Original Paper

An Analysis of Conflict Talk in the Film of Elizabeth from the Perspective of Speech Acts Theory

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Abstract

Speech Act Theory (SAT) mainly focuses on the phenomena of actions performed via speaking and is an indispensable research technique in both pragmatic analysis and literary appreciation. Conflict talk is a common linguistic phenomenon in interpersonal conversations, which takes consecutive and ambiguous language turns as specific form. Although scholars have made some progress in conflict talk and its analysis by using SAT, their research results only focuses on the conflict talk itself which may overlook some countermeasures. Therefore, in order to get a more comprehensive and in-depth result, this paper will proceed from SAT perspective and combine with pragmatic analysis to finish the research of the conflict talks in the film of Elizabeth.

Keywords

conflict talk, the Speech Act Theory, pragmatic strategies, Elizabeth

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In linguistics, speech act theory is a theory with both theoretical and practical value. Speech act theory is concerned with the ways in which words can be used not only to present information but also to carry out actions. By taking the speech act theory as the methodological underpinning for the analysis of conflict talk, it actually defined the research subject which is a relatively macroscopic category as a discourse pattern with obvious characteristics.

Language is a tool for people to express their feelings and perform actions. However, in the actual daily communication between people, there will inevitably be communication conflict in any talks due to the difference from personality, position and occupation, etc..

Therefore, from these considerations, in this thesis, the author mainly analyzes the conflict talk in the film of Elizabeth from the perspective of Speech Acts Theory.

1.2 Research Significance

The thesis mainly takes several dramatic conflicts as the analytic material. From all these analysis, the author deems that the analysis of conflicts between characters is useful in shaping personalities and traits.

By analyzing these conflicts, we can have a better understanding of a literary work and a deeper comprehension of character conflict and psychological contradiction. And we can be inspired to be a smart talker who can avoid the unexpected conflict and compensate the communication breakdown due to the lack of pragmatic principles.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Conflict Talk

Conflict talk is a form of conflict when it happens in our daily communication. Different scholars have defined the term in different types. For example, disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984), the adversative episode (Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981), the contracting routine (Boggs, 1978), oppositional argument (Schiffrin, 1985), quarrel (Antaki, 1994), disputes and disputing (Brenneis, 1988; Kotthoff, 1993), and conflict talk (Grimshaw, 1990). Allen Grmishaw (1990) defined the term "conflict talk" as verbal interaction as arguments, disputes, quarrels, squabbles and the like. When communicators are involved in a conflict talk, they usually disagree with each other on their ideas.

2.2 Speech Act Theory (SAT)

As an important theory in linguistics, Speech Act Theory is commonly used in pragmatic analysis. As the main theoretical framework of this study, it will be introduced from the following aspects:

2.2.1 Definition of Speech Act Theory (SAT)

Speech Act Theory (SAT), which proposed by John Austin in "How to Do Things with Words", mainly focus on the phenomena of actions performed via speaking. In other words, SAT is concerned with the ways in which words can be used not only to present information but also to carry out actions. With the advanced development of the SAT theory by Austin and his student Searle, it has become an indispensable research technique in both pragmatic analysis and literary appreciation. The author will introduce the following two concepts of the Speech Act Theory.

2.2.2 Austin's Speech Act Theory

Austin argues that some of people's statements are pseudo-statements and some of them are not made for the purpose of transporting verified information. According to Austin's trichotomy of speech acts, there are three types of speech acts: locutionary speech act, which indicates the act of making the sentence and producing a meaningful linguistic expression; illocutionary speech act, which indicates the act of communicating intention through the utterance; and perlocutionary speech act, which indicates the act of bringing about an effect. For instance, if a wife says, "I have run out of the salt" in the process of cooking, the act of saying is locutionary, the act of demanding for salt is illocutionary and the effect the utterance brings about--the husband or their child will go and buy some salt--is perlocutionary. Of all these dimensions, the most important and study-worthy is the illocutionary act. Accordingly, the technique the author employs frequently in this thesis is the illocutionary speech acts analysis.

2.2.3 Searle's Taxonomy of Speech Acts

As the student of Austin, Searle has further developed Austin's tentative taxonomy (Verdictives,

Exercitives, Commissives, Behabitives and Expositives) in both philosophical level and linguistic field. He deems that there is no consistent principle in Austin's taxonomy. Based on the necessary and sufficient conditions, known as the felicity conditions for a particular speech act to be felicitously performed, Searle classifies speech acts into the following five categories: Assertives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives and Declarations.

