

# Positive or Negative Emotions: The Speaker's Choice

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**Abstract** - This paper explores how speakers use address terms metaphorically to express their emotions. A co-variation scale of emotion and meaning is constructed and the metaphorical realization of address terms are revealed: speakers may express the positive emotions by choosing negative address terms, or express the negative emotions by choosing positive address terms. And an illustration is provided by analyzing the examples in some Chinese literary works.

**Key words** address terms; emotion; co-variation; metaphorical realization

## 1. Introduction

Researches from pragmatic perspective show that address terms commonly function as greeting; addressing or referring; politeness strategies in communication; markers of speakers' identity and indicators of social culture (Zhao, 1997; Li and Li, 2002; Liu, 2003; Xiao, 2003; Nevala, 2004). Cognitive linguistics holds the view that the choice of address terms is involved in a complex mental process which is based on the language users' cognitive perception of the social relationship between the interlocutors, their perception of the formality of the interaction as well as their emotive involvement. And Hu et al (2005) propose that the studies of emotion in cognitive linguistics and in Appraisal Theory are interfaced in a sense. Therefore this paper will make a tentative study of how people use address terms metaphorically to express their emotions.

## 2. Metaphorical use of address terms

Metaphor studies have been the hot topic in semantics, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics and functional linguistics. Basically the same, each approach has its own focus. From the functional perspective, linguists regard metaphorical use as the opposite of congruent use. The very significant point we draw from functional linguistics is that a particular way of expressing a meaning can not be simply taken as either congruent or metaphorical: it is always a matter of degree, and we should talk of a wording being more or less metaphorical or congruent in relation to a different way of expressing the meaning (Thompson 1996: 166).

To work out our definition of metaphorical use of address terms, theories connected with both metaphor and address terms need to be combined. Metaphorical use of address terms is roughly a choice among the meaning potentials of the terms (Peng, 2005), which can be indicated by two obvious features: conventional address terms used creatively in certain situations that may gain the unconventional meanings; unconventional address terms which are newly or temporarily created through a complex metaphorical mental process to possess obvious

evaluative meanings. In a word, the result of metaphorical use of address terms is its unconventionality or creativity.

Dunkling (1990) claims that "it is the terms of address we use to others, and those used to us in return, which define us, placing us firmly at a social and professional level, indicating our emotional impact on those around us". Steen (1994: 195) also points out that "when metaphors are highly appropriate (conceptually) they are also highly persuasive (communicatively) and natural (emotively)". So affection or emotional attitude, an abstract cognitive process, is one of the functions of metaphorical use of address terms.

The use of address terms is a matter of choice. The expression is the meaning, so the choice of a metaphorical use of an address term construes a different meaning from the choice of a literal one. The metaphorical use always implies the speaker's intentions and is emotionally motivated.

## 3. The co-variation scale of emotion and meaning

Though emotions can be categorized into some basic concepts, such as anger, fear, pride, respect, love, the superordinate category emotion as well as some subordinate categories (Kövecses, 1990, 2000), the basic concepts are always the subjects of research. In the present paper, the emotional meaning expressed by address terms will be analyzed in terms of these basic concepts and will be arranged along the continuum: **Pleasing – Friendly – Polite – Neutral – Impersonal – Dissatisfied – Attacking**, with the left side as positive and the right side as negative. To express the intended meaning, speakers will carefully make a choice, which is based on their judgment of the social relationships between the interlocutors as well as the appreciation of the formality of the interaction.

However, it is unsafe to rely on the semantic content of words used as terms of address to indicate the category to which they belong in face-to-face interactions, for almost any word, name or phrase used vocatively can be made to belie its apparent face-value. Li Zhanzi (2002: 301) points out that negative words don't necessarily indicate negative attitudes, for example, some feminists or young girls may call each other "bitch" which is more of a marker of their solidarity, and similarly American Negroes address each other "nigger" and gays call each other "proof" or "fag". All these apparent negative terms have deep positive meanings.

Thus, there are two ways to express the speaker's emotions: **one is the congruent realization**, and **the other is the metaphorical realization**. The congruent realization will show the correspondence between the forms (positive or negative) and the emotions (positive feeling or negative

feeling), and the metaphorical realization can be further elaborated as: using positive forms to express negative feelings; and using negative forms to express positive feelings.

