

Discourse Interaction in Impersonation Scam: A Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: According to critical discourse analysis, discourse is first and foremost the use of language, but also includes social factors related to it, and there is a dialectical relationship between language use and social factors. Based on the “Two-Layer-Five-Step” framework of discourse interaction analysis, this paper transcribes the content of the telephone recording of the impersonation scam, explores the interaction between the fraudulent discourse and institutional discourse, and concludes that the fraudulent discourse and institutional discourse interact to form a new discourse, and that the new discourse shows obvious dynamic intertextual characteristics. It is argued that the uncertainty of the meaning of the new discourse is indirectly influenced by social factors such as power relations and ideology.

1. Introduction

Impersonation scam seriously harms China's public and private property and the order of residents' lives. Fraudster fabricates the identity of public officials and induce the victim to deposit the money into the so-called “safe account”. The reason why the fraudster can succeed is inseparable from appropriating the institutional discourse resources.

As a social practice, critical discourse analysis can also be described as a dialectical relationship between language use and social factors. Discourse interaction extends this dialectical relationship to different discourses, arguing that the interaction between different discourses is a complex process of social activity, and that new discourses with different ways of using language are formed in discourse interaction, which is the result of the role of different discourses in terms of social factors^[1]. Critical discourse analysis focuses on the relationship between discourse and ideology, power relations, and social context. Ideology is not only the subjective understanding of the world by the subject of social activity, but also a mental framework, which is the perception of a particular social group of the society in which it lives^[2]. Meta discourse, recontextualization, and intertextuality are all important concepts in the field of discourse studies. Meta-discourse is a relative concept to discourse, and the process in which the previous discourse is implanted into the current discourse as a meta-discourse to form a new discourse can be called “recontextualization”^{[3][4]}. Intertextuality analysis is concerned with the dependence of discourse on society and history^[5].

Therefore, this study attempts to examine how the fraudulent discourse interacts with the institutional discourse from the perspective of discourse interaction, based on Tian Hailong's "Two-Layer-Five-Step" framework^[1].

Based on the Tian Hailong's "Two-Layer-Five-Step" framework, the analysis of discourse interaction starts from the micro level of language use, which is reflected in the fusion of different discourse terms and corpora to form a "mash-up", in which the concept of "recontextualization" reveals how the "mash-up" is created^{[1][1]}. In the second step, the concept of "intertextuality" is used to explain the mechanism by which "new discourse" is created. In the third step, the influence of unequal power relations among discourses on discourse interaction will be observed by means of the concepts of "indexical meaning" and "indexical order". In the fourth step, the influence of power relations on discourse interaction will be analysed through the social factor of "ideology"; The fifth step is to analyse the dialectical relationship between language use and social factors of different discourses in discourse interaction from both micro and macro levels^{[4][4]}.

This paper aims to find out how the fraudster consciously appropriates the institutional discourse and combines it with the fraudulent discourse to produce a new discourse that can help the fraudster construct a false identity, in the hope that it can provide a theoretical basis for the prevention of this type of fraud.

2. Discourse Interactional Analysis

2.1. Recontextualization of Texts and Style

In the field of pedagogy, Bernstein introduced the concept of "recontextualization" to denote the process by which discourse is displaced and reoriented^[6]. The following fragment is taken from a victim's statement of fraudulent experience posted on a public platform.

"Now if you can't come here, do you have a pen and paper at hand? Write down what I say and assist the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau task force in the investigation.

Case No.: 000857 Chen Hai money-laundering case

Bid Date: May 10, 2022

Application Location: Beijing Haidian District Construction Bank Yuanxi Sub-branch

Construction Bank Card No.: 2184

Notified by: ... Public Security Bureau (Officer Wang)

Constable No.: 074478"

The fraudster provides such a piece of information about the case in the discourse, in which the meta-discourses such as "case number", "police officer number" are recontextualized in the current context, whereas the original scenario is a real case in the police process. The fraudster, also the executor of the recontextualization, transposes and re-locates the above meta-discourse as "imaginary language" and applies it to the fraudulent situation. The subjective consciousness of the fraudster allows him to appropriate the institutional discourse before the fraudulent discourse that carries false information, and the institutional discourse that is supposed to convey real information becomes a tool to help the fraudulent discourse confuse the victims in the new context, and its meaning becomes to make the victims believe that the above information about the case comes from the public security organs.

The institutional language used by police officers in the performance of their duties is highly regulated, requiring rigorous and precise wording, and therefore more authoritative than personal discourse. Fraudulent discourse also has relatively stable structural steps, and also carries the stylistic characteristics of "professional" discourse. With the purpose of cheating the victim's property, fraudulent discourse will constantly adjust its discourse use according to the information provided by the addressee in the current context.

2.2. Dynamic Intertextual Features of the New Discourse

The second step in the analysis of discourse interaction is to observe the dynamic intertextual features of the new discourse. Fraud discourse and institutional discourse are blended together to form a new discourse, which is unstable in terms of the degree of blending and the relationship between the blended components, and thus the new discourse is characterized by dynamic changes.

As far as the sender is concerned, the institutional discourse serves for the fraudulent discourse, and it is precisely because of the virtual contexts constructed with considerable confusing, it is intentionally placed in the fraudulent discourse by the sender.

