Review Article

An Analysis of Speech Acts in *Teahouse* from the Perspective of Politeness Principle

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Abstract: Speech acts are acts performed by means of language, which are tightly associated with the Politeness Principle in some situations. Politeness Principle is mainly reflected in the social interaction, and the stage play *Teahouse* shows the life of Beijing's "nobodies" completely in the form of dialogue, whose language style has strong unique Chinese characteristics. So *Teahouse* is a good choice for the analysis of Politeness Principle. From the perspective of politeness principle, this paper will analyze the speech acts between the characters in *Teahouse* in order to find their conversational meanings deeply, deepen the understanding of the essence of communication, and help people finish successful social communication.
Keywords: Politeness Principle; *Teahouse*; speech acts.

INTRODUCTION

The conversation people take part in is not in a mess, but is organized in turns. Hence, between the turn-takings, the addressers and addressees should follow some principles to make the talk exchanges continue successfully. Grice [1] has put forward the Cooperative Principle, pointing out that people should abide by the maxim of quality, quantity, relation and manner in communication to ensure that the communication keeps going on and achieves mutual cooperation. However, in daily communication, "the interpersonal communication is not simply an information change [2]". Therefore, due to the need of politeness, people often have inconsistencies between what they say and what they mean by the words they said, which can make the tone softer and make people speak indirectly.

Foreign linguists have done a lot of researches on "politeness" and also have got some findings, such as Lakoff's [3] politeness rules, Fraser's [4] and Fraser &Nolan's [5]. Brown and Levinson's [6, 7] face-saving view, and conversational-contract view, Leech's [8] politeness principle and so on.

Lakoff was one of the people who used Grice's Conversational Principle to explain politeness in early time, and it was she who was the first to study "politeness" from the perspective of conversational norms. Lakoff [3] defined the basic category of politeness research, and proposed three politeness rules that the speaker should follow in communication. But she failed to explain why people deliberately violate the rules in actual communication, what kind of negative results of violating the politeness principles on interpersonal and social relations, and cannot put forward what remedies can be used in conversation as well.

Fraser [4, 9] studied the politeness principle from the principle of sociolinguistics, and he hold the view that the "politeness" was a kind of "convention", and impoliteness behavior was a violation of this "convention".

In addition, the politeness principle in communication depends on the status, power and obligation of both sides. However, his view of politeness is relatively rough. Because he simply thinks that politeness in conversation is to abide by the conversation contract, which is divorced from the actual use of language.

In the study of Politeness Principle, Leech and Brown & Levinson's theories are the most influential ones. Brown and Levinson [7, 6] put forward the issue of politeness from the perspective of Anthropology and Philosophy. They thought that "Politeness" was tightly associated with "face", which is the effort to maintain the face of the hearer and the speaker to the maximum extent, and it contained three parts: face, Face Threatening Acts (FATs) and politeness strategies. But Brown and Levinson's "universal framework derived from the study of Tamil, English, and Tzeltal, it was exactly this claim for universality that was challenged with respect to their key notion of "face." Researchers on Asian languages and cultures in particular argued early on that the notion of face captured predominantly Western value" [10]. There're some language phenomena that the Cooperative Principle cannot explain, so Leech put forward the Politeness Principle. Leech's [8] politeness principle included six maxims, and these six maxims are: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy Maxim. Among the six politeness maxims, their importance is not the same. The Tact Maxim is the basic one that is more important than the other five maxims. Leech's politeness principle emphasizes the object of communication, that is, the addressee or the third party, rather than the speaker himself. When communicating with others, the speaker tries to make himself suffer more and gain less, and give others more convenience, so that the other party may feel respected in this way. In recent years, with the development of Interpersonal Pragmatics, the Politeness Principle has gradually turned into a relational turn. The focus of politeness research is interpersonal relationship, not how to implement politeness [11]. Watts & Locher [12] chose the words "relational work" to represent personal involvement in the process of negotiation with others. Holmes and Schnurr [13] put forward "relational practice" to observe the politeness phenomena in the work place. Moreover, Spencer-Oatey [14] used the word "rapport" to describe the subjective perception of harmony-disharmony, stability-chaos and enthusiasm-hostility in interpersonal relationship.

