

給予建議之言談分析： 英語母語人士與非英語母語人士之對話

The discourse analysis of giving advice: a dialogue between native and nonnative speakers of English

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摘要

本研究的目的是分析英語母語人士與非英語母語人士給予建議的言談模式。根據Searle 的論述，建議是一種“指示”，說話者認為對受話者有所幫助，“指示”也是說話者的一個陳述，其中蘊含著說話者希望受話者去執行某件事情。因此，建議就是說話者指示受話者執行某件事，而且他認為執行此一指示對受話者是有助益的。本研究記錄在辦公室所發生的一段對話內容，根據 Hymes 的論述，言談情境屬於辦公室對話，言談事件是一段會話，言談行為是給予建議。選擇本段對話的原因是因為它在語用學上呈現出豐富的語言資料，本言談分析探討“顏面”議題，包括禮貌的運用(the use of politeness)與階級的平衡(the balance of status)，對未來的助動詞教學而言，本分析提供了一個實用的案例。

關鍵詞：言談行為、建議、禮貌、階級、助動詞

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the discourse pattern of giving advice between native and nonnative speakers of English. According to Searle, advice is a directive that the speaker believes would benefit the hearer. Directive means a statement by the speaker with an intent of directing the hearer to do something. As a result, advice is an utterance that the speaker intends the hearer to perceive as a directive to do something that will be to the hearer's benefit. This study has been conducted by means of transcribing and analyzing a piece of discourse that happened at a workplace. Based on the three levels pointed out by Hymes, the speech situation is a business setting; the speech event is a conversation, and the speech act is giving advice. This piece of discourse has been chosen because of its abundance in pragmatics. The analysis of this transcription concerns the issues of "face" - the use of politeness, and the balance of status. This paper intends to provide a real-life example for future teaching of modals for the use of suggestions.

1.0 Introduction

Learning English as a second language has been a fruitful area explored by linguists. During the past few years, much attention has been paid in the field of English learners' grammatical competence. However, to be communicative in a second language does not only require grammatical competence but also the capability of understanding speakers' intentions as well as the capability of being able to communicate one's idea. The latter, the capabilities of understanding others' intentions and being able to express oneself, is whereas a realm that is receiving more research at present.

Learning a language is not only about memorizing grammatical rules and vocabulary but also many social and cultural factors (Hymes, 1996). Language is known as "...the concept of pragmatic competence that has evolved to complement grammatical competence" (Chen, 1990, p.157). Coulmas says "there is a structure in speech beyond the internal structure of decontextualized sentences" (1981, p.1). The internal structure gives us "a framework of acceptability for our utterance which helps us to indicate our intent in a manner that the hearer will understand and respond to" (Banerjee & Carrell, 1987, p.314). These findings help us understand that language is a reflection of the affiliated culture and social norms. Thus, language acquisition should be concerned not only with grammatical structure but also pragmatic competence.

According to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990), pragmatic competence is defined as "the ability to use utterances that are appropriate both for a given speech event and for the participants in that event" (p.468). Context-specific pragmatic competence would be more difficult for linguistically competent nonnative speakers of English, because context - specific pragmatic competence involves the use of numerous communication strategies. Therefore, the distinction between native speakers and nonnative speakers lies in the level of their various degrees of pragmatic competence, not in their grammatical competence.

Hymes (1996) points out that three levels (the speech situation, the speech event, and the speech act) are taken into consideration for speaking in an acceptable manner. The speech situation is an overall situation, such as a business office. The speech event is the genre, such as a conversation. The speech act is what we do when we speak, such as giving advice. It requires pragmatic competence to achieve the goals of the speech acts taking place in different speech events within different speech situations.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the discourse pattern of giving advice between native and

nonnative speakers of English. According to Searle (2002), advice is a directive that the speaker believes would benefit the hearer. Directive means a statement by the speaker with an intent of directing the hearer to do something. As a result, advice is an utterance that the speaker intends the hearer to perceive as a directive to do something that will be to the hearer's benefit. This study has been conducted by means of transcribing and analyzing a piece of discourse that happened at a workplace. Based on the three levels pointed out by Hymes, the speech situation is a business setting; the speech event is a conversation, and the speech act is giving advice. This piece of discourse has been chosen because of its abundance in pragmatics. The analysis of this transcription concerns the issues of "face" - the use of politeness, and the balance of status. Before discussing these issues, the ethnography of the discourse should be given first.

2.0 The ethnography of the discourse

The participants in this speech event were two subjects who were in charge of different departments in a fine art auction house - Nikki and Meilin.¹ Nikki was the director of Art Department, who had just received a promotion. She was a native speaker of English. Meilin was the Chinese painting specialist of Asian Art Department, who was a nonnative speaker of English and with a mother tongue in Chinese. Both Nikki and Meilin took turns as being a speaker or a hearer. Art Department was responsible for handling newspapers ads, and it was necessary to go through Art Department if Asian Art Department needed to place an ad. Alex, who also belonged to Art Department, was present and kept silent during their conversation.

