The Study of Interactional Stancetaking in Conflict Talk between Parents and Children—A Case Study of the TV Series "A Little Reunion"

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Abstract: The parent-child relationship is the first important interpersonal relationship established after the birth of an individual, which has an important impact on individual development. This study, guided by Du Bois's Stance Triangle and Luo's interaction-oriented stance analysis model, conducted a stance analysis of parent-child conflict sequences in the TV drama "A Little Reunion". The research found that the main cause of parent-child conflicts is often grades, followed by relationship conflicts among family members. Among them, inequality in parent-child rights is the root cause of conflicts. Negative evaluative language markers are often used to construct opposing affect stance during parent-child conflicts. These conflict talks highlight the inequality between parents and children, where parents are the guides, planners, and often controllers of their children's lives and learning. In-depth analysis of the causes of parent-child conflict and the most commonly used language markers can play a positive role in easing parent-child relationship and building a harmonious family relationship.

1. Introduction

Parent-child relationships are one of the most fundamental and important relationships in human society. In modern society, the diversification of family structures and parenting styles brings many challenges to parent-child relationships. In this context, the family drama "A Little Reunion" focuses on the "parent-child relationship issue" that the public is concerned about, addressing the phenomenon of parent-child communication barriers that are widespread in contemporary family education, providing a rich source of data for in-depth analysis of the reasons for parent-child conflicts and the linguistic signals involved.

Currently, most studies on conflict talk between parent-child are based on a pragmatic perspective. Zheng and Chen[1] examined the pragmatic characteristics and mechanisms of parent-child conflict talk from the perspective of interpersonal pragmatics, using the dynamic expansion model of impoliteness. Yang[2] conducted a case study of two elementary school families from a pragmatic identity perspective, finding that during conflicts, parents rely on their own dynamically constructed multiple pragmatic identities. However, until now, stance has been rarely addressed in studies of parent-child conflict talk.

2. Theoretical Framework

Stance triangle (Figure 1), as proposed by linguistic scholar John Du Bois in 2007[3], is a unique framework focusing on analyzing discourse stances within a communicative environment. *Stance* refers to the speaker's attitude or position regarding a specific topic. Hyland defines stance as a textual "voice" or community recognized personality[4]. The stance triangle provides a method to understand how stances are expressed and negotiated within communication. The three angles of this model are the first subject, the second subject, and the mutual object of the stance. During discourse, both the first and second subjects evaluate the mutual object, but through this evaluation, their own positions are also defined. All three elements of the stance are interconnected, resulting in a complete loop.
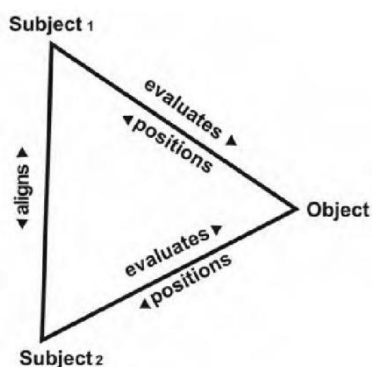

Figure 1: The stance triangle.

Under the inspiration of Du Bois' Stance Triangle, Luo[5] proposed an interaction-oriented discourse stance analysis model. In Luo's model, stance expression is a constructive and strategic verbal activity realized in continuous interaction, where the interlocutors, as stance subjects, cooperatively construct their stances to pursue their own goals. Luo put forward four subcategories: *evaluation*, *affect*, *epistemology*, *(Dis)alignment*. This stance analytical model emphasizes interaction, which includes both the immediate conversational context and a broader social context.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

1) What are the causes of conflicts between parents and children?
2) What specific language markers can be adopted in parent-child interactions to construct, express, and manage stances in informal interactions?
3) Does the language in parent-child interaction reflect the power relationship?

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The main source of data for this research is the TV series "A Little Reunion". Clips featuring parent-child conflicts were extracted for detailed transcription. In total, there are 9 such scenes in the series, totaling about 21 minutes, with about 3402 words. Most of the transcription symbols and conventions used in this research follow the work of Du Bois and his colleagues in 1993, but simplified their transcription rules and did not include details about intonation.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Evaluation

4.1.1 Adjectives

Example 1:

ma:	ying zi, ni ^zhen de shi you ben shi le, ^ha? ni dou yi jing jiao le bao ming biao le. dang tian wan shang wo gei ni jiang kang a yi de jian yi de shi hou, ni hai ke yi ^lian bu hong xin bu tiao de zhe me pian wo, ^zheng zhe yan shuo xia hua de shuo shen me kao lu kao lu. ni hai gen wo shuo zhe ge gan ma? wei shen me? shuo ya...wei shen me?
nv:	wo ^dou yi jing gen ni shuo guo wu shu bian le, wo xiang qu ^nan jing da xue, zhe shi wo de ^meng xiang. ke ni ting jin qu guo ma? ni ^cong lai mei ting jin qu guo.

