

Changes and Development of Person Indicator in Internet Context

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Abstract. Linguistic references to personal pronouns in traditional grammar, i.e., the person indicative in pragmatics, refer to the mutual address of both parties of a conversation when they use discourse to convey information or address the indirect participants. With the development of the times, the gradual popularity of online communication, the promotion of the Internet media platform and other factors have changed the meaning of personal indicatives. This paper statistically analyzes the corpus data of personal indicatives in commonly used online media and finds that there is a phenomenon of “language expansion” in personal indicatives in online contexts, with the third person having the highest degree of expansion. In further analysis, this paper, in accordance with the theory of “cultural information trichotomy”, points out that this phenomenon is related to cultural products, value norms and interpersonal harmony through the analysis of specific examples, and seeks to construct the ecology of network civilization.

Keywords: internet, person indicative, indicative, social media

1. Introduction

With the development of the Internet, the network media has broken the time and space limitations of traditional face-to-face communication, and the mode of language communication has also changed a lot. As an indispensable ingredient of language communication, the personal indicative has shown significant changes in the network media. These changes are not only reflected in the updating of vocabulary but also in the variation of cultural information behind it.

In recent years, emerging online person indicatives have emerged and received a certain degree of attention from the academic community, while at the same time, the related studies suffered from a limited number of quantitative-qualitative studies and incomplete research objects. Among the two quantitative-qualitative studies in the past five years, only the study of Jiang and Tang and the study of Chen Yanqing were related to person-indicative language in the online context. Jiang and Tang compared the similarities and differences in the presentation of personal indicators and the construction of relational identities in Chinese and American hotel online reviews based on a corpus of Chinese and American hotel online reviews on different websites and found that there was a great deal of difference in the construction of relational identities in the replies to Chinese and American online reviews due to socio-cultural differences [1]. However, their study focused more on the cultural differences between the U.S. and China rather than the influence of the online context. Chen

Yanqing studied the discourse of police bulletins that triggered public opinion and examined the use of self-indicators in police bulletins that triggered positive and negative public opinion, as well as the use and preference of referential scope and referential point of view, to find out the different preferences of person indicators in police bulletins that triggered the whole negative public opinion [2]. However, the number of studies is limited, and the scope of the research object was more focused on police notifications than on online personal indicators. Based on the current situation, it is of great research value to analyze the data and explore the reasons for the changes of personal indicators in the online context, which can supplement and refer to the related studies.

This paper takes the change and development of personal indicative language under the Internet media as the research object. By combining the theory of pragmatics and the theory of cultural information layering and by utilizing data capturing and analyzing techniques, this paper seeks to reveal the cultural information variation of the personal indicative language under the Internet media at different levels and to explore the reasons for it as well as its impact on the sociolinguistic life.

2. Definition and classification of person indicators

Indicators, i.e., “words or structures that can only be identified in the context of the object or information to which they refer”, can generally be divided into five categories: person indicators, time indicators, orientation indicators, discourse indicators, and social indicators [3]. Among them, pronunciation Indicators refer to “words or structures used to indicate the speaker, the listener, or a third party in verbal communication” [3]. In short, person indicators are words that refer to the person’s name.

According to the participants in verbal communication, including the speaker, the listener, or the third party, person indicatives can be divided into first-person indicatives, second-person indicatives, and third-person indicatives [4]. First-person directives mainly include the speaker in verbal communication, but sometimes they can also refer to the listener, such as “Wo men (we)” and “Zan men (we)” in a specific context; second-person directives mainly refer to the listener in the communication process, such as “Ni (you)”, “Nin (you)” and “Ni men (you)”; third-person directives in general are not direct participants in verbal communication but refer to other people who are not in the scene of communication. Personally indicative language reflects the relationship between the speaker and the recipient, emotion and social status, and sometimes also implies the speaker’s real intention.