Chinese scholars' studies on the politeness mainly focus on the explanation and evaluation of the Politeness Principle. Liu Runqing [15] and He Ziran [16] introduced the Politeness Principle to us at length. But they didn't make any contributions to localize Politeness Principle. Gu Yueguo [17] and Xu Shenghuan [18] put forward some new ideas concerning our own language characteristics. Gu [17], especially, thought that "*wenya*" maxim (to choose gentle instead of obscene words; to use more euphemism and less straightforward language) associated with euphemism should be added to the Politeness Principle. That filled in the gaps of the ignorance of euphemism in western academe. After that, many other Chinese scholars has been developing the Politeness principle from different aspects according to their own understanding. Ran & Liu [19] explored the interpersonal relation by discussing the pragmatic features of interpersonal relation, and its relatedness to face, politeness and emotion elaborate the research paradigm and objects of it. Chen [20] added two rapport management dimensions ("benefit and cost" and "emotion") to Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management Theory that was put forward in 2008.

Although the politeness principle has been developing continuously in recent decades, the new theories are still not as convincing and acceptable as Leech's and Levinson's. Therefore, this paper chooses Leech's theory on politeness principle as the analytical framework, which can also avoid some theoretical disputes.

Speech act was put forward by Austin [21] who believed that we are performing actions when we are speaking, and he divided the speech acts into three: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Of the three speech acts, the illocutionary act can be understood as the speaker's intention. On the basis of Austin's speech act theory, Searle [22] made it more systematic. One of his contributions is that he made a classification of illocutionary acts. Besides, Searle [23] held the opinion that every speech act showed the speaker's intention and the meaning of speech act was the function of sentence meaning.

In the process of establishing contact with people, it is very important to understand the purpose of the speaker's words accurately and quickly. How to achieve the goal with dignity and politeness? This is another question worthy of our deep thinking. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze different types of texts to help us understand people's illocutionary acts better, which will be very important in interpersonal communication. If we know the speech acts in different occasions well, we can change our speech varieties and ways of speaking properly to get a more successful communication.

There are also many domestic scholars who have conducted in-depth analysis and discussion on Speech Act theory from the aspects of philosophy, cognition and semantics [24]. In addition, Chinese scholars have lots of other studies based on this theory as well. Scholars not only pay attention to the speech acts in different professional fields, especially in the field of education and teaching [25, 26], they also classify speech acts into different types, such as the speech act request [27-29], the speech act of apology [30] and the speech act of refusal [31, 32] and so on. But scholars mostly focus on the speech acts related to people's life and work, and pay less attention to the play like the *Teahouse* with strong cultural and dialect characteristics.

Yutai teahouse in *Teahouse* is a place for people's leisure and entertainment at that time. In order to maintain a harmonious and pleasant atmosphere, most of the people who drink tea in teahouse are polite and know how to advance and retreat. Therefore, this paper will analyze the speech acts in *Teahouse* to further understand the speech activities and enrich the content of speech act research to an extent from the perspective of politeness principle.

The *Teahouse* is a very famous play, written by Lao She, about the life of Pekingese, which has two renowned English versions translated by Ying Ruocheng (a Chinese) and Howard (an American). In this paper, the analysis of the speech acts in it will be based on the translation of Howard in the aspect of politeness. The reason for choosing Howard's translation is that Ying's version serves the performance in the stage, whereas Howard's version remains the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Chinese to the greatest extent. Therefore, Howard's translation would be a better choice to reach the goal of this paper.

