An Analysis on the Complaint Speech Behavior of Online Barrage—Taking Bilibili Barrage as an Example

WANG Xian
University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

This study mainly combines the emerging Internet video comment mode “Barrage” to explore the main types of complaint speech acts, the object of complaint, the discourse function of complaint speech acts, and the modifiers of complaint speech acts in bullet screen culture. It is not difficult to find from previous studies on complaint speech acts that the analysis materials are mainly focused on traditional text resources and lines of film and television works, while the research objects are mainly focused on college students. Few people have studied the combination of the barrage and the complaint speech act. The results of this study show that complaints in barrage culture are mostly indirect complaint language. However, the difference between the object of complaint and the object of complaint in other traditional forms lies in that the object of complaint in direct complaint includes not only the characters in the video but also other bullet screen sender. The discourse function of complaint speech act mainly focuses on expressing reprimanding attitude and venting emotion. The modifiers of complaint speech act are mainly confirmatory modifiers.

Keywords: complaint speech behavior, barrage, Bilibili

Introduction

Barrage

The Bilibili Website, which features live comments suspended above videos, is called a “bullet screen”. They can give viewers the illusion of “real-time interaction”, and users can send them while watching a video, while other users send them to appear synchronously above the video. At different time points, text comments will be overlaid on the video, but the distribution of comments is not uniform. When the content is what the audience wants to make comments, a large number of text comments will slide across the screen, looking like flying bullets, so it is called bullet screen. Chen Songsong (2015) believes that audiences watching bullet-screen videos are just like watching something new. They communicate their feelings by joking with each other, so as to achieve a common psychological identity, which is the value of grand screen videos.

Since the rise of bullet screen culture, previous scholars have also studied bullet screen. They also discussed the functional characteristics, linguistic characteristics, and communication characteristics of bullet screen to a large extent. Chen songsong believes that the main function of bullet screen language is more inclined to catharsis and expression of emotion. Ma Xiaojuan and Cao Nan (2017) found that there were a lot of “code words” among bullet screen users, which seemed to be universally agreed upon and self-evident.
However, those who were not proficient in bullet screen culture could not understand the implication of this language. Ms. Jiang focused on exploration with the spread mode of the barrage, she believes that users can express their feelings anonymously and synchronously with the video.

**Complaint Speech Act**

Following Austin (1962), who proposed the speech act theory in his book on speech acting, Searle (1969) further developed the speech act theory. By implementing the necessary and sufficient conditions for speech acts, Searle systematically and strictly standardized speech acts, and divided speech acts into five categories according to the propositional content and the way language adapts to the world, namely, expression, instruction, commitment, expression, and announcement, among which complaint speech acts belong to expression category.

In the past, many scholars have studied the complaint speech act. For example, Gu Xiaoli (2012) studied the complaining behavior in Chinese, but she mainly studied the basic research points of the complaining behavior, namely the preconditions, ways, and coping strategies of the implementation, and the language of the study was relatively simple. Yuan Zhoumin (2006) made a comparative study on complaint patterns of Chinese and American college students. That is to compare and analyze the two different languages and explore the similarities and differences of their speech acts in terms of output, implementation methods and strategies. However, this kind of research mainly focuses on college students, and the research object is relatively single.

It is not difficult to find through a review of previous literature that scholars seldom pay attention to online discourse in their researches on complaint speech acts, and most of the researches on bullet screen culture are based on the perspective of media studies to explore the characteristics of bullet screen itself, while almost no researches on the content of bullet screen from the perspective of pragmatics.

Therefore, this study focuses on “bullet screen”, an emerging short video comment method, from the perspective of cognitive pragmatics, and identifies the collected corpus based on Boxer (1993)’s complaint classification framework, in an attempt to explain the use characteristics and strategies of complaint speech acts.

**Research the Problem**

(1) What are the main categories of complaints in the bullet screen of the video?

(2) What is the difference between the object of complaint in the bullet screen of the video and the object of complaint in other traditional forms?

**Study Design**

First, a video named “Adult crash, only 4 yuan” on Bilibili video website was selected and 141 bullet messages were collected. The collected corpus is screened to select the corpus samples conforming to the complaint speech act, and then the selected samples are analyzed to get the results.

**Data Collection**

Based on the Boxer complaint classification framework, the researchers first selected the samples to identify direct and indirect complaints, and calculated the percentage of their occurrence. The data were subsequently analyzed in combination with cognitive linguistics principles. The researchers then discussed the main types of complaint speech act in the barrage, the object of complaint, the discourse function of speech behavior and the modification of complaint speech act.
Data Analysis

Classification of Barrage Complaint Speech Acts

Complaint utterances fall into two categories: Direct and indirect complaints (Boxer, 1993; 1996).

**Indirect complaints.** Indirect complaint speech is when the speaker expresses dissatisfaction with someone or something that is not present.

The listener has no responsibility for the incident and no ability to make amends. In indirect speech, the speaker assumes that the listener is not responsible for the event. The function of indirect complaining is to release emotions or to remove negative emotions, rather than to ask the listener to make up for the loss. That is to say, indirect complaining is not a face-threatening behavior in essence; on the contrary, it is a typical way to build a good relationship with others.