3. Research methods

In order to facilitate the comparison as well as to control the number of data, this study firstly selected three pairs of traditional person indicatives and online person indicatives under different personas: “Wo (I)”, “Ou (I)” (first person); “Ni (you)”, “Ni (you)” (second person); “He/She/It (he/she/it)”, “Ta” (third person) [5]. Then, three pairs of traditional person indicative and online person indicative (eight words in total) were used as keywords to retrieve blog posts within five hours of a well-known social software, and all the blog posts were organized into a corpus to build a corpus. By manually filtering the corpus, all the keywords in the corpus appear in the person indicative. Finally, the amount of corpus within different person groups is analyzed to compare the frequency of use of traditional person indicative and online person indicative.

In this study, a total of 2,788 corpora were collected, of which 2,346 were valid. As shown in Figure 1, the keyword search of “Wo (I)” yielded 320 pieces of corpus; the keyword search of “Ou (I)” yielded 273 pieces of corpus, of which 67 were valid; The keyword search of “Ni (you)” yields

288 items; the keyword search of “Ni (you, but it has the same pronunciation as 'mud')” yields 263 items, of which 35 are valid; the keyword search of “He(he)” yields 487 items; the keyword search of “She (she)” yields 410 items; with “It (it)” as the keyword, we got 332 items; with “Ta” as the keyword, we got 415 items, of which 407 were valid items.

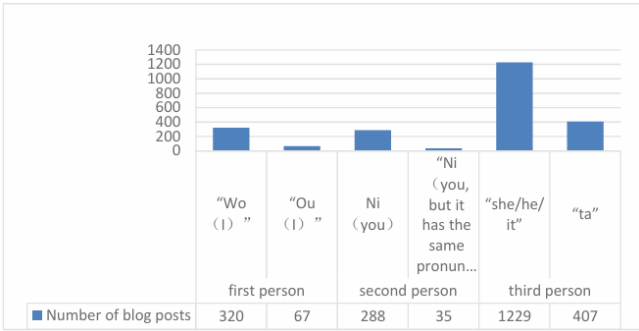


Figure 1. Number of five-hourly blog posts on social networking software searched by different keywords

4. Findings

As shown in Figure 2, third-person indicatives account for the highest proportion in the corpus, accounting for about 70%. For different person groups, the ratio of online person indicators to traditional person indicators is used as the reference basis for “the influence of online context on person indicators”; the higher the ratio, the more the person indicator is influenced by online context. Figure 3 shows that the third-person group has the highest ratio and is most affected by the online context, which is about 1.65 times that of the first-person group and 2.75 times that of the second-person group.

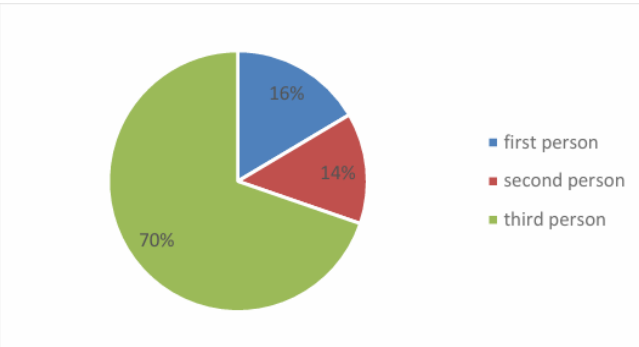


Figure 2. Percentage of corpus with different personas

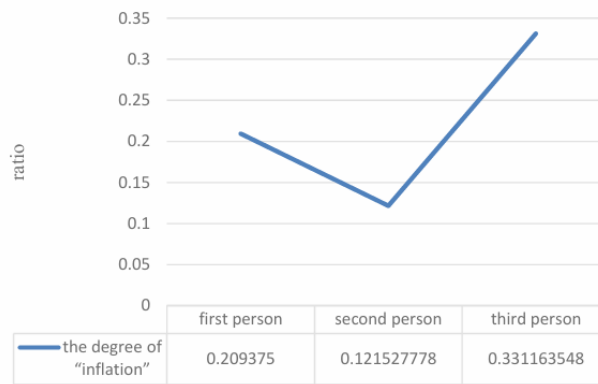


Figure 3. Ratio of different persona network persona indicators to traditional persona indicators

