

Analysis of Cultural Pragmatic Usage of Discourse Deixis

-- A Case Study of the Film "A Grandson from America"

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Abstract

The use of discourse deixis is the language symbol chosen by speaker based on context for better communicative purposes. Through the analysis of relations between deixis, cultural context and speaker and of cultural context characteristics, it is found that most of the deixis are selected and used with profound cultural deposits, and people's unconscious of this hidden culture stems from the abstraction and potential of cultural context. By focusing on the deixis in the film, it is obvious that the deixis more highlights the importance of cultural context in the practical language use against Chinese and Western cultural background, it is also more intuitively observe the process of culture dissemination and inheritance through language, and the charm of Chinese language and culture.

Keywords

Discourse dixies; Pragmatics; Cultural context.

1. Introduction

Language can reflect the relationship between individuals and society, and different discourse choices not only represent the subject's cognition of the object, but also objectively reflect the group culture that the subject lives and accepts. "The word 'deixis' is derived from ancient Greek, meaning 'point' originally. C.S.Peirce first proposed the concept of indices in 1894. And S.C.Levinson (1983) proposed that the study of deixis must be carried out in the framework of context." [1] In order to better express the meaning of the speaker, deixis, as a symbol of communication, is selected in a certain context, so the study of the deixis must live with the analysis of context, language meaning will change according to the complex context, and the complex language holders will consciously or unconsciously reencode their meaning to better express themselves. We can notice the differences between Chinese and Western culture through the daily conversation of the two characters (grandpa and grandson) in the movie "A Grandson from America", which tells the story of an American boy and agrandpa lived in shaanxi rural area, especially through the deixis used by grandpa, with strong local cultural color against the two different cultural background. It is meaningful to conduct pragmatic analysis of the deixis in this film, so that we can better understand the cultural differences between China and theWest.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. The Relationship between Deixis and Cultural Context

"Deixis is the most direct and obvious sign of language and context. A deixis is the speakers themselves or imaginary self to identify and name the context". [2] Deixis reflects the importance of context well, and its interaction with context can better reflect the charm of human language and life. "Context can be divided into immediate cognitive context, social context, and cultural context and the relationship between the deixis and the three different

contexts are the immediate context deixis language reflects the situational characteristics of the speech; Social context deixis reflects the setting and communicative characteristics given by the language community at a specific social stage; Cultural context deixis is the projection of culture to the immediate context, it can facilitate the interaction to shorten the mental distance, enhance the sense of identity, and is conducive to the achievement of verbal behavior effect.”[2]. Since the immediate and social contexts more or less involve cultural contextual components, therefore, the function of the cultural deixis reflects the function of the immediate context deixis and the social context deixis.

2.1.1. The Attachment Relationship between Deixis and Cultural Context

Deixis can be modified for the occasion and used as part of the cultural context, according to the subjectivity of the speaker, showing the speaker's acceptance of a certain culture. The choice of deixis is mixed with the speaker's cognition and cultural background. “The symbiotic relationship between language symbols and recognition activities is a symbiotic relationship in culture. Cognitive subjects will establish their personal context and establish a language-symbol connection according to their own cultural background and their value judgments. Context can be composed of discourse, former discourse constitutes the context of the later, and the content of context is also constantly developing and changing.”[3] According to the cognitive subjects' understanding of their own cultural background, the chosen deixis will basically imprint with their culture. As in the movie dialogue:

Grandson: (pointing to the Spider Man mask) I want that.

Grandpa: What thing? It's weird.

Shop assistant: This is the American zhi zhu da xia (chivalrous).

Grandpa: zhi zhu da xia? Zhi zhu jing ba (Spider essence), not even a nose and eye.

Spider Man belongs to one of the classic representatives of American superman culture, but for the Chinese are not familiar with, the clerk introduces the Spider Man with “zhi zhu da xia”, but “da xia” belongs to the classic characters of Chinese martial arts novels, this cultural reference misused or mixed use blames to the cultural differences and their value judgements. Due to the limitations of his own cognition, the grandfather made value judgment according to his own experiences, showing obvious prejudice against western culture. “Zhi Zhu Jing” is the classic role of the goblins in the Four Great Novels of “Journey to the West”. Both “Jing” and “Xia” are endowed with Chinese cultural color in the expression. Only in the Chinese cultural context can these two deixis be understood.

