

Original Paper

Interpersonal Meaning Construction and Discourse Strategy Realization in Chinese Stand-Up Comedy

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Abstract

As a live verbal performance genre, stand-up comedy forges social ties and articulates cultural observations through humorous, back-and-forth exchange with audiences. Existing scholarship has largely focused on humor's cognitive underpinnings and cultural dimensions, but the linguistic mechanisms through which interpersonal meanings take shape in Chinese stand-up comedy remain largely unexamined from a systematic functional perspective. Grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics, this study analyzes four final routines from The King of Stand-Up Comedy (Season 1) via mixed-methods analysis, probing Mood, Modality and Appraisal across lexicogrammatical and discourse-semantic layers. Findings show that declaratives dominate narrative development, while interrogatives, imperatives, and exclamatives enhance interactional engagement. Modal choices and appraisal resources strategically balance stance and solidarity. These resources are organized into five discourse strategies which reduce social distance, enhance humor, and facilitate social critique.

Keywords

stand-up comedy, interpersonal meaning, discourse strategies

1. Introduction

Stand-up comedy, as an interactive form of verbal performance, draws its rhetorical force not just from punchline design, but also from the linguistic bonding with audiences. Recently, this kind of performance has gained increasing popularity in China. Its convergence of online and offline development indicates that stand-up comedy has moved beyond niche circles and become a new cultural form with broad audiences and substantial commercial value (Bu, 2026). Chinese stand-up comedy is not merely for entertainment; it has further developed into a public arena where performers share their personal experiences, comment on social issues, and construct a sense of shared identity

with audiences. Stand-up comedy naturally offers an important context for exploring how interpersonal meanings are created, conveyed, and negotiated in spoken discourse.

Here are roughly two focuses of previous studies of Chinese stand-up comedy. One is from a sociocultural perspective. Scholars have examined stand-up comedy as a form of emerging popular culture and public discourse, discussing on such issues as narrative change, identity construction, and cultural representation (Bu, 2026; Zhang, 2025). These kinds of studies suggest that stand-up performances are closely associated with our everyday experiences, youth-oriented cultural practices, and evolving social relationships. For instance, Zhou (2025) explored identity politics and class representation in stand-up performances, while Wang and Song (2021) examined how youth subcultural discourse is constructed in online stand-up programs. Others have turned attention to its broader social functions, showing how comedy may serve as a way of coping with feelings of alienation in everyday life (Lu & Luo, 2025) or questioning social stereotypes through disability-related humor (Zhao, 2023).

The other is from the linguistic and pragmatic perspective, with concentration on humor mechanisms, discourse strategies, and interpersonal negotiation. Zhou (2026), for instance, analyzed the use of puns in stand-up comedy and showed that homophonic expressions can enhance verbal creativity and contribute to humorous effects in oral interaction. Xu and Zhang (2025) further examined how comedians negotiate potentially offensive content and maintain audience engagement through narrative organization and linguistic choices. Self-deprecation, irony, and semantic reversal have been identified as important strategies for humor construction (Cao, 2023). Meanwhile, the cross-linguistic study (Huang, 2023) also emphasized the roles of cultural knowledge and the establishment of rapport with audiences in interpretation.

Apart from these valuable contributions, there are still several aspects of Chinese stand-up comedy discourse to be further explored. Existing linguistic research has focused on the mechanisms underlying humor production and its pragmatic effects, while the role of linguistic choices in shaping interpersonal relationships and negotiating social meanings has received relatively less attention. In addition, few studies have examined stand-up comedy in terms of how interpersonal resources are realized at both the lexicogrammatical and discourse-semantic levels. Hence, the present study draws on SFL and Appraisal Theory to explore how interpersonal meanings are constructed in Chinese stand-up comedy discourse.

Specifically, this study explores the following two questions:

- (1) How do comedians employ linguistic resources to construct interpersonal meanings in performance?
- (2) What discourse strategies are adopted by comedians to achieve both humorous and relational purposes?

By answering these questions, this study contributes theoretically by extending the application of SFL interpersonal systems to the underexplored genre of stand-up comedy and empirically by revealing how humor functions as a linguistic practice of stance-taking, audience alignment, and relationship negotiation in contemporary Chinese performance discourse.

