

On the Metapragmatics Theory of Metadiscourse in Ted Talks

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Abstract: Metadiscourse is an important bridge to express the author's attitude and to build a relationship between author and reader. TED Talks are a well known lecture theatre for the dissemination of valuable information, and not much academic attention has been paid to the analysis of metadiscourse in TED Talks. This shows the importance of studying the metadiscourse theory of metapragmatics theory in TED. This paper begins with an overview of metadiscourse and metapragmatics, then describes the research on TED talks, and then uses TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) talks as a corpus to study the metadiscourse categories and discourse functions used by speakers, aiming to uncover the meta-speech awareness embodied in audience metadiscourse, discourse metadiscourse, speaker metadiscourse and message metadiscourse from a metapragmatics perspective.

1. Introduction

Metadiscourse is a way of organising language, articulating the author's point of view on discourse and involving the reader's response, but there is little literature on specific studies based on real material. This paper explores the use of metadiscourse categories and discourse functions by speakers in the context of TED (Technology Entertainment Design) talks, based on metapragmatics theory, with the aim of revealing the metapragmatic awareness embodied in metadiscourse from a metapragmatics perspective. The study has found that TED speakers build a metapragmatics awareness of interaction and viewpoint identification between speaker and audience through the use of audience metadiscourse, discourse metadiscourse, sender metadiscourse, and message metadiscourse. The above findings are useful for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of metapragmatics and for improving the metapragmatics skills of language users, and are conducive to further academic inquiry into metadiscourse and metapragmatics use.

2. Overview of Metadiscourse and Metapragmatics

2.1 Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse is “discourse about discourse”^[1], a self-reflective expression with a coordinated and interactive meaning, such as “as you may know”, “in general”, “in a sense”, etc. These specific terms play a role in regulating and organising the basic discourse in linguistic communication, reflecting the speaker's (author's) communicative intentions and attitudes, guiding the audience to understand the meaning and participate in interactive communication.

2.2 Metapragmatics

Metapragmatics is a pragmatic phenomenon or act of language use itself, a 'meta level' of language use^[2]. For Verschueren, meta-pragmatics is one of the dimensions of language use that includes “the self reflective awareness of language users in all aspects of language use events”, specifically the self-reflective awareness they make of their own utterance and understanding of the discourse. This paper presents Culpeper and Haugh's concept of meta-speech, focusing on how communicators use language to reflect their awareness of the various ways in which they make discourse choices when interacting and communicating with others.

2.3 The Relationship between Metadiscourse and Metapragmatics

Metadiscourse in the perspective of metapragmatics can be carried out as a discourse expression of metapragmatics, a metapragmatics discourse. Thus, the relationship between metadiscourse and metapragmatics is reflected in the following aspects: on the one hand, metadiscourse is a product of metapragmatics. The use of discourse components, i.e., metapragmatics, aims to indicate the communicator's discourse management of the communicative discourse, information evaluation, and communicative relationship processing. On the other hand, metadiscourse is not always embodied as a discourse component with structural independence, but can also be embodied within the utterance. These markers, connectives, social discourse and comments that exist within the discourse belong to the category of metadiscourse and also show a metapragmatics phenomenon.

2.4 Metadiscourse Classification

The use of metadiscourse largely reflects metapragmatics consciousness, and metapragmatics consciousness is the theoretical basis for the production of metadiscourse. Hyland has pointed out metadiscourse that two main patterns are included, which are manifested in interactive and interactional resources, namely, the discourse organization component of communicative nature and the evaluation component of interactive nature^[3]. Since metapragmatics is not limited to discourse organization and interactive evaluation, but involves multiple aspects of communication, Chen Xinren gives another classification of metadiscourse, including contextual metadiscourse, sender metadiscourse, audience metadiscourse, relational metadiscourse, information metadiscourse, discourse metadiscourse, and codebased metadiscourse, which is the basis for the analysis of metadiscourse in TED talks in this paper below^[4].

3. Ted Related Research

TED Talks, as a new means of disseminating knowledge, which has both the characteristics of a scientific discourse and the universal features of a speech, are a new form. Most of the speakers at TED are experts and academics from various professional fields, and the audience is diverse and popularized. In a TED talk, the speaker disseminates new ideas and opinions to the public through this new form of online communication. Although the talk is a monologue by the speaker alone, it is essentially conversational and interactive with the audience, achieving different communication purposes, and is a unique type of discourse that connects the speaker and the audience. TED talks incorporate a variety of discourse genres and are characterised by a blend of entertainment and science. In addition, the audience will feel relaxed and have fun gaining knowledge, a recontextualisation of scientific discourse^[5]. Research on TED talks has focused more on their use of rhetorical methods, how they are constructed, how they operate discourse markers, and the role of speech in language learning^[6], but little research has been done on metadiscourse. The content of a speech is not just the perfect embodiment of language, it is the platform on which the message is conveyed, so in some ways, developing and analysing a speech in terms of metadiscourse and metapragmatics has a great impact on the effectiveness of the presentation. Speakers are required to organise their speeches in such a way that they not only choose appropriate language forms to describe ideas, but also take into account the use of metadiscourse of them, reflecting metapragmatics awareness and being able to manifest it visibly, as in the case of audience metadiscourse, discourse metadiscourse, sender metadiscourse and message metadiscourse, as will be discussed below.