2.3 Relevant Studiesat Home and Aboard

According to Zhao Yingling (2004), conflict talk is the conflict between the utterance of one party and the other, which is manifested as that the one party opposes the words and the behaviors of the other party, or holds different opinions on someone or something, thus resulting in the conflict talk. In addition, in her doctoral thesis "The Pragmatic rhetoric research on Chinese conflict discourse"(2008), she launched a systematically pragmatic and rhetoric study on conflict talk, and made a further analysis of the sequence of Chinese conflict talk structure, gave a further description and explanation of the pragmatic model of conflict talks.

By using Zhao Yingling's structural approach, Zhou and He(2009) analyzed the conflicting talks in the novel "Pride and Prejudice" , revealing the construction of conflict talks and deepening the conflict talks' comprehension. By analyzing these conflicting talks, the linguistic basis for the development of characters and events in the novel is confirmed. This is also an excellent representative of the analysis of literary works from the perspective of conflict talks in recent years.

According to the paper "A Survey of the Pragmatics Studies of Conflict Talk" published by Ran(2010), the conflict talk is a kind of conflict or dispute state caused by differences in opinions, interests, principles and purposes between groups or individuals. His study summarized the research achievements of recent years, thus had great research significance. Gong(2011) extended conflict talks to the analysis of power relationship for the first time, and mentions that conflict discourse can be regarded as a dynamic process of compliance in her paper "A Pragmatic Study of Response Strategies and Power in Conflict Talk" .

Subsequently, many scholars conducted in-depth analysis on various corpuses from the perspective of conflict talk and achieved remarkable results. For example, taking political speech as the corpus, Li (2016) analyzed the conflict talks of the Primer from a relatively new perspective of speech act, taking conflict talks under different interpersonal relationships as corpus, scholars have conducted conflict talks analysis from the perspectives of doctor-patient relationship, courtroom relationship, husband-wife relationship, teacher-student relationship, etc., and also made great progress in recent years.

Although scholars have made some progress in conflict talk and its analysis, their research results only focuses on the conflict talk itself which may overlook some countermeasures. That is, most of their studies separate the problem from the solution. The study of its social pragmatic mechanism has broad space for exploration. Secondly, previous researchers have done much work on the issue of conflict talk from different aspects of linguistic theories, but most of these researches are about conflict talks between some relationships such as friends, families, couples, doctor and patient, and are studied from the

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perspective of conversation analysis and sociolinguistics, thus lacking a natural model of hierarchical rights, such as the monarch-subject relationship. Therefore, the author hopes to proceed from this perspective and combine with pragmatic analysis to complete this research.

The research questions of this study are as following:

1) How is the conflict talk constructed in the film of Elizabeth?

2) What strategies can be used to relieve or eliminate conflict talks?

3. Construction of Conflict Talk based on Speech Act Theory

The occurrence of a conflicting talk is in a certain order and can be traced. Through the analysis of the linguistic data of conflict talk, the construction of conflict talk can be divided into three parts: Cause-Trigger-Response.

3.1 The Causes of the Conflict Talks

When it comes to the causes of conflict talk, there is one element must be mentioned, that is "inappropriateness". Conflict talk occurs when there is something in the topic that makes one side of the speakers feel uncomfortable. In general, the main causes of conflict talk are as follows: improper theme, improper performance, and improper effect.

3.1.1 Improper theme

When we refer to improper theme, we mean that the speaker has said something he should not said, which causes the listener's dissatisfaction or angry response.

Example (1):

Sir William Cecil: Excellency...

Monsieur de Foix: Majesty...

Sir William Cecil: May I present the French Ambassador, His Excellency Monsieur de Foix.

Queen Elizabeth: Your Excellency.

Monsieur de Foix: King Henry of Anjou sends you brotherly love. He trusts the relationship between our countries may be much improved.

Sir William Cecil: That is also my hope.

Monsieur de Foix: The King expects that you will consider the suit of his

brother, the Duke of Anjou.

Sir William Cecil: Her Majesty will consider the proposal most carefully.

Queen Elizabeth: It is unfortunate, however, that the Duke's aunt, Mary of Guise, chooses to garrison Scotland with French troops.

Monsieur de Foix: The marriage of a Queen, Excellency, is born of politics, not childish passion.

Example (1) shows the conflict talk caused by improper theme. For the new British Monarch, the whole European was watching covetously. The French ambassador's choice to mention the French Queen's intention to marry Elizabeth to her nephew was obviously inappropriate. According to Searle, Elizabeth is actually performing a kind of Indirect Speech Act through the Expressives of the Speech Acts

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taxonomy. What Elizabeth is really intending is that if the Mary of Guise had been sincere in seeking peace between the two countries, she would not have garrisoned Scotland with French troops. Ambassador's proposal was a word out of season, which brought him a terrible beat.

