ANALYSIS OF THE STANCE OF E-SPORTS COMMENTARY DISCOURSE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAGMATICS

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ABSTRACT: *From the perspective of pragmatics, this paper uses the speech acts produced by Chinese e-sports commentators to demonstrate their stance. Based on this, the author explores whether e-sports commentators are tendentious or not. Choosing a specific e-sports competition (between a Chinese team and a European team) that had been widely discussed on the Internet as corpus, through the methods of repeated viewing, transliteration, classification, and quantification, results show that in this game, the Chinese commentators have a bias towards their own country's team. Then, the author applies Language Adaptation Theory to analyze the reasons for the tendency.*

KEYWORDS: speech act; e-sports commentary; stance; tendency; language adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Sports commentators' job is to describe and evaluate the on-going sporting events around the players' performance and their judgments, which not only promotes the audience to understand the details of the game, but also enhances the artistic and interesting nature of the sporting event. The utterances from the commentators could show their stance or position, the angle of making comments, and the emotional attitude towards the team under discussion (Shen Sanshan, 2004 . Generally speaking, the vast majority of audience can feel commentators' position from their utterances when they are watching a certain sports event, and finally determine whether the commentator has a tendency or bias. The discourse tendency of the commentators might also arouse controversy among the audience and the teams, but how does the audience determine whether commentators have tendentiousness through discourses of the commentary is worth investigating. Thus, firstly we need to determine what is stance or position. Stance refers to judgments of the speaker about the meaning of the proposition conveyed or the feelings, attitudes, even values of other discourse participants. Stance reflects the pragmatic relationship between linguistic elements and context, namely, the relationship between the speakers and the discourse content as well as the audience, which exists in all languages (Wang Lifei, Ma Huijun, 2009) . The researches on language subjectivity and discourse stance involve a wide range of investigations: the expression of the author's standpoint in academic writing through the discourse marker (Wu Geqi, Pan Chunlei (2010)), the news headline's Subjectivity and author's position expression (Chen Xinren (2013)). Shen Sanshan (2004), Wang Miao (2013) , Jiao Yuping (2014) analyzed the discourse stance and inclination of commentators in traditional sports events.

According to the existing researches, it can be judged: First, the speaker's stance expression and

tendency can be explored through specific pragmatic methodologies, such as discourse markers. Secondly, the selection of corpus in the existing researches is mainly concentrated on the written text (writing, news headlines), and the discourse analyses of the sport commentator are mainly focused on the traditional sports on televised broadcast. Therefore, this paper selects the utterances of the commentators of newly network broadcast e-sports events as the analysis corpora, using the statistical analysis of the specific speech acts in the commentators' discourses as the pragmatic means to represent their stances. Then, through partial and overall interpretation of the utterances, both quantitative and qualitative analysis are carried out to determine whether the commentators have bias.

LITERATURE UNDERPINNING

The founder of speech act theory is the British philosopher Austin. He suggests that people in speech communication are not always making statements or descriptions, but are performing certain actions, in which speech acts are actions performed through words. (Austin, 1975) Later, the American linguist Searle continues to develop and perfect the theory of speech act. He believes that the smallest unit of language communication is not the words or sentences that people commonly believed in the past, but the speech act. Therefore, the process of language communication is actually connected with one speech act by another. Every speech act reflects the speaker's intention (Searle, 1969).