The bullet screen is a speech act of direct complaint. This is because of the particularity of bullet screen users, who are anonymous and do not know each other. The object of complaint is all kinds of difficulties and troubles encountered in their life. They complain just to find a channel to vent their emotions. For example:

**The twine is chosen for the fine part, bad luck finds only the unlucky.**

麻绳专挑细处断，噩运只找苦命人。

The saying is a common Chinese saying, which means that the poor themselves are in a very difficult situation, and any bad luck will further aggravate their poverty. This is similar to the “House leakage partial meet the night rain”. Even with the combination of the video content and the bullet screen before and after the sentence, it is difficult for us to analyze the identity characteristics of the speaker and the object of complaint from this kind of complaint speech. The speaker may be a poor worker who has been through the rough and rough of life and gets sick in old age but gives up treatment because of high medical costs. The speaker could also be a high school graduate. As he did not pass the college entrance examination and then began to work career, the first society but everywhere hits the wall, so he inevitably feels that life is more difficult.

**Direct complaint.** A direct complaint speech is when the speaker expresses the dissatisfaction caused by the incident directly to the perpetrator. The speaker believes that the listener or the listener’s team is responsible for the incident or has the ability to compensate. In direct complaint speech, the speaker holds the listener responsible for the incident and expects the listener to acknowledge or reverse the bad situation. Direct complaints often threaten the listener’s positive face, the need for approval, or affection. The study found that the direct complaints in the barrage were not only the video content and video producers, but also other barrage senders. Here are some examples below.

1. **Video producer.**
   
   For example:

   **You’re insulting him by making a video and laughing.**
   
   你拍着视频，笑着说话就是对他最大的侮辱。

   Combined with the content of the video, the target of this complaint is clearly the person who made the video. The “you” refers to the person who made the video. This sentence expresses the speaker’s dissatisfaction and complaint to the video maker, as well as his sympathy and pity for the hero of the video.

2. **Other barrage senders.**

   For example:
Why not eat minced meat?
何不食肉糜？

There are two meanings of this phrase: One is that people do not have a full understanding of things, and the other is that people who have not experienced the situation or behavior of others make judgment or suggestions, and the other is survivor bias. If you just look at the video, the object of the complaint cannot be analyzed from this sentence. However, in combination with the barrage in front of this sentence, it can be seen that the speaker should be complaining and accusing other barrage senders without experiencing the life of the video protagonist, and making reckless comments on his or her behavior.

Complaint Speech Act Discourse Function

According to the research of Olshtain and Weinbach (1987; 1993) and Trosborg (1995), the complaint speech act, complaint speech act has the following four discourse functions:

(1) expressing displeasure, disapproval, irritation, blame, condemnation, threat, or scolding (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987; 1993; Trosborg, 1995).

For example:

Why is this woman so grotesque?
这女的怎么阴阳怪气的？

(2) imply or directly demand compensation from the other party (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987; 1993).

For example:

Then you buy it for him!
那你给他买啊！

(3) to release emotions (Boxer, 1993; 1996).

For example:

With my temper, I would have blown up, fuck it!
就我这暴脾气，早就炸了，去尼玛的！

(4) to share negative comments, strive for recognition, and build a harmonious relationship (Boxer, 1993,1996).

For example:

If he is willing to buy Wuliangye, he will also buy the alcohol mixed with water.
他要是舍得买五粮液还会买这兑水酒精。

The discourse function of complaint speech act in bullet screen is mainly concentrated in Point (1) and Point (3). This is due to the particularity of the bullet screen user who are anonymous and do not know each other. They complain just to seek a channel to vent their emotions.

Modifiers for Complaining Speech Acts

In essence, the speech act of complaint is a threat to the listener’s face, and this kind of verbal conflict violates people’s desire to maintain harmonious social relations. Therefore, the speaker will have many considerations before really censure the other party. In this regard, Trosborg (1995) made a detailed study. Here, only two types of commonly used complaint modifiers are briefly listed.
TAKING BILIBILI BARRAGE AS AN EXAMPLE

(1) Moderating modifier.
Mitigating modifiers try to make a complaint sound less unacceptable by making soft, flattering, or apologetic remarks, such as:

If he was willing to buy Wuliangye, he would also buy the alcohol mixed with water.
他要是舍得买五粮液还会买这兑水酒精。

(2) Confirmatory modifier.
This kind of complaint is a kind of confirmatory modifier for the purpose of strengthening tone and intensifying contradictions. Most of this happens because the complainer thinks the situation is bad for him or her, which justifies his or her complaint. Such as:

Wuliangye? I believe you, you just made a video and now you’re fooling the audience.
五粮液？我信你个鬼, 你就拍视频这会儿骗骗观众罢了。

Most modifiers complaining about speech acts in the barrage are confirmatory modifiers. This is because the barrage is usually short, so the sender of the barrage needs to achieve the purpose of complaint through a barrage.

Results and Discussions

On the basis of previous studies, this study, from the perspective of cognitive pragmatics, takes the video bullet acts in Bilibili bullet acts website as the corpus to explore the main types of bullet acts, the object of complaint, the discourse functions of the complaint speech acts, and the modifiers of the complaint speech acts. The results of this study show that the complaint language in barrage culture is mostly indirect complaint language.

However, the difference between the object of complaint and the object of complaint in other traditional forms lies in that the object of complaint in direct complaint includes not only the characters in the video but also other bullet screen senders. The discourse function of complaint speech act mainly focuses on expressing reprimanding attitude and venting emotion. The modifiers of complaint speech act are mainly confirmatory modifiers.

This study, to a certain extent, expands the scope of pragmatic research on complaint speech acts, enriches the research content, and improves people’s understanding of complaint speech acts in bullet screen culture.

References