3.1.2 Improper performance

Improper performance is the performance related to what the hearer says, which the speaker thinks is inappropriate, thus causing conflicts.

Example (2):

Duke of Norfolk: Mary of Guise has increased the French garrison in Scotland by 4,000 men.

Earl of Sussex: Perhaps more.

Sir William Cecil: Madam... I'm afraid the French mean to attack while we are still weak and while Your Majesty's reign is still uncertain.

Queen Elizabeth: What is your counsel?

Duke of Norfolk: Madam, we must with all haste raise an army to march upon Scotland.

Queen Elizabeth: Can... can...? Can we not send emissaries?

Duke of Norfolk: There is no time for that! As Queen we look to you for action, unless you are content to wait for the French to send more reinforcements.

In this conversation, it is exceedingly impolite and disrespectful for an adviser to give the suggestion in such a direct and rude way. Actually, the Duke of Norfolk is employing the Directives of the Speech Acts, in which he is ordering and inquiring by saying "There is no time for that!" and "We must......". The Duke of Norfolk adopts a tone and manner which is unsuitable for talking with the Monarch, thus leads to the conflict talk. But at the same time, the Duke's abnormal move also implies that he was not obedient to the Queen from the bottom of his heart, and he was secretly plot to overthrow the Queen.

3.1.3 Improper effect

When we talk about inappropriate effect, we mean that the speaker's speech acts are contrary to the listener's expectations, rather than what he wants. In other words, the listener does not want to be influenced by the outcome.

Example (3):

Queen Elizabeth: What say you, Walsingham?

Sir William Cecil: Your Majesty!

Sir Francis Walsingham: I say a prince should rather be slow to take action and should watch that he does not come to be afraid of his own shadow.

Sir William Cecil: You are not, Sir Francis, a member of Council, nor are you in the majority.

Queen Elizabeth: I do not like wars. They have uncertain outcomes.

This example provides us with an unexpected effect created by Sir Walsingham. In this dialogue, one of the most important figures in Elizabeth's political career appeared on the stage. He is Sir Francis Walsingham. In contrast to the Duke of Norfolk, he employed the Assertives in the taxonomy of the Speech Acts and asserted undoubtedly that "a prince should rather be slow to take action and should

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watch that he does not come to be afraid of his own shadow". By saying this, Sir Francis Walsingham actually broke the principle of polite conversation and doesn't care about the bad consequences it would led. And this plot can also be regarded as the turning point in Elizabeth's transformation from helplessness to resourcefulness.

3.2 The Triggers of the Conflict Talks

In the dynamic process of conversation, conflict talks are not a kind of general term. In most cases, a sentence or even a word in the speech of one party may lead to a conflict talk. We call these sentences or words as conflict triggers.

3.2.1 Positive statement

In verbal communication, if the speaker holds an excessively positive attitude towards a certain point of view, behavior, position or suggestion, and the listener just holds the opposite view, then the speaker's attitude is likely to cause dissatisfaction of the listener, thus causing conflict talk.

Example (4):

Queen Elizabeth: How dare you come into my presence! Why do you follow me here?

Sir Francis Walsingham: It is my business to protect Your Majesty against all things.

Queen Elizabeth: I do not need protection. I need to be left alone!

Sir Francis Walsingham: Majesty...

Queen Elizabeth: They should never have been sent to Scot. My father would not have made such a mistake. I have been proved unfit to rule. That is what you all think, is it not, Walsingham?

Sir Francis Walsingham: It is not for me to judge you.

Queen Elizabeth: Why did they send children! Why did they not send proper reinforcements!

Sir Francis Walsingham: The Bishops would not let them. They spoke against it in the pulpits.

Queen Elizabeth: Then... they are speaking against their Queen.

Sir Francis Walsingham: Madam, the Bishops are against you and have no fear of you. They do not expect you to survive.

In example (4), as the newly appointed Queen, Elizabeth experienced failure for the first time in her political life. Lacking the courage to question and resist in the meeting with courtiers, Elizabeth could only accept the taunts of French enemies and the disappointment of British people. Sir Francis Walsingham seemed to have used a positive explanatory statement contrary to Elizabeth's inner expectations, leading to the conflict. But in fact, we can infer that Elizabeth is not ignorant of her situation, she just needs a direction. This was what Sir Francis Walsingham had brought to her in this conflict talk. From this, we can also draw another conclusion, that is, the conflict talk does not only produce negative effects.

