

Pragmatic Functions of Anti-Pre-Emptive Use of Person Deixis and Pre-Emptive Use of Social Deixis in Chinese

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Pre-emptive use of deixis involves speakers' psychological tendency towards using deixis to pre-empt the non-deictic ways of referring to the relevant person, time or place, while anti-pre-emptive use of deixis refers to the phenomenon of non-deictic words substituting deixis. Both the pre-emptive use and anti-pre-emptive use of deixis produce significant pragmatic functions in language communication. This paper discusses the anti-pre-emptive use of person deixis and the pre-emptive use of social deixis in Chinese and concludes that their pragmatic functions are of the same nature.

Keywords: Pre-Emptive Use; Anti-Pre-Emptive Use; Person Deixis; Social Deixis; Pragmatic Function

Introduction

The pre-emptive use of deixis, as one of the derivational usages of deixis, has been put forward by Levinson to explain linguistic phenomena. Noting that the deictic words yesterday, today and tomorrow pre-empt the calendrical or absolute ways of referring to the relevant days, Levinson claims that the pre-emptive nature of pure deictic words is probably a general tendency (Levinson, 2001). He also maintains that it takes special conventions to make it appropriate for a speaker to refer to himself by name, and it would be strange to say Do it at 10:36 instead of Do it now, when now is 10:36 (Levinson, 2001). Such special conventions referred by him, or constrictive factors to pre-emptive use raised by later scholars are essentially relevant to studies upon what is called anti-pre-emptive use of deixis.

Levinson (2001), following Lyons and Fillmore, divides deixis into five types—person deixis, time deixis, space deixis, discourse deixis and social deixis. Analysis on the pre-emptive use of deixis or the anti-pre-emptive use of deixis has been fruitful. Pragmatic functions of the anti-pre-emptive use of deixis are also accounted. However, pragmatic functions of pre-emptive use of deixis are seldom referred to and comparison between pragmatic functions of these two usages is even rarer. Most of the existing researches cover a general account of the five types of deixis in this area, while this paper intends to concentrate on the pre-emptive use of social deixis and anti-pre-emptive use of person deixis, and concludes that the pragmatic functions of the former and the latter are of the same nature.

There are diverse studies upon Chinese deixis and deixis in general as well as their pragmatic functions in language usages. However, they lack a systematic study upon deixis analysis. The study specifies on person deixis and social deixis and attempts to dive into the study of person deixis and social deixis

in Chinese. The comparison made on the nature of these two deixis helps to contribute thorough understanding on this matter and may promote to suggest a more reasonable and economical framework to incorporate deixis.

Deixis and Its Pre-Emptive and Anti-Pre-Emptive Usages

Deixis is directly concerned with the relationship between the structure of a language and the context in which the language is used. It can be defined as the phenomenon whereby features of context of utterance are encoded by lexical and/or grammatical means in a language (Huang, 2009). Deixis is universal in languages and exerts great influence in everyday communication.

As early as in 1940s, Russell has noticed the priority of deixis over non-deictic words in natural language, and set up an example to explain this phenomenon. He supposed he was lost with his friend in the dark and they could not see each other, so the friend asked: "where are you?" He would respond: "I'm here", instead of answering in an exact and scientific way like "Russell is at latitude 53.16°N and longitude 4.03°W" (Liu Hong, cited in Tang, 2010). Fillmore (1975, cited in Levinson, 2001) points out that the pre-emptive uses of deixis can eliminate the ambiguity in some expressions. Afterwards, Levinson coined the term in 1983 when he was studying the projection nature of time deixis.

Zhang (1994) makes researches on the pre-emptive use of deixis and puts forward another term anti-emptive usage to refer to the phenomenon of non-deictic words substituting deixis. Some notice that deictic words have different degrees of priority. Others find that particular context and contextual information are decisive factors to anti-pre-emptive use for the sake of clarity. Once participants are derived of shared background, anti-pre-emptive use of deixis is likely to appear, for

example in letters, telephones, telegram, fax, and email (Hu, 2006). Tang (2010) states that mechanism of pre-emptive use of deixis are often accounted for in accessibility theory and the egocentric nature of deixis, which sheds light on why deictic words pre-empt non-deictic words.