The theory of linguistic adaptation was proposed by the Belgian pragmatician Verschueren. In his view, Language use is a process in which language functions, or the process that language users continue to choose linguistic means according to the needs of communicative context to achieve communicative purposes. Linguistic adaptation is reflected in the mutual adaptation between language environment and linguistic structures (He Ziran, Yu Guodong, 1999: 428-435). The theory of linguistic adaptation suggests that language users choose a communicative strategy in order to achieve compliance with various contextual factors (Verschueren, 2000). Verschueren believes that there are four research perspectives on the pragmatics and pragmatic interpretations of linguistic adaptation phenomena. These four perspectives are: contextual relationship adaptation, linguistic structural adaptation, dynamic adaptation and conscious awareness in the process of adaptation. Contextual adaptation refers to the choice of language in the process of language use and it must be in line with the communicative context (Shi Yizhi, 2000). The linguistic structure conforms not only to consider the speaker's own linguistic abilities as well as the ease of applying the language, but also the social factors, including the political positions and ideologies involved in the speakers. Dynamic adaptation can be said to be the core of adaptation theory. The adaptation of contextual relations and linguistic structure only makes sense in different real dynamic situations. The awareness of the process of adaptation is "the reflexive consciousness of specific pragmatic functions highlighted in the process of language use". It can be understood that not all choices are made consciously or deliberately. Some choices are spontaneous, and some are subjectively determined (Jin Changyu, 2018).

Shen Sanshan (2004) used the commentators' utterances in the table tennis competition as the corpus to analyze and judge whether there is bias, by statistics of counting the frequency of eight different speech acts that the commentators made to the two players, thus reflecting their standpoint. In other words, the commentators' stance refers the commentators are cheering for whom. The results indicate that the table tennis commentator has expressed his position by means of pragmatic means. Finally, it is concluded that the comments on the commentary of table tennis matches are full of commentators' tendency to express their preference to native players (Chen Xinren 215). Wang Miao (2013) combined Du Bois' "stance triangle" theory to judge the position and inclination of the gymnastics project's commentary from lexical and syntactic means. Jiao Yuping (2014) used the eight speech behavior analysis modes used by Shen Sanshan (2004) to explain the stance of commentators and the identity construction in a tennis match.

METHODOLOGY

This article selects the last deciding game in the quarterfinal of 2018 League of Legends World Finals as recourses of corpus, which generated heated discussion on the Internet, since the game was between the No. 1 seed team RNG from China and the No. 3 seed team G2 from Europe. The author chose the Chinese commentary version broadcasting video as data recourses. The reasons for audience's extensive discussion over this game are as follows: First, most of the audience thought that the traditional strong Chinese team RNG would win effortlessly before the game, because RNG won several other championships in 2018. Secondly, in the case of RNG leading with 2-1 rounds, G2 revered the game by chasing two consecutive rounds, and finally defeated RNG becoming an unexpected winner. In this way, a large number of audiences deeply feel sorry and pitiful for RNG, so it triggers intense discussions. In addition, some Chinese online users commented on the online platform and considered that in the final deciding game, the Chinese commentators excessively favored RNG and ignored the wonderful performance of G2, which might be inappropriate. Therefore, is there a bias from Chinese commentators' utterances is worth investigating in this game. To testify the subjective feelings of the viewers, this article treats the commentators' utterances as speech acts from the perspective of pragmatics, by watching the game repeatedly and making transcript, to explore the commentators' stance and position.

This article applied Shen Sanshan's (2004) proposals of eight pragmatic means to represent commentators' stances: appreciation or affirmation, cheers, approval, worry or pity, hope, suggestion, criticism, loss excuses. On the one hand, these pragmatic means are all specific speech acts. On the other hand, if the frequency of occurrence of these speech acts in a game are counted, such as the number of cheers for a certain team or team members, the number of appreciations, worries, etc., it can fully indicate the commentators' discourse stance and whether there is a tendency can be proved.

Ultimately, the specific process is as follows:

(1) Download the final game's video (2018 League of Legends Professional League spring finals) of Chinese commentary version.

(2) Transcript the utterances of Chinese commentators and treat them as pieces of speech acts, recording them into 8 categories and dividing them according the tendency to RNG or G2.
    (3) Make statistical quantity and comparison.

RESULTS

From the perspective of pragmatics, the above eight commentators' stance expressions are composed of specific speech acts. In order to clearly see whether the Chinese commentators have a tendency, it is necessary to quantitatively analyze the transcripts of the utterances, and classify the speech acts of the commentators according to the above 8 pragmatic means. The statistical result is generated for both teams. The numbers of speech acts are counted and the statistical results are shown in Table 1.