In 1979, Teahouse was going to tour abroad for the first time, but there was no English script suitable for performing on stage. Therefore, Ying, a famous Chinese theater actor and translator, translated *Teahouse* himself. Compared with the two translations, "the principle of performability" in Ying's translation reflects more, which is mainly reflected in these aspects, namely "sentences are short, simple and rhetorical, paying less attention to grammar, and using lots of slang and informal words" [33].

While Howard's main motivation of translating *Teahouse* is his curiosity and love of the dialect, culture and society of Beijing. And he hopes to improve his Chinese proficiency and introduce Laoshe's immortal works to the West. In order to make it easier for the target readers and audience to understand some important cultural background, Howard adopts the method of "Intratextual Addition" in his translation. Gibbon's translation pays more attention to target language, which made the play easier for target language readers to understand [34]. The English language theory would be more compatible with the works translated by native translators, and this will be of great help to avoid some unnecessary problems due to the theoretical and cultural differences.

Analysis of Speech Acts
The Teahouse plays an important role in the history of modern Chinese literature. Although the play has only three acts, it has depicted three periods respectively. Through the description of the fate of various characters, it reflects the historical changes of nearly 50 years: from the failure of the Reform Movement of 1898 to the defeat of the Kuomintang

regime which is after the victory of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, reveals the darkness and corruption of old China, and truly shows the miserable life of broad masses of people at that time. Moreover, the characters in *Teahouse* have distinct personalities, and each line reflects their thoughts and personalities.

The utterances of characters in a play are a quite important part that the author used to indicate their images, shape their images in the play, and then motivate the development of the plot. In *Teahouse*, the characteristics of the society and the times were reflected by the rise and fall of Yu Tai, the life experiences of its owner Wang Lifa, and different customers. In such a social place as teahouse, the communication between people often has some implicatures. Because Leech's six maxims of Politeness Principle are better accepted by people. This paper will analyze the dialogues in the Teahouse from the perspective of Leech's six maxims step by step.

1. From the perspective of Tact Maxim
The tact maxim means that we should minimize cost to others and maximize benefit to others (other-perspective) [8]. To express politeness to the other side, the speaker should talk with his or her tact. This maxim often embodies in the mandatory and committed speech act. Take the following dialogue in Howard's [35] translation as an example,

WANG LIFA: Older Tang, why don't you take a walk, eh?

SOOTHSAYER TANG (with a wan smile): Proprietor Wang, show a little kindness to old Soothsayer Tang a bit. Give me a bowl of tea and I'll tell your fortune. Come on, let me see your palm—won't cost a cent. (Not waiting for Wang's agreement, takes hold of his hand.) It's 1898, the twenty-four year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. And your age…

This is the start of this stage play. Soothsayer Tang, who makes a living by fortunetelling, comes to the teahouse, but the owner is not willing to show welcome to his arrival for his course of fortunetelling and credit for tea. So, Wang Lifa asks Soothsayer Tang to leave the teahouse with a wh-question to euphemize his proposal that he does not want Soothsayer Tang to drink his tea on credit any more, nor does Soothsayer Tang's fortunetelling to affect the teahouses business. In these talking turns, Wang Lifa do not use the wording like *go away* to require Soothsayer Tang to leave his teahouse directly, which would make Soothsayer Tang not happy. Hence, Wang Lifa's utterances are tact in this talk exchange. However, Wang Lifa's does not get the response he expects.

2. From the perspective of Generosity Maxim

The generosity maxim is to minimize benefit to self and maximize cost to self (self-perspective) [8]. The generosity maxim requires less expression of self-interest, which is mostly reflected in compulsive and committed speech acts. This maxim is to judge the politeness of speech acts from the speaker's point of view, which requires the speaker not only to do things in a proper way, but also to be "generous", that is, to let himself benefit as little as possible and suffer as much as possible. For example,

SOOTHSAYER TANG (with a wan smile): Proprietor Wang, show a little kindness to old Soothsayer Tang a bit. Give me a bowl of tea and I'll tell your fortune. Come on, let me see your palm—won't cost a cent. (Not waiting for Wang's agreement, takes hold of his hand.) It's 1898, the twenty-four year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. And your age…

WANG LIFA (snatching his hand away): forget it! There's no need to ply me with that old fortuneteller's gab—I'll give you a bowl of tea. Fortunetelling's useless. In this country people like us are always the underdogs anyway. (Comes out from behind his counter and guides Soothsayer Tang to a seat.) Sit down. You know, if you don't break that opium habit nothing good will ever come your way. That's my telling fortunes—much more effective than yours.