Based on exploration of these two questions, this study seeks to enrich SFL-based discourse research by extending it to the relatively overlooked genre of stand-up comedy. It also provides some practical insights for performers to express their stances and establish connections in contemporary Chinese performance discourse.

2. Theoretical Framework

The analytical framework of this study is primarily grounded in the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), with further reference to appraisal Theory proposed by Martin and White (2005). SFL regards language as a meaning-making resource that realizes ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The interpersonal metafunction is concerned with the ways in which speakers establish relationships, convey attitudes, express evaluations, and position themselves in social interaction. Since stand-up comedy relies heavily on the dynamic relationship between performers and audiences, this perspective offers a useful means in this research.

Further, this study analyzes interpersonal meanings at two interconnected levels, that is, the lexicogrammatical and the discourse-semantic levels. The former one includes mood and modality. The latter is based on appraisal theory to examine how evaluative meanings and attitudes are developed beyond individual clauses.

2.1 Mood System

The mood system describes how speakers use grammatical choices to enact speech functions and manage exchanges between interlocutors (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). It mainly includes declaratives to provide information, interrogatives to request information, and imperatives to demand goods or services. Exclamative clauses and minor clauses are not the core mood system, but they are still analyzed for their role in emotional expression and interactive involvement.

In stand-up comedy, different mood choices bring up different feedback of audiences. Generally, declaratives allow comedians to construct narratives and present personal viewpoints. Interrogatives facilitate interaction and invite audience involvement. However, imperatives, exclamatives, and minor clauses enhance emotional intensity. Therefore, the mood system is selected to explore how comedians forge interactional relationships with their audiences.

2.2 Modality System

Modality is employed to show degrees of certainty, obligation, willingness, and commitment between positive and negative poles (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). SFL distinguishes two major types of

modality, that is, modalization and modulation. The former, including probability and usuality, is associated with propositions. By contrast, the latter, including obligation and inclination, relates to proposals. Both types can be further graded as high, median, or low, thus enabling speakers to adjust their commitment and interpersonal positioning.

Here, modality functions as an important resource for expressing attitudes and building relationships with audiences. It also allows comedians to present their views and position themselves and others in interaction. Therefore, this study examines modality resources in terms of type and value to explore how comedians use modality to construct interpersonal meanings.

2.3 Appraisal System

Appraisal theory extends the interpersonal dimension of SFL to the discourse-semantic level by examining how speakers evaluate experiences, negotiate viewpoints, and construct interpersonal positions. It consists of three subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation (Wang, 2001; Martin & White, 2005).

Attitude refers to evaluative meanings and includes affect, judgment and appreciation. Affect expresses emotional feelings, judgment evaluates people's behavior, and appreciation concerns the value of things or phenomena. Engagement is related to how speakers express their positions in relation to other viewpoints. It distinguishes between monoglossic resources, which present a single voice, and heteroglossic resources, which introduce or respond to different perspectives. Graduation describes how evaluation is adjusted in terms of force and focus, showing different degrees of intensity and precision in meaning.

In stand-up comedy, humor is closely related to evaluation, personal stance, and interaction with audiences. Hence, this study shows analysis based on the three subsystems of appraisal to examine how comedians create humorous effects and maintain interpersonal relationships in performance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The data collected in this study is from four final-round performances from season 1 of *The King of Stand-Up Comedy*. This is a stand-up competition program produced by iQiyi in 2024, which earned huge popularity and was representative in contemporary Chinese stand-up comedy. Specifically, the text for analysis comes from four individual performances given by Fu Hang, Xiao Lu, Hei Deng, and Liu Rencheng.

The four performances were transcribed manually from the official videos, with a total of 8,829 Chinese characters. There are respectively 2,748 characters from Fu Hang, 2,933 characters from Xiao Lu, 1,764 characters from Hei Deng, and 1,384 characters from Liu Rencheng. All texts were checked twice against the original recordings to ensure the accuracy of the data.

3.2 Research Procedures

A mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis with qualitative discourse analysis is employed here. Based on the theoretical framework mentioned above, the corpus was manually annotated according to mood, modality, and appraisal resources. The quantitative analysis focuses on the frequency and distribution of such resources across comedians' performances. The qualitative analysis presents out more details with representative examples.

