

Book Review: Pragmatic Identity: How to Do Things with Words of Identity

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Abstract: Pragmatic Identity: How to Do Things with Words of Identity firstly defined identity as pragmatic identity in the field of pragmatics by Chinese scholar Chen Xinren, and systematically constructs the mechanism of pragmatic identity. It is an innovative attempt by Chinese scholars to construct a native pragmatic theoretical framework, which can provide a more appropriate theoretical basis and research path for identity research in the context of Chinese language.

Keywords: Pragmatic Identity; Monologue; Book review

Published in 2018, *Pragmatic Identity: How to Do Things with Words of Identity* is a compensatory and innovative book, giving a clear definition of identity in pragmatics, which is neglected in existing pragmatic research. Although some scholars have realized the influence of identity on language, 'identity' has always been a common word but not a theory in the field of pragmatics. In order to make it a pragmatic term like face, politeness and adaptation, Chen advanced a new theory named pragmatic identity theory. It proposes that words can not only help construct identity, but can also be constructed through the resource of identity. Therefore, this book mainly discusses two topics: (1) How to use words to construct pragmatic identity? (2) How to use identity resource for practice? Based on this, the book is composed of ten chapters, and then I will briefly introduce the main content of each chapter.

Chapter 1 provides a regular and lucid introduction of the research. Besides noting the feasibility of the research, the editor also indicates that, with corpus collected through six different ways (daily conversation, television show/series, newspaper, website, corpus of CCL, academic literature), all identities presented in natural communication are the research objects. Furthermore, Chen puts forward five questions and five corresponding research paths, which constitute five separate chapters in the second topic. The five questions are about pragmatic meaning, resource attributes, identified/identifying analysis, causes analysis and critical pragmatic analysis of identity. Finally, he shows us the framework of this monograph. In addition to this introductory chapter and the conclusion chapter (chapter 10), the second and the ninth chapter are the main content of this research, which can be divided into two parts. The first part includes chapter 2 to 4, where pragmatic identity is systematically defined. The second part is consisted of chapter 5 to 9, elaborating on the five research paths mentioned above in detail. Chapter 2 deals with relevant concepts and theory. Distinguishing from the inherent, static social identity, pragmatic identity is defined as a contextual, dynamic identity in communication by reviewing identity in other fields. Chen also states various ways of classifying pragmatic identity^{[1]26}, and four attributes of pragmatic identity, which are communicative dependence, dynamic selectivity, discourse constructiveness and communicative resource. Chapter 3 focuses on how words construct identity in a dynamic context. It elaborates on the choice of pragmatic identity, including pragmatic identity construction at the macro-discourse level (code, style, textual features, discourse content, way of speaking) and the micro-discourse level (speech act, address, grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, paralinguistic features). Chapter 4 mainly talks about how speaker and hearer choose their identity in communicating, and forms a principle of choosing pragmatic identity. It is worth noted that Chen claims pragmatic identity characterizes both synchronic and diachronic.

Chapter 5 to 9 are concerning about the five paths of the research. Chapter 5 views pragmatic identity as an interpretive resource. It deals with how pragmatic identity influences the word meaning, illocutionary meaning and interpersonal meaning. Chapter 6 views pragmatic identity as an illocutionary resource, focusing on how identity serves specific communicative purposes and satisfies communicative needs. Chapter 7 views pragmatic identity as an interpersonal resource, because interpersonal relation is the same important as other factors while communicating. Identifying is a suggested strategy in conveying special interpersonal meaning. Chapter 8 views pragmatic identity as an explanatory resource, aiming to find out contributing factors of specific discourse from external aspect. Chapter 9 keeps probing into the matter discussed in chapter 8, pointing out that the reason why pragmatic identity can be an explanatory resource for analysts lies in the appropriateness of the choice of identity in a given context. Therefore, both speaker and hearer can evaluate each other's identity choice in the process of communication. Finally, chapter 10 summarizes the findings of previous chapters, and points out the deficiency of the research, then puts forward the application research of this theory in the future.