2.1.2. The Symbiotic Relationship between Deixis and Cultural Context

In the cultural context, the cognitive subjects will give priority to the deixis in line with their cultural cognition against their cultural background. And the selection of certain deixis is the need to constitute the cultural context. The dialogue in the film is as follows:

Grandson: guo nian shi shen me? (What is the Chinese New Year?)

Grandpa: guo nian jiu shi chun jie, zhe zai wo men zhong guo jiu shi zui da de yi ge jie le, guo miao hui, chi jiao zi..., re re nao nao gaogao xing xing di chi yi dun tuan yuan fan. (The Chinese New Year is the Spring Festival, this is the biggest festival in China, visit the temple fair, eat dumplings..., lively and happy reunion dinner.)

Grandson: wo ye xiang chi yi dun tuan yuan fan. (I also want to have a family reunion dinner.)

Grandpa: guai sun zi, zan men chun jie jian. Zan men la gou, la gou shang diao yi bai nian bu xu bian. (good boy, then we promise to see each other in the spring festival, we pinky-swear, pinky-swear will not broke up for a hundred years.(la gou, shang diao, yi bai nian bu xu bian.)

Since the West has no spring festival, the grandson lacks the concept of “nian”, grandpa is based on his own cultural experience elaborated it with vivid and specific festival activities to form the cultural context, and the grandson expressed his desire for “ guo nian” and his acceptance

of the culture accordingly; And the “gou” and “diao” in the idiom expression of “la gou, shang diao, yi bai nian bu xu bian.” also with a strong Chinese cultural color, “The 'gou' refers to a tool for string up the copper crash, and “diao” was a monetary unit in ancient times, since copper crash was not easy to manage at the time, people just string them together with a rope, and “shang diao” is the process of string money, later, it evolved into a gesture of vowing to keep his promise, that is, the two persons’ small fingers hook up, and thumbs press together for determination.”[4] The choice of deixis has an obvious cultural orientation in the corresponding cultural context, which forms part of the overall cultural context.

2.2. The Relationship between the Choice of Deixis and the Speaker

2.2.1. The Need of Code Switching

“The code-switching refers to the conversion of languages.”[5] In order to achieve better communicational goals, speakers modify and switch their language to express the meaning they satisfied according to the context. Its motivation complexity will not be repeated again. The main motivation of code switching here is the result of the speaker's psychological compliance. “Psychological motivated compliance is a proactive strategy adopted by the communicator to achieve a specific communicative purpose.”[5] Examples following in the film:

(1) Grandson: zhe shi hamburger ma? (Is this a hamburger?)

Grandpa: zhong guo de hamburger, wo hai yi wei shi sha gao ke ji chan pin ne? bu jiu shi women zhong guo rou jia mo de mian bing zi huan cheng ni men de mian bao er yi ma hai hamburger.(It's Chinese hamburger, what high-tech product do I think it is? It is just our Chinese steamed bun for your bread, so-called hamburger.)

(2) Grandpa: (grandpa scolds his grandson) ni ge gou...dog tai yang di, suibian fan ren jia de dong xi, dog tai yang di, deng bi zi jiu shang lian (you bit...bitch, casually turn over someone else's things, bitch, too spoiled.)

In example (1), grandson's language code switching was due to the lack of culture knowledge, for he only learned some basic expressions and could not refer the thing do not exist in China; while grandfather did not know the concept of hamburger, he learned to be the result of cultural blank, after several repetition of what his grandson said, he just imitates the pronunciation and brought him a similar one. Example (2) grandpa learned some words from stationmaster Wang like “dog, sun”, and then put the two words together to express his own meaning, because he thinks “dog sun” refers to the meaning of “bitch”, and mingled with Chinese like “dog tai yang” in his anger, so the code switching just for expressing his emotion.

2.2.2. The Need of Cultural Blanks

Cultural blanks is usually caused by cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures and word vacancy is the representative of it. “Word vacancy can reflect the differences of Chinese and Western cultures and their historical origin”[6] in the film,

Grandson: (pointing to the patterns on the bed sheet) The bird.