Soothsayer Tang ignores Wang Lifa's request for his unwillingness to leave, and he begs Wang Lifa to "show a little kindness" to him. Here, the Soothsayer Tang's intention is realized, that is to say, the illocutionary act of his utterance is identified by the hearer. The helpless owner has no alternative but to give him a bowl of tea and a piece of advice. In Wang Lifa's turn, his words comply with the generosity maxim of politeness because his responses to Soothsayer Tang are to maximize cost to himself by giving Soothsayer Tang a bowl of tea. Besides, Wang Lifa also expresses his dislike to Soothsayer Tang's course of fortunetelling that may get his teahouse into trouble by saying that if Tang cannot break the opium, he will have a bad fortune.

3. From the perspective of Approbation Maxim

The approbation maxim requires that we should minimize dispraise of others and maximize praise of others (other-perspective) [8]. The approbation maxim requires the speaker should have few negative comments about others, which is usually used in speech acts of expressing and asserting. This maxim is to judge the politeness of speech act from the perspective of the hearer, which requires the speaker to reduce the expression harmful or derogatory to others. Generally speaking, in the process of communication, the purpose of praise is not only for the consideration of politeness,

but also for the need of pragmatic purpose, which is of great psychological significance. For example,

FIFTH ELDER MA (without bothering to get up): Erdezi, you're quite something.

WEDEZI (looking around, spots Fifth Elder Ma): Ho! Fifth Elder Ma, I didn't know you were here. How careless of me not to have noticed you. (Goes over and drops to one knee in traditional gesture of respect.)

In Teahouse, Erdezi has a lower social status than Fifth Elder Ma, which is related to his shady business and family background, so he knows that Fifth Elder Ma's "you're quite something" is a warn instead of a praise, that is, Fifth Elder Ma is warning Erdezi not to be complacent. Erdezi immediately realized that Fifth Elder Ma is angry with his behavior, and quickly leave the Yu Tai teahouse after greeting to Fifth Elder Ma. In his greetings, he lowers himself to make Ma think himself is in a high status in order to avoid unnecessary trouble. This embodies the Approbation Maxim, and Erdezi succeeds in keeping a communication away from something troublesome by talking politely.

4. From the perspective of Modesty Maxim

Usually, the modesty maxim can be explained to minimize praise of self and maximize dispraise of self (self-perspective) [8]. This maxim is used to judge the politeness of speech act from the perspective of the speaker. Take the following dialogue as an example:

QIN ZHONGYI: Just checking—checking to see if a young fellow like you can run a place like this.

WANG LIFA: Ai! I've had to learn because I depend on this place for a living. Since my father died young, I have no choice. Luckily, the regular customers are all old friends of my father; they're prepared to overlook my mistakes. When you're in business to make a living it's very important to be well-liked. I do things just like my father did. If I'm not dropping to my knee, in greeting, I'm dropping compliments—trying to please everybody. That way you avoid trouble. Please sit down. I'll make you a bowl of the very best.

Qin Zhongyi is the landlord of Wang Lifa, so Wang Lifa shows his great respect and politeness to him. When answering his question, Wang modestly says that "Luckily, the regular customers are all old friends of my father; they're prepared to overlook my mistakes", which means that Wang Lifa dues his business to his father's contacts. Wang Lifa derogates himself to please Qin Zhongyi in order to let him know that everything benefits from Qin Zhongyi and his father, which will make Qin Zhongyi to show sympathy for him. That way, Qin Zhongyi may not ask more rent. However, if we have read this stage play before, we can know that Qin Zhongyi wants to increase the rent,

which means that the illocutionary act of Wang Lifa here is not understood.

