

Impoliteness in Chinese Talk Show

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Abstract:

This paper set out to analyse the impoliteness strategy in a Chinese talk show “The Jin Xing Show”. The discourse was transcribed and translated into English. Culpeper’s (1996) impoliteness strategy was used as the main reference for data analysis. The use of one of the most cited impoliteness frameworks like Culpeper’s (1996) for this paper will shed light on impoliteness in Mandarin discourse and lay the path for more research in this topic.

Keywords:

Impoliteness, Chinese, Talk Show

1. Introduction

This paper set out to analyse the impoliteness strategy in a Chinese talk show “The Jin Xing Show”. The discourse was transcribed and translated into English. Culpeper’s impoliteness strategy [1] was used as the main reference for data analysis. The paper is sectioned into five parts: introduction, literature review, research methodology, data analysis and conclusion.

Since the formation of Culpeper’s framework [1], most studies in impoliteness tended to revolve around the framework. Some recent examples include Hassan [2] and Abdelkawy [3], where Culpeper’s [1,4] framework and insights were used as the foundation leading up to the study of impoliteness in Arab talk shows. Both studies made reference to impoliteness with Culpeper’s five super strategies of impoliteness [1] leading up to the study, then applying Culpeper’s conventionalized and implication impoliteness [4] to analyse its data. Data were categorised into the nine subcategories of conventionalized impoliteness and three kinds of implication impoliteness. Due to the scale of the current paper however, only Culpeper’s [1] impoliteness framework will be used for data analysis, as it provides a steady foundation to begin exploring impoliteness strategies in Mandarin discourse. Despite Culpeper’s (1996) influence in studies on impoliteness, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., [5] decided to rely on a different approach altogether. The study took on a genre approach to identify the classificatory and metapragmatic of impoliteness in the context of a Spanish talk show called La Noria. The researchers explained that this was to avoid the application of Spanish data in the typical Anglo-centric models like those of Culpeper [1]. Although the current paper is examining a talk show not of the English-speaking context, the chosen framework remained as Culpeper’s [1]

framework. This is due to the limited number of studies conducted on talk shows in Mandarin in particular, raising the need to investigate impoliteness strategies in Chinese talk shows with a more prominent impoliteness framework like Culpeper [1]. Furthermore, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al.'s [5] genre approach in the study takes into account the linguistic and cultural diversity of a certain community, which provided a well-rounded perspective into impoliteness realisations between interlocutors. Therefore, varying the definition and extent of impoliteness depending on what is considered the norm or an FTA in the community. This is not the case for the current paper, as it is smaller in scale, and the genre approach requires a more detailed analysis and a larger amount of data. This paper will therefore serve as a pilot using Culpeper's [1] impoliteness framework to tap into impoliteness strategies commonly used in the context of Chinese talk shows.

2. Materials and Methods

The chosen framework for this paper is Culpeper's [1] impoliteness strategy which involves five super strategies inspired by Brown and Levinson's [6] politeness model. Contrary to the politeness strategy, impoliteness strategies are used to attack one's face. The degree to which damages one's face is dependent on the context and imposition of the act [1]. Although Culpeper has since made minor amendments and included additional insights into the impoliteness strategy over the years, Culpeper's [1] initial framework is sufficient for the purpose of this paper to identify instances of impoliteness in discourse. This framework is particularly suitable to examine instances of impoliteness in talk shows, where there are ample interactions between the interlocutors, in this case, host-guest interactions. Moreover, the context of talk shows are typically well-established from the very beginning for the benefit of live audiences and viewers elsewhere. Furthermore, there has been limited studies on impoliteness in talk shows, especially those in Mandarin. The use of one of the most cited impoliteness frameworks like Culpeper's [1] for this paper will shed light on impoliteness in Mandarin discourse and lay the path for more research in this topic. Hence, this paper investigates four of the impoliteness strategies found in a Chinese talk show: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness and sarcasm or mock politeness. An episode of a talk show titled 'The Jin Xing Show' was obtained from YouTube and only data relevant to impoliteness was transcribed and translated into English before analysis. During data analysis, reference was made to the list of output strategies, used to satisfy impoliteness super strategies, as recommended by Culpeper [1]. However, as highlighted by Culpeper himself, 'the list is not exhaustive' [1]. Therefore, examples other than those provided in the output strategy list were also included in this paper according to the context of the current data set.