The concept of “inflation” first originated in the field of economics to describe the issuance and circulation of money, referring to an economic phenomenon in which the amount of paper money issued is greater than the amount needed to circulate in the market, resulting in a depreciation of the value of money. Simply put, the actual demand for money is less than the supply of money, resulting in a period of time when prices continue to rise—a phenomenon.

Some scholars believe that the currency system is a means of exchanging wealth, and language is a medium for conveying thoughts and emotions, just like the inflation born from the mismatch between the currency system and the wealth behind it; the mismatch between the language and the thoughts and emotions behind it is the inflation of language [6]. In the Internet society, the inflation phenomenon of language has a stronger propagation through the Internet medium and has derived many branches.

The proliferation of personal indicatives in the Internet context has led to the expansion of the meanings of some words, which can also be interpreted as the “inflation” of personal indicatives. Comparing the ratio of the different personal indicators in the above study to the traditional personal indicators, i.e., the degree of “inflation” of different personal indicators in the Internet context, it can be seen that the third-person indicator in the Internet context has the highest degree of “inflation”. (As shown in Figure 3)

5. Discussing the reasons for the change of third-person indicative language

From the above data, it can be concluded that third-person indicative language has the most obvious degree of “expansion” in the Internet context, so this study takes the “expansion” of third-person indicative language as the main object of research. According to the “cultural information trichotomy”, cultural information can be divided into three categories: surface cultural information (cultural products), deep cultural information (norms and values), and core cultural information (the basic assumptions of existence, i.e., the basic assumptions of the culture) [7]. The basic types of “inflation” of person indicators in the online context can thus be categorized into three types: surface cultural information, deep cultural information, and changes in core cultural information.

5.1. Surface cultural information

Surface cultural information refers to cultural products, i.e., perceptible cultural existence, including linguistic facts, food, buildings, houses, monuments, agriculture, altars, markets, fashion, art, etc. [8]. For example, the third-person indicative “green tea” is derived from the evolution of the surface

cultural information in the Internet context, mocking people who have the attributes of “fragility, purity, and pretending to be pitiful” and borrowing the traditional meaning of ‘freshness’ from the traditional meaning of “green tea”. Green tea in the traditional sense of “freshness, purity,” and other cultural information of the plant itself, although “green tea” as a metaphor, distorts the original meaning and is used in the third person to refer to the third person so as to realize the third-person indicative of “inflation The third-person indicative is “inflated” by distorting the original meaning and using it in third-person reference. Similarly, there are also “four-eyed boy (四眼仔)”, “white lotus flower (白莲花)”, “loser (屌丝)” and so on.

5.2. Deep cultural information

Deep information refers to value norms and also refers to a kind of hidden objective information that exists in the collective consciousness [8]. Deep cultural information is the behavioral norms and standards of the members of a culture. Taking the third person indicative “nv hanzi (female tough guy)” as an example, “nv hanzi (female tough guy)” refers to a woman who possesses the characteristics of “strong and willing to work” that are traditionally defined for men. The term “nv hanzi (female tough guy)” refers to a woman who possesses the traditionally defined male characteristics of being “strong and capable”. From the deeper cultural message that “male dominates the outside and is beautiful in terms of strength, while female dominates the inside and is beautiful in terms of softness,” the norms of ‘female’ and “tough guy” cannot be used to describe female individuals at the same time, which is a subversion of the traditional gender identity setting, as well as a reversal of the traditional gender identity setting, and a reversal of the traditional gender identity setting. This is a reversal of the traditional gender identity, and it will also cause other social individuals to disapprove of this kind of person because of the huge difference with the traditional identity perception. Therefore, the change of traditional deep cultural information in the Internet context has led to the emergence of personal indicators such as “nv hanzi (female tough guy)”, which indicates that in modern society, gender differences between men and women are narrowing, and the convergence of gender characteristics has become a development trend, on the one hand, because of a less clear-cut division of labor in society, and, on the other hand, because of a more pluralistic and free society, people have a more relaxed and liberal attitude towards many things. On the other hand, society is more diversified and free, and people’s attitudes towards many things are more relaxed and tolerant [9].

