Conversational Moves in Talking about Body-image in all Female Interactions

MOUVEMENT CONVERSATIONNEL DANS LA DISCUSSION SUR L'IMAGE DU CORPS DANS TOUTES LES INTERACTIONS FÉMININES

女性會話中談論身體形象的話步研究

Huang Rui

黃　瑞

Abstract: This paper examines the extracts taken from daily conversations as well as from a serial TV play respectively involving female postgraduate students and professional women. The aim of this research is to see whether Guendouzi's (2004) conversational moves in talking about body-size can be generalized. The extracts are analyzed based on Guendouzi's model and Brown and Levinson's (1987) face threat theory. It is found that Guendouzi's model is only applicable in the circumstance when the speaker exposes herself to face threat. A new model, which fits the situation when the speaker exposes the hearer to face threat, has been tentatively noted based on the analysis of data.
Key words: body-image, face threat, politeness, conversational moves

Résumé: Le présent article examine des extraits des conversations quotidiennes ainsi que ceux d'un feuilleton télévisuel qui concernent respectivement les étudiantes chercheuses et les femmes professionnelles. Le but de cette étude est de vérifier si le mouvement conversationnel de Guendouzi (2004) dans la discussion sur la taille du corps peut être généralisé. Les extraits sont analysés sur la base du modèle de Guendouzi et la théorie d'affronter le menace de Brown et Levinson (1987). On trouve que le modèle de Guendouzi n'est applicable qu'à la circonstance dans laquelle l'orateur expose lui-même au menace. Un nouveau modèle, qui convient à la situation dans laquelle l'orateur expose l'auditeur au menace, a été expérimentalement marqué sur la base de l'analyse des données.
Mots-Clés: image du corps, affronter le menace, politesse, mouvement conversationnel

摘　要：　本文以 Guendouzi 在 2004 年提出的話步模式和 Levinson 在 1987 年提出的威脅面子理論位框架對語料進行分析，研究發現 Guendouzi 提出的話步只適用於說話人把自己的面子暴露在外的境況，本文根據對語料的分析嘗試性地提出了說話人把聽話人的面子暴露出來的話步。
關鍵詞：身體形象；威脅面子；禮貌；話步

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Body-image

Body-image not only is a popular topic in mass media but also captures the attention of researchers in academic field. As physical appearance is tied to women's social identity (Guendouzi, 2001), women expect to present themselves in a socially accepted way. Thus the ideal body-image has come to be emphasized. As Guendouzi put it, media plays an important role in "constructing the socialized gender image" (p.31). Therefore, the image appeared in media is very influencing and the young and extremely slim women are taken as the ideal image to pursue.

According to Parker et, al (1995, cited in Schooler, Merriwether & Caruthers, 2004, p.38), young women describe the perfect ideal physical appearance as tall,

extremely thin and blonde. However, the standard of ideal body-image differs in different cultures. In the United States, the blonde Hollywood actresses present the ideal image in their culture. In China, the standard varies in different centuries. In Han Dynasty slender body was admired. In Tang Dynasty, the image of women was emphasized on roundness and corpulence. In modern China, the image of ideal body focuses on slenderness.

Studies on body-image have tended to focus on the relationship between body- image and eating disorders (e.g. Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Harrison, 2000, Jung & Forbes, 2007). A few studies analyzed the conversations about body-image among female friends. Based on the analysis of the extracts of women "bitching", Guendouzi reveals that women not only cooperate in their conversation but also compete for the "socially acceptable image of femininity" (2001, p.29). Guendouzi (2004) by analyzing extracts from women's daily conversation reveals that the speaker's positive face is exposed to threat in talking about body-size and the need to diet. Specific conversational moves in talking about body-size have been noted based on the analysis of data. (See figure 1, cited in Guendouzi, 2004, p.164).

Potential face threatening moves	Cooperative moves
BIA(BSA)–diet/body-size announcement opens speaker to potential face threat through critical evaluation from interlocutors FTC –face threatening challenge of speaker's discursive claims SAE–substantiating account elaboration, typically signify that the speaker needs to justify her account PAC –pathological confession (admittance of weakness) PED – personological discourse attributing body-size to character traits or lifestyle 　　*CEO – critical evaluation of other 　*CES – critical evaluation of self	FSMA–face saving move by agreement FSMD – face saving move by denial SMA – supportive matching accounts or comment CSM – conversational smoothing device

CEO & CES can be seen either as forms of verbal play or episodes of bitching both moves are reliant on audience support and conversational cooperation

Figure 1. Conversational moves in talk about body-size

However, Guendouzi (2004) only discusses one circumstance of the conversation about body-size, that is, the speaker initiates BSA and exposes herself to potential face threat. There is another case that the speaker may initiate the comment on the hearer's body-image and expose the hearer to potential face threat. In respect of this, the conversational moves in talking about body-size should be improved based on more data.

