

An Empirical Study on Class Intersubjective Teacher-student Relationship: Interpersonal Functional Perspective

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Abstract

The video of the winners of the special prize and the first prize in “The 10th SFLEP Foreign Language Teaching Contest” in 2019 were selected as the research data to explore the connotation and construction means of the inter-subjective teacher-student relationship. The data is manually annotated through UAM-CT software, and the use of mood and modality in the teachers' discourse are analyzed from the perspective of interpersonal theory. Combined with the intuitive feeling and comprehensive analysis of the class, it is considered that the inter-subjective teacher-student relationship is embodied in the cooperative relationship of the “teacher-led and student-involved” organizational form; the democratic and equal personality relationship between the main actors of the class and the high-quality communication relationship based on dialogue. It aims to provide an analytical framework for class teaching relationships and reference for College English class teaching.

Keywords: teacher-student relationship, interpersonal function, teachers' discourse, intersubjectivity

1. INTRODUCTION

Intersubjectivity was first proposed by the German philosopher Husserl, who considers intersubjectivity to be the communication between the “ego” and “alter ego”, an epistemological “commonality” [2]. Heidegger and Habermas argue from an ontological point of view that intersubjectivity exists between people with subjective consciousness [2]; a domestic scholar Zhan Guo explained from the Communication Theory that intersubjectivity is the development and enrichment of subjectivity, actually a kind of interactive subjectivity [3]; Yue Wei argues that that “intersubjectivity is a companion of subjectivity” is easy to cause misunderstanding, intersubjectivity arises in interaction, and the intrinsic purpose of communication is to make the subjects of interaction form a mutual “understanding” rather than a compulsive “consensus” [16]. The author agrees with Yue Wei's definition of intersubjectivity, that is, “intersubjectivity is the “mutual recognition” and “consensus” between subjects [16].

The Communication theory holds that teachers have equal-dialogue relations of “subject-object-subject” with students; the postmodern educationalism emphasizes the

emotional exchange between teachers and students on the basis of equality and democracy; phenomenology argues that teachers and students share the equal intersubjective relationships. In general, most of the theories support the relationship between teachers and students of democracy, equality and dialogue [6]. Xiaofeng Shao and Qifa Liao put forward that now most people recognize that the teacher-student relationship in the 21st century is democratic, equal, and dialogue-oriented and is an intersubjective relationship [12]. Hao Guo regards that from the perspective of intersubjectual philosophy, the authentic relationship between teachers and students is really an intersubjective relationship [2].

Therefore, the research questions in this study are as followings: (1) the connotative characteristics of the intersubjective teacher-student relationship; (2) the means of constructing the intersubjective teacher-student relationship in tone and mood.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

One scholar used the CNKI database to search for articles published in core journals and excellent master's and doctoral dissertations from 2000 to 2019 with the

keywords of "teacher-student relationship in colleges or universities" and "university or college teacher-student relationship", and found the research on the teacher-student relationship in domestic colleges and universities mainly focused on the reflection on the essential connotation, the analysis of the current situation and causes of the problem, the construction of the ideal relationship, etc., namely mainly summarizing the phenomenon [14].

The study of classroom discourse from the perspective of the interpersonal function of Systematic Functional Linguistics is essentially an empirical study of the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom. Lijuan Gao explain the characteristics of teacher discourse for the first time with the perspective of Systematic Functional Linguistics [1]. By comparing the tone, mood, and discourse markers of different teachers' discourses, Junhui Liang found that it is helpful to establish a student-centered, equal and harmonious teacher-student relationship through the use of the consultative, softened tone, medium and low value modalities, and rich discourse markers [9]. Jing Wang found that the use of a conciliatory tone, and low and medium value modal discourses in MOOCs can promote the teacher-student communication on and off the screen, and create a harmonious and equal learning atmosphere [15]. However, the elaboration of the teacher-student relationship in these studies only stays on the characteristic description, and do not dig deeply about the connotation of the teacher-student relationship. Therefore, from the perspective of interpersonal function, the analysis of teacher discourse in the framework of teacher-student relationship can provide the vivid empirical micro-case descriptions of connotation and construction means of teacher-student relationship in reality.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Research Data

The data of this research is selected from the final of "The 10th SFLEP Foreign Language Teaching Contest" held by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Publishing House. In the final contest, Unit 3 Breaking Stereotypes of the textbook "the Comprehensive Course of Intercultural College English" is taught by four teachers. Students are the same group in the finals. One special prize and three first prizes were awarded in the contest, so the teaching videos of four teachers T1, T2, T3 and T4 were collected, all of which were about 20 minutes long, lasting for about 80 minutes in total.

3.2. Theoretical framework

Halliday points out that people's most fundamental speech roles can be divided into giving and asking, what the speaker gives or asks from the listener. At the same

time, the exchange content can be divided into information, goods or services. The combination of exchange roles and exchange contents constitutes the four basic speech functions: statement, question, provision and command [4].