Pragmatic means	Chinese team RNG	European team G2
appreciation or affirmation	30	20
cheers	6	0
approval	4	0
worry or pity	35	7
hope	20	0
suggestion	31	0
criticism	25	7
loss excuses	24	0

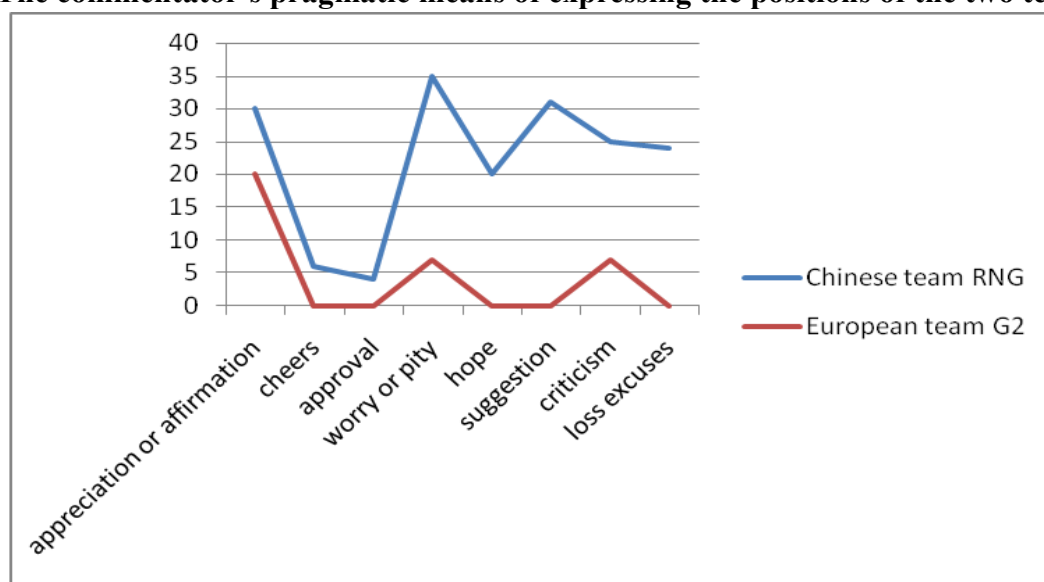**Table 1. The commentator's pragmatic means of expressing the positions of the two teams**

Figure 2. **The commentator's pragmatic means of expressing the positions of the two teams**

Through Table 1 and Figure 2, it can be clearly found that in this game, the speech acts expressed in

each type of pragmatic means by Chinese commentators are quantitatively biased to the Chinese RNG team. In the vast majority of cases the commentators interpret the entire round from the stance and perspective of the Chinese RNG team. Secondly, during the whole game the Chinese commentators only expressed approval, cheers, hopes and suggestions for RNG, non for the European team G2. At the same time, the number of affirmation, worries and criticisms to Chinese RNG was significantly higher than that of European G2. Therefore, the commentators' discourse stance is obviously biased towards the Chinese team RNG. The author also used SPSS21.0 to analyze the results, and found that $p=0.00<0.05$, the difference is significant, that is, the discourse of Chinese commentators does have a tendency.

DISCUSSION

Appreciation and affirmative

Appreciation and affirmative expression belong to the category of expressive in Searle's speech act classification that the speaker expresses the mental state and perception. For the commentators, there will usually be two teams to compete fiercely. Thus, the appreciation and affirmation to one part mean that the commentators will appreciate and affirm this certain part by occupying both language resources and time resources. If the commentators do not appreciate or affirm the other team or players to balance the tendency, there are two possibilities for commentators: For one thing, to ensure the facts and seeking truthfulness, the performance of the other team members is not good enough. For another, the commentators have personal subjective bias, merely showing appreciations or affirmations according to their own preference.

Although the winner of this game is G2, the Chinese commentary has reached 30 times for the appreciation or affirmation to RNG, but only 20 times for G2.