1.2 Face threats

Body-image is believed to be connected with social constructions of identity which is realized through social interaction. According to Goffman (1957), face is the public self-image of a person. Based on Goffman's view of face, Brown and Levinson distinguished negative face ("the want of every component adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others") and positive face ("the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others") (1987, p.62). Both the speaker's and the hearer's speech acts are believed to be an FTA (face-threatening-act). For example, the speaker's compliment may threaten the hearer's face as a judgment and the hearer's response, either to accept or to refuse, may threaten the speaker's face. Politeness is the awareness of another's face. Based on the distinction between positive face and negative face, the politeness strategies can be divided into positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness strategy includes seeking agreement, avoid disagreement etc. Negative politeness strategy includes question, hedge etc. (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Face which is socially negotiated during an interaction has been recognized as a universal concept. Chinese people also have the face wants to be praised and admired. They also try to avoid conflict and sustain harmony among people. According to Gu (1990), the concept of *limao* (politeness) contains four notions: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement in Chinese (p.239). If one of the four elements occurred in the behavior, then it is considered as a polite behavior (p.240). Because of the different understandings of politeness, the strategies employed by Chinese people to redress FTA are also different.

The conversation about body-image is a place to produce FTA because it always includes the judgment of other or self. As no studies have been found to examine conversations about body-image in Chinese, this study is to fill the gap and aims to test Guendouzi's (2004) conversational moves in talking about body-size with Chinese data and to find out what cooperative strategies are adopted by the participants.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data were collected from daily conversations and from a Chinese serial TV play (《律政佳人》). The

participants involved are a group of female postgraduate students who are my classmates and a group of women lawyers. They are all very familiar with one another. As for the first group of participants, they are classmates and some of them are also roommates. The data collected from this group of participants is by observation and field note taking. I observed my classmates around me for three weeks and took down their conversations about body-image. As for the latter group, the participants are colleagues and friends in the same law firm. The data was translated and transcribed by the researcher (see Appendix A for transcription conventions).

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As Extract 1 is from the conversation on their way to dinner, it can be recognized as backstage talk among friends (Guendouzi, 2001). The ideal body-image presented by media achieves general acknowledgement among the three interlocutors.

Extract 1 (On their way to dinning hall)

1A：B 腿 好 長: 啊.　　　　　　　　　　**BSA**
　B leg good long SFP
　B, how long: your legs are!
2B：（笑）
　(laughing)
3A： 又　細.　　　　　　　　　　　**SAE**
　again thin
　And very slim.
4B：哪　有　那麼　細.　　　　　　　**FSMD**
　where have   so   thin
　Not that slim!
5C： 我 昨 天 看 了 一 個 電 影, 裏面 的 女 主 角 是 一
　I yesterday see ASP one CLS movie inside PT girl heroine be one
　I saw a movie yesterday. The heroine was an airtress who was
　個 空 姐, 一 米 八 二, 那:腿, 特 別 細.　　**CEO**
　CLS airtress one meter eight two that leg specially thin
　　182cm and her: legs are very slim.

The topic of body-image was taken by A. This is the BSA move. She provides positive comments on B's body-image. Although it serves as a compliment, comment on her body-image from others exposes B to potential face threat. A does not receive any cooperative support from C by using FSMA or FSMD. In the SAE move, A adds another trait of B's body-image that is very slim. B rejects A's comment on her image by questioning. This questioning serves as a negative politeness strategy. Because modest is considered as an important notion of politeness in China, rejecting is the most frequently used strategy by Chinese people based on Chen's study (1993). According to Gu (1990), there are four maxims of politeness principle in Chinese culture: self-denigration, address, tact and generosity.

The reason why Chinese people reject the compliment is that they are constrained by the maxim of self-denigration. In this extract, C does not cooperate with A or B, she self-selects the turn to take another topic about the heroine in the movie, who is very tall and has long straight legs. This can be interpreted as CEO. This reflects that she has accepted the ideal body-image as tall and slim.

In this interaction, the girls who are under the influence of media have acknowledged the socially accepted ideal body-image as tall and slim. According to Guendouzi (2004), BSA move opens the speaker to potential face threat. In this extract, BSA move can be interpreted as a compliment. A attempts to establish a collaborative floor and marks solidarity with B.

Extract 2

1D: E 你 好 像 有 点 <u>胖</u> 了 吧 ? 脸 好 像 圆 了.　**BSA + SAE**

　E you seem have dot fat ASP SFP Q face seem round SFP

　E, you seem to be a little <u>heavier</u>. Your face seems to be round.