According to Halliday's definition of interpersonal meaning, the interpersonal function of language can be viewed from two aspects: interaction and attitude [8]. Interactive function refers to the language function related to the interaction between the two sides of the dialogue, which is realized by the mood system; The function of attitude refers to the attitude and evaluation of discourse by both sides of the dialogue, which is realized by the modality system.[7]. Mood is composed of subject and finite elements in clause. The subject is served by the nominal component, and the finite component is served by the verb operator expressing tense or modality. Modality refers to the speaker's effective affirmation of a proposition or proposal, as well as the determination to undertake some responsibility and obligation for the implementation of the proposition or proposal, which is mainly realized by modal verbs, modal adverbs and "extended predicate". Modality can be divided into two categories: modalization and modulation [11]. Modalization refers to the speaker's judgment on the possibility of proposition, including probability and frequency; modulation is the speaker's judgment of desirability of a proposition, including obligation and inclination[10]. Modality value can be divided into three levels: high, medium and low.

3.3. Research steps and methods

Firstly, the teaching video was transcribed into text data by using "iFLYrek", and has been manually reviewed for three times. Then the modality is marked in clause level with UAM-CT3.0. Based on the mood and modality theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics and combined with the research purpose, an annotation framework is designed to mark the data from two aspects: mood and modality.

The framework for the mood annotation is:

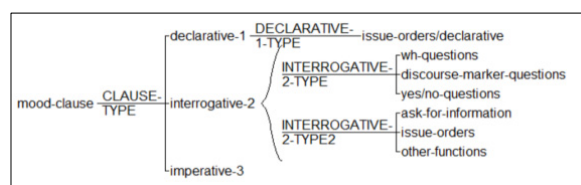


Figure 1: The framework for the mood annotation

As shown in Figure 1, the verbal function of the command is specially marked in the annotation framework. The functional clauses (issue orders / declarations) to issue commands in the declarative and interrogative mood are specially marked, and all the imperative mood clauses are not marked, because all the imperative mood clauses in the selected data implement

the verbal function of command. As mentioned in 3.2, the two sides of communication constitute four basic verbal functions in communication: statement, question, provision and command. As far as statement and question are concerned, they have an obvious consistency: usually, statement is reflected by statement sentence and question is reflected by question sentence [11]. By analyzing the verbal functions of imperative clauses and interrogative clauses in the data, it is found that the provision function is realized by declarative clauses. The different use of the three tones can explain the role identity automatically selected by teachers in teaching activities and the teacher-student relationship they try to build tend to equality, democracy or autocracy.

The proportion of wh-question clauses can explain the openness of classroom communication and the degree of discourse initiative that students have in the classroom. Therefore, wh-question clauses are distinguished in the annotation of interrogative clauses. Teacher talk belongs to spoken language style, and there are a certain number of discourse markers in spoken language. Discourse markers, such as "OK, yes, right" usually convey mood, declarative mood or interrogative mood, and have the communicative functions of confirmation, negotiation and seeking support.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Connotation And Characteristics Of Teacher-Student Relationship

In classroom communication, teachers and students have established a communication field of the same frequency resonance in the process of interaction from shallow to deep. Driven by the teaching objectives, teachers and students have been enhancing the mutual understanding with proceeding of different teaching steps, and have formed a certain degree of consensus on the "stereotype" of the two sides and the teaching content. According to Wei Yue 's definition of intersubjectivity, intersubjectivity is the "mutual understanding" and "consensus" between subjects. [5]. It is concluded that an inter subjective teacher-student relationship is constructed in the classroom.

Van Dijk (1997) [13] argues that discourse has three dimensions: language use, the communication of beliefs (i.e., cognition), and interaction in social contexts [10]. In this study, the discourse forms are analyzed from the perspective of interpersonal function in the dimension of language use. As for the perspective of communication of beliefs, teachers and students exchanged their cognition of stereotypes in the classroom through group discussions, whole-class discussions and other activities. From the macro level of classroom discourse, the entire teaching process is composed of long or short dialogues, and there are clear structures of continuous speech turn. Therefore, the communication in the classroom is illustrated with

high-quality communication relationships based on dialogue. Interaction in social contexts contains at least two-sides, interpersonal relationships between actors and the organizational model of activities. In this classroom, the democratic and equal interpersonal relationship between teachers and students is formed, and the organizational model is teacher-led and student-involved. Therefore, this study describes the interaction between teachers and students with the democratic and equal personality relationships between both actors and the teacher-led and student-involved cooperative relationships.

