

Discourse Analysis of Police-Foreigner Conversations

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Abstract: This paper looks at two sample conversations between Chinese police officers and foreigners from the perspectives of context of situation and communication role. The analysis is performed within the framework of Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar, with the aim to describe the discourse features in the dialogues studied in regard to the expression of specific meanings and conveyance of messages.

1. Introduction

According to Halliday [1], the purpose of constructing Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is to provide a theoretical framework for discourse analysis, which can analyze any spoken and written discourse in English [2].

Context of situation (register) is an important part of functional grammar. Context of situation is the concrete form of the concept of context of culture (text genre). The factors involved in the process of communication, such as the content of conversation, participants in communication activities and the media of speech, are closely related to the text actually used. These factors and the environmental factors in the text, according to Malinowski (1923, 1935), are called "context of situation" [3]. There are three factors affecting language use in context of situation: field, tenor and mode, which are called register variables [4]. Field refers to what is being talked about; tenor refers to the person involved in communication and the relationship between the two parties; mode refers to the form of communication, which is oral or written.

The communication role mainly refers to two speech roles in the process of communication, which are referred to as "giving" and "demanding". In the process of communication, people change their roles in a constant way, either giving information, providing goods or services, or asking the listener to do something or provide information.

This paper makes an analysis of help-seeking conversations between foreigners and Chinese police officers from the perspective of context of situation and communication roles, and illustrates their features in discourse structure and meaning expression in terms of the above aspects.

2. Subject of Study

Foreign-related policing activities in China are mainly carried out by foreign affairs police or entry-exit departments. Other police agencies may also use foreign languages (mainly English) to communicate with foreigners residing in China for the purpose of effective management. The examples of police-foreigner dialogues selected here fall into the category of oral discourse, which is recorded and transcribed by grass-roots police officers on duty.

Conversation 1 covers the processing of aliens' residence permits. There are 14 turns in the dialogue, in which the foreigner initiates the first turn, marking the beginning of the dialogue, while the last turn ends the dialogue with the response of the police officer. Conversation 2 involves a police officer interviewing a foreigner on the roadside. There are seven turns in this conversation, which is initiated by the police and ended with the police's response.

(T * indicates the order of turns, F = Foreigner P = Police Officer)

Conversation 1

T1 F: Good morning, officer. Is this the right place to go through residence certificate procedures?

T2 P: That's right. Is there anything I can do for you?

T3 F: I come from South Africa and now I'm a student at Sun Yat-sen University. I'd like to complete residence certificate procedures.

T4 P: Show me your passport, please.

T5 F: Here it is.

T6 P: You should also submit your health certificate and admission notice.

T7 F: Here they are.

T8 P: Well, all your certificates are right. Now, would you please fill out a residence application form?

T9 F: OK. Full name, nationality, birth date, temporary address.

T10 P: Please sign your name and write down the date at the bottom of the form.

T11 F: All right. Are there other formalities I have to go through?

T12 P: No. That's all.

T13 F: Thank you very much indeed.

T14 P: You are welcome.

Conversation 2

(A policeman is on patrol while noticing a foreigner is hanging around in front of a hairdressers' salon, and then he walks up and speaks to him.)

T1 P: Good evening, sir. What are you doing here?

T2 F: Nothing, officer. I am just waiting for a friend.

T3 P: Can you show me your passport?

T4 F: Sure. Here you are.

T5 P: It's all right, but please remember to extend it before it expires. You should do what is not against Chinese laws in China.

T6 F: Sure, officer. Thank you.

T7 P: My pleasure.