2E：（笑）

　(laughing)

3F：她 哪里 是 <u>有点</u> 啊?　　　　　　　**SMA**

　she where be have dot SFP Q

　She doesn't <u>SEEM</u> to be a little heavier. She is!

4E：（笑）

    (laughing)

5D：不 知 道 是 头 型 显 得, 还 是: 反 正 看 脸 好 像

    NEG know be hairstyle show ASP or be opposite right look face seem

    I don't know whether it is the hairstyle that makes your face seem a little

    胖 了.   **SAE**

    fat SFP

    heavier or just:

D's comment on E's body-image in a BSA move leaves E open to a potential positive face threat. D then justifies her account in a SAE move by saying that E's face has become round. E's smile indicates that she has been aware of the face threat to her own positive body-image. F cooperates with D by providing SMA to threaten E's face. In this SMA move, she attempts to create discursive solidarity with D. D's SAE move can be an attempt to mitigate E's potential face threat.

According to Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1978, p.54, cited in Levinson, 1983, p.298), certain rules are followed in turn-taking. Only when the current speaker selects the next speaker, can the next speaker speak. If the current speaker does not select the next speaker, then any other party can self-select the turn. However, in this extract, the interlocutors do not follow this rule. D selects E as the next speaker but E refuses by laughing instead of saying anything to protect her own face. Although D does not select F, F self-selects to support D. This time E is chosen by F as the next speaker again, however, she does not take the turn. E here refuses the chance to save her own face twice because she is under the pressure of social ideal body-image and feels ashamed of being out of control.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), self-image contains emotional sense of self and social sense of self. As for body-image, there are also two kinds: socially accepted body-image and personally accepted body-image. Some girls are under the pressure to achieve socially accepted image. But others care more about emotional sense of self. The following extract is a good example.

Extract 3

1G：我 得 多 吃 點, 我 最近 都 瘦 了, H 你 看 我 瘦 了

    I DE more eat dot I recent all thin SFP H you look I thin ASP

    I have to eat more. I become thinner recently. H, am I thinner?

    嗎 ?   **BSA + CES**

  SFP Q

2H：我 看 看, 嗯, 瘦 了   **FMSA**

    I look look en thin SFP

    Let me see. Yeah, you are thinner.

3G：你 看（對 方 方 說), 你 說 我 瘦 了, H 也 說 我 瘦 了.

    you look (right Fang Fang say) you say I thin SFP H too say I thin SFP

    You see (to Fang Fang), you said that I am thinner. H also said that I am thinner.

4H：你 可 以 去 量 一 下, 如果 現在的 體重 和 以前 一樣 就 瘦 了.

you may go measure one CLS if now PT weight and ago same just thin SFP

You can go to measure. If your weight is the same as before, you are thinner.

現在 我們 穿 的 多.   **SAE**

now we wear PT more

(Because) we wear more than before.

As Wetherell's (1992, cited in Guendouzi, 2004) respondents mentioned, two of the positive images are thin woman and natural woman. Although most of the girls are under the pressure of the first image, G tends to pursue the second image. As mentioned above, the socially accepted body-image is acknowledged as tall and slim. Although the social ideal has been aware of, some girls choose to behave against this ideal. They

attempt to pursue their personally accepted self. G self-initiates BSA move and exposes herself to potential face threat. "我最近都瘦了" can be interpreted as CES and a confrontation to thin-ideal. She prefers to eat more as she thinks that she has become thinner. It indicates that she has her own standard about body-image. Although socially accepted body-image is being slim,

she peruses healthy body-image and natural beauty, that is to say, G does not compare own body-image with socially accepted body-image. H cooperates with G by agreeing on her comment in turn 2 (FSMA). Then G justifies herself by SAE, that is, she needs to eat more based on her friends' comments.

Extract 4

1X：你 臉 上 的 皮 膚 還 可 以, 手 上 的 皮 膚 好 像 有 四 十 歲

　　you face on PT skin still OK hand on PT skin seem have forty years old

　　Your face skin seems OK. Your hand skin seems to be forty years old.

了. 在 美 國　讀 書 的 時 候 一 定 刷　了 不 少 盤 子 吧.　　**BSA**

SFP in America reading PT time must wash ASP NEG few plate SFP

You must have washed a lot of plates when you were studying in America.

2Y：有: 嗎 ？　　　　　　　　　　　　**FSMD**

　　have SFP Q

　　Really:?

3Z：她 跟　你 開 玩 笑 呢.　　　　　　**FSMD**

　　she follow you open jokes SFP

　　She is playing jokes on you!

