is necessary to consider the enterprise’s own profits and survival issues, and also the need to enter the vast Chinese demand market. The enterprise side tries to find the best balance between

these two goals, and smoothly enters the National Medical Insurance Catalogue in China without harming the interests of the enterprise.

Figure 3. *Facial Expression of the Enterprise Side*



In Figure 3 it can be seen that the representative of the enterprise side holds a tight brow, looks directly at Ms. Zhang Jinni, and their lips are also tightly pressed together, reflecting a serious psychological state, which means that the enterprise side feels the difficulty of this negotiation, and it is expected that greater price adjustments will be needed. Although there is no discourse expression, this facial expression vividly and concretely constructs the psychological activities and views of the enterprise side.

At the same time, although the number of words spoken by the enterprise side in the negotiation is much less than that of the national side, it can also be seen that it has a firm negotiating stance from the brief words in the following example (said by the enterprise side).

Example 4: “Our offer is 37800, which is a very big effort”.

Here the enterprise negotiators have reduced the price to 37,800 yuan per bottle from 53,680 yuan per bottle authorized by the headquarters initially. They have made “a very big effort”, as they say. This sentence belongs to the positive evaluation of self-behavior. Here, the enterprise negotiators hope to be affirmed by the national side through self-positive evaluation and demonstration of their efforts, so as to promote further negotiations, thus implicitly expressing the evaluation of the object by the discourse subjects.

Conveyance of Emotion

The expression of emotions is often not done through a single discourse, but is constructed through multiple rounds of discourse interactions during the interactive process (Spencer-Oatey 2011). There are some emotional stance strategies which can be used to convey emotion, such as direct expression of emotional stances, implied indexing of emotional stances and the description of emotion through verbal behaviors and non-verbal behaviors (Marín-Arrese 2021). In the negotiations between the two sides, the national side and the enterprise side have realized the expression of emotions and the construction of stances through many verbal interactions. Expressions are generally divided into positive emotions and negative emotions, which can be analyzed from two aspects: emotional words and expressive speech behaviors.

Table 1. *Examples of the Conveyance of Emotion in the National Medical Insurance Catalogue Negotiation*

Discourse Object	Examples (said by Ms. Zhang Jinni)	Emotion
The fourth quotation of the enterprise side	“The price of 42800, from the enterprise side, I believe you feel painful...”	Empathy
The sixth quotation of the enterprise side	“For this price, I think the prior effort... I’m <i>really</i> sad.”	Disappointment
The fifth quotation of the enterprise side	“...It was <i>really</i> tough, in fact, just now I felt that my tears were about to fall.”	Difficulty
Expected outcome of the negotiations	“If this medicine can be negotiated, we may <i>really</i> be happier than you.”	Expectation

As shown in Table 1, Ms. Zhang Jinni’s responses to the several quotation results of the enterprise side have shown her negative emotions, which can be seen from emotional words such as “sad”, “difficult” and “tears falling”; similarly, from the perspective of expressive speech behaviors, in the above four examples, the word “really” is used in three, which assumes the adverbial role of indicating degree, deepening the expressive function of the statement sentence, and expressing the emphasis and importance of the conveyance of emotion. In the fourth quotation, Ms. Zhang Jinni conveys empathy towards the enterprise side, and considers the difficulties from the perspective of the enterprise side, showing universal human concern. In the fifth and sixth quotation, Ms. Zhang Jinni conveys the emotion of disappointment and difficulty towards the enterprise side. Negotiation is an activity that both parties need to choose between their personal interests. Ms. Zhang Jinni’s conveyance of emotion here can make the enterprise side realize that China can understand its situation, and hope to include this

Nusinersen Sodium Injection into the National Medical Insurance Catalogue in China. This is a good thing for the benefit of the Chinese people, because it can raise the sense of happiness of Chinese people and promote the development of the society.

As one of the parties involved in this drug negotiation concerning National Medical Insurance Catalogue in China, the enterprise side also engaged in expressing emotional behaviors in the negotiation through verbal expressions. For example (said by the enterprise side):

Example 5: “So are we, we are also about to shed tears. Please give us some hints”.

Example 6: “After our consultation, we take a good auspicious number...”

