

Research on Interpersonal Conflict Between Family Generation

--Take the TV Series A Little Reunion as an Example

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Abstract: Interpersonal conflict is a universal phenomenon in our daily life, especially the family conflict. Conflicts between our family members run counter to the desire for family harmony, so it's worth taking into account the conflict, particularly between parents and children. This paper takes the TV series A Little Reunion as an example, chooses one of the three families in the series as a representative, studies the interpersonal conflict between parents and children in the family, organizes the dialogue patterns by recording the conversations and classifying the sentences through emotional characteristics and content, namely used the methods of corpus organization and corpus classification. After that, literature reading is used in this paper to analyze the reasons for the family conflicts. At the end of this paper shows the patterns of interpersonal conflicts are triggered by four actions, namely questioning, accusation, assertion and request, and the reasons can be related to the concept of how personal values are realized, as well as perspectives on conflict.

Keywords: family, interpersonal conflict, generational communication, pragmatics

1. Introduction

The research on interpersonal conflicts can be traced back to Dawe, who analyzed the interpersonal conflicts, using the example of quarrels among pre-school children [1]. After that, this research on interpersonal conflicts has been emphasized by more and more scholars gradually, resulting in a wider and wider range of research perspectives, and the results of the research can help promote the smoothness of communication, alleviate tense interpersonal relationships, and promote the harmonious development of society. Relevant research on interpersonal conflicts in China started late, and the first to introduce "argumentative dialogue", i.e., interpersonal conflict, was Chen, who introduced the meaningful explorations in discourse coherence and demonstrated that in argumentative discourse, cohesion intensifies accordingly within one's own speech as well as in relation to the speaking partner, as each wishes to emphasize his own point of view [2]. Then, Liu did a research on interpersonal conflict in TV dramas using speech act theory, mainly analyzing the speech acts that triggered the conflicts and their responses [3]. Wang, Ma, and others also similarly utilized speech act theory to study interpersonal conflict in films and TV dramas [4][5], from which it can be seen that the sociolinguistic perspective of interpersonal conflicts deserves attention [6].

All in all, the relevant research on interpersonal conflicts in China has already yielded some results, while the sociolinguistic perspective still has further research value. And this paper takes the TV series *A Little Reunion* as an example, chooses one of the three families in the series as a representative, studies the interpersonal conflict between parents and children in the chosen family, organizes the dialogue patterns, and tries to analyze the reasons for the phenomenon, by using corpus organization, corpus classification and literature reading. Through this study, some families can be helped to avoid family relationship breakdown due to too many conflicts or poor communication.

2. Interpersonal Conflict Theory

According to Conceptualizing the Construct of Interpersonal Conflict [7], interpersonal conflicts are viewed as a dynamic process. Since the definition of interpersonal conflict may vary considerably, there are three general themes or properties that can be identified to underlie many descriptions of what conflict is: disagreement, negative emotion, and interference. And through the three general themes or properties, the perspectives of definitions of interpersonal conflict can be divided into two groups. One group of definitions equates conflict with a single property or theme. That is, they define interpersonal conflict or a type of interpersonal conflict solely as disagreement, solely as a negative emotion, or solely as interference. A second group of perspectives has conceptualized interpersonal conflict using multiple themes or properties, viewing it as the joint presence of two or all three properties. Combining the two groups of definitions above, till the second part of Conceptualizing the Construct of Interpersonal Conflict, gave the “final concept” of interpersonal conflict: it may be more fully conceptualized as a construct that incorporates the simultaneous presence of cognition, emotions, and behaviors relevant to conflict contexts and defines it as a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals.

The phenomenons of conflicts between parents and children definitely meet the above definition of interpersonal conflict. Even the nagging is a representative family conflict arena [8], complying with the interpersonal conflict, since the move subsequent to the reminder is similar to a complaint in that when the nagger reaches this stage he must consider the payoff, just as in the complaining situation, contains two of the three properties: “negative emotional” and “interference with the attainment of the goals” for naggers are trying to control the environment by nagging.