In the previous part of this paper, the traits of ideal body-image have been discussed, which is slim and tall. Another important topic related to body-image among girls, especially women, is the skin. Whether they have fresh skin is considered as an important trait of women. In this extract, the topic of body-image is introduced by X. In this BSA move, X leaves Y open to potential positive face threat on purpose because X falls in love with Y's boyfriend. This move leaves a space for comments from other women present. Y's questioning can be interpreted as a FSMD move. Instead of cooperating with X to make comment on Y's skin, Z self-selects the turn to attempt to mitigate in a FSMD move. As Z has already known that X is in love with Y's boyfriend, Z is trying to save Y from face threatening. Thus, the cooperativity can be interpreted either to save the target's face on the target's half or to comment on the target cooperatively with the speaker (As what F did in extract 3).

Y is a successful professional woman as a lawyer. X is only an assistant. She is in an inferior position compared to Y in profession. Thus, X chooses to compete with Y from the aspect of body-image. Sometimes, the negotiation of body-image is the floor for them to compete for social status. As what Guendouzi found, "women's conversation may rely on interlocutor's cooperativity and a collaborative floor, the conversations are underpinned by a need to discursively claim symbolic capital through competition for socially acceptable images of femininity" (2001, p.29).

By analyzing data in the present study, it was found that not all of Guendouzi's (2004) conversational moves can be applied to the situation when the speaker exposes other to face threat. Based on the data in this paper, conversational moves in talking about body-image are tentatively noted when the speaker exposes other to face threat.

Potential face threatening moves	Cooperative moves
BIA(BSA) – body image announcement opens **the target** to potential face threat	**FSMA (PAC)** – face saving move by agreement
SAE – substantiating account elaboration, typically signify that the speaker needs to justify her account	**FSMD (FTC)** – face saving move by denial
PED? – personological discourse attributing body-size to character traits or lifestyle	SMA – supportive matching accounts or comment
*CEO – critical evaluation of other	CSM – conversational smoothing device
*CES – critical evaluation of self	

Figure 2. Conversational moves in talk about body-image

As the body-image announcement not only exposes the speaker to face threat but also exposes the hearer to face threat, the speaker in the first move can be improved to "the target". In this case, PAC and FTC can be respectively interpreted as FSMA and FSMD. It is hard to say whether PED will occur in my model as the data in this paper is limited and this move does not occur as frequently as other moves. It only appears in one turn in Guendouzi's (2004) study.

As the data in this study is not large enough to generate universal conversational moves in talking about body-image, Future studies are encouraged to improve this model based on more data.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of extracts here suggests the conversational moves in talking about body-image (see figure 2) is a little different from what Guendouzi (2004) has noted (see figure 1). The speaker does not necessarily expose herself to potential face threat. When the speaker self-initiates the BIA (BSA), it is the speaker whose face is threatened. When the speaker begins her comment on one of the interlocutor's body-image, it is the target whose face is open to threat. Secondly, when the hearer's face is threatened, she always keeps silent to show agreement or questions to deny. Agreement is a positive politeness for the hearer to save her own face. Questioning is employed to deny the announcement because Chinese people like to be indirect and try to avoid direct confrontation. The third point is that cooperativity is a characteristic of women's interaction. Both negative politeness and positive politeness strategies are adopted. The cooperation function as either face saving act on the target's behalf or substantiating information to support the face threat.

This study has two limitations. Data collected in this paper is very limited. I just took down the conversations about body-image around me and only short conversations can be written down while the long ones can not, thus the data may not include all the possibilities of such conversations. The second point to be improved is the collection method. Although field note data is realistic, it can not record all the features of the conversation like pause, intonation in detail. Therefore, future studies can be improved by enlarging the data based on improved data collection method.

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Appendix A

The following transcription conventions are adapted from Potter (1996), which are based on the system developed by Gail Jefferson:

,   a continuing intonation (not a grammatical comma)

.   a completing intonation (not a grammatical full stop)

_   underlining indicates words or parts of words stressed by the speaker

?   a questioning intonation (no correspondence with utterances participants treat as questions)

:   the prolongation of the sound immediately before

( )   bracketed ethnographic information

The following explains the codes (based on Li and Thompson, 1981) used in my translation of Chinese:

ASP   aspect particle

BA   marker preceding direct object

CLS   classifier

INTJ   interjection

MW   measure word

NEG   negation

PT   particle

Q   question tag

SFP   sentence final particle

THE AUTHOR

Huang Rui（黃瑞），female, postgraduate student, Beijing Foreign Studies University, linguistics and applied linguistics. Beijing, 100089, China.