Mom: Yingzi, you've really got some skills, huh? You've already handed in the application form. On the night when I was giving you Aunt Kang's advice, you can still lie to me without blushing or skipping a beat. Why did you even tell me this? Why? Say it... why?

Daughter: I've told you countless times that I want to go to Nanjing University, it's my dream. Have you ever listened to me? You never have.

In this example, the mother used the adjective "lian bu hong xin bu tiao de", which means "lie to someone without blushing". The use of this negatively connotated adjective indicates her reproach towards her daughter's deceit, establishing a negative evaluation stance.

4.1.2 Verbs and Verb Phrases

Verbs are commonly used to describe actions or behaviors. However, beyond these basic literal meanings, verbs can carry some evaluative meanings, thereby having the function of constructing and expressing stances.

Example 2:

er :	ba, ma…wo hui lai le.
ba:	^ni hai zhi dao hui lai... ^dou ji dian le? ^dou shi dian le.
er:	ba...wo gang cai...
ba:	[^wo wo.. wo shen me wo]? ni ma xiang zhe zan men yi jia san kou ^hao bu rong yi tuan ju, cong ^wu dian jiu kai shi zuo fan shou shi jia, deng ni hui lai, ^ni ne, wo men deng le ni zheng zheng ^wu ge xiao shi. jiu cha chu men bao jing zhao ren le, ^ni dao hao...zai wai bian sa ye.

Son: Mom, Dad... I'm back.

Dad: You still know how to come back … What time is it now? It's already ten o'clock.

Son: Dad... I just...

Dad: I, I, What I? Your mom was looking forward to our reunion. She started cooking and cleaning the house from five o'clock, waiting for you to come back. We waited for you for a whole five hours. We were on the verge of calling the police to help look for you, and there you were...gallivanting about outside.

In this example 2, the father uses the derogatory verb "sa ye", which means "gallivant". As soon as his son stepped into the door, the father ignored any explanation for his late arrival. Instead, he gave him a stern rebuke, believing that his late return indicated that he had been out on the town, wasting his time on frivolous escapades. In fact, the son had been out learning how to drive with his uncle. Therefore, it shows the father's negative evaluation of his son coming home late.

4.1.3 Adverbs

In example 2, when the son comes home, the father's first words use the negatively connoted

adverbs "still" and "already", revealing his negative stance on his child's late return. Another example is:

Example 3:

er:	ma wo ke yi.. ni bie ma wo jiu, wo shi wo jiu ta men yang da de, ni ^mei zi ge shuo ta men, ni hai dei gan xie ta men.
ba:	^zai shuo yi bian!

Son: You can yell at me... but don't yell at my uncle. I was raised by him, you have no right to criticize him, you should thank them.

Dad: Say it again!

In example 3, the father is often absent from home due to busy work, and the son receives a lot of care from uncle. Therefore, when the son hears his father blaming his uncle, he angrily rebukes his father, which also annoys the father. The adverb "again" is actually a form of pressure and also reveals the father's authority. The father believes that it was the son's uncle who led the son astray, so the adverb "again" also constructs a strongly negative stance.

4.1.4 Nouns

Nouns have the most number and the most important syntactic position, it may therefore play an important role in expressing an evaluation stance.

Example 4:

ma:	yi ge dian ying kan liang bian ^xian de ya? zhe you ^yi yi ma?
nv:	^zen me mei yi yi le? rang ni gao xing bu shi yi yi ma?

Mom: Is there any sense in watching a movie twice when you have nothing better to do?

Daughter: Why is it senseless? Isn't it meaningful if it makes you happy?

The daughter, in order to make her mother happy, took her to a movie she had already seen. When her mother found out, she was so angry that she left the cinema before the movie ended, and they argued in the lobby. The mother thinks that there is no "sense" in watching a movie twice, while the daughter thinks that as long as it makes her mother happy, that's "meaningful". In Chinese, "you" and "mei you" often followed by abstract nouns to express the speaker's judgment and evaluation of a person or something. Abstract nouns have weaker spatiality and reality, giving the listener ample associative and imaginative space. Therefore, abstract nouns can often express the speaker's stance, as well as reflect the subjectivity and inter-subjectivity in conversation.

4.2 Affect

4.2.1 Explicit markers of affect

Example 5:

ma:	wo ^shen me shi hou dui ni bu man yi guo ya? ma ma ^shen me shi hou dui ni bu man yi guo ya? wo bu shi dao chu dou gen ren shuo ni shi wo de jiao ao ma? wo shi bu shi zhe me shuo de? ni hai sheng shang qi le...sheng ma ma qi le?
nv:	^mei you!

Mom: When have I ever been dissatisfied with you? When have I ever been dissatisfied with you? Don't I always tell everyone that you are my pride? Haven't I said that? And now you're even angry with me... Are you angry with me?

Daughter: No!

In this example, the mother fears that her ex-husband's inappropriate conduct will spoil their daughter. Conversely, the daughter believes that she carries half of her father's genes, which makes her think that her mother might also be dissatisfied with her. From words like "satisfied" and "pride", it's apparent that the mother loves her daughter dearly and takes great pride in her.