3. Structure of Police-Foreigner Conversation

According to the general rules of everyday conversation and the concept of adjacency pair (see Sacks [5]), turn-taking is supposed to occur in conversations, in which the addresser and the addressee constantly exchange conversational roles; that is, the addresser becomes the addressee, and the addressee turns into the addresser, so that the conversation can move on. Generally, during the conversation, one interlocutor begins with greetings, questions, warnings, complaints, etc., while the other may make appropriate responses correspondingly, so that the one-after-another adjacency pairs form initial remarks and responses. In the police-foreigner conversations selected, initial remarks are made either by the foreigner, who starts with an inquiry, or by the police officer, who poses a question, while following responses are then made by the police officer or the foreigner accordingly. In either way, foreigners and police officers take turns to swap their conversational roles, finally achieving the purposes of dialogues. Therefore, based on the general rules of conversations and the nature of police work, it can be seen that the police-foreigner conversation (two-person dialogue) usually presents a "question-and-answer" structure, namely A-B-A-B... (A is the initiator and B is the respondent). Herein, there are two kinds of situations: (1) when the addresser is a police officer, the discourse content is mostly about police officers' performing their duties like questioning, examining (see Conversation 2), interrogation and inquiry; (2) when the addresser is a civilian, this kind of discourse usually involves asking for help from the police, as depicted in Conversation 1.

The following paragraphs will make a functional analysis of the context of situation (register) and communication roles of the two conversation samples.

4. Context of Situation

For English users, the content, interpersonal function and the relationship between the two parties involved in the dialogue are not difficult to determine: as a typical foreign-related policing conversation, Conversation 1 mainly reflects the situation where the Chinese police provide population management services to foreigners in China, while Conversation 2 depicts the situation in which a police officer interviews a foreigner. Based on the concept of turn-taking, an investigation is made into this from the perspective of register variables.

4.1. Field.

Due to the characteristics of police work, the field of foreign-related policing discourses is generally related to the management of foreign population, response to help-seeking and interrogation. Conversation 1 is about going through residence certificate procedures. This can be seen in his initial remarks. In Turn 1, the foreigner first speaks to the police officer and asks for help, "Is this right place to go through residence certificate procedures?" Then in Turn 2 the police officer responds positively and offers help. Only when these two turns define the field, namely the topic of the conversation, can the subsequent content develop. In Conversation 2, the police officer interviews the foreigner by starting with Turn 1, "Good evening, sir. What are you doing here?", which is followed by the foreigner's response.

4.2. Tenor.

Obviously, the relationship of the two interlocutors in each conversation is the one between the addresser and the addressee, while the roles of the addresser and the addressee change in accordance with rotation of turns. In Conversation 1, the addresser of Turn 1 is a foreigner, the addressee is a police officer, while in Turn 2 the addresser becomes the police officer, and the addressee switches to the foreigner, and so forth. In Conversation 2, the addresser of Turn 1 is a police officer and the addressee is a foreigner. The roles of the addresser and the addressee in the follow-up turns also change in a similar fashion. The patterns of these conversions between two interlocutors are as follows:

Table 1 Turn-taking between Addresser and Addressee in Conversation 1

Turn	Addresser	Addressee	Turn-taking signal
1	Foreigner	Police Officer	Good morning, officer, Is this...?
2	Police Officer	Foreigner	Is there...you?
3	Foreigner	Police Officer	I, I'd like to...
4	Police Officer	Foreigner	your, please
5	Foreigner	Police Officer	Here it is.
6	Police Officer	Foreigner	You, your
7	Foreigner	Police Officer	Here they are
8	Police Officer	Foreigner	Your, would you please...?
9	Foreigner	Police Officer	OK.
10	Police Officer	Foreigner	Please, your
11	Foreigner	Police Officer	Are there other...?
12	Police Officer	Foreigner	That's all.
13	Foreigner	Police Officer	You...
14	Police Officer	Foreigner	You are welcome.

From the tables above, we may find that in the process of turn-taking and role-switching, due to the difference in identity and status (on the one hand, it is police officers representing Chinese law enforcement; on the other hand, it is foreigners residing in China), the relationship between the addresser and the addressee is unequal in interpersonal communication, which enlarges interpersonal distance and causes estrangement. However, the addresser can close or distance his or her relationship with the addressee in due course, which helps realize the switching of the role of the conversation. This can be mainly achieved by greetings, appellations, pronouns, modal verbs, questions and imperative sentences. For example, in Tables 1 and 2, the use of "Good morning,

officer", "Good evening, sir" helps close their relationship, while imperative sentences and modal verbs like "Please", "You should..." are used to distance their relationship, and "Is there... You?", "you", "your" and "I" are adopted to change roles, from the addresser to the addressee and vice versa.

