Analysis of "Versailles Literature" from the Perspective of Speech Act Theory

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Versailles literature, which can be understood as fake humble in English, is a kind of internet catchphrase which became popular on a Chinese social media, Weibo, last year. This paper aims to explore the communicative intention of uploader as well as the communicative effect from the perspective of speech act theory so as to draw researcher's attention on internet catchphrase and social media study. The result shows that sometimes people's locutionary act do not correspondence with their illocutionary act. Also, since perlocutionary act has uncertainty, the communicative effect can be either an expected or an unexpected effect.

Keywords: speech act theory, versailles literature, communicative intention, communicative effect

Introduction

Weibo is a popular social media in China with features including concision, quickness, and interactivity, as well as the strong awareness of current events. Weibo enables the users to instantly post short message in order to express their opinion or describe and sharing their states. On the other hand, users are also allowed to comment themselves' or other's massage. So it provides abundant and diversified linguistic data for researchers which is easily accessible. The study of Weibo used to fasten on journalism, management, and information science. But with the social catchphrase emerged in an endless stream, they have gradually received the attention of scholars.

Versailles literature is more like a kind of mode of speech expression rather than a kind of literature (Zhu, 2021). Versailles Literature became popular in November 2020 due to the microblog of a sentiment writer "Meng Qiqi 77". Almost every post revolved around her husband who was described as handsome, rich, single-minded, etc. It got its name from the Japanese comic book *Rose of Versailles* by a netizen, Xiao Naiqiu who is also the originator. This work illustrates in detail the glam and extravagance of aristocratic life at the Palace of Versailles in France in the late 18th century. So people use Versailles to indicate the life of luxury. And it is used initially to describe sentences or discourse which describe a kind of low-key show off. To put it simply, Versailles literature is to use seemingly plain words to show off in an oblique way, which is a kind of advanced and hidden expression of superiority.

Most studies of Versailles literature have been conducted from a sociological or journalistic perspective. As a relatively new patterns of language, Versailles Literature receives a little attention by linguists. Guo and Tang (2021) studied Versailles Literature based on the theory of interactive linguistics. They think that the speaker's

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intention of Versailles literature includes no intention, conspicuous intention, expressive intention, and intention to gain respect. And from the perspective of the listener, they claim that some of the listener have the same feelings and opinions with the uploader, while others may understand that these posts are just the illusory projection of the ideal life. Yang and Gao (2021) discussed the pragmatic function of Versailles literature. They believed that the appearance of Versailles Literature showed the distorted social values.

Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory was first proposed by J. L. Austin in his book *How to Do Things with Words* (2002). In his opinion, to say something is to do something, or in saying something we do something, and by saying something we do something. A complete speech act contains three parts: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. A locutionary act refers to the act of "saying something". An illocutionary act refers to the intention of "saying something". While a perlocutionary act refers to the result of locutionary act. Searle (2008) claimed that speaking a language is performing speech acts. He defined speech act as a language action. But it also works when studying a written form (Mohamad et al., 2018).

Data and Methodology

Weibo provides abundant and diversified linguistic data for researchers which is easily accessible. Weibo allows users to make up a nickname so that it protects users' privacy. This, in turn, makes users more willing to give their opinions or comments to others. It's also worth noting that users can search for keywords to retrieve messages associated with the keywords. The data of this paper is collected from a total of 376 posts on this Chinese social media, Weibo, published in May and June, 2021. And the nicknames of uploaders in the examples we analyze below are removed.

Analysis

In the present analysis, this paper focuses on qualitative analysis in three aspects: the forms of the Versailles Literature, uploader's communicative intentions and communicative effect. In this case, we will look at uploader's communicative intentions in terms of his or her posts and the communicative effect in terms of comments. As a new mode of expression of network language, Versailles Literature has its own forms and structure. As can be seen from the data, what feature they have in common is that seemingly complaining and belittling oneself, in fact it is really showing off one's superior or stronger side than others.