3. Results and Discussion

The conversations below are between a famous host Jin Xing and an actress Zhu Yin. They were in a talk show called 'The Jin Xing Show' in which the host Jin interviewed Zhu. Seven excerpts involving impoliteness were identified throughout the 15-minute YouTube video posted on 22 June, 2021. Table 1 shows the type of impoliteness strategies used by interlocutors in the talk show based on the five super strategies proposed by Culpeper's [1] framework.

Table 1. Type of impoliteness strategies used by interlocutors in a Chinese talk show.

Impoliteness Strategy	Frequency
Bald on record	1
Positive impoliteness	6
Negative impoliteness	7
Sarcasm or mock politeness	2
Withhold politeness	0

The analysed excerpts are presented in the order of their appearance in the video. In the following excerpts, A refers to Jin and B refers to Zhu.

3.1. Excerpt 1

‘Fairy Zi Xia’ is a character Zhu played in the movie ‘Journey to the West’. The Speaker A starts the conversation with a statement which is “Fairy Zi Xia made you very popular”, then the speaker A asks the speaker B’s feelings about this ‘fact’. However Speaker B directly denied what speaker A stated before by saying ‘In fact, I was not popular...’. At this moment, a positive impoliteness strategy occurred, that is, speaker B avoids agreeing with A’s position. In the following part, the speaker B provided ‘box office’ as evidence to prove her view which would put speaker A in an awkward position, because that means A, as an interviewer, didn’t know well about the interviewee, which would challenge the profession of the host.

1 A: *Zi xia xian zirang nida huo te huo le, ni jue de shi yi ge hao shier ne hai shi yi ge bu hao de shier?*

2 B: *Oi shi na ge shi hou mei you huo de, zai xiang gang huo shi zai da lu shang ying de shi hou, qi shi piao fang shi yi ban er yi.*

1 A: *Fairy Zi Xia (a movie character) made you very popular, do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing?*

2 B: *In fact, I was not popular when the movie was released in Hong Kong or on the mainland, the box office was actually just so-so.*

3.2. Excerpt 2

In sentence 8, speaker A directly points out that there must be true love in speaker B’s eyes when she looks at Zhou in the movie. This statement is only a personal judgement by the speaker A herself but she says it in front of speaker B in a quite certain way which could make the listener uncomfortable, not to mention that speaker B is already married with another man. Therefore, sentence 8 involved positive impoliteness. Instead of denying speaker A directly, speaker B responds as if she agrees with speaker A (S9), but the true meaning of speaker B is, ‘I love each of my partners only due to the need of work, but not in a romantic way.’ Apparently, this answer doesn’t satisfy speaker A because she avoids agreeing with B by claiming that ‘But they are totally different from this movie’. Again, this involved positive impoliteness. This time, speaker B chooses to fight back with a negative impoliteness strategy by belittling speaker A: ‘Jin, you might have barely watched my movies.’ What speaker B tries to prove is that speaker A doesn’t know her at all. She also mentions another character (Huang Rong) she played to prove utterance 9. As a response, however, speaker A insists on her view. She avoids agreeing with speaker B again, ‘But it’s still different.’

8 A: *Wo zai hui kan 《da hua xi you》 de shi hou, ni zai hui kan na ge xing ye na ge yan shen, chu le yan yuan de yan ji zhi wai, na ge yan shen li bian, yi ding shi you zhen ai zai li tou de.*

9 B: *Wo pai mei yi ge jue se, wo dou fei chang xiang xin, wo shi ai shang na ge dui shou de.*

10 A: *Dan dou mei you xiang da hua xi you na ge zi xia xian zi kan na pang bian de shi hou, ta zai na ge shi hou ni zhe yang, na ge yan shen shi shei dou xue dou xue bu dao de, na ge taijing dian le.*