#### 4. Metaphorical realization of the meaning potential of address terms

The congruent realization of address terms is not focused, and we only pay attention to the metaphorical realization. The analysis is along **two dimensions**: using positive address terms to express negative emotions and using negative address terms to express positive emotions. Along these two dimensions, the functions of address terms are illustrated as: address terms as insults, as disrespect, as blames, and as complaints; address terms as endearments, as signals of intimacy, as compliments, and as a tool for making fun.

##### 4.1 Positive address terms expressing negative emotions

Metaphorical realization of the positive address terms means that the endearment, intimate, and respect terms are used to express the negative emotions like complaint, anger, hate, disrespect, or insults.

###### 4.1.1. Address terms as insult

In Chinese, *guafu* (寡妇widow) refers to the woman whose husband died and who has not remarried. It is seldom used as a face-to-face addressing term but as a referring term. The term itself does not possess negative meaning. However, when it was used in the following situation by Lu Xun in one of his works, *A Storm*, a negative emotion of insult was involved. Here the referent was apparently taken as the speaker's daughter who was only a child, but the real referent was a widow present. And before the address term the epithet *tou han de* (偷汉的a woman who commits adultery) was added. By using such a term a strong sense of insult was revealed.

*Qi Jinsao* (the wife of *Qi Jin*) was just in bad temper at the moment, so she pricked between her daughter's feet with chopsticks vehemently, roaring, "Who asked you to speak here? You adulterous widow!"

Lu Xun *A Storm*

###### 4.1.2 Address terms as disrespect

The special address term adopted by the speaker is always connected with the addressee's character, capacity or appearance. Among the intimates both positive and negative nicknames can be used to indicate their close relationships. However, in some cases the apparent positive address terms are intended not as solidarity markers but as disrespect signals. Though the face value of the creative address term *yuan gui* (圆规Compasses) was not negative at all, it was used here to present before us a vivid picture of a thin, ugly woman, who was standing with both of her legs gracelessly apart. In a word, the positive address term was intended as a ridicule term for the old woman who was greedy and ugly.

"Well, well, the richer, the miser, and the miser, the richer..." While she was speaking garrulously, *Compasses* turned to walk outside slowly, with anger in her face. She put a pair of

my mother's gloves in the waist of her trousers, and then walked out.

Lu Xun *Hometown*

##### 4.1.3 Address terms as blames

Sometimes speakers use the common endearments to express their blame on the hearer. The following address term is taken as metaphorical for its application of the animal name *cat* upon human beings. The deep feeling of the mother by choosing such a term is conveyed in this special situation. The usual endearment address term *xiao chan mao* (小馋猫a little gluttonous cat), in this specific situation revealed the mother's blame on her son because he didn't finish his homework.

"Mom, are the fried peas ready?"

The mother gave him a stare, "*Xiao chan mao* (lit. a little gluttonous cat), you only know eating! Do your homework!"

Xu Dexia 2004 *Remaining Fragrance after Years*

##### 4.1.4 Address terms as complaints

The use of animal names upon human beings always indicates the speaker's evaluation of the hearer in terms of the characteristics of the animal. It seems difficult to distinguish complaint from blame when the complaint is relatively implicit and indirect in degree.

Monkeys are regarded by Chinese as clever and smart. The situation was that Uncle Jin was the gardener of the orchard and the two naughty boys always gave him troubles by stealing apples. This utterance was an imitation of the words of Uncle Jin by Mao Mao to Ning Ning. The creative use of *Hou Jing* (猴精Clever monkey) by Uncle Jin to address these two naughty boys indicated that these two boys were so smart that he could do nothing. Thus, though positive evaluation of the two boys' cleverness was involved, Uncle Jin's complaint was also conveyed.

Mao Mao drew back Ning Ning, and the two boys quickly hid behind the big pagoda tree like two rats. If they were seized by Uncle Jin, things would be worse. He must say, "Look, it was these two *Hou Jing* (clever monkeys)".