In order to study the role of deep cultural information changes on the “expansion” of person indicative in the online context, this study grabs the corpus of a social platform within 4 hours with “green tea” as the keyword, and a total of 150 items are grabbed, of which 76 are “green tea” with non-personal indicative semantics and 74 are third-person indicative semantics (as shown in Figure 4).

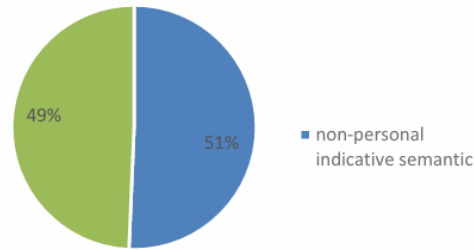


Figure 4. Percentage of “green tea” as a person-indicative semantic versus a non-personal indicative semantic

According to the data, in the Internet context, the expansion of the third-person indicative has expanded the meaning of “green tea” to nearly twice its original meaning. It is puzzling that the original meaning of the word “green tea” does not have a pejorative color, but the expanded third-person indicative in the Internet context has an obvious pejorative color, e.g.:

Alas, the green-tea-scheming woman; alas, pretending to be a pig to eat a tiger.

In this corpus, it is not difficult to see that “green tea” and “scheming” have similar meanings. The production, proliferation, and use of the paradoxical rhetoric of “green tea” reproduce the traditional gender norms for women in Chinese society, including the contempt, spurning, and ridiculing of “undesirable” women [10].

5.3. Core cultural information

Core cultural information mainly contains the basic assumptions of culture, and it also has a certain influence on the person indicators in the online context, especially the second-person indicators [8]. For example, the second-person indicator “pro”, which originally means parents, biological, closest in lineage to those who are related by blood or marriage, and those who have a good relationship and deep feelings, refers to people who have a certain physical blood relationship and belongs to the surface-level cultural information. In the deeper cultural information of Chinese, the purpose of interacting with people is often to bring them closer together and show their closeness. In this case, the use of “qin (亲)” is to use the meaning of “proximity” to draw the social distance between each other closer. Therefore, “qin (亲)” satisfies the need of the deep cultural message of the Chinese language, and with the help of this expression of ‘proximity’, the core cultural message of the Chinese language, “regard peace as precious” can be realized. Therefore, the evolution of “qin (亲)” is essentially the direction of the core cultural message “regard peace as precious”.

6. Conclusion

The change of personal indicatives in the Internet context is not only a morphological variation of language itself but also an inherent reform of social and cultural information. Through data capturing and analysis techniques, combined with pragmatics and cultural information layering theory, this study concludes that the phenomenon of third-person indicative language “expansion” is most significant in the online context and that the change of personal indicative language is closely related to the surface cultural products, deep value norms, and core cultural information. Meanwhile, this study provides a new direction for online language ecological governance. The “inflation” of PIDs may not only promote the diversity of language expressions but also lead to semantic

ambiguity and communication misunderstanding. Therefore, it is necessary for the relevant authorities to regulate and guide them in order to build a harmonious and inclusive online language ecology.

There are some limitations in this study. Firstly, the data source of this study mainly focuses on blog posts within five hours of a single social platform, and the spatial and temporal coverage of the sample is limited, which may not be able to comprehensively reflect the whole picture of online contexts. Secondly, the research method of this study relies on keyword searches and manual filtering, which may have a subjective bias. In future research, the corpus can be further expanded to enhance the objectivity of the study.

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