The purpose of this speech event recorded was to state the designation of responsibilities. The key, the tone in which the speech event is performed, was formal, serious, and complaining. The channel was face-to-face oral transmission. The message form was the timing of submitting the ad. It was direct, on-record (Rose, 2000). This speech event can be viewed as advice-giving which lacked pragmatic competence at some points.

3.0 The transcription of the discourse

Meilin was talking to Alex in Art Department. Suddenly, Nikki jumped in and began the following conversation.

N(ikki) : Meilin, it's really a panic for us to handle he ad in such a short time. You should give us earlier. Otherwise, we're not gonna be able to do that.

M(eilin) : I give it to Alex long time ago. He know it. (Meilin looked at Alex, and Alex nodded.) Actually, YOU should tell me what should I do, not OUR department tell you. So you should ask Alexandra this before she go, or she should tell you.

N : I did. I asked her. But still, you can't give this to us today and say I want it tomorrow. You should give us more time. We have our own stuff to do.

M : This is routine. (Alex nodded again.) We do ad every time when we have auction. We do this many years. You should know this. When should we do this? When should we do that? So you should thank me tell you this.

N : I won't.

M : Um?

N : I -- WONT.

4.0 Communication strategies - the issues of "faces"

The kinds of communication strategies being examined in the above transcribed conversation are politeness strategies and status - preserving strategies. In the following section, each of them will be discussed separately.

4.1 Politeness strategies

Politeness is defined by Goffman as "the appreciation an individual shows to another through avoidance or presentation rituals" (1967, p.77). Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987) posit that politeness is motivated by two types of "face" and two relevant types of politeness. Negative face refers to one's "need for personal space, free from physical and emotional interruption and imposition" (Banerjee & Carrell, 1987). Thus, negative politeness is used to satisfy a hearer's negative face. Its function is to mitigate a face threatening act (FTA). On the other hand, positive face is the image that one hopes others set upon him or her. That is to say, it is the personality one would like to present to the outside world, and by which one is known. Thus, positive politeness is used for the sake of a hearer's positive face. It functions to fulfill the hearer's self-image. Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies are illustrated in association with pragmatics, semantics, syntax, and lexicon as follow :

Positive politeness strategies :

(1). Show concern for the hearer (and show patience as the hearer)

(2). Use inclusive "we" by the speaker

(3). Seek opinions or agreements

Negative politeness strategies :

(1). Hedge

(2). Ask for reasons

(3). Be conventionally indirect or use conventionalized politeness forms

The conversation was initiated by Nikki by using a word with a strong complaint component, "panic". The wording of the first sentence "it's really a panic..." does not show concern for the hearer. By adopting the first positive politeness strategy, Nikki may have used the more appropriate form as "are you aware that the deadline is coming...". Then, she was using "should" to give Meilin her directive instead of using the conventionalized politeness forms, such as modals - "could" you, "can" you. With the use of "should," Nikki intended to enforce Meilin to cooperate with her (Nikki's) schedule. Nikki's last sentence violated the third negative politeness strategy - be conventionally indirect. To be in accordance with the convention, she could say, "I'm afraid we won't be able to do that."

Then, it was Meilin's turn to clarify herself. She was explaining the situation, and trying to defend herself. Noticing that she put stress on two words, you and our, showing her affirmation that she did not do anything wrong. However, probably because of the opposition and offensive manner set by Nikki at the very beginning of the conversation, Meilin used "should" frequently in her utterances. Again, this threatened the hearer's (it is now Nikki's) negative face. In addition, there was an overlapping utterance by Nikki saying "I did." It seemed that the hearer was not showing patience while the speaker was giving her opinions rather than being eager to assert her position.

In the third unit of the conversation, Nikki was restating her point expressed in her first utterance. She said "You can't give this to us...". The word "can't" was used here to reveal a very strong emotion, and tended to become a face threatening act. It could be suggested that she apply the second negative politeness strategy by saying "why don't you give this to us..." to soften FTA.

In the fourth unit, Meilin was again using "should" repeatedly. This may be explained by the fact that Meilin lacked various linguistic forms, and meanwhile she was within a defensive situation. At the end of this utterance, Meilin said "So you should thank me" (with a smile on her face). It seemed that she was closing the conversation in an embarrassing context by exploiting the situation in a somehow lighthearted way (basically, the direct literal translation of "you should thank me" in

Chinese is viewed as a humorous expression). However, Nikki seemed very offended by the way Meilin was talking, which resulted in an almost unpleasant ending of the conversation with Nikki's response "I won't." Meilin may not have expected Nikki to have such a reaction, so she did not comprehend when Nikki said that. Then, Meilin was soliciting her response by an interrogative tone, and it was followed by Nikki's exaggerating repetition. This misunderstanding is believed to occur due to native-language culture patterns that are inappropriately transferred to a target-language culture. In addition, there seemed to be a transitional topic when Meilin said "this is routine...". A transitional topic is defined as a topic that is not itself the focus of the conversational interaction, but acting like a bridge to the actual topic (Kasper & Rose, 2002). That is to say, the topic of the conversation was shifted from the timing of submitting the ad to the office routine that the staff was supposed to know. In fact, the transition somewhat took place in the second unit but not clearly. What is revealed in the transition of the topic is that sometimes the topic of the conversation is just a surface manifestation of a deeper problem. The real problem surfaced may be the designation of departmental responsibilities, and the interpersonal relationship, not merely the time allotted for handling the ad.

