Study on the Causes of Verbal Humor in Chinese Rock and Roast from the Perspective of Construal Theory

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Abstract

From the perspective of construal theory, based on the four-dimensional framework of scope and background, perspective, salience and specificity proposed by Wang Yin, this paper interprets the causes behind verbal humor in the real roasters' performance of the Chinese Rock and Roast. This study confirms the explanatory power of construal theory to verbal humor and proves that salience is the core of the five elements of construal theory.

Keywords

Construal theory; Chinese Rock and Roast; Verbal humor.

1. Introduction

In recent years, studies on the causes of verbal humor based on different schools of linguistic theories are in full swing. Previous studies are mainly based on pragmatic adaptation theory, cooperative principle, relevance theory and conceptual integration, conceptual metonymy and frame semantics in cognitive linguistics. Based on the construal theory, which is the core concept of cognitive grammar, this paper aims to interpret the causes of verbal humor in Chinese Rock and Roast from four dimensions of construal theory proposed by Wang Yin [1] by selecting the jokes of popular roasters in Chinese Rock and Roast as the real corpus, so as to confirm the perfect explanatory power of construal theory on verbal humor.

2. Theoretical Foundation

As one of the core concept of cognitive grammar, construal theory aims to explain that people have different forms of expression in language when dealing with the same event, which is completely consistent with the core principle of cognitive linguistics: "reality-cognition-language" [2]. Langacker [3, 4] gave a detailed explanation of the construal theory from five aspects, namely specificity, background, scope, perspective, and salience. Among them, prominence is the most basic and core part, and the other four aspects can be derived from salience. The construal theory shows a strong explanatory power for language phenomena such as meaning and part of speech. The author thinks that construal theory still has perfect explanatory power to verbal humor.

3. Interpretation on Verbal Humor Based on Construal Theory

Based on Wang Yin's four-dimensional theoretical framework of cognitive construal theory, this paper interprets the verbal humor of popular roasters-He Guangzhi and Xu Zhisheng's funny paragraphs from the perspectives of scope and background, perspective, salience and specificity, and then analyzes the causes of verbal humor.

3.1. Scope and Background

"Scope refers to the relevant experience and activated conceptual domain configuration involved in language expressions. Understanding the meaning or structure of one expression requires relevant experience and requires the meaning or structure of another or more expressions which serve as the background." Rock and Roast performances often present differences between actors and viewers in the scope and background knowledge activated by the same thing, resulting in a collision of thoughts which makes audience laughing.

He Guangzhi's performance: Shandong girls are tall and gentle; Sichuan girls are beautiful and lively. Northeast girls are straightforward, humorous. Southern girls are lovely, elegant. By contrast, Shanghai girls have more prominent advantages: they have Shanghai household registration.

He Guangzhi's Performance: In order to make myself a high-quality man, I will dress up and make up myself every day. Before I go out, I see myself who has washed face by facial cleanser in front of the mirror, and then smell the clothes that smell the fragrance of the laundry detergent. I remind myself that I can no longer be excessively dressed, or it will appear to be too gorgeous for me.

Xu Zhisheng's performance: I have received praise from my fans lately, and they praised me for my ugly face.

The humor in the first paragraph is that He Guangzhi provides a common background when introducing the characteristics of girls in different regions: appearance characteristics or personalities. Then this guides the audience to activate the scope that we often use to introduce the characteristics of girls, and then when introducing Shanghai girls, activates and highlights the scope and background that Shanghai girls have Shanghai household registration (Shanghai's ultra-high housing prices), which makes the previously involved scopes of introducing girls in different regions conflict with those of Shanghai girls, resulting in unexpected laughter and verbal humor.

In the second paragraph He Guangzhi also first activates the audience's scopes over the usual well-dressed make-up, and then turns around to say that his best dress-up is to wash his face with facial cleansers and wash his clothes with laundry detergent, which is quite different from the audience's cognitive domain about make-up and thus contributes to good humor.

In the third paragraph, Xu Zhisheng's joke also follows the same track. He first describes that he has received praise, activating the audience's cognition of normal praise, and then explains that audience praise him for he is ugly. As a consequence, ugliness contradicts the audience's cognitive domain of praise, thus forming an ideal humor effect.

3.2. Perspective

Perspective refers to the perspective of people describing things, involving the relative relationship between observers and things. The perspective of human observation may directly affect the understanding and language expression of things. Different perspectives will produce different cognitive reference points. Therefore, the cognition of things with different reference points will produce different cognitive results. At the same time, there will be different salience and presentations, which are manifested in different language expressions. The roasters in the Rock and Roast often change their perspectives to present things, so as to achieve different language expressions and achieve humorous effects.

He Guangzhi: when I have my hair cut, there is often such a situation when in the first two minutes, I had a friendly communication with the barber on my new haircut, and then he began to cut my hairs,but gradually we were silent. Finally I stared at my hairstyle in the mirror in silence, meanwhile he stared at his scissors in silence, but the same words occurred to our minds: "I am also responsible for this terrible hairstyle."

