

Linguistic Landscape: A Study on the Slogans of Political Demonstration From the Perspective of Pragmatic Identity

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Pragmatic identity is chosen and constructed by the speaker on a specific occasion to achieve his own communicative purpose. Pragmatic identity is integrated in various fields, but there is little connection with sociology. Language landscape is an important branch of sociolinguistic research. Based on pragmatic identity theory, this paper intends to explore the characteristics and functions of language landscape, and investigate the conflict between pragmatic identities. The study shows that the slogans of political demonstration have the following four characteristics: powerfulness, conciseness, vividness, and passion. Its function is consistent with the purpose of the demonstration. The subjects of the study dynamically chose new pragmatic identities in the demonstration, which conflicted with their previous pragmatic identities.

Keywords: pragmatic identity, language landscape, demonstration slogans

Introduction

In recent years, pragmatic identity has gradually become the focus of pragmatic research. Chen (2014) pointed out that the focus of the pragmatic identity study lies in the meaning expressed by the speaker in a specific context by choosing a specific identity, in order to achieve the goal and effect, rather than the identity construction itself. At present, pragmatic identity is combined with many fields, in literature (Yuan, 2020), academic English (Zhong, 2018), political discourse (Chai & Han, 2017), and business conversation field (Yuan, 2016). However, from the perspective of sociology, there is no research on the phenomenon of pragmatic identity in society. Therefore, based on the theory of pragmatic identity (Chen, 2014), this paper explores the characteristics, functions, and identity conflicts of the language landscape in the slogans of political demonstrations.

Theoretical Framework

Landry and Bourhis (1997) first proposed the term linguistic landscape, which has now become an important branch of sociolinguistics. The research objects of language landscape include street signs, warning signs, billboards, posters, etc. And its background is public space (Shang & Zhao, 2014). These factors together constitute the language landscape of a certain region or city. The object of this article is the demonstration slogan. As an important part of the language landscape, the slogan can convey the purpose and intention of the demonstrators in real time during the procession.

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Chen (2013) first proposed pragmatic identity, which refers to the speaker's intention or unintentional choice of his own identity or the identity of others when speaking, and that identity can be distinguished from the identity before speaking. Pragmatic identity is a dynamic selection process. In a context, in order to meet the communicative needs, the speaker chooses the identity and then chooses the utterance, and finally achieves the communicative effect (Chen, 2013).

Data and Methodology

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African-American man from Minnesota, USA, was unlawfully killed by white police officers. This murder triggered off a wave of protests. The study is based on a self-built corpus extracted from the parade slogans in the "Black Lives Matter" parade series of the black human rights movement. With a total of 30 demonstration slogans from different races, 12 were from black people, 16 from white people, and two from yellow people.

By an analysis of the slogans based on the theory of pragmatic identity, the paper intends to examine the motivations behind the demonstrations, and the dynamic changes of the pragmatic identities. It seeks to answer the following questions:

What are the characteristics of the language landscape of the demonstrations?

What is the function of the demonstration language landscape?

How has the pragmatic identity changed?

Analysis

Said and Kasanga (2016) pointed out that "protest discourse" can be interpreted in three kinds of frames: the Nationalist-Patriotic Frame, the Revolution-and-Freedom Frame, and the People's-Agency-and-Power Frame. They also pointed out that "protest discourse" has the characteristics of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Said & Kasanga, 2016). Based on their research, this paper further elaborates on the Revolution-and-Freedom Frame. The 30 demonstrative slogans in our study are found realized by three subframes: the Equality-and-Justice Frame, the Life-and-Freedom Frame, and the Protest-and-Change Frame.

The Equality-and-Justice Frame

In this frame, the main theme of demonstration slogans is "equality" and "justice". Table 1 shows the division of "Equality-and-Justice Frame" in the slogans of black, yellow, and white people.

Table 1

The Division of "Equality-and-Justice Frame"

Black people	White people	Yellow people
Haven is crying out for justice	No justice no peace	No silence justice
Black lives matter	Liberty & justice & all	
Black is beautiful	I stand with my black brothers and sisters	
	Justice for Floyd	
	The real virus racism	
	Racism is also a pandemic	

The protest slogans held by black people are short and vivid. In the demonstration slogan "haven is crying out for justice", the usage of personification indicates that the sky issues crying action. The cause of crying is feeling sad, aggrieved or disappointed about something. Black people expressed their disappointment and

sadness for unfair treatment and emphasized racial equality. In this frame, black people's pragmatic identity is from their own point of view, in order to achieve their own fair and equal voice; pragmatic identity dynamic change is not obvious.

The protest slogans held by the white people are comprehensive, and powerful. In the slogan "no justice, no peace", the language indicates that if there is no justice, there will be no peace, that is, the consequences can be predicted through the slogan. The short and powerful language strongly expressed the attitude of the white people also strongly expressed the injustice of the police's violent enforcement, and accused the government of giving Freud justice and equal treatment to all black compatriots. "Virus" and "pandemic" use metaphor to form a mapping between the "Virus", "epidemic" (source domain), and "racial discrimination" (target domain), vividly expressing the harm and destructiveness of racial discrimination and transmitting the message of resisting racial discrimination. There is a clear shift of pragmatic identity. Before the parade, the pragmatic identity of the white people is a citizen who loves America. During the parade, the white people in the parade automatically choose the party against the government, unite with the black compatriots, and jointly fight against unfair treatment.