Although context is one of the major factors causing anti-pre-emptive uses of deixis to guard against ambiguity, the anti-pre-emptiveness also appears when the context is unequivocal and the use of deictic words would not result in ambiguity. In such cases, it is the speaker's pragmatic intention that functions as another important factor. As the speaker attempts to get his pragmatic intention across, the anti-pre-emptive use of deixis shows their pragmatic functions. Researches have shown that there are mainly three pragmatic functions in using anti-pre-emptive uses, that is, to alter psychological distance, to convey special emotions, and to erase ambiguity (Wei, 2008; Xu, 2007; Gu, 2006; Zhu, 2003).

Most anti-pre-emptive uses of person deixis embody speaker's pragmatic intention of regulating the interpersonal relation. Through different non-deictic addressing forms, the speaker implicitly draws close his psychological distance with the addressee to show closeness, love or care (Tang, 2010). Furthermore, the anti-pre-emptive usage regulates personal relation, not to draw each other close but keep a distance so as to show respect, superiority or indirect reminding (Tang, 2010). In addition, it also conveys complicated emotional overtones, such as modesty, conceit, self-esteem, self-mockery or joking.

Pragmatic Functions of Anti-Pre-Emptive Use of Person Deixis

Person deixis is concerned with the identification of the interlocutors or participant-roles in a speech event. It is commonly expressed by 1) the traditional grammatical category of person, as reflected in personal pronouns and if relevant, their associated predicate agreements, and 2) vocatives, which can be encoded in kinship terms, titles, and proper names, and in combinations of these (Huang, 2009: p. 136). Levinson (2001) maintains that person deixis concerns the encoding of the role participants in the speech event in which the utterance in question is delivered, while He (1988) raises, in a similar term, that they are expressions which necessarily refer to participant roles in the speech event.

In general, the first person is usually used to refer to the speaker(s); the second person is used to refer to the addressee(s). In such communication, participants pre-empt to use person deixis. However, there are certain circumstances where anti-pre-emptive use of person deixis overrides. As in scientific journals, the third person tone pre-empts for compactness, objectivity, and accuracy. When talking on a phone, pronominal nouns pre-empt the first person deixis.

In the case of face-to-face interaction, the anti-pre-emptive use of person deixis is more complex. To begin with, the first type is that first person plural pronouns pre-empts second person pronouns, which are often appeared in classroom communication. A teacher may say "what are we going to have the English test?" to the students. Here "we" is used as we-exclusive-of-addressee and is an anti-pre-emptive usage, to shorten psychological distance with the students to show closeness, love or care. The second type is first plural pronouns pre-empt first single pronouns to show modesty and politeness. Take the following Chinese sentence for example. "咱们是门外汉, 不

会拉那玩意儿。” Here the first plural pronoun "咱们" replaces the first single pronoun "我". The speaker tries to shorten their psychological distance and also show affection. Another case in point is "we"—usage in academic papers.

The third type is to replace the second person deixis with a third person nouns or noun phrases. The anti-pre-emptive use conveys complicated emotional overtones, such as irony and reproach. For example, a wife who is busy preparing dinner in the kitchen asks her husband "Would his highness likes some coffee?" Another example is "somebody didn't clean up after himself". It shows the speaker's pragmatic intention of reminding or reproaching.

Another type is to replace the first person deixis with summons/calls or teknonymous terms. It may serve to regulate personal relation, not to draw each other close but keep a distance so as to show respect, superiority or indirect reminding, or show modesty, conceit, self-esteem, self-mockery or joking. For example, instead of saying "这是我的决定", "这是董事长的决定" is preferred. It is intended to show the speaker's authority, which contains a pragmatic intention of ordering others to carry out decisions. In comparison, the reply using "老庄" to refer to himself shows self-mockery. "老庄这件衣服挺不错的嘛? 哪里, 三十多块钱, 老庄能穿什么好衣服?" When it comes to the anti-pre-empting of teknonymous terms, the usage may indicate intimacy or show affection to the addressee. Instead of saying "I will buy a teddy bear for my little baby", "dad will buy a teddy bear for my little baby" is preferred.

Pragmatic Functions of Pre-Emptive Use of Social Deixis

According to Levinson (2001), social deixis concerns encoding the social identities of participants, or the social relationship between them, or between one of them and persons and entities referred to. Huang (2009) points out that the information encoded in social deixis may include social class, kin relationship, age, sex, profession, and ethnic group. Defined thus, social deixis is particularly closely associated with person deixis. He also suggests that there are scholars who argue that person deixis cannot be studied independently of social deixis (Huang, 2009).