As a novel theory in pragmatics, Chen has done a lot in defining the concept of pragmatic identity, generalizing the mechanism of choosing pragmatic identity, and explaining the five research paths. In chapter 2, Chen firstly defined pragmatic identity as one or more social identities that accompany a specific utterance in the field of linguistics^{[1]25}. Once people enter communication, they must choose pragmatic identity. Specifically speaking, in order to meet the needs of communication, communicators should choose pragmatic

identity with appropriate utterances based on various contextual factors. Also, the choice of identity and the corresponding discourse will affect communication effects^{[1]93}. From chapter 5 to 9, Chen introduces the five research paths in detail, each of which is explained by two case studies. To regard pragmatic identity as an interpretive resource, one must first regard identity as a kind of context. To this end, Chen carried out two case studies, respectively, involving the tongue-in-cheek and respectful language. The study shows that neither the speaker nor the hearer should be interpreted in the literal sense, but the complicated interpersonal meaning can be better understood by accepting the temporary pragmatic identity constructed by the other. After explaining how to use identity resources to understand the meaning of discourse, Chen further points out the importance of identity for acting. In chapter 6, he puts forward five pragmatic identity strategies, including foregrounding strategy^{[1]121}, shadowing strategy^{[1]125}, identifying strategy^{[1]128}, deviating strategy^{[1]130}, and switching strategy^{[1]132}. Besides using identity as an illocutionary resource, the speaker can also use identity to get close to or alienate the hearer. The research shows that, in various public management spaces, the relevant departments are more and more inclined to construct a more personal identity, which partly reflects the pro-people trend of social management discourse. Pragmatic identity can not only help people understand the meaning of discourse, guide discourse practice, enhance interpersonal communication, but also explain the formation of specific discourse. Taking the passive sentence in Chinese News as an example, Chen points out that the reason why the passive sentence is deliberately used in some media is to construct a specific pragmatic identity in an implicit way. However, why can pragmatic identity explain the formation of a particular discourse? It turns out that identity owns appropriateness and felicity in a particular context.

To conclude, the book not only enriches the theoretical exploration of pragmatics, but also provides feasible suggestions for the study of identity from the perspective of pragmatics. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to do a pragmatic or identity study, because it not only lays the theoretical foundation for you, but also broadens your mind through different case studies. However, I think there are still a lot of things that have not been explained clearly in the monograph. First of all, it is a matter of Corpus. In Chapter 1, the author points out that there are six sources of Corpus in the book. However, a lot of the first kind of Corpus is presented by the author's memory, and I think it is difficult to guarantee the authenticity and objectivity of the Corpus. Second, I don't think the author has gone far enough in Chapter 9. Chapter 9, for example, states that the present utterance is considered appropriate if the speaker's pragmatic identity corresponds to the present act. For example, the Civil Affairs Bureau staff's remarks during the marriage ceremony can be considered appropriate because they correspond to their identity in the current context. But if a divorce-related remark is made in front of the newlyweds, the remark is deemed inappropriate. However, in some contexts, even if the speaker has an identity and is acting in that identity and the utterance is appropriate, sometimes the pragmatic identity they construct may not be valid. Take doctors, for example, who construct expert identities to communicate with patients in specific contexts. When a doctor informs a patient about a treatment by applying the words of an expert and following professional guidelines, the patient still does not understand and does not trust the doctor. In such cases, the construction of the doctor's expert identity is invalid, but Chapter 9 does not discuss this situation.

I think this is a great step forward for Chinese scholars in their theoretical exploration. Despite these limitations, I still suggest those who are interested in pragmatics to buy it and read it over and over again to find out the research gaps and enrich the theory of pragmatic identity.

References:

- [1] Chen X.R. Pragmatic Identity: How to Do Things with Words of Identity[M]. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing House, 2018