11 B: *Jin Jie ke neng ni kan wo de xikan de bijiao shao, wo dang huang rong de shi hou, wo ye hen ai guo jing.*

12A: *Dan hai shi bu yi yang.*

8 A: *When I was watching "Journey to the West" again, I found the way you looked at Zhou, in addition to the acting skills, there must be true love in your eyes.*

9 B: *Every time I play a character, I believe very much that I fell in love with my partner. 10 A: But they are totally different from this movie, the way you looked at him at that moment, no one can imitate that look, that is too classic.*

11 B: *Jin, you might have barely watched my movies. When I played Huang Rong, I also loved Guo Jing very much.*

12 A: *But it's still different.*

3.3. Excerpt 3

At the beginning, speaker B seeks agreement with speaker A, however, speaker A doesn't respond to her question and asks another question. Therefore, positive impoliteness (ignore others) is involved in sentence 13. When speaker A asks "Did you really have a romantic relationship with Zhou?" A negative impoliteness act happens meanwhile, because this question is an invasion of B's privacy and obviously speaker B has already tried a lot to prove that she was not in love with Zhou. Speaker B doesn't respond directly, she just says that she and Zhou are a good pair of movie partners. Speaker A pushes speaker B to answer her question again in sentence 16, so the negative impoliteness happens again.

13 B: *Ni xi huan zhe ge ren, ni kan ta dou chong man ai de, ni bujue de ma?*

14 A: *He Zhou Xing Chi, ni men lia zhen hao guo ma?*

15 B: *wo men pai xi de shi hou shi yi dui hao de dui shou.*

16 A: *Dong guo xin mei you?*

17 B: *You cai hua de ren dou bi jiao guai pi, jiu bu tai hao xiang chu.*

13 B: *If you like someone, you will see him/her in a way that is full of love, don't you think?*

14 A: *Did you really have a romantic relationship with Zhou?*

15 B: *We were a good pair of partners when we were playing in the movie.*

16 A: *Have you ever loved him?*

17 B: *Talented people are more eccentric and not easy to get along with.*

3.4. Excerpt 4

At the beginning of this conversation, speaker B is narrating her romantic story with Huang, her husband. When she says that the reporters were dumbfounded because of the sudden appearance of Huang, speaker A interrupts and says "It's because Huang is so ugly." This is an unambiguous and clear attack of the appearance of speaker B's

husband, which is an example of bald on record impoliteness strategy. As a response, the speaker B directly denies speaker B to defend her husband, she says “No, I think he is very handsome, Jin.” It is a kind of positive impoliteness strategy: avoid agreeing with the other speaker. At the end of this conversation, speaker A explains she was just kidding, this makes sentence 19 an example of negative impoliteness strategy: do not treat the other seriously.

18 B: *Suo yi ji zhe kan dao ta(Huang GuanZhong) dou sha yan le.*

19 A: *Shi vin wei tai chou le.*

20 B: *Bu, wo jue de ta hen shuai de jin jie.*

21 A: *Wo zhi dao, kai wan xiao ha ha.*

18 B:*So the reporters were dumbfounded when they saw him(Huang Guanzhong). 19 A: It's because Huang is so ugly. 20 B: No, I think he is very handsome, Jin. 21 A: I know, just kidding haha.*

3.5. Excerpt 5

In sentence 22 speaker B wants to express that she can know Huang's true heart from his eyes. After hearing this, speaker A turns to the audience and says “If she can see Huang Guanzhong's heart from his eyes, this girl would be really impressive and really smart.” Literally, speaker A is praising speaker B but the tone is insincere. What speaker A truly wants to imply is that “It is impossible to see Huang's heart only from his eyes.” Therefore, sentence 23 is an example of sarcasm or mock politeness strategy. Speaker C (guest) says speaker A has X-ray vision which sounds impressive but obviously impossible, so speaker B also used sarcasm impoliteness strategy.