4.2.2 Implicit markers of affect

Implicit emotional marking means constructing an affect stance in a subtle and indirect manner. In example 2, the father scolds the child for coming home too late, but from the father's talks about "wait for the son for a whole five hours and on the verge of calling the police to help look for him", we can deduce that the parents were extremely worried about the child's safety. The fact that the parents started clearing up things early for this family reunion also suggests that they value the gathering with the child a lot.

4.3 Epistemology

Epistemic stance reflects the speaker's opinions and attitudes towards the propositions or information provided. In parent-child conflictual conversations, modal verbs are most commonly used.

Example 6:

ma:	wo ^shen me shi hou bu rang ni qu jian ta le...a? ni na ci qu wo bu rang ni qu le, ni ^shuo wo na ci? ni xian zai ma shang jiu yao gao kao le, ni ^bi xu ba jing li dou fang zai xue xi shang...zan men neng bu neng li zhe bu kao pu de ren ^yuan yi dian a?
nv:	na ni bu shi ^hai shi bu xiang yao wo jian ta ma?

Mom: When have I ever stopped you from seeing him ... huh? Which time did I stop you from going, tell me when? You're about to take the college entrance exam, you must focus all your energy on studying ... Can we stay a little away from this unreliable person?

Daughter: So, you still don't want me to see him, do you?

In this example, the mother used the strong modal verb "must", expressing the mother's emphasis on the daughter's study and also issuing a command to the daughter. The use of modal verbs reflects the mother's control over her daughter's life, constructing the mother's strong epistemic stance that her daughter should seriously heed her advice.

4.4 (Dis) alignment

This section focuses on interactional subjectivity, exploring how parents and children cooperatively construct stances in conflict talk, as well as expressing their acceptance or rejection of each other's communicative purposes. It should be noted that due to the limited amount of data, explicit markers of agreement have not been found so they will not be analyzed here.

Common linguistic markers for constructing a *disalignment stance* include questions, interruptions, and overlaps. Parents and children often use these means to implicitly construct their disagreement with their counterpart's stance, expressing their disagreement with the other's opinions.

4.4.1 Questions

Example 7:

nv:	wo ^bu gan gen ni shuo, er qie jiu suan wo shuo le ni ^neng da ying ma?
ma:	wo ^dang ran bu neng da ying.

Daughter: Even if I told you, would you agree?

Mother: Of course I cannot agree.

In example 7, the daughter uses the rhetorical question "Even if I told you, would you agree?" to implicitly express her negative appraisal of her mother's dictatorial behavior. Although this utterance is expressed in the form of a question, its implication is not meant to gain an informative answer from the listener.

4.4.2 Interruptions and Overlaps

Example 8:

er:	bu shi...ma, nin ^you wan mei wan le ya! a? wo shi kao le quan ban ^dao shu di yi, hai shi kao le quan nian ji ^dao shu di er, hai shi quan qu ^dao shu di yi a... a? ni fan dou bu rang wo chi, ni ba wo la guo lai, ni ^shen me yi si ya? zai shuo ni ping shi lao na wo gen bie ren bi shen me, [zhe you ^shen me ke bi xing a?]&
ma:	[^zen me mei you ke bi xing a?]
er:	& zhe ge jia ting zhuang kuang ^bu yi yang, ren jia jiao yu mei zhun ^jiu bi zan jia qiang suo yi zhe gen ben jiu mei you ke bi xing.

Son: No... Mom, are you ever going to stop? Huh? Did I rank last in the class, second to last in the grade, or first from the bottom in the district... Huh? You won't even let me eat, you pulled me over here, what do you mean by that? Moreover, why are you always comparing me to others, what's the point of comparing?

Mother: What do you mean there's no point in comparing?

Son: Our family conditions aren't the same as theirs. Maybe their education is even better than ours, so there's no basis for comparison.

In example 8, the son articulates his epistemic stance on studying that it shouldn't be comparative and there's no basis for comparison. However, the mother interrupts with "What do you mean there's no point in comparing?", expressing her own opposing stance. She believes her son is wrong. Simultaneously, they establish contrasting epistemic stances.

5. Conclusion

The present study is based on Du Bois' definition of stance, and under the theoretical framework of Luo's interaction-oriented stance model, it describes how communicators in intimate relationships construct their stances by adopting various explicit or implicit linguistic and pragmatic markers. The study found that in the dynamic interaction process, parents and children inevitably construct interaction subjectivity, thereby achieving consistent or inconsistent stances. There are mainly three reasons for parent-child conflict: academic performance, family living conditions, and inequality between parents and children. Lastly, the unequal power relationship between parents and children is the fundamental problem causing conflict. Research on parent-child conflict stances needs to expand corpora sources, strive to select the most realistic corpora for analysis, and also consider the differences in families and the influence brought about by cultural differences.

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