4. Results and Discussion

This part gives a full interpretation on the findings under the two-level theoretical framework outlined above. Finally, it identifies five main discourse strategies. Representative examples are here used to illustrate.

4.1 Interpersonal Meaning Construction in Performances

4.1.1 Analysis in Terms of Mood

As a key lexicogrammatical resource for realizing speech functions, the mood system plays an important role in organizing interaction in stand-up performance. Based on the classification, this study identifies declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses as the main mood types. Exclamative and minor clauses are also included as supplementary categories to reflect the spoken and performative features of comedy discourse. Interrogative clauses are further divided into yes/no and wh- questions because they perform different interactive functions. Table 1 presents the distribution of the identified mood units.

Table 1. Distribution of Mood Types across Four Comedians

Mood	Liu Rencheng	Hei Deng	Xiao Lu	Fu Hang	Total
Core Mood Types					
1. declarative	140	152	277	291	860
2. yes/no interrogative	9	16	23	12	60
3. wh-interrogative	7	8	10	11	36
4. imperative	1	6	3	4	14
Supplementary Categories					
1. exclamative	0	1	9	3	13
2. minor clause	6	7	14	18	45
Total	163	190	336	339	1028

Quantitatively, declarative units represent 860 intonation units in the annotated corpus, accounting for 83.7% of the total. Such a high proportion is consistent with the monologic and narrative-oriented nature of Chinese televised stand-up performances (Feng & Dong, 2026). In SFL, declaratives are the

typical grammatical form used to realize information-giving functions. Compared with everyday conversations, where speakers usually exchange information through both giving and demanding moves, stand-up comedy mainly relies on the comedian's extended narration. This one-way speaking format helps explain the frequent use of declarative clauses in the data collected. Example (1) echoes with this pattern.

(1) ST: 我呢其实台下呀, 节目播出之后, 很多人给我发私信。

[pinyin]: *wǒ ne qí shí tái xià ya, jié mù bō chū zhī hòu, hěn duō rén gěi wǒ fā sī xìn.*

TT: Actually, after the show aired, lots of audience sent me private messages.

This extended declarative stretch constructs a personal anecdotal frame. Declarative narration in spoken performance can neutralize power imbalance between speaker and addressees. Fu Hang recounts authentic audience feedback as shared lived experience without imposing reply obligations, laying a neutral setup for subsequent humorous plot twists.

Interrogative constructions total 96 coded instances (9.3%), split into 60 yes/no tag interrogatives and 36 wh-interrogatives. Aligning with foundational rhetorical discourse research (Ilie, 1994) and Mandarin tag question corpus findings (Lu & Shi, 2024), many interrogative tokens in this dataset operate for rhetorical purposes rather than genuine information retrieval.

(2) ST: 你有二百三吗? 对吧?

[pinyin]: *nǐ yǒu èr bǎi sān ma? duì ba?*

TT: Do you weigh 230 jin, right?

Grammatically, Liu Rencheng adopts the tag 对吧 (*duì ba*, "right") in example (2) as a mild rhetorical device. Instead of making a direct judgment, he puts his observation into an interrogative structure with this tag. Superficially, the tag generates a sense of equal conversation by inviting the listener to respond, yet the speaker retains full control of the dialogue. This interrogative form carries little intent to collect factual information; it only seeks the listener's recognition of the speaker's viewpoint.

Imperative clauses occur at a notably low volume of only 14 instances (1.4%) within the corpus. The sparse presence of direct directives suggests overt commanding speech acts are relatively uncommon in televised stand-up discourse. Unmitigated imperatives risk constructing asymmetric speaker-audience power hierarchies. Unlike instructional or coaching talk saturated with direct imperatives, comedians in this sample guide audience imagination indirectly via narration and rhetorical questioning instead of issuing explicit demands.

(3) ST: 想象一下这种感受。

[pinyin]: *xiǎngxiàng yíxià zhèzhǒng gǎnshòu*

TT: Imagine this kind of feeling.