Xu Zhisheng: My appearance always makes other people feel that I have lead a miserable life. I went to the convenience store to buy toothbrush the other day, and I began to select a suitable one there. Suddenly, the boss came up to point out that this was the cheapest, and I wondered what this meant. The boss thought I was hesitant, and reminded me that there was no cheaper toothbrush than this one.

In the first humorous paragraph, He Guangzhi used two perspectives to describe the haircut event, highlighting his joke of self-mocking ugliness from the hairdresser's perspective. Through the barber's perspective, such as the description of the barber: "he stared at his scissors in silence; I am also responsible for this terrible hairstyle,"the description of the two perspectives strengthens the humorous effect more than the description of He Guangzhi's own perspective.

In the second paragraph, Xu Zhisheng also described his experience of being judged as poor by appearance from the perspective of the convenience store owner. His description of the owner repeatedly reminding him of the cheapest toothbrush highlighted the fact that he was unappealing and handsome in appearance. The conversion to the third-person perspective also strengthens verbal humor in comic monologues.

3.3. Salience

We have the capacity to determine the direction and focus of attention, which is the basis for forming the principle of prominence. When we observe things from different angles, we will get different understanding and language expression, which highlights the different aspects of things. Salience can be seen to a large extent as a reflection of the speaker's conceptualization of the surrounding environment, which is restricted by the principle of attentive salience. Roasters usually produce humorous effects by highlighting the information they want to convey which poses a sharp contrast to other background information.

He Guangzhi: I was recognized as soon as I got on the plane the other day. The stewardess looked at me with amazement for two seconds and said that you were Jay Chou (A famous Chinese pop singer). I said that I was He Guangzhi. He said that you were Jay Chou. How could He Guangzhi be able to afford the business class seat! She would rather believe that I was Jay Chou than that I can afford the business class seat.

He Guangzhi: I don't use facial cleansers in general reality shows. I only use facial cleansers in the Rock and Roast, and other reality shows are not worthy of facial cleansers: because other shows will not invite me.

In the first paragraph, He Guangzhi highlights the stewardess's description of the resemblance of him and Jay Chou, and the background information that he is indeed He Guangzhi to form a stark contrast, further bringing out the fact of their own poverty. As a consequence, this leaves audience bursting into laughter.

In the second paragraph, He Guangzhi highlighted the fact that he used the facial cleansers to show that he attached great importance to Rock and Roast, which was in sharp contrast to the background information that only this show invited him to be the guest. His self-mocking and bantering achieved the desirable humorous effect.

3.4. Specificity

The formation of different understandings is closely related to the degree of specificity of external observation. People can understand and describe a thing from different degrees of accuracy. The difference in specificity is also to highlight one aspect of things, so that the information on one aspect is more detailed or brief than that of the normal situation. The roasters usually describe some common information in a more detailed or more concise way, so as to strengthen the humorous effect.

He Guangzhi: Other people's self-introduction will be: I graduated from the Jiaotong University; I am a top student in my school; I have studied abroad; I have served as an intern in a well-known world top 500 enterprises. While my introduction is that I am a person, and every time I take part in a reality show there is only one line of characters: a Shandong person in my personal profile column.

Xu Zhisheng: My boss especially likes to persuade people to drink. I insist that I would not drink. My boss replies that I would teach you how to drink. Attention, this is wine, and this is the mouth. The only difficulty in drinking is to open the mouth.

In the first paragraph, He Guangzhi's introduction to himself is particularly brief, which can also be seen as a fact to highlight his low educational background. Self-introduction like "I am a person and Shandong person" is too simple and straightforward. This self-mockery contributes to desired humorous effect.

In the second paragraph, Xu Zhisheng's description of steps to drink is very detailed, which is in sharp contrast to the drinking understood by ordinary people. This sardonic remarks to leaders achieve expected humorous effect.

3.5. Salience Occupying Core Role

In the five important elements of construal theory, prominence is the core part. First of all, since there are prominent scopes and backgrounds, there are not prominent scopes and backgrounds. And people can also present things briefly, making the correspondent language expressions concise. It can also highlight the details of things to make the correspondent language expressions concise. Observing things from different perspectives will have different salience and language expressions, so the perspective can also be roughly classified into salience. From the above four aspects of corpus analyses we can confirm that salience indeed occupies the core role in the five elements of construal theory, in other words, the remaining four elements of construal theory can be derived from salience.

4. Conclusion

Verbal humor plays an indispensable role in people ' s daily communication. It is necessary to analyze the causes of verbal humor from a new perspective. Grounded on Wang Yin's construal theory, this paper probes into verbal humor in Chinese Rock and Roast from four dimensions: scope and background, perspective, salience and specificity, and explores the causes of verbal humor. This paper confirms the explanatory power of construal theory to verbal humor, and at the same time proves that prominence is the most basic and core part of the five aspects of construal theory. Furthermore, It provides certain enlightenment for the interpretation and creation of verbal humor, and also blazes a new trail for the linguistic research of verbal humor.

References

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