3. Phenomenons of Family Conflicts

Cases of the study come from the Chinese TV series *A Little Reunion*, which is set against the backdrop of a College Entrance Exam and tell the stories of three families. In one of the three families, there are more conflicts between parents and children. The child of that family is named Qiao Yingzi. She currently lives with her mother since her parents are divorced, but that doesn't mean she didn't keep in touch with her father. It also set the stage for her contradictions with her mother because sometimes she meets with her dad in secret to keep her parents from fighting. For Qiao, her conflicts with her mother built up a little bit, and the conflicts between them are all very typical not only in the series, but in reality, this can be seen in many online movie reviews or real-time pop-ups, as they all often exclaimed that “it's like it happened to me”. There are ten conflicts between Qiao and her mother in the series, and the themes of the conflicts centered around two things: parenting and learning. Three of the ten conflicts are related to the former theme, the mom and Qiao are mostly at odds because dad's parenting style is different from mom's, which is related to the fact that Qiao has a lot of stress in the series, and she needs someone like her dad who can relax her, but it makes her mom feel like the parenting is out of control. Seven of the ten

conflicts are related to the latter theme, and mom and Qiao argue over study plans and school choice goals. It is worth noting that this categorization is not absolute, as there are two other conflicts in the former theme that implicated studying.

From the parenting perspective, most conflicts are triggered by the mom in two main actions, and the actions usually happen when the mom finds out that Qiao is secretly in touch with her dad. The first action is questioning like asking “Do you just want to be with your dad” or “Do you just like your dad” or “Did I make you uncomfortable” or “Do you hate me”. The second action is an accusation like “You’re under a lot of pressure, so am I! But your dad didn’t do anything for us over so many years. And after all, I’ve done for you, this is how you treat me? You disappoint me so much”. The first type of expression fits into the dimension of negative emotions of interpersonal conflict, this is because all of these interrogations reflect the mom’s suspicion and dissatisfaction with her daughter’s behavior. And the second type of expression fits into all properties: disagreement, negative emotions and interference. It conveys the mom’s “disagreement” with her daughter’s stress at the time, the “negative emotions” of disappointment, and the “interference” of wanting her daughter to act the way she wants to, since she asked, “this is how you treat me”.

From the perspective of learning, most conflicts are also triggered by the mom through nagging, especially when Qiao feels tired of talking about studying all the time, or not being able to get mom’s support in choosing the ideal college, mom will have other two actions: assertion and request. The following conversation is a representative example. The context of the following conversation is that Qiao is preparing for her workplace as a planetarium docent, but her mom tries to stop her because mom thinks it’s interfering with Qiao’s studies.

Mom: I’ve always supported your dreams about astronomy, and I understand that, but the College Entrance Exams don’t test for that, so can you just not go there for the workplace?

Qiao: Mom, don’t be like this, please. Astronomy has always been my dream and hobby.

Mom: Come on. I know you’re upset. I just confiscated your Legos, and now I am stopping you go to the planetarium. You may say, I always kidnap your life with senior year, but what kind of life is there if you can’t even pass the College Entrance Exams?

The expression fits into the combinations of two properties: disagreement and interference. It embodies the mom’s support for things like her daughter’s hobbies in the form of a concession that is different from the support her daughter wants to receive, and reveals the intrusive subtext: “I only want you to do what is good for your exams and your studies”.

In short, the mom’s language patterns and conversations that triggered the conflicts were as described above. And Qiao tends to react in two ways when confronted with mom’s questioning, accusations, assertion, or request. The first reaction is an apology. When conflicts happen, Qiao is the first to apologize in most cases, such as “I was wrong” or “I sincerely apologize” or “Don’t be angry. I’ll listen to you”. The second reaction is affirmation, which means Qiao has recognized the mom’s dedication and understanding through positive feedback, like “I know you work hard” or “I know you love me very much” or “I certainly love you so much” or even “Don’t be sad. I certainly love you more than my father”. According to the response of Qiao, it is clear that mom and she genuinely care for each other actually, although mom’s action seems a bit controlling, resulting in miscommunications and sadness.

4. Causes of Family Conflicts

One of the reasons for the persistence of conflict is the essential issues of conflicts have never been confronted and resolved. Every time Qiao and mom make up, it’s either through an apology or a consolation, or because another incident covered the original argument, but the real issue has never been resolved. The above conclusions can be drawn from Qiao’s responses, which are adherence to the rhetorical principle [9,10]. It is a basis for bettering one’s skills of interpersonal interaction, a

means to advance in “society” by pleasing “the Other”, which is well reflected in Qiao’s responses, as the two types of reactions have the function of “pleasing mother”. The first type of reaction complies with the mom’s words by showing weakness, and the next type of reaction gives the mom a sense of security by providing positive feedback affirming her dedication, both make the mom happy. When Qiao stops following the rhetorical principle to express herself, like “you make me uncomfortable”, or even “I hate you”, her conflicts with her mom worsen. But if they just express themselves by pleasing each other and lightening the mood after conflicts, the essential problem between them won’t be solved.