The fraud discourse gains higher authority and publicity because of its fusion with the institutional discourse, and the interplay between these two discourses is not static but dynamic. While institutional discourse is fixed and needs to be emphasized repeatedly, fraud discourse is flexible and needs to be hidden in institutional discourse. In this process of linguistic hybridization, the sender relies on the institutional discourse's corpora structural patterns and discourse category resources to hide his fraudulent purpose. By appropriating institutional discourse, the fraudulent discourse gains a certain degree of authority to the extent that it cannot be immediately recognized by the addressee, so the sender will quote institutional discourse as needed to achieve the purpose of cheating the victim's property.

2.3. The Inequality of the Inter-discourse Relations

The third step in the analysis of discourse interaction is to reveal the inequality of power relations between the discourses at the level of social factors. The inequality between the fraud discourse and the institutional discourse is manifested at the level of social factors of power relations in the discourse.

The institutional discourse seems to be consistent throughout, while the fraudulent discourse always holds the discourse hegemony, and the institutional discourse always serves the sender's fraudulent purpose, is utilized by the sender, and becomes the umbrella of the fraudulent discourse. The long institutional discourse is for the purpose that the fraudulent discourse cannot be easily detected, and the sender covers the fraudulent discourse by calling the discourse resources of the institutional discourse to weaken the addressee's perception of the fraudulent discourse. Although fraudulent discourse appears occasionally in the conversation, it is covered by the authority and publicity of institutional discourse, so that the addressee cannot wake up from the virtual context constructed by the sender.

The fraudulent discourse is always in an authoritative position because the use of institutional discourse serves the sender's purpose of fraud, if the fraudulent discourse occupies more than the institutional discourse or the style of the fraudulent discourse dominates the whole text, it will trigger the alertness of the addressee, which is contrary to the sender's purpose of fraudulent acquisition of property. Institutional discourse is consciously quoted and inter-textualized by the sender in the fraudulent discourse, and the two discourses are dynamically combined as a new discourse. The fraudulent discourse, which has the ultimate purpose of cheating money, is more authoritative and confusing with the help of institutional discourse. The institutional discourse, which is supposed to provide real information and service to the public, is the carrier of false information because of the sender's purpose of fraud and the effect of the fraudulent discourse on the institutional discourse.

2.4. Recognition of Different Indexical Orders by Social Subjects

The most basic meaning of ideology in the field of discourse studies is the subjective

understanding of the world by the subject of social activity^[7]. The subjective perceptions embodied in ideology are perceptions about power relations in the public sphere^[8].

The National Anti-Fraud Center released an “impersonation of public prosecutors and lawyers” fraud recording on May 6, 2022, which has a paragraph as follows:

“December 29, 2021, due to the unauthorized disclosure of personal materials about **the involved parties, the criminal case** is now under the jurisdiction of Xia Jie, a police officer from the Criminal Investigation Corps of Jiading District Public Security Bureau with badge number 085168. Please state your name.”

Fraudsters initially use professional vocabulary in telephone communication to build a virtual context, while at the same time emphasizing their own police identity to obtain the victims’ trust. And then put pressure on the victim through the invocation of such as “the involved parties” “criminal case” and other language resources, trying to break down the victims’ psychological line of defense.

The ideologies of both the sender and the addressee in the process of fraud influence the degree of appropriation of the discourse interaction. When the fraudster believes in a certain context that the addressee is quite vigilant and cannot be easily confused by the authority carried by institutional discourse, he or she will increase the appropriation of institutional discursal resources. However, if the fraudster believes that the addressee has let down his or her guard or is not at all familiar with the use of institutional language, the fraudster will, to a certain extent, decrease the appropriation of institutional discourse and increases the use of fraudulent discourse. The fact that fraudsters selectively tailor institutional discourse to produce a new discourse that combines the two is also a reflection of the fact that the production of new discourse is indirectly influenced by the ideology that exists as a social factor.

2.5. Linguistic and Social Factors

The final step in the analysis of discourse interaction is to observe the dialectical relationship between discourse use and social factors in different discourses.

The new discourse formed by the hybridization of fraudulent and institutional discourses is characterized by uncertainty of meaning due to the asymmetry of the hybrid components, which exists because of the unequal power relations between the two discourses at the social level. Fraudulent discourse does not have the authority and credibility of institutional discourse, and the information carried by fraudulent discourse inherits the power symbolized by institutional discourse because of the appropriation of institutional discourse, which is the main reason why fraudsters are able to obtain money through the use of institutional discourse. The social factors that play a role in this process come from the following two main sources: one is the public’s attitude towards the “Public Prosecutor’s Office”, the other is the purpose of the discourse.

3. Conclusions

Based on the “Two-Layer-Five-Step” discourse interaction analysis framework, this study discusses the discourse interaction mechanism in the new discourse. The creation of this new discourse is indirectly influenced by social factors such as power relations and ideology, because the uncertainty of the hybrid components leads to the uncertainty of the meaning of the new discourse, reflecting the obvious dynamic intertextual characteristics. By combining institutional discourse and fraudulent discourse, the fraudster commands the victims to cooperate with the police in taking statements, refusing to answer 96110 (the national unified warning and dissuasion advisory telephone number), and transferring the balance of the bank card to the so-called “safe account”. The victims believe that they are acting according to the institutional discourse, but the

words of the institution discourse are just a set of words of the fraudulent discourse disguised as institutional discourse.

The fraudulent discourses are also involved in the construction of social reality, resulting in many people being burdened with huge debts due to fraud, and many families being broken up. Therefore, people must always be on guard when receiving unknown phone calls, not to be confused by the virtual context deliberately constructed by the other party, and when encountering such events, to seek evidence through multiple channels. As the means of fraudsters are endless, and we should always pay attention to the relevant information, and understand the new ways of fraudsters to avoid being deceived.

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