

Realization Forms and Pragmatic Functions of Mock Politeness in Comedy Sketches of 2023 CCTV Spring Festival Gala

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Abstract: The phenomenon of mock politeness is common in our daily life. However, most of the early studies of mock politeness remained at the theoretical level, and few applied to the analysis of specific examples. Taking comedy sketches of 2023 CCTV Spring Festival Gala as materials, this article is based on Brown and Levinson's face theory and Leech's politeness principle to analyze and summarize the forms and functions of mock politeness. And after the analysis, the article found the mock politeness has four realization forms which are mock praise, mock apology, mock help, and mock empathy, and three pragmatic functions which are function of maintaining interpersonal rapport, expressive function and recreational function.

1. Introduction

The study of politeness and impoliteness has always been an important topic in the field of pragmatics. With the deepening of the study of politeness and impoliteness, some researchers find a kind of language phenomenon, that is mock politeness which is superficially polite but actually may cause offence. Leech^[1] mentioned mock politeness when he discussed about the Irony Principle and Banter Principle. He thought irony was an apparently friendly way of being offensive, which could be regarded as mock politeness. Culpeper^[2] put forward the impolite model which classified mock politeness as impoliteness and regarded it as a kind of sarcasm. Kienpointer^[3] believed that some manipulative or insincere politeness in communication should be regarded as irrational, so it should belong to impoliteness. Bousfield^[4] divided the impoliteness into open impoliteness and hidden impoliteness, while mock politeness was classified as hidden impoliteness. In China, Wang^[5] believed that the kind of superficial politeness but substantive impoliteness is typical mock politeness, which is generally more impolite than the impolite utterances. Lin and Xie^[6] thought it is essential to distinguish surface politeness from deep politeness, because surface politeness is the formal politeness which is used by the speaker in a mock way in order to hide his real intention while deep politeness is absolute politeness which is sincerely expressed. Li and Ran^[7] believed that when the speaker uses mock politeness in communication, he will choose polite language, ostensibly closing the distance with the hearer, reflecting his own upbringing or identity, but will indirectly deny the face or identity of the hearer.

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studies of mock politeness remained at the theoretical level, and few applied to the analysis of specific examples. Until recent years, some scholars began to study the phenomenon of mock politeness in some programs, TV series or works to analyze the pragmatic strategies and functions of mock politeness. But there are no studies of mock politeness in comedy sketches. In addition to the comedy effect, the comedy sketches often have profound significance, and mock politeness is also a frequent phenomenon in the communication, which worth of studying. The CCTV Spring Festival Gala is an annual program that almost all the people would watch, in which the comedy sketches are performed. Therefore, this article intends to analyze and summarize the forms and functions of mock politeness in comedy sketches of 2023 CCTV Spring Festival Gala, based on Brown and Levinson's face theory and Leech's politeness principle, so that people can have a better understanding of mock politeness and to promote the harmony of daily communication.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1. Leech's Politeness Principle

Leech ^[1] proposed famous politeness principle which stated that with all other things being equal, one should minimize the expression of impolite beliefs and maximize the expression of polite beliefs. In order to stress what is good to the addressee and diminish what is unwelcome in conversation, the maxims in PP are in pairs as follows:

Tact: (a) Minimize cost to other

(b) Maximize benefit to other.

Generosity: (a) Minimize benefit to self

(b) Maximize cost to self

Approbation: (a) Minimize dispraise of other

(b) Maximize praise of other

Modesty: (a) Minimize praise of self.

(b) Maximize dispraise of self.

Agreement: (a) Minimize disagreement between self and other.

(b) Maximize agreement between self and other.

Sympathy: (a) Minimize antipathy between self and other.

(b) Maximize sympathy between self and other.

Leech also divided the first sub-maxim and the second sub-maxim of each maxim as positive politeness and negative politeness. In a word, Leech's politeness principle focused more on others than on self, and it can be simplified as maximizing cost to self and maximizing benefits to others.