Table 2 Turn-taking between Addresser and Addressee in Conversation 2

Turn	Addresser	Addressee	Turn-taking signal
1	Police Officer	Foreigner	Good evening, sir What are you ...?
2	Foreigner	Police Officer	Officer, I
3	Police Officer	Foreigner	Can you...your ...?
4	Foreigner	Police Officer	Here you are.
5	Police Officer	Foreigner	Please, You should...
6	Foreigner	Police Officer	Thank you.
7	Police Officer	Foreigner	My pleasure.

4.3. Mode.

Conversation 1 and Conversation 2 are both oral texts, which are informal and concise in discourse expression and not complex in sentence structure either. They employ a large number of simple sentences, and their wording is easy to understand, without using obscure and difficult vocabulary. However, due to the involvement of police affairs, some professional vocabulary such as "residence application form", "health certificate" and "temporary address" has emerged.

5. Communication Roles

It is true that in the process of communicating information, people need to change their roles frequently. "Giving" and "demanding" are the two main speech roles in interpersonal communication. As a special oral discourse, foreign-related policing discourses can be addresser-oriented or addressee-oriented. Generally speaking, the addresser is the information provider, while the addressee is the information receiver. Because the roles of the addresser and the addressee are in a constant change, the addresser continuously shifts the conversation center through the use of language (especially pronouns, modal verbs and different sentence patterns), assigning specific roles (information receiver or provider) to himself/herself and the addressee. The following paragraphs will mainly discuss the shifting of the conversation centers (see Tables 1 and 2).

5.1. Conversation Analysis.

A deeper look into the turn-taking patterns of both Conversation 1 and Conversation 2 will be discussed as follows.

Conversation 1

Turn 1: The foreigner uses greetings and addressing "Good morning, officer" and the general question "Is this right place to go through residence certificate procedures?" to designate the addressee and the recipient of information, i.e. a police officer, to establish the addressee as the conversation center to solve his or her own problems "to go through residence certificate procedures". At this point, the conversation center is on the officer's side.

Turn 2: The officer turns the conversation center back to the foreigner by adding pronouns "I" and "you" to the question "Is there anything I can do for you?" and asks the foreigner for further information.

Turn 3: The foreigner uses two personal pronouns "I" to take the conversation center back to himself/herself. At this time, the conversation turns from being addressee-centered to being addresser-centered.

Turn 4: The officer receives the information from the foreigner and continues to place the conversation center on the foreigner through an imperative sentence and pronoun ("your") "Show me your passport, please" and asks the foreigner to provide his or her passport.

Turn 5: The foreigner uses an inverted sentence "Here it is" to respond and expect the police officer to provide information, but the conversation center remains on his or her side.

Turn 6: The police officer uses a modal verb ("should") and pronouns ("you", "your") in the sentence "You should also submit your health certificate and admission notice" to maintain the conversation center on the foreigner ("you").

Turn 7: Similar to Turn 5, the foreigner responds with the inverted sentence "Here they are" with an expectation of the police officer to provide further information.

Turn 8: The police officer euphemistically asks the foreigner to fill out a form with the use of an interrogative sentence "Would you please fill out a residence application form" and the pronoun "you", while the conversation center is still on the foreigner.

Turn 9: The foreigner answers with "OK" and repeats the contents on the form.

Turn 10: The police officer uses an imperative sentence "Please sign your name and write down the date at the bottom of the form" to precede a response from the foreigner.

Turn 11: The foreigner uses an interrogative sentence and a pronoun ("I") in the sentence "Are there other formalities I have to go through?" He or she expects the addressee, who is the police officer, to provide information, but he or she still maintain himself or herself as the conversation center.

Turn 12: The officer responds to the addresser, who is the foreigner, with "That's all."

Turn 13: The foreigner then responds back to the officer with a polite phrase "Thank you very much indeed." By thanking the officer for the help, the foreigner shifts the conversation center from himself or herself to the officer.