The Chinese commentators' appreciative and affirmative discourses to the Chinese team RNG such as:

(1) No problem, although lost a blood, but I think the rhythm is still OK.

(2) In this round, Xiao Hu plays well against the line. In the absence of jungler's help, he presses Perkz a little.

(3) It seems that RNG is doing very well. They are not letting the economy legged behind too much but try to exchange resources.

The Chinese commentators' appreciative and affirmative discourses to the European team G2 such as:

(4) The opposite does very well in the early stage.

(5) Let their Jin take one blood.

(6) Mainly now G2 is getting excited. Even ADC dares to come up and shoot. They are now leading the economy, including their mentality and the whole state is in good conditions. In this case, they perform very well.

Cheers

Cheering is almost the most basic and obvious means to show standpoint (Shen Sanshan). In short,

cheering is subjective and only praised for supporting sides. By watching and transcription of the corpus, it is found that in the most intense moment of the game, the voice tone of the commentators will increase, and even become shouting. When dealing with the classification, the author found the cheers also include the appreciation of the team members, but considering the dramatic changes in the phonetic intonation, the author will end to classify high-pitch emotional utterances as cheers. After the classification, it shows that although G2 is the final winner, the Chinese commentators had a lot of cheers for the Chinese team RNG, and basically did not applaud for the G2, for example:

(7) Yes! Is RNG going to turn over the round?

(8) This part performs very well, Leblanc fell, killing the front row! Kill the front row!

(9) Rush! Rush! First hit Olaf!

(10) Nice! The Leblanc was forced back.

Approval

The semantics of refueling is the encouragement and support of others, giving others an encouragement or motivation. The meaning of refueling in the discourse will obviously express the discourse position of the explanation. If the commentator explains that the game is not fueled by both players but only one of them, the subjective tendency of the commentary is reflected obviously. It is found from the transcript that the Chinese commentators only refuel for RNG.

And this refueling expression reveals eager expectations, such as:

(12) (RNG) Come on, really cheering, the last one.

(13) RNG wants to die, and must fight.

Worry or pity

People usually express worry or pity to those they care, or convey pity to express their stance. Generally speaking, in order to balance the fairness of the game, usually the commentators will express concerns to the team in backwards situations, or pity that the players miss an excellent opportunities. However, if the commentators are overly worried about certain one team, there will be a clear bias. Since the RNG is inferior to G2 in the whole final deciding game, Chinese commentators are worried about RNG. The speech act of showing pity reached 35 times and only 7 times for G2, which is the most frequently used pragmatic means in this game. It can be seen that commentators' eagerness for RNG to reverse the adversity.

The Chinese commentators' worry or pity discourses to the Chinese team RNG such as:

(14) Sivir is OK, but our lineup is a bit weak.

(15) Here Olaf came down, no vision to see. The opposite will immediate level up to the second. Be careful!

(16) Be careful! The chain is connected, and it is over.

(17) This part of E skills does not break off the Leblanc's R, which is a pity.

(18) Uzi fell, (RNG) would better withdraw. It is very dangerous, wow it's over.

The Chinese commentators' concerning discourses to the European team G2 such as:

(19) It can be seen that of G2 becomes increasingly urgent than before.

(20) The speed of the opponent's to gain the dragon is not that fast.

(21) They are unable to fight the big dragon, and the Leblanc and Olaf have dropped

significantly.

Hope

The propensity of this pragmatic approach is similar to cheers, and for whom they show pity. It usually appears in the predictive analysis section before the upcoming games. If the commentator expresses which side he wishes to win, then the stance and tendency is self-evident. In this game, the words conveying hopes are basically directed to RNG, the frequency is up to 20 times, for example:

(22) Don't leave any regrets. Be sure to stabilize.

(23) UZI buys the Infinity Blade. UZI has three main blades. There is hope, don't give up.

(24) Be sure to drag it, you must hold it.