2.2. Brown and Levinson's face theory

Brown and Levinson ^[8] defined face as the public self-image that individuals want to be recognized by others, which includes positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to the positive consistent self-image or "personality", including the desire to be appreciated and approved of by others. Negative face refers to the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, including the freedom of action and choice and freedom from imposition and interference. They believe that both the negative and positive face of the interlocutors will be threatened during conversation, and such speech acts are face-threatening acts which present threats on the hearer's public image. According to Brown and Levinson, face-threatening act can be divided into four types. The first type is acts threatening the hearer's negative face, in which the speaker gives orders, requests, suggestions, warns and so on to pressure, advise, remind the hearer to do or not to do something. The second type is acts threatening the hearer's positive face, in which the speaker does not agree with the

hearer, and even may be against, criticize, despise, complain about, condemn, accuse or insult the hearer. The third type is acts threatening the speaker's negative face, in which the speaker express gratitude, accepts criticism, makes explanation and so on. The last type is acts threatening the speaker's positive face, in which the speaker makes an apology or accepts the hearer's compliment or flattery but be forced to make a disapproving or unpractical response.

3. Method

3.1. Research Questions

Under the guidance of Brown and Levinson's face theory and Leech's Politeness Principle, the present study attempts to explore the realization patterns of mock politeness with the corpus from comedy sketches of 2023 CCTV Spring Festival Gala. Specifically, the study centers on answering the following three questions:

Question 1: How is mock politeness realized?

Question 2: What are pragmatic functions of mock politeness?

3.2. Data Collection

This thesis is a pragmatic analysis of mock politeness of the comedy sketches in 2023 CCTV Spring Festival Gala under the framework of Leech's Politeness Principle and Brown and Levinson's face theory. Therefore, the data being analyzed in the present study is taken from comedy sketches of 2023 CCTV Spring Festival Gala. There are 5 comedy sketches in total, The shortest comedy sketch is 8 minutes, the longest 15 minutes, and the total time is about 1.2 hours. The procedures of data collection can be divided into four steps. Firstly, all the utterances of 5 comedy sketches are transcribed. Secondly, the interactions occurring on different occasions linked with mock politeness are pick out. Thirdly, typical examples are chosen to examine and classify the realization forms and pragmatic functions of mock politeness. Finally, identify the data of each realization form and pragmatic function and make further analysis of them. This article will choose 4 typical mock politeness conversation as samples to study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Realization Forms of Mock Politeness

Based on the corpus analysis, the speaker expresses the apparent politeness when implementing the mock politeness, but the actual intention is to be impolite to the hearer, such as opposing, ridiculing and satirizing the hearer. When implementing mock politeness, the speaker will take different forms according to different situations, such as apologizing before accusing, praising before satirizing, or humiliating in a sympathetic way, which not only follows some politeness maxims but also violates some politeness maxims, threatening and saving the face of the hearer and the speaker himself. After analyzing the mock politeness behavior of comedy sketches in the 2023 Spring Festival Gala, this article found that there are four forms of its realization, including mock praise, mock apology, mock help, and mock empathy. Next, we will use concrete examples to show the manifestation of mock politeness to analyze how it is realized under Leech's politeness principle and Brown and Levinson's face theory.

4.1.1. Mock Praise

Example 1:

A: Manager, you are so calm. The new director has been in office for a week. I really admire you for never showing up and pretending to be ill.

B: I'm not pretending to be sick. It's going to be real.

A: What kind of disease?

B: Eat too much.

(From comedy sketch: Pit)

In this dialogue, B is the leader of A and he has not come to work for a week. A first praised B for his calm, expressed his admiration, following the approbation maxim, but what he said was that he admired B for pretending to be ill for a week, violating the maxim of sympathy, threatening B's positive face, which expressed his satire on B. Therefore, the praise A gave to B is the irony to B, showing his mock politeness.

4.1.2. Mock Apology

Example 2:

The wife and the husband are arguing.

Wife: I'm wrong. I apologize to you.

Husband: I'm wrong, you're right.

Wife: I am wrong.

Husband: You're right.

Wife: Are you a man? Why don't you take responsibility?

Husband: I'm not responsible, right? I've given you my salary for so many years since I got married. I haven't been responsible yet. Who is responsible?

(From comedy sketch: Meeting in the Photo Studio for the First Time)

In this dialogue, the wife and the husband are arguing. The woman apologized to the man for his blame, following the maxim of tact, threatening her positive face. The man also replied that he was wrong and the wife was right, following the maxim of tact and generosity. But the woman did not accept the apology, instead, she accused the man of not being responsible, violating the maxim of approbation, and threatened his positive face. But the man's immediate refutation violated the agreement principle, which showed that the apology in front of the man and the woman was mock politeness, and neither of them sincerely wanted to express politeness.

4.1.3. Mock Help

Example 3:

A: What are you doing?

B: I want to move this car.

A: (Pointing somewhere in the car) Isn't there a phone number?

B: Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

B: (Calling) Hello, could you move your car.

A: (Answering the call) No, I can't.