4. Metapragmatics Analysis of Metadiscourse in Ted Talks

4.1 Audience Metadiscourse

Audience metadiscourse eases the cognitive processing pressure on the audience, helps the audience to better comprehend the message of the discourse and enables the management of the information understanding process of the audience, as in example (1):

Eg. (1): Okay. Now on the left you can see the hand-that's the big arrow.
(Ten things you didn't know about orgasm)

The information lead in example (1) “you can see” identifies the source of the information to the audience. In TED talks, the easiest way for the audience to gain knowledge is to perceive what the speaker is saying by watching. Through these guiding messages the speaker guides the audience to focus on the current discourse and gain knowledge through the sensory organs, highlighting the equal status of the audience and the speaker, reflecting the speaker's audience meta-linguistic awareness, aided by the use of audience meta-discourse like “you can see”, which not only increases the credibility of the speaker's speech content, but also allows the audience to participate in the process of explaining knowledge, bringing the relationship between the speaker and the audience closer and thus enhancing the speech effect. Moreover, in TED talks, speakers often use modal verbs such as can, which can significantly reduce the compulsion of the form and tone of the utterance and can better guide the audience's understanding of the content of the talk ^[7].

4.2 Discourse Metadiscourse

The cultural characteristic of TED talks, which seldom use quotations and idiomatic allusions, may explain the low use of verbal markers and code-annotated language in the corpus. For example, Ellen Johnson begins her speech with two transitions labeled not only , but, smoothly conveying the main message to the audience with clear language structure and conveying her feelings as a guest speaker to the audience, as in example (2):

Eg. (2): I am honored not only to be the 360th Commencement speaker at my alma mater, but to do so in the year Harvard University celebrates 375 years of preparing minds as the oldest institution of higher learning in America.

(Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, May 26,2012)

An analysis of the TED talk material shows that there are many examples of transitional and framing markers that Hyland has proposed, such as “in addition” and “to conclude”, and that the TED talk exemplifies many of these from a discourse metadiscourse perspective. TED talks incorporate the features of spoken discourse and are usually restricted to ten minutes or less, so the length of the speech is usually around 3000 words. The length of the speech and the way it is conveyed directly to the audience dictate that the speech does not need a cumbersome framework, but it does need a rigorous discourse framework to support the entire discourse and facilitate the clear delivery of the message. The presence of discourse metadiscourse solves this problem, for example the above example “not only...but” marks the stages and frames of the discourse, highlights discourse connections, signals the audience to the direction of the topic, increases the audience's conversational engagement, and demonstrates the metapragmatic awareness of the speaker's discourse organisation.

4.3 Sender Metadiscourse

Self-referential language is mostly in the first person, passing subjective evaluation while increasing the credibility of the content talked about, reflecting the speaker's attitude of being close and friendly to the audience, and at the same time, because self-referential language markers tend to be subjective personal interest, can mobilize the curiosity of the audience, close the emotional distance between the speaker and the audience, to obtain good persuasion and influence effect, can better achieve the purpose of the speech message delivery, such as:Example (3).

Eg.(3): I have no personal anxieties,however,for in a decades-long career in public service, I have learned many lessons that I can share with you today. In my journey, I have come to value hope and resilience. As an actor in Liberia's history as it has unfolded over the last 40 years, I have seen these characteristics come full circle.

(Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, May 26,2011)

By describing her own experience to the audience, Ellen puts herself in the context of a historical era (Liberia's history) and asserts a good self-image, which enhances the credibility of the content and at the same time impresses and influences the audience, making the speech more convincing. The use of metadiscourse by the speaker helps to express the awareness of using metapragmatics of

the speaker himself/herself, bringing the audience into the speaker's world while highlighting the self, allowing the audience to have a better understanding of the content of the speech and achieving the ultimate goal of the speech.

4.4 Information Metadiscourse

When arranging and presenting the speech content, the speaker should take into account the cognitive state of the audience, reinforce their background knowledge, reflect the language of prompting information in the speech content, and treat the audience as active cognitive subjects to jointly complete the construction of knowledge, as in example (4):

Eg. (4): It's really prompted by a conversation I had with a wonderful woman who maybe most people have never heard of, Gillian Lynne. Have you heard of her? Some have. She's a choreographer, and everybody knows her work. She's wonderful.

(Do schools kill creativity?)

In example (4), the speaker uses the audience knowledge state reference "Have you heard of her?". The speaker should consult the audience on Gillian Lynne's background knowledge, generate relevant information, allow the audience to relate his views to Gillian Lynne, reinforce and corroborate the information, thus increase the persuasiveness and credibility of his views.

5. Conclusion

This paper's review of meta-speech research shows to a certain extent the current research situation and development prospects, and draws more attention to metapragmatics and its application research from scholars at home and abroad. An empirical study of metadiscourse research and metadiscourse use from home and abroad, this paper presents a metadiscourse analysis based on the audience metadiscourse, discourse metadiscourse, speaker metadiscourse, and message metadiscourse exhibited in TED talks to provide an in depth description of the interpersonal relationship between TED speakers and their audience and to facilitate the study of metadiscourse.

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