Turn 14: The officer also answers the foreigner with a polite phrase "You are welcome." Thus, the conversation center returns to the foreigner.

Conversation 2

Turn 1: The police officer initiates with a greeting and an addressing "Good evening, sir" and a special question "What are you doing here?" to designate the addressee and the recipient of information; that is, a foreigner. The conversation center then points to the foreigner.

Turn 2: The foreigner uses a declarative sentence "I am just waiting for a friend" which contains the pronoun "I" to keep the conversation center on himself.

Turn 3: The police officer feels suspicious of him, so he continues to ask the foreigner for his passport with an interrogative sentence "Can you show me your passport?" and the personal pronoun "you" still points the conversation center to the foreigner.

Turn 4: The foreigner responds to the police officer with the sentence "Here you are." The conversation center stays on himself.

Turn 5: The police officer then responds with two imperative sentences "Please remember to extend it before it expires" and "You should do what is not against Chinese laws in China." Modal verbs with personal pronouns are employed to show expectation from the foreigner to make an assurance. At this time, the conversation center remain on the foreigner.

Turn 6: The foreigner makes a promise by saying "Sure, officer" and thanks the officer with a polite phrase "Thank you." Here, the conversation center turns to the police officer.

Turn 7: The officer responds with a polite phrase "My pleasure" as a closing sequence and concludes the conversation.

From the above analysis, it can be found that in the two conversations, although the roles of the conversation alternate many times from the addresser to the addressee and from the addressee to the addresser, conversation centers are mainly concentrated on foreigners. Only the conversation centers of Turn 1, Turn 13 in Conversation 1, and Turn 6 in Conversation 2 are on the police officers. The "one-sidedness" tends to show the asymmetry of foreign-related policing dialogues; that is to say, foreigners are usually information providers, while police officers are information demanders, even in the discourse of Conversation 1, which covers a kind of help-seeking topic. In a sense, the asymmetry of conversation center in foreign-related policing conversations is determined by the professional characteristics of the police as law enforcers, because policing activities are more embodied in management behaviors than pure services.

5.2. Characteristics of Language Use.

In the process of analysis, it is noteworthy that language use is closely related to the positioning and transformation of communication roles, especially for the use of imperative sentences and modal verbs. The use of imperative sentences in foreign-related policing conversations can increase interpersonal distance, thus embodying the seriousness and solemnity of the content of the conversation. For example, "please remember to extend it before it expires." Here, the police officer asks the foreigner to renew his passport before it expires. Imperative sentences embody the relevant law of the act and the seriousness of the legal system. Likewise, the use of modal verbs reflects the mandatory nature of law and management, such as "You should do what is not against Chinese laws in China", which is to require the foreigner to abide by Chinese law from the perspective of the law enforcement. This wording emphasizes that a foreigner is having a dialogue with a Chinese law enforcer, which is self-evident to be mandatory and serious in nature.

In the meantime, due to the fact that these conversations are help-seeking discourses, and that the interlocutors are Chinese police officers and foreigners who are required to abide by the laws and regulations of the country, it is without doubt that the two sides are supposed to use polite language when they initiate and close a dialogue.

6. Summary

Based on the framework of Halliday's systemic functional grammar, this paper makes a discourse analysis of the two police-foreigner conversation samples in the form of turn-taking, from the perspective of context of situation and communication roles. It is found that the foreign-related policing conversations (two-person dialogues) usually present the structural characteristics of "question-answer" and that their conversation centers are asymmetric. It is also noticeable that foreigners are usually information providers, while police officers are mainly information demanders. In this type of discourse genre, appellation, pronouns, modal verbs and imperative sentences, interrogative sentences and other linguistic means are also employed, with an aim to shift the role of communication, thus effectively expressing the specific significance of this discourse, especially the mandatory and serious nature of law and policing activities. Therefore, it is true that discourse meaning can be revealed in terms of language usage and language structure, which is in line with the breakthrough point of functional linguistics' analysis, which is "form embodies meaning". Admittedly, foreign-related policing discourses can be presented in a wide range of forms and contents, which requires our sustained commitment and further exploration in future research.

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