An Analysis of Dialogues in the Blind Side from the Perspective of Face Theory

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Abstract: Appropriate interchange can facilitate communication, while inappropriate interchange can cause displeasure.[1] This paper takes the dialogue of characters in film the Blind Side as the cases to analyze the face-threatening acts and to explore the use of politeness strategies. This paper has a certain guiding significance for readers to better understand the face theory of Brown and Levinson, to avoid face-threatening act and to promote the smooth and harmonious communication.

Keywords: Face theory; Face threatening act; The Blind Sid

1. Introduction

In the film the Blind Side, the main characters are the African-American boy Michael, the kind-hearted couple Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy, and their son SJ and daughter Collins. This story is about Michael becoming a member of the family, and with their help, he makes his dream come true. In daily communication, in order for communication activities to go smoothly, we must acknowledge and be aware of the role of face. [2] Face is often involved in communication, and the interchange in movies is no exception. This paper analyzes the FTA in large number of characters' dialogues in the movie.

2. Face Theory

Brown and Levinson[3] define face and assert that face is comprised of positive face and negative face. They also argue that certain kinds of acts essentially threaten face, and any rational agent should avoid these face-threatening acts, or adopt some strategies to minimize them. Brown and Levinson put forward five strategies, which are without redress action, positive politeness, negative politeness, off record and don't do the FTA. In order to communicate better, we should adopt different politeness strategies according to different situations.[2]

Many scholars have studied politeness strategies in conversations from the perspective of face theory. Long and Huang interpret the characters' dialogues in The Return of the Native based on the face theory, in order to help readers better deal with family relationships.[4] Ye analyzes the application of face theory in advertising language with specific examples and argues that it is crucial to fully consider the audience's face in designing advertisements. Zhang uses the face theory to explore English teachers' classroom discourse, which provides some guidance for ensuring effective communication between teachers and students and improving the quality of English teaching.[6] Based on face theory, this paper analyzes the character dialogue in the Blind Side, which not only expands the application scope of face theory, but also plays a guiding role in promoting successful communication between people.

3. Analysis of the Film the Blind Side from the Perspective of Face Theory

This paper takes the dialogue of characters in the film the Blind Side as the cases to analyze the speech acts that threaten face and the application of politeness strategies.

3.1 Threatening the hearer's positive face

The speech act threatening the hearer's positive face mainly means that the speaker shows that he does not care about the hearer's feelings and disregards the hearer's needs in some important aspects.[7] The following is a typical case.

Example 1:

SJ: Enough with the rugby shirts, you look like a giant bumble bee.

Michael shows a little bit of unhappiness.

Leigh Anne takes Michael to buy clothes. Michael is tall and fat, so there are few kinds of clothes that he can wear. When Michael is choosing clothes, he chooses a yellow shirt. He likes very much and wears it in school. SJ tells Michael not to wear such clothes all the time because they look like a giant bumble bee.

SJ's words threaten Michael's positive face, and Michael's personal image is not approved. Michael thinks that his clothes look nice, but SJ doesn't like them. Positive face is threatened when the SJ disagrees with the Michael's opinions and ignores his feelings, interests, and needs. SJ and Michael have a very good relationship, so SJ directly say what he thinks. Michael's positive face is threatened, so he shows a little unhappiness and frustration. SJ can adopt the politeness strategy of off record, and embellish his language or take indirect speech acts. For example, he might invite Michael to buy clothes, which not only avoids potential face threatening act, but also shows concern for Michael. The application of off record can make approach between speaker and hearer.

3.2 Threatening the hearer's negative face

Speech acts that threaten the negative face of the hearer mainly refer to the speaker's interference with the hearer's freedom of action.[7]

Example 2:

Leigh Anne: It's where your mother lives? Let's go get them.

Michael: No. Don't get out.

Leigh Anne: Who's going to help you carrying your clothes, Michael?

Michael: Don't get out of the car.

Michael lives in an unsafe place. There are some bad people in this place and they always like to make trouble. In this conversation, Michael wants to protect Leigh Anne, so he doesn't want her out of the car. When Leigh Anne doesn't listen to his advice, Michael locks the door. Michael uses a commanding tone and refuses to let Leigh Anne out of the car, threatening Leigh Anne's negative face. In moments of urgency, the efficiency of communication takes precedence, while the need to save face about both sides can be put in a secondary position. It shows that Michael is a responsible person who is worried about Leigh Anne's safety. After the matter is resolved, he can resort to negative politeness strategies such as apologizing to explain the reasons for threatening her face at the time.

4. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the dialogue between characters in the movie the Blind Side, it can be found that characters often threaten others or their own face intentionally or unintentionally. In analyzing cases, it can be exhibited that using the positive politeness strategy can indicate a friendly relationship. The use of the negative politeness strategy can avoid interfering with others' acts and show respect to others. The use of the off record can reduce the threat to others' face and successfully achieve the communicative intention through indirect discourse. Based on the face theory, this paper analyzes the speech acts that threaten face and explores the use of politeness strategies, so as to help readers better understand the face theory and promote harmonious interpersonal relationships.

References:

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