Analysis of Illocutionary Act

Bach and Harnish (1979) proposed that performing an illocutionary act is equivalent to expressing an attitude, that is, indicates what the uploader really means in this case. The main point of view of Bach and Harnish is that the presentation of some discourse of illocutionary act can not influence other's thought or action but express their own opinion. Hence in this part we aims to analyze illocutionary act of the upholder to explore their communicative intention. According to uploader's intention, the data can be divided into two types: true complaint and true strut.

True complaint means that the upholder really wants to complain about their lives or something and they hope to be better instead to flaunt their living condition. Then let us look for an example of in our corpus:
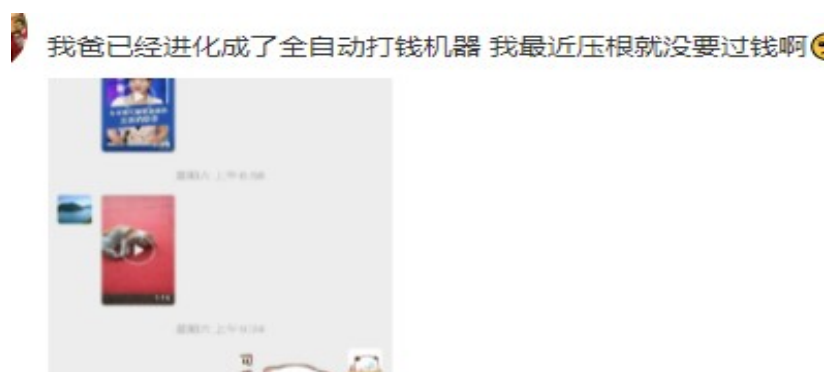
Example (1)

凡尔赛文学一下：衣服架子我本人，试的都好看（苦恼），最终理智战胜一欢的😂去时打车回来小黄车。周末愉快🐰
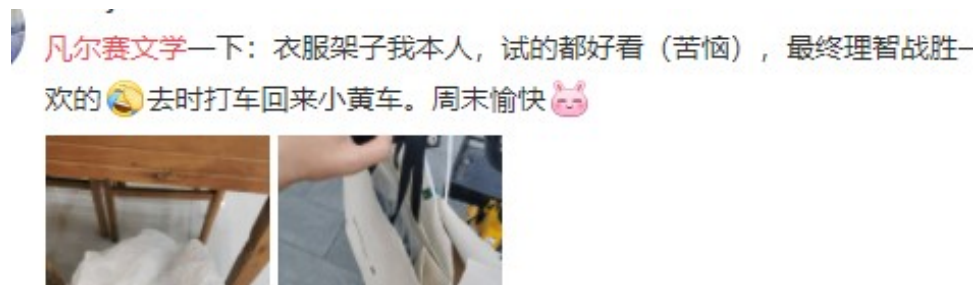
The uploader of this example complained that her figure was so good that no matter what cloth she tries on, clothes suit her very well. This troubles her that she could not decide which one to buy because she definitely cannot buy all for the lack of enough money. So these uploaders are not meant to show off, but to express a reasonable view of their living and social circumstances.

Another kind of communicative intention is the true strut. And it is this kind of intention that leads to the burst of Versailles Literature. The upholders seem to complain about their living condition or to be humble, but their words create a better life condition than most of the people and between the lines reveal their own identity, status and in the heart of the sense of superiority.

Example (2)

我爸已经进化成了全自动打钱机器 我最近压根就没要过钱啊😭

In this example, the uploader shows less self-deprecating and on the other hand more feeling of showing off. The uploader described his father as an automatic money machine which means that the uploader's father transferred money to him without asking whether he needed money or not and the uploader did not even ask the father for money. Likewise, it's not that the uploader did not want his father to give him money. On the contrary, the uploader was satisfied with it. Therefore, the communicative intention of this uploader is to display his or her father's concern to him.

From the examples showed above, we can conclude that sometimes speaker's locutionary act is not correspondent with illocutionary or even just the opposite in our case.