Based on Brown and Levinson's research (1987), the employment of redressive actions mentioned in the politeness strategies is able to moderate the potential of FTA. Moreover, there are three basic syntactic forms for giving advice. They are statement, question, and imperative. Lakoff (2005) suggests that an imperative is less polite than a statement, which in turn is less polite than a question. Both participants investigated used statements only. They did not adopt question forms to lessen the tension during the conversation. Also, past tenses of modal verbs were not employed to enhance conventional indirectness. Actually speakers' task is to express their intentions and make them understood by the hearers "while balancing their positive face with that of the hearers' and while imposing as little as possible upon the personal space of either" (Banerjee & Carrell, 1987, p.316). Because both the participants failed in achieving the task, the communication broke down and both the speakers were regarded as rude. Another cause for the breakdown of the communication can be related to Brown and Levinson's finding (1987): the more urgent the situation is, the more impolite the speaker tends to be. That the ad was to be done in a hurry increased the urgency of the speech event.

4.2 Status - preserving strategies

There are two kinds of status relationships: congruence and noncongruence. Congruence indicates "the match of a speaker's status and the appropriateness of a speech event given to that status" (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, p.473), and noncongruence is the opposite. Congruent speech acts reflect the expected role of the speaker. Status - preserving strategies are employed to preserve the status balance between the speaker and the hearer without jeopardizing their relationship. There are two kinds of status -preserving strategies. One is linguistic status-preserving strategies, such as using the form of a congruent speech act where possible and using downgraders when giving advice. For example, "I have an idea, but I don't know how it would work out" would be a downgrader when giving advice to negotiate something. The other is nonlinguistic status-preserving strategies, such as timing and frequency, which are related to the structure of the speech act itself.

Nikki and Meilin had equivalent status at the workplace though they might have differed from each other in terms of English proficiency and target cultural familiarity. However, in the conversation, we find that they both performed a noncongruent speech act. As examined, both participants were using "should" in a statement form, but "should" and statements are more appropriate when talking to those who have lower status. In fact, the repetition of the same word "should" is regarded as an upgrader to increase the force of the utterance, which may in turn increase the tension between the participants. Having probed into the communication, we realize that both Nikki and Meilin had a dual role, in which lies a dilemma. The dual role is, on the one hand, the cooperative relationship between these two departments, and, on the other hand, the tension existing between these two participants during the information exchange. As such, the dilemma would be keeping up with the cooperative departmental relationship while defending their authority in the position without jeopardizing the relationship and sacrificing the independence of their opinions. Undoubtedly, failure to negotiate successfully in the communication investigated may lead to the over-ride of the counterpart in terms of the status at work, and enforce one's obligation to follow the rules set by the one who prevails. Thus, the distance in status is increased. To maintain the status balance and departmental relationship, they could employ the status - preserving strategies by balancing "the competing postures of compliance and initiative" when negotiating in such a context (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, p.477).

According to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's research, the difference between native and nonnative speakers is how they implement the principle of congruence and its result. Native Speakers mitigate the potential interruption of noncongruent speech acts by adopting status- preserving strategies, while nonnative speakers employ fewer strategies. In other words, their noncongruent speech acts are more likely to cause status imbalance. However, there is not an obvious distinction between Nikki and Meilin in the way and frequency they employed status-preserving strategies since they both failed to successfully negotiate with each other for not using the strategies. Moreover, there was no timing ("wait-and-agree") strategy (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990) because there was almost no pause and no compromise during the communication. Both participants intended to fight for their own rights in order to maintain their status. This strategy is found to be employed more by nonnative speakers in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's study, but similar results are not found in this investigation.

5.0 Conclusion

The essential goal of conversation demonstrated by Searle (2002) is to make the hearer understand the speaker's intention. Misunderstandings and even breakdown of relationships can result if the intention is not clearly conveyed. Conversation is a cooperative endeavor; both the speaker and hearer are responsible for moving the conversation in an appropriate direction. Though different levels of speech allow their own novelty of expression, speakers are expected to obey certain accepted conventions. To avoid unwanted misunderstandings and relationship breakdown, it is necessary for all the participants to carry out certain conventions when communicating with each other. However, politeness is inevitably related to directness in speech, but politeness conventions differ from one culture to another. Thus, cross-cultural misunderstandings are expected to happen. This is why language learners need to acquire pragmatic competence and be familiar with the communication strategies applied in this field and culture. To further introduce this notion into the domain of English teaching, it is important to elucidate how culturally specific situations can affect students' language comprehension. In order for them to be able to communicate effectively in a context of the target culture, students must be sensitized to the subtle meanings of all kinds of pragmatic usage as they are taught various grammatical structures.

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