Xu Dexia 2004 *Remaining Fragrance after Years*

##### 4.2 Negative address terms expressing positive emotions

Metaphorical use of these negative address terms means using these terms to express positive emotions instead. Here the apparent negative address terms can be used as endearments, intimacy signals, praising expressions or as a tool for making fun.

###### 4.2.1 Address terms as an endearment

Address terms are used by the speakers as endearments can be seen in many occasions. If it is common to use endearment terms to express the speaker's love towards the hearer, it is not rare that sometimes the speaker may choose the apparent negative forms such as *xiao duitou* (小对头 lit. little enemy), *xiao yuanjia* (小冤家 lit. little enemy), *henxin zei* (狠心贼 lit. cruel-hearted person) to indicate their positive emotions towards the hearer. A negative form functioning as an endearment term to express deep love can also be found in literary works. In this example, the address term *gui* (鬼ghost)

was not a swearing term but an endearment term, which may indicate the cleverness of the boy.

She found Jiu Ping (the boy's name), laughed, "**Ghost!** What are you glaring at?" She lowered her head to have a look at her beautifully bulged belly and laughed even more loudly, "When your mother was conceiving you, she was just like this, a highly bulged belly. People said that she would give birth to a boy, and so she did. She gave birth to you, a boy, a handsome boy. Good fortune!"

Cao Wenxuan 2005 *Wild Windmill*

#### 4.2.2 Address terms as signals of intimacy

The same as endearment, intimacy is also the pleasing emotion from the speaker to the hearer. To express love is not to be restricted to the older generation for the younger generation. Sometimes among the intimates, apparent negative address terms (**you silly little girl, you fellow**) can be used to express the speakers' intimacy towards each other.

"**Lao Jue Ye (Old stubborn grandpa)**! You're waiting for our **stubborn grandma**, are you? Hei Hei!" Sister Xiue said.

"**You silly little girl!** Your mouth is so quick!"

"**Jue da ye!** Let us taste the fresh watermelon, will you?"

"**You fellow!** Do you have the right tooth for the fresh watermelon?"

Cao Wenxuan 2005 *Wild Windmill*

#### 4.2.3 Address terms as compliments

As far as address terms are concerned, the creative use always involves the speaker's subjective evaluation of the hearer's capacity. Metaphorical use of address terms is also indicated in using negative address terms to express the speaker's positive emotion. Here we will see how the speakers use address terms to express their praise or compliment on the hearer.

A (male): **You fellow!** You got the first scholarship.

B (male): Hei, just by fortune.

For a university student, winning the first scholarship is really an event that needs to be congratulated. Thus, though the apparent negative address term **xiaozi** (小子 *gu*) is used by speaker A, his sincere praise of B's capacity is revealed.

#### 4.2.4 Address terms as a tool for making fun

To be humorous is one of the communicative strategies in interactions, and sometimes address terms can serve as such a trigger. That is, speakers use the address term not only to arouse the attention of the hearer but to make a joke upon the hearer so as to enliven the speech atmosphere.

In informal contexts, creative selection among the varieties of address terms can reach unexpected goals. And in most cases, the attitudes of the speakers are implicated by the choice of address terms. If a person's name or title serves as a signal of his/her social identity in communication, the function of a nickname is more than that. The nicknames like **pai gu**

(排骨 *Spareribs*) or **lu chai bang** (芦柴棒 *a very thin person*) to those people who are adequately thin, and **mu nai yi** (木乃伊 *Mummies*) to those who are always emotionless, are commonly accepted by people because of their vivid description of the hearers.

Besides the use of nicknames in our daily life, in literary works successful use of nicknames by the writer can also provide vivid pictures or images of the characters to the readers. These nicknames are created to make fun of the hearer's appearance. Appropriate use of such nicknames can enliven the speech atmosphere and make the interaction humorous.

## 5. Conclusion

We have illustrated by examples how speakers use address terms metaphorically to express their emotions. We attempt to conclude that there are no positive or negative address terms but only positive or negative intentions, because the understanding of emotions is based on the social culture, the situational context, as well as the social relationship between the interlocutors. The face value of address terms sometimes will defy the real intentions of the addresser towards the addressee. All in all, the study of the metaphorical use of address terms will facilitate the studies of language communication.

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