Although this sentence is grammatically classified as an imperative, it does not express a strong command. Instead, it works as an imaginative invitation that encourages the audience to share the

comedian's perspective. Through the humorous performance context, the imperative form reduces the sense of power difference between the comedian and the audience.

Among the supplementary mood categories, minor clauses (45 instances) occur much more frequently than exclamative clauses (13 instances). Minor clauses mainly appear as standalone vocatives, greetings, and conversational fillers. Although they do not provide propositional information, these forms help create a more casual atmosphere and reduce the distance between comedians and audiences. The low frequency of exclamative clauses also suggests that emotional emphasis and punchline effects are not usually achieved through mood structures alone. Instead, such meanings are more often realized through graduation resources at the appraisal system.

The four performers show different distribution patterns in terms of mood. Liu Rencheng's performance contains the highest proportion of declarative clauses (85.9%), which is related to his narrative-focused and observation-based style with fewer direct interactions with the audience. Fu Hang uses the largest number of minor vocative clauses (18 instances), showing a more conversational style in which he frequently addresses and involves the audience. Xiao Lu and Hei Deng present a middle pattern, combining declarative storytelling with rhetorical questions to maintain interaction with audiences throughout their performances.

4.1.2 Analysis in Terms of Modality

Modality calibrates the speaker's commitment to propositions and proposals. The revised dataset of all explicit modal markers is segmented by modalization/modulation and three value tiers, as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Modality Types and Value Levels across Performers

Modality	Sub type	Value Level	Liu Rencheng	Hei Deng	Xiao Lu	Fu Hang	Total
Modalization	Probability	High	2	2	2	1	7
		Median	4	27	6	18	55
		Low	0	2	2	0	4
	Usuality	High	5	3	0	8	16
		Median	1	2	2	2	7
		Low	0	0	0	0	0
Modulation	Obligation	High	3	7	6	2	18
		Median	0	0	2	6	8
		Low	0	0	3	0	3
	Inclination	High	1	0	0	0	1
		Median	4	1	4	8	17
		Low	0	0	0	1	1
Total			20	44	27	46	137

Across the full corpus, 137 explicit modal realizations are annotated, with modalization (n=89, 65.0%) vastly outnumbering modulation (n=48, 35.0%). This statistical skew mirrors the declarative-dominant mood pattern: stand-up's core function is recounting experiential propositions about life events, so markers of likelihood and habit naturally take precedence over markers of duty or personal volition.

(4) ST: 当然最懵的不是农民，也不是马。

[pinyin]: *dāngrán zuì měng de búshì nóngmín, yě búshì mǎ.*

TT: Naturally, the most confused one was neither the farmer nor the horse.

The median modal 当然 (*dāngrán*, “naturally”) in example (4) expresses moderate subjective certainty without absolute assertion. In humorous performance, probability modals with median values can help build rapport with audiences. They present personal views as commonly accepted ideas instead of strong personal claims, which shortens the distance between comedians and audiences.

Median probability is the most frequent modal category here, with 55 instances, accounting for 40.1% of all modal expressions. This notable distribution suggests a common interpersonal tendency. High-value modals may make performers appear too certain or forceful, while low-value modals may weaken the credibility of personal stories to some extent. Hence, median-value modals allow

comedians to share their experiences in a more balanced way, which makes them sound relatable without imposing strong claims on the audience.

Within modalization, probability markers (66 instances) are much more frequent than usuality markers (23 instances), suggesting that comedians more often express degrees of certainty rather than describe habitual patterns. However, high-value usuality markers still play an important role in comedy discourse. They are often used to generalize everyday experiences and create shared impressions or stereotypes that can connect with young audiences.

(5) ST: 永远要分一二三本，人还分三六九等。

[pinyin]: *yǒngyuǎn yào fēn yī èr sān běn, rén hái fēn sān liù jiǔ děng.*

TT: There will always be rankings among universities, and people are still divided into different levels.

The high-usuality marker 永远 (*yǒngyuǎn*, ‘always’) in example (5) amplifies generalized social commentary. Such extreme habitual framing turns individual frustration into collective shared experience, strengthening emotional resonance among young viewers through universalized life narratives.