There are two basic kinds of socially deictic information that seem to be encoded in languages around the world: relational and absolute (Levinson, 2001: p. 90). The relational social deixis are embodied in honorifics among speaker, referent, bystander and setting. Relational social deixis is deictic reference to a social relationship between the speaker and an addressee, bystander, or other referent in the extra-linguistic context. Therefore, non-deictic nouns pre-empt person deixis in order to show their social relationship and social status. There are several types of pre-emptive social deixis in use.

The first type is polite nouns. It is to use, for example, "您" in place of "你". When a teacher says to his students, "你就听老师的吧", he reinforces their teacher-student relationship. In embodying this relationship, the speaker implicitly draws close his psychological distance with the addressee to show closeness, love or care (Tang, 2010). The second is naming forms and titles. Forms of names and titles are often used to indicate the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer. The pre-emptive use of social deixis in naming forms and titles is to address the person in conversation by forms such as Sir John Smith, Mr. Smith, or Prof. Smith. The pragmatic function of

this addressing is to show respect and reverence to the addressee. In the same vein, the Chinese addressing such as “先生”, “女士”, “老师” as well as “部长”, “主任”, and “处长” are for the same function, which regulates personal relation, not to draw each other close but keep a distance so as to show respect, superiority. The third type of pre-emptive use of social deixis is embodied in Chinese honorific terms and self-abasing expressions (Wang, 2003), which is to show modesty, or to regulate personal relation, not to draw each other close but keep a distance so as to show respect, superiority. The last embodiment is in teknonymy. The pre-emptive use of social deixis is to use teknonymous terms to replace first person pronoun like I. The speaker intends to draw close his psychological distance with the addressee to show closeness, love or care (Liu, 2006).

What needs to point out that if deixis pre-empts non-deictic nouns in social deixis, the social relationship cannot be effectively shown, and thus the anti-pre-emptive use of social deixis is rare.

Conclusion

Anti-pre-emptive use of person deixis has been shown in formal style, special context and face-to-face interaction. In face-to-face interaction, first person plural pronouns pre-empt second person pronouns. The speaker implicitly draws close his psychological distance with them to show closeness, love or care. Also the first plural pronouns pre-empt the first single pronouns, showing modesty and politeness. It shortens their psychological distance, and also shows their mutual connection. Furthermore, the third person nouns or noun phrases pre-empt the second person deixis, which may show authority. In addition, summons/calls or teknonymous terms pre-empt the first person deixis. The former may show respect, superiority, or modesty, conceit, self-esteem, self-mockery or joking, while the latter may indicate intimacy or show affection to the addressee.

In comparison, the pre-emptive use of social deixis is demonstrated as follows. Polite nouns and naming forms and titles show social relationship and social status. In embodying this relationship, the speaker regulates personal relation, not to draw each other close but keep a distance so as to show respect, superiority. Honorific terms and self-abasing expression are also used to symbolize personal relation, similar to that of polite nouns and naming forms and titles though they are different kinds of honorifics. By using teknonymous terms to replace first person pronoun like I, the speaker intends to draw close his psychological distance with the addressee to show closeness, love or care.

Therefore, we can conclude that pragmatic functions of

anti-pre-emptive use of person deixis and that of pre-emptive use of social deixis are of the same nature (Liu, 2006). There are even researches showing the necessity of cancelling the category of social deixis on the grounds that almost all of its linguistic facts can be fully covered under dynamic investigation of the category of person deixis and that these linguistic facts are reflections of person deixis in interpersonal linguistic activities (Chen, 1994).

By analyzing the anti-pre-emptive use of person deixis and pre-emptive use of social deixis, we can not only conclude that their pragmatic functions are the same, but also attempt to establish a more systematic framework of deixis study. Whether to merge social deixis and person deixis under economy principle is a subject worthy of study. This paper specifically focuses on person deixis and social deixis from the phenomena of anti-pre-emptive use and pre-emptive use and discusses their pragmatic functions in referring from the perspective of psychological distance and pragmatic intention. It serves as a reminder for future study that different deixis are closely related and pragmatic functions of deixis can also bear resemblance to each other.

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