Suggestion

When the commentators begin to provide game suggestions and countermeasures for certain one team, they have placed themselves in the ranks of supporters of the team. Although in the game, the advice from the commentators will not directly affect the players who are playing the game, the commentators stand on the side of their inner support, and hope that the team or players they support can behave better. In this game, the commentary still only provides advice to RNG, and has repeatedly proposed countermeasures (31 times) when RNG is at disadvantage, such as:

(25) Then don't let anyone go to the bottom lane. Focus on develop economy.

(26) It is really necessary to pay special attention to the position of Olaf and the Leblanc at any time.

(27) Now we don't have to fight with them together.

(28) In fact, we won more just now, and we must be dragged again. And the other side will actually be anxious; this offensive pressure is on their side.

Criticism

In the discourse of the commentary, the negative statement of the commentator belongs to the category of criticism. Criticism includes: directly explaining the player's faults, wrong decisions, and so on. Once the critical discourse of the commentators transcends the truth-seeking statement of the player's mistakes and even adds subjective complaints or censure, then the commentators have a tendency. This tendency may be a way to show "fell exasperated at their failure to make good". If the teams they support behave badly at the crucial time, resulting in losing, the commentators will feel sorry for the mistake and then criticizes. In this game, the number of criticisms to RNG reached 25, which basically belonged to the category of subjective tendencies in criticism, such as:

(29) RNG is too under-estimate the opposite. I am telling the truth. This cannot be played like this. Every time RNG are trying to save skills, no need to save.

(30) Ah! During this time, RNG played so strangely. Suddenly a little short circuit, why always find the opposite actively? We are the late lineup.

(31) Why is there no one stealing development? In fact, at this time, once RNG decides to give up the second tower, someone could go to bottom lane to steal development.

(32) Mainly I think that RNG's mentality of the group collapsed in the 14 minutes. The

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opposite plays better, and the RNG transition and development were completely interrupted, so the economy of RNG was lagged behind quickly.

The number of criticisms to G2, such as:

(33) Olaf, he is very greedy, he does not pay punishment.

(34) In fact, the worst lineup of the opposite is that they have no way to start the fight.

Excuses

In the course of the game, all the players might some mistakes. If the commentators not only present the players' mistakes, but also make an excuse for it, the position and orientation will be clearly reflected. In this game, the commentators only make a lot of excuses (24 times) for RNG's mistakes and backwardness, and reasons for excuse are to comfort and calm the inner anxiety of the audience who support RNG. Commentators hope that the negative impact of the mistakes will be minimized without affecting the subsequent schedule, for example:

(35) It's not a loss for RNG, because it reduces blood volume of the opposite AD. It is a small profit. To be honest, it is already very careful and in detail.

(36) However, no further expansion of the economy is a good thing, although RNG did not catch the Leblanc.

(37) However, it is good to be able to play two perfect group battles under such backwardness. After all, our own disadvantages are too great. No one thinks that RNG, which we have high hopes for, has fallen under the hands of G2 when it entered 8 into 4. Their recovery is too slow, and the mentality is not stable, so I did not expect it. But this is the charm of the game. UZI, the high-profile man was down in the quarter-finals. I think that 90% of people have not thought of the result. But it happened like this.

Through the above quantitative and qualitative analyses, it can be seen that in the game, the commentators have an absolute tendency to applaud, refuel, appreciate or affirm, criticize, suggest, hope, worry towards the Chinese team RNG. The number of every category of pragmatic means to RNG is much larger than that of the winner G2. In other words, the explanation for RNG occupies large amount of resource allocation, which means the time of commentary recourses is much longer than the G2 team. Concerning the commentary resources are limited, then it can be concluded that RNG is indeed the focus of Chinese commentators in this game.

As the above sections demonstrated, it can be concluded that in this game Chinese commentators do have a tendency, so it is necessary to explore why the bias tends to appear. Jiao Yuping (2014) believes that during the commentary for live broadcast competition, the commentators will always show a certain tendency, which is actually a kind of adaptation choice for context-related components. In other words, the linguistic structure as a communicative strategy was selected according to relevant components to conform to the context.