The protest slogans held by the yellow people have a strong sense of emotion in the "Equality-and-Justice Frame". In the slogan "no silence, justice!", with strong sentiments, it powerfully denounced the police's violent enforcement, which was unfair to Freud. There is a sharp contrast between the changes of the yellow people's pragmatic identity here, from obedience to protest against the government.

The Life-and-Freedom Frame

In this frame, the theme of the slogans is mainly around "freedom" and "life". Table 2 shows the division of "Life-and-Freedom Frame" in the slogans of black, yellow, and white people.

Table 2

The Division of "Life-and-Freedom Frame"

Black people	White people	Yellow people
	Liberty and justice for all	Black lives over white feelings
	Liberty & justice & all	

In the 30 selected demonstration slogans, there are only three slogans of this frame. It can be seen from the data proportion that this demonstration for "freedom" is not the key point. In essence, only under the premise of ensuring equality and human rights can we have freedom. And in this frame, there are no slogans from the black, which can be reflected that black people are often squeezed in the United States, and their awareness of "freedom" is not strong enough.

The demonstration slogans held by the yellow people have a distinct emotional bias. In the demonstration slogan "black life over white feelings", yellow people used contrasting ways to compare "black lives" with "white emotions", emphasizing the importance of "black lives". In this demonstration slogan, there is a strong personal sentimental content, thus demonstrations can easily turn into radical movements. Thus, we can infer that the demonstration of the yellow people also chose to stand on the black side, calling attention to the lives of black people. The pragmatic identity of the yellow has also undergone subtle changes, from an equal attitude towards blacks and whites to a slightly skewed attitude towards black power.

In "Life-and-Freedom" Frame, the slogan of demonstration has the characteristics of concise, extensive, and catchy. In the white slogan "liberty, justice, for all", the white not only emphasized fairness, but also

freedom for all people. We can see the alteration in the pragmatic identity. Here we can observe the dynamic change of pragmatic identity, from the non-discriminated party to the discriminated party.

The Protest-and-Change Frame

In this frame, the theme of the slogan revolves around “protest”, “crime”, “violence”, and “change”. Table 3 shows the division of “the Protest-and-Change Frame” in the slogans of black, yellow, and white people.

Table 3

The Division of “the Protest-and-Change” Frame

Black people	White people	Yellow people
Stop killing black people	White silence = violence	
Take away their guns now	Color is not a crime	
We will not be silent	Change for George Floyd	
Get your knee off	Charge killer cops	
I can't breathe	End racism now	
We want black power	Wake up and then show up	
Being black is not a crime	End police brutality	
The police are training to kill us	Hate has no home here	
	Hate can't win	

The black protest slogans in this frame are concise and powerful. Verbs such as “stop”, “get off”, and “take away” can directly express the defense of power and strong dissatisfaction with racial discrimination. In this frame, the pragmatic identity of the black people does not change much, and they all start from their own perspectives to achieve the purpose of resisting injustice, defending human rights and resisting racial discrimination.

The white demonstration slogans in this frame are characterized by rhyming, short, vivid, and straightforward. “Silence” and “violence” share the same syllable, forming rhymes in rhythm. “End”, “charge”, and other words express injustice for Freud’s death and condemn police brutality. In this frame, all slogans held by white people clearly express effective messages such as opposing racial discrimination and defending the human rights of black compatriots. Therefore, white people have a clear identity transformation from citizen to rebellion.

The Characteristics and Functions of the Demonstration Language Landscape

Through the analysis of the three frames, it can be concluded that the language landscape of demonstrations has the following four characteristics: (1) powerfulness, (2) conciseness, (3) vividness, (4) passion. Demonstrators directly convey their feelings, attitudes, and ideas through the language in order to achieve the purpose of its demonstrations.

Conclusion

Based on the theory of linguistic identity (Chen, 2014), this paper explores the characteristics and functions of the language landscape in the slogans of political demonstrations from three frames (“the Equality-and-Justice Frame”, “the Life-and-Freedom frame”, and “the Protest-and-Change Frame”), and reveals the dynamic changes of the linguistic identity. In this “Black Lives Matter” demonstration, there are three subjects in the march, namely: black, white, and yellow. Through the above analysis, the pragmatic identity of each subject has undergone a dynamic transformation. As in Table 4:

Table 4

The Dynamic Change of Pragmatic Identities

Black	U.S. citizens/residents → citizens/residents who have been treated unfairly → citizens/residents who are against unfair treatment by the government
White	U.S. citizens/residents → citizens/residents who express sympathy for the black and fight against the government
Yellow	U.S. citizens/residents → citizens/residents who are against the government also speak up for colored people

The common purpose of the changes in the pragmatic identity is to oppose the violent law enforcement of white police officers, to safeguard the human rights of black people, to achieve equality between different colors and ethnic groups, to live in harmony, and ultimately to eliminate racial discrimination. There are nuances in the purpose of different subjects, with the white people against the government also containing the purpose of a society eager for harmony and stability, and the yellow people voice for colored people. The language identities among the three main groups in the demonstration are different. Also, each group form a conflict between the front and back identities, and also conflict with the government.

This paper hopes to contribute to the study of language landscape. However, there are shortcomings in this paper. The paper only investigates the conflict in the language landscape, but did not explore how to negotiate. Hope to make up for the shortcomings of this article in the future.

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