Grandpa: what bird, that is phoenix, and this is dragon, two of them together expressing auspicious meaning.

In the dialogue, we know that the boy does not have the concept of Chinese dragon and phoenix, only made wrong judgement according to his life experiences and limited knowledge. As phoenix is the sacred auspicious in Chinese mythology, the ancient people created the image and rendered a good wish. We can see the cultural vacancy and culture difference from this episode.

2.2.3. The Natural Need of the Culture's Rich Meaning

“Lexical semantics is inseparable from the context, and it shows a high degree of flexibility in the process of specific use. From the perspective of pragmatics, lexical meaning will change in

form and meaning in the specific use according to its meaning and purpose of use.”[7] In addition to the influence of context, many Chinese words have multiple part of speech expressing different meanings. In the film,

Examples:

(1)Grandpa: Buse, na shang xiang, na shang xiang jiu bu chou le. (take the incense, then you won't smell the odour.)

(2)Grandpa: ni shuo ni yao bu shi wai guo ren duo hao, ji bian shi tuo zhe you ping zi, wo ye ren le, ni zhang de xiao gui yi yang, rang cun li ren xiao hua wo.(How good it is if you are not a foreigner, even if you are not my offspring, I also recognized, with a foreigner look, the villagers will laugh at me.)

Grandson: “xiao hua” shi shen me yi si?(What does “xiao hua” mean?)

(3)Wang stationmaster: zhi yao nin lao chu shan, ren jia jiu qu, nin yao shi bu chu, zan zhe shi jiu dei huang.(as long as you agree to out of the retirement and teach, somebody else will go, if you won't, this matter must be over.)

In example (1), “xiang” can be both an adjective or a noun, “xiang” originally refers to the smell of ripe cereals, and later generally refers to the good smell; Opposite to ‘smelly’, it refers to the fragrant ingredients or products; good appetite or sound sleep; being praised or popular; men of letters in ancient time used to describe women; surname”,[8] and here “xiang” takes the second meaning, refers to a kind of incense. In the case (2) “xiao hua”, can be both noun and verb “stylistic name, the form is short, with a simple storyline, oftent revealing the absurd phenomenon of life to achieve the purpose of ridicule and fun; sneer”.[8] “xiao hua” here goes with a noun thus it is of the second meaning. In the example(3), “huang” also has several part of speech and meaning, the derivative expression of gold or mature apricot; the shorter form of huang di; the name of a horse; refer to children; the name of ancient country; yellow river; yolk; refer to the obscene things; unachievable; surname”[8]. Here “huang” is used as a verb, which means that things cannot be realized. Therefore, when choosing words according to the context, we should also pay attention to the mutual understanding of the meaningbetween the speaker and the obedient.

2.2.4. The Need of Identity Construction

“Identity is the goal of harmonious integration of the actor in his community, and is constructed through the process of individuation”.[9] The common identity and its construction is through the equivalent discourse choice with people in the same language community, which sharing the same habits and conventional cognition like intonation, manner of expression and vocabulary selection etc.. Examples following:

(1) Dad (to his son): Yang Dongliang, ni zhe hui ke fang le ge wei xing, san nian bu hui jia, qu le ge tuo zhe ge you ping zi de yang gua fu, ni ba xian ren de lian dou diu jin le.(Yang Dongliang, you are ridiculous this time, three years gone, and married a foreign widow with a boy, you lost the face of your ancestors.)

(2) Neighbor: Erdan zhao ni le ba. (Erdan had a visit for you, right?)

Old Lao Yang (grandpa): Ai! gou pi gao yao yi yang, fan si le.(Ah! like a dog skin plaster, it's annoying.)