Qualitative scrutiny of high-value obligation modals (18 instances) reveals such items predominantly occur within heteroglossic quoted dialogue, rather than the comedian’s own direct assertions. Comedians deploy high obligation markers to reproduce external voices such as social norms, family demands and workplace pressure; they rarely adopt high-modulation stance to issue direct demands toward spectators, which helps avoid confrontational, unequal tenor in performance.

(6) ST: 不应该让我的动物工作。

[pinyin]: *bù yīnggāi ràng wǒ de dòngwù gōngzuò.*

TT: One ought not to make animals work.

The high-obligation modal 应该 (*yīnggāi*, ‘ought to’) appears in the quoted speech of an animal rights activist, instead of the comedian’s own standpoint. By attaching rigid normative language to external characters via heteroglossia, the speaker avoids assuming a prescriptive, authoritative persona while satirizing rigid social standards.

Turning to performer-specific modal profiles, each comedian’s modal inventory closely corresponds to their routine’s thematic focus and delivery style. Hei Deng’s set contains the highest count of median probability markers (27 instances), which aligns with his reflective, explanatory narrative built around unique lived experiences of visual impairment (Zhao, 2023).

(7) ST: 我感觉我现在就站在那根线上。

[pinyin]: *wǒ gǎnjué wǒ xiànzài jiù zhànzài nàgēn xiàn shàng.*

TT: I feel like I stand right on that dividing line now.

The median probability verb phrase 感觉 (*gǎnjué*, feel like) softens definitive claims about his dual identity between sighted and visually impaired groups. Consistent with his mild, exploratory delivery, frequent median modals sustain a gentle, conversational stance without overassertion.

Fu Hang registers the largest total volume of modal items (46 instances) and the maximum number of high-usuality markers (8), matching narratives centered on long-term personal hardship and persistent ambition. Liu Rencheng's text contains only 20 modal realizations, a sparse inventory consistent with his dry, understated observational delivery that prioritizes plain factual narration rather than overt stance calibration.

4.1.3 Analysis in Terms of Appraisal System

Shifting from clause-level grammar to discourse-semantic evaluation, Table 3 presents the updated full count of all appraisal spans annotated across the four performances, with proportional weights recalculated against a total of 1432 appraisal units.

Table 3. Distribution of Appraisal System Resources across Performers

Appraisal System	Subtype	Liu Rencheng	Hei Deng Xiao Lu	Fu Hang	Total	Proportion	
Attitude	Affect	14	10	21	47	92	6.4%
	Judgment	5	2	31	21	59	4.1%
	Appreciation	22	10	17	26	75	5.2%
Engagement	Monogloss	75	76	179	167	497	34.7%
	Heterogloss	82	107	143	154	486	33.9%
Graduation	Force	45	45	47	77	214	14.9%
	Focus	2	3	1	3	9	0.6%
Total		245	253	439	495	1432	100.0%

The most notable finding is the similar distribution of monogloss (497, 34.7%) and heterogloss (486, 33.9%) resources. This result challenges the view that stand-up monologue is mainly a single-voiced form of discourse. In fact, the data suggest that stand-up performances show strong dialogic features at the discourse-semantic level. Comedians often introduce other voices, including audience responses, family conversations, and social stereotypes, to create a sense of interaction. Heterogloss allows comedians to introduce different viewpoints and strengthen audience involvement. Monogloss helps present direct and unexpected claims, especially in punchline delivery. The alternation between heterogloss in the setup and monogloss in the punchline is an important feature of stand-up discourse.

(8) ST: 很多人就说, 我上大专了, 我该怎么办? 当然最懵的不是农民, 也不是马。

[pinyin]: *hěnduō rén jiù shuō, wǒ shàng dàzhuān le, wǒ gāi zěnmě bàn? ... dāngrán zuì měng de búshì nóngmín, yě búshì mǎ.*

TT: Many people said, “I went to a junior college, what should I do?” ... Naturally, the most confused one was neither the farmer nor the horse.