3.2.2 Blunt instruction

When the speaker asks someone to do something with tough or blunt imperative language, the listener may refuse him unpleasant, thus producing conflict talk.

Example (5):

Queen Elizabeth: Are you all in agreement?

Earl of Sussex: I say there has never been a better time to abate the French pride.

Queen Elizabeth: Arundel?

Earl of Arundel: War is a sin, but sometimes a necessary one.

Duke of Norfolk: <u>Lord Robert, you were appointed to the Council to protect England's interests. Now it appears you do not have the stomach for it.</u>

Earl of Leicester: I am in agreement, Your Grace, if Your Majesty's throne is at risk.

In example (5), Earl of Leicester forced by the words of her courtiers which is the typical blunt instruction. Elizabeth turned to Earl of Leicester, her lover, for help. However, he was also imprisoned in the tower of London for family reasons just like Elizabeth. Although he returned to the center of power, he had no true power but to butchered. In this dialogue, the Duke of Norfolk actually used Indirect Speech Acts, suggesting that the Earl should pay attention to the overall situation and not be blinded by his love. It can also be inferred from later episodes that the Duke, by exerting pressure on him, was in fact alienated him from Elizabeth, thereby took him for his own use. This passage also contributes to shaping the Earl's coward character.

3.3 The Response of the Conflict Talks

In most conflict talks, since some inappropriate or sensitive topics are mentioned by one party and operated by the triggers, the prerequisite for conflict talks has been met. In this section, the author will focus on the response of conflict talks in the film from both direct and indirect aspects.

3.3.1 Direct response

Direct response can be regarded as a direct and obvious statement of one's attitude and viewpoint.

3.3.1.1 Negative response

The hearer's mode of speech is negative, which will hurt the speaker's face and self-esteem, thus causing the conflict.

Example (6):

The Spanish Ambassador: I see it is true that the Queen favours you above all others. But you have many enemies here. Is it not so?

Earl of Leicester: That is no concern of yours.

The Spanish Ambassador: It may be. If you would be prepared, in secret, to renounce heresy and embrace the true faith, then you might find many new and powerful friends and keep your Queen.

Earl of Leicester: <u>You are most mistaken, Monseigneur, if you think I might so easily be persuaded to act against my conscience, and my love.</u>

The Spanish Ambassador: My Lord, what will a man not do for love?

In example (6), Earl of Leicester used the typical direct negative response. One obvious sign of a negative response is the Denial. Under the inducement of the Duke, the Earl directly denied it, and the Duke seized his weakness immediately, for which his love for Elizabeth was so strong that he did not want to do anything bad to hurt her. This is the art of conversation, in which the Duke was able to gain

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the upper hand by deliberately provoking the other side--- the Earl. This also shows the Duke's cunning and intelligent character.

3.3.1.2 Irrelevant response

The hearer expresses his dissatisfaction to the speaker with irrelevant answers deliberately.

Example (7):

Lady in Waiting: That's Sir Christopher Hatton. There is Sir William Makepeace...

Queen Elizabeth: I do not see...I do not see why a woman need marry at all.

Example (7) is an interesting and typical one. We can even draw some conclusions from the rhetorical analysis of Puns. Here the Lady in Waiting introduced the guests to Elizabeth. But Elizabeth had no time to pay attention because Sir William Cecil's words threw her into a complex mental state of confusion, perplexity and even wrath. So she said, "I do not see... ". It's an irrelevant answer, but then she said, "I do not see why a woman need marry at all. " That is, from the very beginning, Elizabeth longed for freedom and equality. (In English, the word "see" means both to catch sight of something and to understand clearly.)

3.3.2 Indirect response

Through topic transferring and some other ways, the listener euphemistically expresses his opposition and disapproval.

3.3.2.1 Topic transferring response

The hearer deliberately changes the topic, thereby eliminating the speaker's negative emotions and ending the conflict.

Example (8):

Queen Elizabeth: If there is no uniformity of religious belief here then there can only be fragmentation. Disputes and quarrels. Surely, my Lords, it is better to have a single Church of England. A single Church of England! With a common prayer book. And... and a... And... a common purpose. I ask you to pass this Act of Uniformity not... not for myself but for my people who are my only care.

Lord in the House: Madam, by this Act, you force us to relinquish our allegiance to the Holy Father.

Queen Elizabeth: Hear, hear! How can I force you, Your Grace? I am a woman. I have no desire to make windows into men's souls. I simply ask, can any man, in truth, serve two masters and be faithful to both?