B: Is this your car? You are here. Why did you ask me to call you?

A: I said the phone number is here, but I don't let you call.

(From comedy sketch: Immediate Coming)

In this dialogue, the two are strangers. A saw B move the car by hand, so he offered help to B, telling him where the phone number is, following the maxim of generosity and sympathy, and his accepting B's thanks follows the maxim of tact. But when B called, he found that A was the owner of the car. A explained that he didn't let B call, ostensibly saving his positive face. At the same time,

when B asked A if he could move the car, A refused without asking the reason, violating the maxim of agreement and sympathy, threatening B's positive face, which showed that the help he had provided was false, because he didn't want to really help him, just to tease B. So, the previous politeness is mock politeness.

4.1.4. Mock Empathy

Example 4:

Photographer: In my camera, no couple is unhappy. Please give me your smile.

The couple: hee hee, hee hee

Photographer: There's nothing wrong with laughing. But don't hide a knife in your smile, okay? You two are not in good condition. Get down and have a rest. Let the young couple take the photo first.

(From comedy sketch: Meeting in the Photo Studio for the First Time)

In this dialogue, the two older couple took photos according to the instructions of the photographer. But the photographer was not satisfied, he said to them to had a rest, which reflected his understanding and tolerance, following the maxims of sympathy and generosity. However, he said that they were not in good condition, which means his dissatisfaction with the two people, violating the maxim of approbation, saving his positive face, expressing that it was not his problem of the ability of taking pictures.

4.2. The pragmatic functions of mock politeness

Mock politeness occurs frequently in daily life. Like other speech acts, mock politeness also has some pragmatic functions. Through the analysis of mock politeness in comedy sketches, it has the following three pragmatic functions: function of maintaining interpersonal rapport, expressive function and recreational function.

4.2.1. Function of maintaining interpersonal rapport

The speech acts of politeness can maintain the harmony of communication, while impoliteness can lead to the contradiction in the communication. But when using mock politeness, the speaker is eager to maintain or protect the current interpersonal relationship, rather than to achieve positive changes in the relationship ^[9]. People sometimes want to express their negative attitudes such as dislike, opposition and dissatisfaction to others, but they do not want to speak directly to completely damage the relationship. At this time, taking mock politeness by using superficial politeness can make the relationship between the two parties less bad, and reduce the harm of direct impoliteness to the hearers. For example, the speaker implementing superficial praise, agreement, and apology can reduce the negative impact of some speech acts to the hearer's face, so that the communication can continue.

4.2.2. Expressive Function

On the basis of concrete contexts and its effects, mock politeness has two functions of language. The first is expressive function. Expressive function means that language is used as a way to express the speaker's emotions or attitudes. The use of mock politeness by the speaker is to express the negative attitude towards the hearer while maintaining the relationship. In Example 1, the speaker expresses the sarcasm to the hearer through mock praise. In Example 2, the speaker expresses the blame for the hearer through mock apology. In Example 3, the speaker shows the teasing of the hearer by providing mock help, and in Example 4, the speaker expresses the

dissatisfaction with the hearer through the mock empathy. Therefore, the mock politeness has the same expressive function as language.

4.2.3. Recreational function

Recreational function is the second function mock politeness has as same as the language. Recreational function is based on the perspective of the others or the third party, which refers to that the utterance has the function of making others happy. As can be seen from the corpus we analyzed from comedy sketches, mock politeness has the function of entertaining others, especially spectators. When mock politeness occurs on others, people often have a kind of psychological state, namely "schadenfreude". with the help of related knowledge, experiences or memories stored in the brain, people will get a certain kind of self-reflective pleasure deep in their hearts ^[10].

5. Conclusion

Mock politeness is a common phenomenon in interpersonal communication. In essence, it is not only to follow some maxims of the politeness principle, but also to violate some maxims of the politeness principle. Combined with Leech's politeness principle and Brown and Levinson's face theory, this thesis analyzes the mock politeness phenomenon of the comedy sketches in 2023 CCTV Spring Festival Gala. Through analysis, mock politeness has different forms of realization in different contexts, which are manifested as mock praise, mock apology, mock help and mock empathy. At the same time, this thesis also studies the pragmatic functions of mock politeness, which are the function of maintaining interpersonal rapport, expressive function and recreational function. The study of mock politeness in this thesis also helps people have a better understanding of mock politeness in daily life. However, only analyzing a few examples in this article to study mock politeness is limited. A better study still requires further consideration and research from different perspectives.

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