5. From the perspective of Agreement Maxim

When applying this maxim, we need to minimize disagreement between self and others, and to maximize agreement between self and others [8]. This means that the speaker should say less disagreed words to avoid discourteousness of their speech acts that may cause the talk exchange a failure. Take the following dialogue as an example:

WANG LIFA: Grateful for these times? That doesn't seem to ring true!

SOOYHERSAYER TNAG: The more uncertain the times, the better my business. These days life and death are a toss-up, so of course scads of people want their people fortunes told, their features read. Make sense, eh?

WANG LIFA: Yes, I suppose it does.

It is the start of the second scene, everything has changed a lot. Soothsayer Tang becomes richer and is dressed in silk because many people want to know their fortune during the war. Therefore, Soothsayer regards "these times" as "better off than before". By saying this, Soothsayer Tang wants to tell Wang Lifa that his opinion is well-founded, which is the illocutionary of Tang. However, Wang Lifa's teahouse business is getting worse for "these times", so he doesn't agree with Tang's comment first with an interrogative to express his doubt. Soothsayer explains to Wang, and Wang starts to change his opinion about the times, which becomes in line with the Soothsayer at last. As a proprietor for many years, Wang Lifa knows that it is better to keep pace with the times to survive. Actually, it's impolite to express different opinions directly. Therefore, when expressing different opinions, he often apologizes first, or shows the same opinion to some extent, or expresses the symbolic agreement, and then disagrees [15]. In this sense, Wang Lifa's utterance accords with the Agreement Maxim, because he show his disagreement first, and then use "suppose" to express his symbolic agreement with Soothsayer Tang.

6. From the perspective of Sympathy Maxim

This maxim means that we should minimize antipathy between self and others and maximize sympathy between self and others [15]. When communicating with others, it is very important to have the same feeling or attitude to the topic, which can make the communication more successful and let the addressers and addressees be more comfortable in the talk. Please see the following dialogue:

DINGBAO: Could I make a little suggestion?

DIRECTOR SHEN: Yessiree!

DINGBAO: I really feel sorry for the old proprietor of this place. Couldn't you give him a uniform and keep him on as doorman? He could greet patrons; help them in and out of their cars. Everybody knows him, he's been here so long. He's sort of like an old trademark.

DIRECTOR SHEN: Yessiree! Bring him in.

This happens at the last scene of the play, the teahouse will be used as a location to track down the commies, and only Wang Lifa still stay at the teahouse. Ding Bao show her empathy to Wang Lifa by asking the Director Shen to give him an offer in the teahouse. Director Shen agree with her proposal, and wants to give Wang Lifa an offer, too, so he asks Erdezi to "bring him in", which is the illocutionary of Director Shen. The sympathy maxim requires the two parties in the talk share the similar feelings about one object [15]. So, Director Shen complies the sympathy maxim in the dialogue.

CONCLUSION

In *Teahouse*, the hearers seem not to be willing to make up the loss produced by the speakers in the conversation. This may be because most conversations take place in informal contexts. The most conversations in the play finished by the acquaintances in daily life. In addition, through the analysis, we can find that the speaker will pay more attention to the choice of the speaker's face and self-identity. Sometimes she/he will choose to exert pressure to the hearer, sometimes a euphemistic request. In order to achieve the goal, the speaker will constantly adjust the discourse strategy according to the listener's response, and choose to abide by or violate the politeness principle. But in conversation, both sides should not only take into account the politeness principle, but also consider the use of other conversation principles to make the conversation more successful. In the conversation, polite words and deeds are sent out by the speaker in the hope of getting the desired effect. That is to say, we not only need to behave politely, but also hope that the other party can respond appropriately to make the dialogue more unhindered.

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