Analysis of Perlocutionary Act

Contrast with illocutionary acts, perlocutionary act was not paid enough attention in the linguistic field by linguists. Cause entangling with illocutionary acts, perlocutionary act is one of the most problematic among speech act theories (Wang & Gu, 2001). Although posting on Weibo does not involve face-to-face communication between two people or among more people. But it does involve people sharing their feelings about an event happening around them or comment on posts. These can be seen as the perlocutionary act of Versailles Literature.

Example (3)

As can be seen from the post above, uploader added two pictures in which a LV bag was filled with fruits or other goods. For her, this LV bag was taken as a shopping bag. So we can infer that the uploader has a high living standard. And because she called the commenter "an expert", this commenter is also well off or knows much about the luxury brand. So this commenter did not think the uploader's words are Versailles Literature and did not have a bad feeling about it. The commenter advised her to buy a new LV bag. But for people who can not afford a LV bag or who have to save money for a period of time to buy a bag may think this uploader is showing off. Because they prefer taking good care of their luxury bag rather than using it to package fruits or vegetables.

Example (4)

Commenter1: How hot can you get at 30 degrees Celsius? There is 35℃ in my place.

Uploader applied: I was sweat all day.

Commenter2: Are you talking in a way of "Versailles Literature"?

Commenter2: It is only 30℃.

The illocutionary act is that this uploader complained about the hot weather in Qingdao which is 30℃ as shown in the picture. First, we can work out that the uploader did not mean to show off but really want to complain about the weather instead according to his apply to commenter 1. And we can infer from the commenters' words such as "how hot can you get", "only" that this uploader's words let them think that he is showing off because the temperature of their places are much higher than that of Qingdao. They think the uploader has less rights to complain about the hot whether since they have not complained about it yet. So from this point of view, the uploader's communicative intention was not understood by the receiver, and the locutionary act leads to unexpected communicative effect.

Example (5)

Commenter 1: I'm less than ninety in my second semester. I like Miss Alsu! Chilling.

Commenter 2: Awesome. Your combined mark of two courses is 40 points higher than mine.

Commenter 3: You're talking about Versailles Literature.

In this example, the uploader shared his marks and complained that his teacher gave him full marks. But his intention is not to ask his teacher to give him a lower mark but to show off his high marks. According to the comments we can draw a conclusion that the uploader reaches out his communicative intention, because he received admires of others. However, for people who also get 100 points or get higher scores than him in another subject, they will not complement or envy him.

We can conclude from the examples above that perlocutionary act is characterized by uncertainty. Austin (1962) thought that perlocutionary act can be the realization of communicative intention or the production of perlocutionary result. He believed that perlocutionary act is a kind of result. But Han (2005) proposed that perlocutionary act should be defined as the psychological or behavioral results of the speaker's utterance on both parties or others in verbal communication. We have to admit that the communicative effect is not always same or fixed for the listener or commenter in our case is not passive and unconscious, but a conscious, active agent (Han, 2005). So different kinds of VL cause different communicative effect. Even the same discourse can cause different communicative effect due to different social status, live conditions, values, or educational background.

Conclusion

In this paper, we studied the Versailles Literature in Weibo from the perspective of speech act theory. Versailles literature is a spirit of acting out the high life, which intended to disentangle in a comical way the gladness of everyday life and the poison of a narcissistic personality. But meaning is subjective. So there exists four different situations: the uploader is really complaining and the viewer thinks he is complaining; the uploader is really complaining but the viewer thinks he is showing off; the uploader aims to show off but the reviewer may think he is complaining; the uploader aims to show off and the reviewer does think he is showing off. The reason why these possibilities exist is that people with different living condition, world view, value, even the state of mind at the time may have different understandings to the same discourse.

The burst of Versailles Literature reflects the problems in contemporary society and people's values. In today's rapidly developing social background, we should not only rationally treat the new network popular style, but also pay attention to the social realistic significance reflected behind it. While the study would be more informative if a diachronic study is added. From a diachronic perspective, we can better understand the development and changes of Versailles Literature.

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