Another reason of the interpersonal conflicts happen between the family generation may result from parents. In the series, the conflicts resulted from the mom’s insecurity because of the divorce and other characterization reasons, which has given her the tendency to place all the plans and hopes of her life in her daughter, and neglect herself. But this reason is specific in nature. The reason why the public resonates with the mother and Qiao’s conflicts should be more universal, and it has to do with the Domino Logic. Domino logic is a clocked logic family, which means that every single logic gate has a clock signal present [11]. Like Qiao’s mom in the series, she often counters her daughter with Domino Logic:

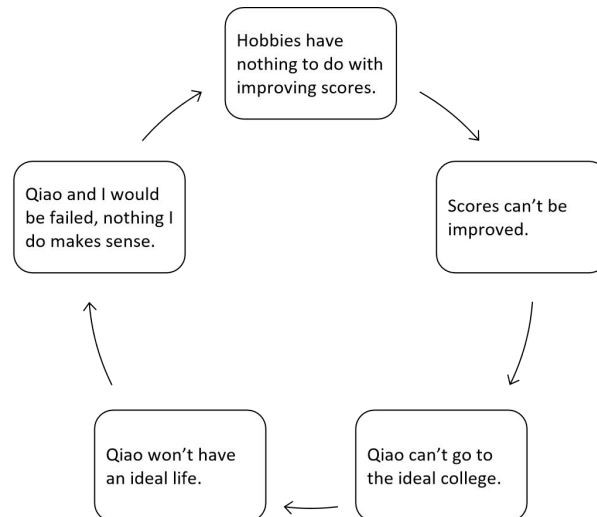


Figure1: Illustration of Domino Logic using Qiao’s mom as an example.

The details are shown in Figure 1. Starting with the box at the top of the illustration, since Qiao’s mom’s daily plan is to make sure nothing would interfere with Qiao’s learning environment, hobbies and other leisure activities are seen as things that are not useful for improving scores. If the scores can’t be improved, Qiao won’t go to an ideal college, and she won’t have an ideal life either. And finally, Qiao and herself would be failures, and everything she’s done for years has been for nothing. And this Domino Logic can cause her to amplify her anxiety and fear at the moment, turning her into a more controlling mother. So as much as she cared for her daughter sincerely, she also became one of the causes of Qiao’s depression by putting too much stress on her daughter.

In conclusion, the causes of family conflicts are related to the attitudes of parents and children, as well as to the methods of conflict resolution. Too many conflicts can drive even families who care about each other apart. To avoid this, at some point, it may be better for parents to focus on their own lives first, for example, by keeping personal values out of the hands of raising children and thus not “disagree”, or “interfere” too much in children’s lives. It is also necessary for children to express dissatisfaction or other true feelings at the right time when communicating with their parents, so that children won’t suppress their emotions by observing the rhetorical principle all the

time, causing it to have to end up erupting in an unhealthy form, hurting themselves and people around them. Realizing that interpersonal conflict also has its positives and can sometimes lead to the strengthening of human relationships is important too so that we should not fear the conflict, but rather face it [12].

5. Conclusion

On the basis of interpersonal conflict theory, rhetorical theory and Domino Logic theory, as well as the organization and classification of the corpus, this paper analyzes the conflicts between Qiao Yingzi and her mother, using the TV series *A Little Reunion* as an example. And it learns more about what are the words interpersonal conflict like between parents and children in Chinese families and why these conflicts happen in Chinese families: the patterns of interpersonal conflicts are triggered by four actions, namely questioning, accusation, assertion and request, the reasons can be inferred from the persons involved in the conflicts- it's related to the concept of how personal values are realized, as well as perspectives on conflict. The limitation of this paper is that the cases and summaries of the corpus are taken from the TV series. In the future, the research direction can focus on the study of real families, collect more diversified data on the phenomenon and causes of family conflicts, and analyze them in a more general way, to help more people have a harmonious family.

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