4.2. The Teacher-Led, Student-Involved Cooperative Relationship

As described in 3.2, when information is exchanged, teachers usually use the declarative tone and the question tone. The declarative tone is used to provide information, and the interrogative tone is used to ask and confirm information. When the goods or service are exchanged, if the teacher takes the initiative to provide goods and services, the verbal behavior of the provision is realized; if the teacher requests goods and services, the verbal behavior of the command is used. The total number of clauses in this study was 1091, of which the three tones of statement, question and imperative accounted for 64.89%, 26.58% and 8.52% respectively. It shows that teachers provide information in the classroom far more than ask for information, and exchanging information far more than exchanging goods and services. It can be seen that teachers play the role of information givers most of the time in the classroom and are in a leading position in the classroom.

The proportion of interrogative mood and imperative mood in teacher talk can reflect students' participation in the classroom. The imperative tone directly reflects the willingness of teachers to invite students to participate in the classroom, and also shows students' direct participation in the classroom. Interrogative tone is used to ask questions and request information, goods or services, which has obvious interactive characteristics. Students' participation in the classroom are analyzed mainly from the composition types of interrogative clauses in the following.

Total Units	290	
INTERROGATIVE-2-TYP	N=290	
- wh-questions	99	34.14%
- discourse-marker-qu	101	34.83%
- yes/no-questions	90	31.03%

Figure 2: the amounts of different questions

The proportion of wh-question can be used to roughly measure the discourse depth and openness of the classroom. In this study, wh-question clauses (34.14%) exceeded yes/no question (31.03%), indicating that the course has a certain degree of interaction between

teachers and students with a certain degree of openness.

The speaker's use of discourse markers to attract the recipient's attention is a ready strategy to mobilize the recipient's awareness of participation. By the analysis of the amounts of the different discourse-marker clauses, it is found that the main interrogative marker used is "right" (82.18%), followed by "OK" (9.90%).

The use of "Right" indicates that the teacher has been paying attention to students' reception of information. From the number of using the discourse markers in class, the number of T1, T2, T3 and T4 are 22 times, 25 times, 29 times and 25 times respectively, and their teaching time is only about 20 minutes, which shows that teachers use discourse markers to ask questions with high frequency, and strategically set aside a certain amount of time for students to think, so that students can fully understand and digest knowledge. Discourse markers act like communication metronomes, adjusting the pace and contributing to the same frequency resonance of interactions.

4.3. The democratic and equal personality relationship between actors

The democratic and equal personality relationship between actors is mainly analyzed from the use of command.

4.3.1. Use of Command Tone

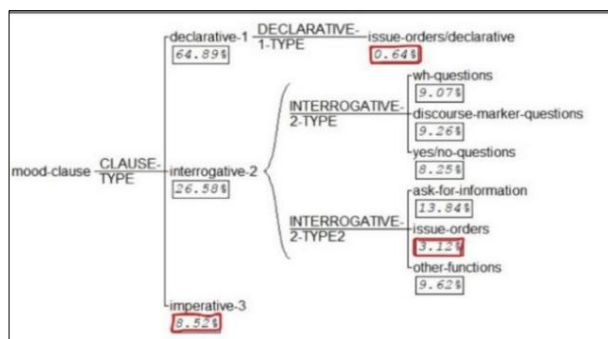


Figure 3: the amounts of three mood clauses

As shown in Figure 3, 0.64% of declarative clauses, 3.12% of interrogative clauses and 8.52% of imperative clauses (all imperative clauses in this study are used to issue commands), that is, a total of (0.64% + 3.12% + 8.52%) 12.28% of clauses are used for the verbal function of commands, which accounts for a relatively small proportion in the total amount of teacher discourse. As for the verbal function of issuing orders, it mainly uses imperative mood (8.52% / 12.18% = 69.38%), mixed with a certain proportion of interrogative mood (3.12% / 12.18% = 25.41%), and a small amount of declarative mood (0.64% / 12.18% = 5.21%).

Analyzing the specific interrogative clauses, it is found that the verbs "can, could or will" with medium

and low values are used in the example sentences. The use of these words can weaken the command tone and help build a democratic and equal classroom atmosphere.

In the clause (25.42%) issuing orders in interrogative tone, the proportions of T1, T2, T3 and T4 are 18.18%, 10.45%, 10.34% and 9.88% respectively. Analyzing the specific interrogative clauses, it is found that the interrogative command clauses are often paired with the words "please", medium and low value modal verbs "can, could and will". Medium and low value modal verbs can be used to weaken the command tone, and "please" can be used to express request and respect for the other.

In this study, the imperative tone accounts for 8.52%, all of which are used to issue orders. It is found that words such as "please, let me, let's" are frequently used in the imperative clause. The verbal meaning of "let me" is to give myself instructions. "Let's" is a typical pattern to bring imperative sentences. In the real context, "us" in "let's" only refers to the listener and does not include the speaker in most cases, but the use of "let's" can make the listener feel the same status with the speaker.