In this study, one point that cannot be ignored in this game is that RNG is a team from China and G2 is a team from Europe, and the viewpoint chosen is the perspective of Chinese commentators. Firstly, in terms of contextual adaptation, the speaker's choice of language will be affected by

different types of listeners to various degrees. In this competition, Chinese commentators (speakers) are synchronized with the one part of the competition, since RNG is a Chinese team. In terms of Chinese commentators, the target audience is the domestic audience (listeners) in China, and the RNG is one of the best team in Chinese. These aspects form a common structure and context. The context consisting of domestic commentators, domestic audiences and domestic competition teams will influence the commentators' discourses and stance expressions. The commentators are activated by the contexts and adapted to the contexts, thus producing a tendency to Chinese team RNG.

Besides, from the structural adaptation, according to Table 1 and Figure 2, it can be seen that the commentators' pragmatic means and evaluation of RNG in this game are far more than that of the G2. Moreover, in terms of reference selection, the author found that Chinese commentators use 29 times "we" to refer to RNG in this game and 23 times "they" to refer to G2. It can be seen that the commentators used "we" to express and evaluate the tendency to RNG, while the commentator chose "they" to refer to G2 because of the psychological distance. This expression is derived from the sense of belonging and pride of the national region (Du Wei, 2009), as well as the identity of its own ideology and identity position, thus generating tendentiousness.

From the theory of dynamic adaptation, the adaptation of the language structure of commentators is based on the context in which the commentator is located. It is precisely because the commentary is aimed at the Chinese audience and one of the main sides is a domestic team that the commentators tend to be tendentious to the Chinese team in this particular situation.

The last point is the degree of awareness highlighted in the process of adaptation. Most of the explanations are conscious conveyed in the process of competition, such as the use of proper nouns and the balance of the atmosphere. There are also unconscious choices, such as cheers and slips of tongue due to excitement during the intense stage of the competition. Although the commentators know to balance the commentary of the two teams for the sake of fairness, because of the particularity of the context, the commentators naturally adapt himself to the position of supporting RNG out of the national attribution in most moments. Therefore, from the perspective of linguistic adaptation, the reasons for the tendency of competition commentary through discourse are reasonably explained.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of pragmatics, this paper analyses the discourse stance of E-sports commentators, exploring whether there is tendency in commentary, and analyses the reasons for tendency. Through repeated viewing, transcription, classification and quantitative and qualitative analyses of the corpus of the game which has aroused wide discussion on the Internet, it can be verified that there is a tendency in this game.The commentators have an absolute tendency towards the Chinese team RNG. The number of every category of pragmatic means to RNG is much larger than that of the winner G2. In other words, the commentary to RNG occupies large amount of

resource allocation.Then it can be concluded that RNG is indeed the focus of Chinese commentators in this game. Based on speech act theory and linguistic adaptation theory, reasons and causes to the tendency are that the tendency is due to the unique context produced by the Chinese commentators, targeted audience, and the same national identity among the commentators, viewers and the team. As a result, this paper argues that the appropriate tendency of commentators is acceptable, because the commentary and stance are influenced by the environment of the competition and the audience, but excessive tendency will also cause the audience discomfort and unfairness to both sides of the competition. What the audience wants to hear is not only excellent commentary, but also a fair explanation of competition.

Future Research

In addition, the view to discourse stance and tendency of commentators has always been controversial. Wei Wei (2008) said that Olympic sports commentators should use "we" cautiously, to reduce the phenomenon of "family" commentary, and that commentators should ensure objectivity and fairness. On the contrary, some scholars believe that "sports commentator's viewpoint orientation and identity construction are formed under the specific situation of intense sports competition, which originates from guiding the audience, media development needs and personal characteristics. As a result, appropriate tendencies are the necessary qualities of sports commentary" (Wang Miao, 2013). All in all, it still needs further researches on methods to testify the existence of commentators' stance and tendency and to demonstrate the reason and acceptability of such tendency.

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