Lords in the House: Madam, this is heresy!

Queen Elizabeth: No, Your Grace, this is common sense. Which is a most English virtue.

Lord in the House: Your Majesty would improve all these matters if you would agree to marry.

Lords in the House: Aye. Marry, Madam.

Queen Elizabeth: Aye. But marry who, Your Grace? Will you give me some suggestion? For some say France, and others Spain, and, and some cannot abide foreigners at all. So I'm not sure how best to please you unless I married one of each.

The Earl: Now Your Majesty does make fun of the sanctity of marriage.

Queen Elizabeth: <u>I do not think you should lecture me on that, my Lord, since you yourself have been twice divorced. And are now upon your third wife!</u>

In example (8), we can clearly see that Elizabeth is gradually growing up and mastering the power of language, and gradually occupying the dominant position in the argument. Faced with the aggressiveness of the ministers in Parliament who were submissive to her seemingly and did not approve her actually, Elizabeth skillfully responded and thus avoided direct conflicts and internalized the irreconcilable conflicts. Firstly, in response to the minister's heckling, Elizabeth replied, it is you who have said that a woman cannot preside over state affairs, and now it is you who say that I have compelled you. Secondly, Elizabeth was also good at using questions to avoid conflicts. When a minister in Parliament thought that Elizabeth had committed the sin of disrespecting holy marriage, she did not make a strong argument immediately, but asked the minister, who had been divorced twice, how to explain the question of holy marriage.

All of these words can be regarded as the result of topic-transferring: by shifting the topic, the contradiction in the discourse conflict can be weakened effectively. Moreover, the third party's reaction to the shifting topic can be used to dominate the surrounding public opinion. Therefore, topic transferring response is most widely used in response to conflict talk.

4. Pragmatics Strategies for Relieving or Eliminating Conflict Talks

4.1 From the Perspective of Linguistic

One side of the conversation uses linguistic methods, such as topic transferring and third-party intervention, to alleviate and weaken conflicts. Topic transferring means one party switches or transfers to a different topic to support his own ideas, hence to solve the communication barriers. It should be noted that the difference between the topic transferring response and topic transferring in the principle-compensation is that whether the intention of this action is to solve or pacify the contradiction, and whether the result of this action is to achieve the goal of harmonious dialogue and mutual benefit. Third party intervention not only provides a new direction for the issue to move forward, but also can temporarily calm both sides down.

4.2 From the Perspective of Non-linguistic

In addition to the pragmatic strategies in linguistic forms, non-linguistic pragmatic strategies such as environment termination and one party withdrawal can also exert influences on conflict talks. Sometimes, the conflict can be terminated by the objective environment. In daily communication, making good use of the changes in the environment to avoid conflicts or strengthen the trigger tag can give full play to the communicative ability of language. As long as one is good at observation and flexible thinking, some "coincidence" can also become positive intention.

The second non-linguistic strategy is the withdrawal of one party. One party of the conflict talk does not want to continue to dispute, quit talking or automatically eject. In our daily life, if a conflict talk arises and one of the two parties wants to end this talk, this strategy can be adopted to compromise and

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can be a good "inhibitor" to the conflict dialogue.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the conflict talk in the lines in the historical biopic film Elizabeth, this paper uses the Speech Act Theory to deepen the understanding of conflict talk and the use of pragmatic strategies. And the main findings are as follows.

First of all, according to the occurring sequence of the conflict talks, the conflict talk is constructed by cause, trigger and response orderly from the perspective of SAT. (1) From the perspective of cause, they can be divided into improper themes performance and effect. (2) There are two types of trigger words: positive statement and blunt instruction. These two types of trigger words are bidirectional and the latter one can be regarded as the reverse proposition of the former. (3) As for the response part, from the perspective of the direct and indirect, the negative response in direct view is most frequently used in the realistic conflict talks whereas the irrelevant response is rather unusual; the topic-transferring in the indirect response is much more positive compared with the negative response, so it also appears in the later pragmatic rules.

Secondly, the author mainly introduces the breaking and compensating of the conversational principle. From the perspective of linguistics, topic transferring and the third party intervention are the most frequently occurs in our daily communication. The author deems that the environmental termination in the non-linguistic perspective can be artificially facilitated under the conditions of high degree of coordination between subjective and objective situation. One party's withdrawal is the most effective pragmatic strategy, because if one party voluntarily exits the conflict talk, the contradiction cannot be intensified anyway. However, it should be noted that the withdrawal of one party cannot really solve the contradiction, and can only play an "inhibitor" role in the conflict.

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