In the two segments, all of the three characters lived in the same language background, they shared Shaanxi dialect, which not only shows the identity of the same language community, but also shortens the emotional distance, expressing the identity and its maintenance. In Example (1), The grandpa's use of “fang wei xing and tuo you ping” was consistent with the expression of local's, and the metaphorical expression is even more vivid and easier to understand, “‘fang wei xing’ originally refers to the grandiose wind behavior prevailing in the Great Leap Forward in 1958, The People's Daily called it ‘fang wei xing’, and later refers to those unrealistic, boast,

exaggerated behavior. 'tuoyouping' is a dialect of the area Wu, refers to widow, with her child or children, remarried a new husband" [10]. The use of these emotional expressions under the situation that they shared the same historical and cultural background, which not only expressed what the speaker means, also expressed his feelings of dissatisfaction. The example (2), the neighbor and Old yang called stationmaster Wang "Erdan" is also based on the familiarity of the relationship, instead of using the respect term like "stationmaster Wang", which expresses the two elders' intimate but repulsive attitude to the guy; "gou pi gao yao" describes the pesterous behavior. Since the two elders have a bad impression of that behavior, they use a negative deixis to achieve the consensus.

2.3. Characteristics of the Cultural Context

2.3.1. Immateriality

"Culture, as a psychological existence, is a highly stable norm accumulated by a community, ethnic group and nation through its historical development, and guides and governs the setting system of interactive and speech behavior in material life and social activities." [11] Culture, as an immaterial but objective existence, its abstraction determines the abstraction feature of cultural context to some degree. "Cultural context belongs to a cognitive context, which is more abstract and more complex than the direct situational context and social context. It is a collection of cultural abstract information stored in the human brain." [12] In the film, some cultural expressions, such as "pi ying da tai, jing ji chang xi (shadow play sets up the stage and economy plays on it)", "xin guan shang ren san ba huo (a new official applies strict measures.)" and "chu shan shou tu (out of retirement to teach others)" and so on, which records and inherits Chinese history and culture, and their meanings are rich and changeable in different contexts.

2.3.2. Potentiality

"Culture, as an intangible deep structure, is rooted in the collective consciousness of a community, nation and ethnic group, and most of its content is potential." [11] The potentiality of culture is an imperceptible common sense, when certain language stimulus offered, the appropriate response provoked, and there is no need to give redundant explanations as the language behavior has already become a conformity, conventional and appropriate application of them just as an unconscious and natural result. In the film, Example:

Old Yang: wo po yi si shi ji le?(How many years my daughter-in-law is over forty?)

Yang Dongliang: za neng si shi ji ma, ta cai san shi chu tou. (How could she be over forty, she is only in her early thirties.)

Old Yang: zhang de gou lao xiang, tou hun?(looks old, first marriage?)

Yang Dongliang: married once.

Old Yang: Er guo tou, li le?(secondhand, divorced?)

Yang Dongliang: bu shi li le, ren jia na jiao sang ou.(not divorced, that is called widowed.)

Old Yang: gua fu, ye shi ge ke lian ren.(widow, a poor woman she is.)

In the dialogue, based on the common cultural context of the father and the son, the words used such as "po yi, tou hun, er guo tou, gua fu, sang ou" belong to the concepts that have been already learned imperceptibly, and the speaker and the obedient can naturally extract, encode and decode them.

2.3.3. Metaphoricity

"In order to achieve better communicational goals, people usually use metaphors (pictorials, symbol, metaphor, metonymy, etc.) in an unconscious way to specify a culture into a certain form or an object". [11] The concrete expression usually develops from people's life experiences, examples like "Er guo tou, fang wei xing, gou pi gao yao, chu shan" are all vivid expressions generated from the history and life experiences, and fully reflect the characteristics of the

matter, which is closer to life and with more cultural features and interest than direct expressions.

3. Conclusion

Deixis are consciously or unconsciously used by speakers, and most of them carrying information of local and historical culture. We find that most of the deixis in the film of "A Grandson from America" used are with strong cultural characteristics, especially in the dialogues of the grandpa and the grandson, which shed more light on the importance of cultural context and cultural differences between Chinese and Western countries. Speaker makes an appropriate choice of the discourse deixis according to the context to achieve the best communicational goals. Since the cultural context embraces features like immateriality and potentiality etc., it is difficult to notice the cultural color hidden behind it in the process of using deixis. Through the analysis of deixis in this film, we can note that there are a large number of cultural deixis in life, and we also constantly output, spread, innovate and inherit our culture in an imperceptible way. Only by combining with concrete context, can words and language be creative and vibrant, and offer a method to create a new cultural context to highlight the humanity and characteristics of the time, and promote the inheritance and development of Chinese culture.

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