In example (8), the initial heteroglossic clause presents actual audience comments, thus expanding the dialogic space and creating a sense of shared involvement. While the following monoglossic clause removes alternative viewpoints and strengthens the effect of the punchline. This movement between dialogic expansion and contraction can be found repeatedly in the performances of all four comedians. When examining the attitude subsystem, affect (92 instances, 6.4%) and appreciation (75 instances, 5.2%) appear more frequently than judgment (59 instances, 4.1%). This result reflects a consistent relational logic observable across the present corpus. Centering shared emotional responses and situational evaluation rather than moral assessment of individual traits can be effective to reduce the risk of alienating audiences who have divergent value frameworks. Most judgment items captured in coding feature self-critical evaluation directed at the comedian’s own traits, which lays the lexical foundation for the self-deprecating discourse strategy elaborated in Section 4.2.2.

(9) ST: 我有点太胖了。

[pinyin]: *wǒ yǒudiǎn tài pàng le.*

TT: I am a little too heavy.

This unit encodes self-targeted negative Judgment without external moral criticism. By confining evaluative blame to himself, the comedian softens interpersonal tension and shortens social distance, a core rapport-building mechanism in Chinese stand-up discourse (Cao, 2023).

Graduation resources make up 15.5% of all appraisal units, with force (214, 14.9%) vastly outstripping focus (9, 0.6%). This heavy dominance of Force confirms that lexico-semantic intensification carries primary responsibility for building punchline intensity, compensating for the scarcity of exclamative syntactic structures noted in the mood analysis. Minimal Focus usage signals that stand-up discourse prioritizes exaggerated, loose evaluative framing rather than precise categorical delineation.

(10) ST: 非常开心，非常和谐的画面。

[pinyin]: *fēicháng kāixīn, fēicháng héxié de huàmiàn.*

TT: A very joyful, very harmonious scene.

The repeated graduation marker 非常 (*fēicháng*, “very”) increases the intensity of positive affect and appreciation. Since exclamative clauses are uncommon in this corpus, force becomes an important resource for creating emotional emphasis before punchlines.

Differences in appraisal density can be found among the four performers. Fu Hang uses the largest number of appraisal resources (495 instances) and has the highest frequency of affect (47 instances), which is consistent with his emotional and expressive performance style. Xiao Lu shows the highest number of judgment resources (31 instances), reflecting her use of satire to comment on gender issues and social behaviors. By contrast, Liu Rencheng and Hei Deng show lower overall appraisal density, which corresponds to their more restrained and observational performance styles.

4.2 Discourse Strategies for Interpersonal Meaning Construction

The quantitative findings of mood, modality, and appraisal resources are not separate from each other. Instead, these resources work together to form five discourse strategies that combine lexicogrammatical and discourse-semantic features to manage relationships between comedians and audiences. Table 4 presents the main linguistic features of each strategy.

Table 4. Discourse Strategies and Their Corresponding Linguistic Realizations

Discourse Strategy	Mood	Modality	Appraisal
Interactive Strategy	Interrogative, vocative, declarative	Median probability/usuality	Heterogloss; positive/negative Affect
Self-deprecating Strategy	Declarative, exclamative (supplementary)	Low to median probability/inclination	Negative self-directed Judgment; mild Affect
Exaggeration Strategy	Declarative, exclamative (supplementary)	Median to high probability	High-force Affect; extreme Appreciation
Reversal Strategy	Declarative, interrogative	Median probability	Incongruous Appreciation; multi-voice Engagement
Mocking Strategy	Declarative, exclamative (supplementary)	Median to high certainty	Ironized Judgment; appreciative critique

4.2.1 Interactive Strategy

The interactive strategy is systematically underpinned by cross-stratum linguistic resources quantified in Table 1 and Table 3. At the lexicogrammatical level, vocative minor clauses and various interrogative structures constitute its core mood resources; at the discourse-semantic stratum, heteroglossic engagement serves as the primary evaluative carrier. Comedians embed audience feedback and ordinary daily dialogue into monologues to construct pseudo-interactive space and narrow the psychological gap between the stage and spectators.

(11) ST: 怎么去你的大学?

[pinyin]: zěnmē qù nǐde dàxué?

TT: How do I get to your university?

This wh-interrogative belongs to typical interactive rhetoric. It quotes a fan's message via heteroglossic framing, simulating real audience consultation and triggering shared conversational atmosphere, which perfectly reflects the collocation of interrogative mood and multi-voiced appraisal core to this strategy.