The total amount / proportion of non- "let's please let me" clauses is calculated (40.22%), indicating that in imperative clauses, teachers are also using words such as "let's and please" to soften the tone and give students more respect. Leech points out that "indirect words are often more polite because they increase the degree of choice and negotiation in the discourse, thus reducing the coercion on of the listener." (Leech, 1983) In communication, giving others more choices belongs to Leech's appropriateness criterion, so that others can benefit more and enjoy more rights, which reflects the characteristics of teachers' generosity in discourse. In short, the high-frequency use of modal verbs with medium and low value and "please" in statement and the question command clauses and the collocation of "let's, please and let me" in imperative clauses can effectively weaken the command tone, give students more discourse choices, reflect teachers' respect for students' personality, and create a democratic and equal negotiation relationship between teachers and students.

4.3.2. Modulation

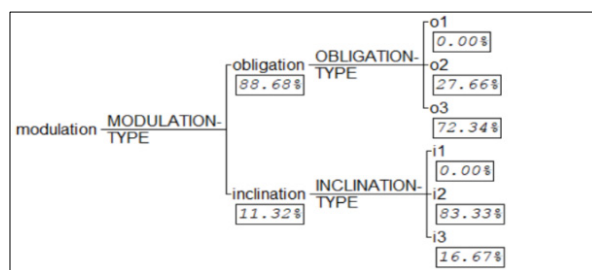


Figure 4: the data of modulation

Both the high-value obligation and the high-value inclination expressions are zero, which shows that

teachers in the classroom are using low-medium value words to issue commands and provide services. Analysis from the data of the specific data of the modulation expressions, “would” is used more frequently in the expression of inclination, which is consistent with the meaning of “would” itself.

In summary, teachers mainly use imperative mood, more interrogative mood and a small amount of declarative mood to implement the verbal function of command. Modal verbs with middle and low value, “let’s, let me, please” and other words are frequently used in imperative clauses to effectively weaken the imperative tone and help build a democratic and equal classroom atmosphere.

4.4. The high quality communication based on dialogue

The high-quality communication relationship based on dialogue will be discussed in the use of low-value modal words and the design of “in-person” teaching materials.

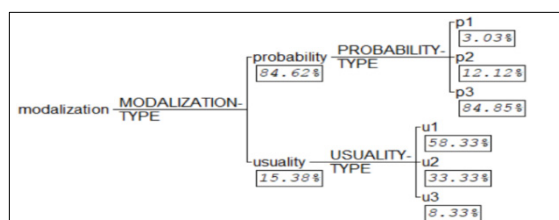


Figure 5: the data of modalization

It can be seen that the probabilistic words with high modal values are both adverbs, and there are only two of them, one representing absolutely with a positive meaning and one representing a negative meaning. The middle-value probability are all modal verbs, “will or would”. The low probability are all modal verbs, and the use of “can” accounts for 59.09%.

The use of low-modal words such as “can” indicates the speaker’s judgment about the likelihood of propositional information occurring. Quality maxim Grice put forward requires that what the speaker says should be true. In reality, the validity of information or propositions exists under certain conditions, and the judgment of yes or no can only exist based on the limited context, so when summarizing the subjective judgment of a certain type of proposition, under the general context, the use of the low-value modal verbs can make the discourse statement more in line with objective facts and express a realistic conversational attitude.

The design of the “in-person” teaching materials refers to the teaching design of the teacher telling his own experience in the lecture, creating his own lines related to himself. T1 uses his own “famous words” to make a summary, and puts forward it in the humorous way of asking himself to answer, which is impressive. This way

is not only humorous and interesting, but also expresses the teacher’s sincere attitude in communication. T2 uses her own photo taken in Greece to illustrate the stereotype of European women about Asian appearance. Generally speaking, the low-value modal expressions and the “in-person” design of teaching materials can highlight the sincere communication attitude of teachers.

5.CONCLUSION

This paper describes the connotation characteristics of intersubjective teacher-student relationship in this classroom: the “teacher-led and student-involved” cooperative relationship in organizational form; the democratic and equal personality relationship between actors; and the high-quality communication relationship based on dialogue. As the basic relations in teaching activities, these three relationships exist in every teaching activity and can be used as a reference framework for analyzing the relationship between classroom teaching and learning.

Teachers used more declarative mood, a certain amount of wh-question clauses, and high-frequency discourse-marker question clauses in the class, which built a cooperative relationship dominated by teachers; the imperative mood and more interrogative mood were used to issue orders, and the use of the medium-value and low-value modal verbs and “let’s and please” could build democratic and equal personality relations; the modal expression of low-value modal words and the “in-person” design of teaching materials helped achieve high-quality communication. These discourse means in high-quality teaching can provide reference for College English teaching.

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