In Example 5, the enterprise side received Ms. Zhang Jinni’s negative emotional information about the quotation, and replied with the same negative emotion, that is, “We are also about to shed tears”. This emotional expression can reflect the same negotiation stance of the enterprise side and the nation side: hoping that the negotiation will have a good result, so the emotions of both sides are convergent. Example 6 indicates that the negotiation has entered the final stage, and the representative of the enterprise side has given the final quotation after learning the reserve price of the drug set by the national negotiation team, so that the Nusinersen Sodium Injection has successfully entered the national medical insurance catalogue. Here, the enterprise negotiator used the word “auspicious” to express his positive emotion for the perfect result of the negotiation, and also expressed his support and affirmation of the national stance of “Life first; people first” concept.

The above pragmatic analysis show that the conceptual content, the interpersonal and inter-group relationship and stance expressed by negotiation discourse are closely related and they interact with one another in a dynamic and complex way through verbal behaviors. The conveyance of emotion is a very effective way for both the parties involved in this negotiation to have empathy and emotional understanding towards each other. This kind of emotional understanding can achieve better results compared with single conveyance of information.

Conveyance of Attitude

Attitude is the stable psychological tendency of the individual towards a specific object, which contains the subjective evaluation of the discourse subject and the resulting behavioral tendency (Wu 2016). The act of conveyance of attitude refers to “the purpose of the conveyance of attitude is to sincerely express a certain state of mind in response to the event or state expressed in the content of the proposition” (Searle 1979, p15). According to the Pragmatic Stance Cone, through

the mutual integration of expressions, the discourse subjects can express their attitude and stance.

The conveyance of attitude is a choice of convergence or extension between discourse subjects (Yuan 2019). In the context of the negotiation of drugs in the national medical insurance catalogue in China, the starting point of both sides is the same, which belongs to the stance of convergence. On the one hand, through the comprehensive consideration of the current stage of China's economic and social development level, as well as the affordability of the insured personnel and the affordability of the fund and other factors, the national side determined the payment standard formed by the negotiation, hoping to reduce the price of Nusinersen Sodium Injection to a range that most patients can afford through negotiation, so the national side hopes that the negotiation can be successful, so that rare disease drugs can enter the national drug reimbursement list and benefit people to the greatest extent. On the other hand, enterprise side also hopes that its own production of drugs can enter the national medical insurance catalogue, because China's population base is the world's largest medical insurance market, entering the medical insurance catalogue means that the enterprise opened a broad potential demand market, the enterprise's sales will be doubled, and profits will also increase, so the enterprise side also hopes to promote the success of this negotiation. It follows from this point that the national side and the enterprise side have a convergent pragmatic stance, which is reflected in the language and non-verbal modalities in the negotiation. For example (said by Ms. Zhang Jinni):

Example 7: "Just now, in fact, from our point of view, we really repeatedly stated our stance, I think that at the negotiating table we as party A are so humble, really..."

Example 8: "The space for adjustment by our negotiating team for the reserve price is zero, and we follow this reserve price. If you step in, we meet; if you can't step in, we are parallel lines".

In the process of the conveyance of attitude, the national side, as the leader in the negotiation, clearly expressed its attitude through words such as "repeatedly stated", "the space for adjustment is zero", "parallel line" and so on. That is, the reserve price of drugs determined by the National Medical Insurance Bureau is a rigid line and will never be changed for the benefit of the enterprise, so if the enterprise wants to achieve the success of the negotiation, it must adjust its own price and seek to fit the national drug reserve price within the affordable range of the enterprise to enter the negotiation space. The attitude expressed by Ms. Zhang Jinni here is not a personal subjective attitude, but a view and attitude that stands on the national stance and takes the state as the main body. The attitude of the state towards the entry of Nusinersen Sodium Injection into the National Medical Insurance Catalogue in China is very rigid, because it is related to the living

standards and happiness index of thousands of families. Careful and comprehensive consideration and arrangement on this issue are necessary and vital. For example (said by Ms. Zhang Jinni):

Example 9: “Medicare is actually a problem that we have been thinking about, that is, every small group should not be abandoned”.

Example 10: “The cost of vaccines actually accounts for a large expenditure of the medical insurance fund, so we, the National Medical Insurance Bureau, still have the courage to carry out our health insurance negotiations this year, and indeed we have experienced this very great determination of ‘Life first; people first’ concept”.