22 B: *Er qie wo zai ta yan jing kan dao na zhong guang cai shi zai bie de ren yanzhong kan bu dao de.*

23 A: *Ru guo ta neng cong yan jing kan dao huang guanzhong na gexin de hua, zhe nv hai ti li hai tai cong ming le.*

24 C: *Na...tou shi yan.*

22 B: *And the light I saw in his eyes is not one I can find in other people.*

23 A: *If she can see Huang Guanzhong's heart from his eyes, this girl would be really impressive and really smart.*

24 C: *That is...X-ray vision.*

3.6. Excerpt 6

Speaker A starts this conversation with Muse, the goddess of inspiration. As she suggested, every director has their own goddess of inspiration, and she thinks speaker B is Zhou's goddess of inspiration. It is worth noting that Zhou is one of the best comedy directors in China. He made a lot of great movies. Therefore, being his goddess of inspiration will be such an honor which would also make Speaker B feel extremely flattered. That might be a reason why speaker B looks uncertain. There's an old saying in Mandarin: “shu da zhao feng”. That means a person of high position is liable to be attacked. However, in sentence 27, speaker A imposes speaker B to accept this honor which attacks speaker B's negative face.

25 A: *Ren he dao yan, ta dou you zijide Miu Si, ju ling gan nv shen, ni shita(Zhou Xing:*

de ling gan nv sheng.

26 B: *(looks uncertain)*

27 A: *Ni shi Zhou Xing Chi de (ling gan nv shen), zhe ge ni yi ding yao jie shou.*

25 A: *All the directors, they'd have their own Muse, the goddess of inspiration, you are his (Zhou Xingchi) inspiration.*

26 B: *(looks uncertain)*

27 A: *You are Zhou Xingchi's (goddess of inspiration), you must accept this.*

3.7. Excerpt 7

Speaker B is a Hong Kong actress. In sentence 28, speaker A explicitly associates speaker B with Hong Kong actresses who married into a wealthy family for money. In most cultures, marrying for money is not a decent behaviour, thus negative impoliteness strategy was used by speaker A in saying “...most Hong Kong stars, especially Hong Kong actresses, it seems as though it's a path they must go through, going in the direction of marrying into a wealthy family.” Following that, speaker A directly asks speaker B “have you never thought of this?” This question can be scornful and condescending for speaker B, because it means the speaker A believes it is possible for B to marry for money. Therefore, the negative impoliteness happened twice in sentence 28.

28 A: *...Jue de gang xing, you qi xiang gang nv yan yuan hao Xiang shi bi jing zhi lu a, jiu shi fang xiang shi yao jia ru hao men de, cong lai mei zi li xiang guo ma?*

29 B: *Mei you.*

28 A: *...most Hong Kong stars, especially Hong Kong actresses, it seems as though it's a path they must go through, going in the direction of marrying into a wealthy family, have you never thought of this?*

29 B: *No*

4. Conclusions

The paper identified a number of impoliteness strategies (as proposed by Culpeper, 1996) used by both interlocutors in the chosen episode of the talk show. They include bald on record impoliteness (1), positive impoliteness (6), negative impoliteness (7) and sarcasm or mock politeness (2). Surprisingly, withhold politeness was not found in this set of data, which future research will need to investigate whether this could be due to the community's culture or the nature of Chinese talk shows. The paper however, found that negative impoliteness and positive impoliteness strategy were used commonly throughout the talk show. This is inconsistent with Abdelkawy's [3] recent findings where the researcher found that insults (equivalent to bald on record impoliteness) were used most frequently in Arabic talk shows. However, this could be largely attributed to cultural differences between the two communities. Furthermore, similar to Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al.'s [5] justification of not using Culpeper's impoliteness strategies when dealing with non-English data, the paper found that this is also true to a certain extent for the current Mandarin data. Although instances of impoliteness were successfully identified using Culpeper's [1] framework, it could not account for the cultural aspect of the community in some data, further explanation beyond the framework was needed to explain why and how the FTA was performed from the standpoint of a member of the community. Despite that, the impoliteness strategies observed within the current paper offered a glimpse into FTAs in Mandarin talk shows, which was scarcely studied. Future research can look into FTAs cross-

linguistically like in Mandarin and English to compare the intensity and uses of impoliteness strategies in nationally-broadcasted talk shows, taking the community's cultural norms into account, or even implement some of the more recent impoliteness frameworks during data analysis for a different point of view.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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