4.2.2 Self-deprecating Strategy

This strategy rests on two consistent resource patterns extracted from Tables 2 and 3. Lexicogrammatically, it adopts low and median probability/inclination modals to weaken assertive force; evaluatively, it centres self-oriented negative judgment rather than criticizing outsiders. Restricting negative evaluation to the comedian himself relieves interpersonal friction and arouses audience empathy, as illustrated in example (9).

4.2.3 Exaggeration Strategy

This strategy's linguistic foundation lies in abundant force graduation items (Table 3) matched with

medium-to-high probability modals (Table 2). Lexical intensifiers amplify affective and appreciative meaning to form comedic incongruity, making up for the scarcity of exclamative clauses observed in mood analysis.

(12) ST: 街上的人都完全格格不入。

[pinyin]: *jiēshàng de rén dōu wánquán gégébùrù.*

TT: All people on the street feel totally out of place.

The graduation marker 完全 (*wánquán*, ‘totally’) amplifies negative appreciation, adopting median probability modality to generalize personal experience into extreme hyperbole, which is the core linguistic device of exaggeration.

4.2.4 Reversal Strategy

The dialogic core of the reversal strategy grows directly out of the near-balance between monogloss and heterogloss documented in Table 3. Heteroglossic narration lays conventional cognitive expectations, while subsequent monogloss punchlines break preset logic; median modals maintain mild plausibility throughout setup segments before delivering subversive payoffs.

(13) ST: 盲人乐园能看见烟花升到最高点吗？没有人能在乐园获得永恒爱情。

[pinyin]: *máng rén lè yuán néng kàn jiàn yān huā shēng dào zuì gāo diǎn ma? méi yǒu rén néng zài lè yuán huò dé yǒng héng ài qíng.*

TT: Can a paradise for the blind ever see fireworks at their highest point? No one can find eternal love in paradise.

The wh-interrogative heteroglossic setup builds romantic anticipation, and the subsequent monoglossic statement completely subverts the audience’s expectation, presenting the classic setup-punchline reversal structure.

4.2.5 Mocking Strategy

The mocking strategy deploys restrained evaluative collocations dominated by appreciation and mild ironized judgment rather than harsh personal moral criticism. It pairs median-high certainty modals to satirise unreasonable social norms while sustaining harmonious onstage tenor. This balance between comic provocation and audience pleasure is consistent with the narrative equilibrium described by Xu and Zhang (2025).

(14) ST: 打印店老板只是算错一点，却把我们当坑蒙拐骗的人。

[pinyin]: *dǎ yìn diàn lǎo bǎn zhǐ shì suàn cuò yì diǎn, què bǎ wǒ men dāng kēng méng guǎi piàn de rén.*

TT: The print shop owner only miscalculated a little, yet he treated us as swindlers.

The declarative clause with median-high modality carries ironic judgment toward inappropriate commercial behaviour; it mocks unreasonable social trivialities without attacking specific individuals, matching the linguistic features of mocking discourse.

Taken together, the five discourse strategies constitute a unified interpersonal toolkit for stand-up

performers. Every comedic segment represents a deliberate orchestration of the lexicogrammatical and discourse-semantic resources quantified in the revised tables, proving that comedic effect is not spontaneous improvisation but rule-governed linguistic design oriented toward audience solidarity.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on a reannotated corpus, this study probes interpersonal meaning construction in four Chinese stand-up routines via SFL and appraisal theory. Two key findings surface from the analysis. For one, interpersonal resources follow consistent stratified patterns: declaratives dominate narration with scarce imperatives and exclamation marks to maintain equal performer-audience tenor; median modals prevail to balance clear stance and audience rapport; monogloss and heterogloss appear in near parity to shape joke rhythm, with affect and appreciation favored over moral judgment to lessen interpersonal friction. For another, five coordinated discourse strategies orchestrate these resources to serve rapport-building, hierarchy reduction, comedic amplification, surprise creation and mild social critique. Theoretically, the study extends SFL's stratified framework to understudied televised Chinese stand-up. Empirically, it offers quantified annotated evidence for Mandarin humorous discourse research. Restricted to a single competition sample and verbal language alone, future work may expand the corpus and explore multimodal or cross-linguistic perspectives.

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