Here Ms. Zhang Jinni first started from her identity as a medical insurance personnel working in the local frontline, described the economic pressure and life embarrassment of rare disease patients who have difficulties seeing a doctor and treating diseases, and also proposed that in the post-epidemic era, China has taken a series of measures in order to fight the epidemic, such as lowering the medical insurance fund, taking the cost of vaccines, etc., and then put forward the expected risks and promotion difficulties of the national introduction of high-priced rare disease drugs. It reflects the courage and determination of the national side in this negotiation, showing the principle and policy of China to put the people’s health first and does not abandon any small group, and further indicates the national side’s stance of guiding the interests of Chinese people. As a policy closely related to Chinese people, the National Medical Insurance Catalogue in China can greatly affect the Chinese people’s living standards and solve the livelihood problems of difficult and expensive medical treatment.

Figure 4. Ms. Zhang Jinni’s Facial Expression and Gesture



At the end of the negotiation, when the enterprise side gave a drug quotation that met the requirements of the national reserve price, the two sides reached a deal. At this moment Ms. Zhang Jinni was smiling and clapping, as can be seen from Figure 4. Her facial expression and gesture here express a positive attitude. Reaching an agreement in the negotiation is in line with the expectations of China, which can facilitate the perfection of the national medical insurance catalogue, improve the living quality of the patient groups, and further promote medical care and social development in China.

Conclusion

Based on the framework of Pragmatic Stance Cone, this paper analyzes the pragmatic stance constructed in the drug negotiation of national medical insurance catalogue in China from the three dimensions of the conveyance of information, emotion and attitude, and achieves the following research results. In this negotiation, the national negotiator always guides the negotiation process, expresses the informational stance of hoping to promote the success of the negotiation through verbal and non-verbal behaviors, the negative emotional stance of guiding the enterprise quotation through emotional expressions and the attitude stance of “Life first; people first” concept through language modes and non-verbal modes. Meanwhile, the negotiator of the enterprise side utters the expressive stance of hoping that Nusinersen Sodium Injection would be included in the national medical insurance catalogue through verbal and non-verbal cues, the negative and positive emotional stance of seeking a balance between corporate interests and the national reserve price by using language modes and non-verbal modes, and the attitude of adjusting prices and entering the Chinese market guided by the national stance through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors.

From the above pragmatic analysis based on the theoretical framework of the Pragmatic Stance Cone, it can be seen that the conveyance of information, the conveyance of emotion and the conveyance of attitude are complementary to each other among the discourse subject 1, discourse subject 2 and discourse object, and are expressed through verbal behaviors such as direct expression and expressive speech behaviors and non-verbal behaviors such as facial expressions and gestures.

In this paper, the selection of corpora is limited, and the corpus analysis is mainly based on a negotiation of Nusinersen Sodium Injection entering into the National Medical Insurance Catalogue in China between the national side and the enterprise side, which has certain limitations. In the future research, we may select a larger number of and a wider range of drug negotiations as corpora, analyze pragmatic stance expressions from different angles, and further deepen the stance

research in the area of pragmatics, aiming to conduct further multi-perspective and multi-context research concerning different social issues in discourse analysis.

References

- Du Bois J (2007) The stance triangle. In R Englebretson (ed.), *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction*, 139–182. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Englebretson B (2007) Stancetaking in discourse: an introduction. In B Englebretson (ed.), *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction*, 1–26. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Gong S (2014) On characteristics of S-P predicate sentence. *Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)* 2: 168–178.
- Kostiantyn K, Schamp-Bjerede T, Kerren A, Paradis C, Sahlgren M (2016) Visual analysis of online social media to open up the investigation of stance phenomena. *Information Visualization* 15(2): 93–116.
- Larry C (2015) Analyzing complex negotiations. *Negotiation Journal* 31(2): 131–153.
- Luo G (2014) Stance and its study models. *Contemporary Rhetoric* (1): 41–47.
- Marín-Arrese JI (2021) Stance, emotion and persuasion: terrorism and the press. *Journal of Pragmatics* 177(May): 135–148.
- Miao Q (2020) Negative evaluation stancetaking from an interactive pragmatic perspective. *Foreign Language Research* 2: 45–50.
- Searle JR (1979) *Expression and meaning: studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.
- Spencer-Oatey H (2011) Conceptualising ‘the relational’ in pragmatics: insights from metapragmatic emotion and (im) politeness comments. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43(14): 3565–3578.
- Wu A (2016) Semantic and pragmatic analysis of expressives. *Foreign Language Research* 6: 70–73.
- Yuan Z (2019) Pragmatic stance cone: a localized study of pragmatic stance of media microblog discourse in public events. *Foreign Language Research* 4(Jul): 26–31.

