Analysis of Speech Act "Greeting" in Film *Love Actually*

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Abstract

Pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication in different social backgrounds and contexts (Mey, 2001). In the field of pragmatics, the analysis of speech act constitutes one of the majority of the related research (Austin, 1962). Speech act is significant to research the linguistic phenomena that occur in spoken language, particularly in movies. For this study, it choose the movie *Love Actually* as the data to investigate one of the speech acts, greeting. *Love Actually* is British famous romantic comedy, displaying love stories of various characters such as Prime Minister, singer, and writer. Focusing on greeting, the essay will discuss its classification based on Ebsworth et al. (2009), and combine with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies to bring more implications to language education.

Keywords: greeting, speech act, politeness theory, sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Pragmatics, as Culpeper and Schauer (2009) state, focused on the "language use in context" (p. 202). More specifically, it studies the use of language in human communication in different social backgrounds and contexts (Mey, 2001). In the field of pragmatics, the analysis of speech act constitutes one of the majority of the related research (Austin, 1962). Speech act, in Yule's (1996) definition, is "the action performed via utterance". It expresses human thinking through words, indicating certain function in language communication, such as refusal, request and apologizing. Austin (1962) claims there are 3 types of speech acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Searle (1969) further classifies illocutionary act into 5 types based on different functions: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. Searle (1975) also divides illocutionary acts into direct and indirect speech acts. Direct speech act has a clear connection between sentence structures and forms while indirect speech acts more depends on the specific context.

The investigation topics of the speech act vary and the research of politeness is often linked to these topics (Austin, 1962). The foundation of politeness, face, is put forward by Goffman (1967). He defines face as a "positive public image you seek to establish in social interactions" (p.5). Based on Goffman's definition, Brown and Levinson (1987) suppose there are positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to one's desire to be liked or admired, while negative face is about individual's preference to be free on their own interest or preference. When we are polite to somebody, we are protecting his/her positive and negative face. Nevertheless, when we are rude to someone or impede him/her, we are possibly making "Face-threatening acts" (FTAs) (p.211). In order to minimize the threat of FTAs, Brown and Levinson (1987) supply several politeness strategies: bald on record strategy, positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, off-record strategy and avoidance of FTA, with degree of politeness from low to high; and the choice of strategies depends on three social factors: "social distance (D), relative power (P), and rank of imposition" (R) (p.77). Although such politeness strategies are criticized by many scholars for its Anglocentrism and Western bias (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984), it still offers groundbreaking guidance for second language (L2) learners to investigate proper use of language in English-speaking countries.

Guided by previous theories, different types of speech acts have been researched in relation to politeness theory, including requests (Taguchi, 2006), apologies (Blum- Kulka et al., 1984; Limberg, 2016) and refusals (Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016). However, scholars have seldom focused on greeting. The reason for this limitation is that unlike other speech acts, greeting, as a category of expressive, is considered relatively simple, most common and straightforward (Searle, 1969; Austin, 1962; Barrata, 2009). Drawing on insights from Goffman, Laver (1981) combines greeting with politeness, supplying that greeting is the part of both the communicative behavior and

politeness strategy. Guided by Laver, Qing (1996) applies Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies into the greeting. Furthermore, Ebsworth et al. (2009) give a classification of greeting based on its forms: greeting on the run, speeding greeting, chat greeting, long greeting, intimate greeting, business greeting, introductory greeting and re-greeting. All these greeting styles have a common feature: to acknowledge the presence of different social identities, of which the major function is social (Goffman, 1971).

Hence, despite greeting is easier to be ignored in speech act theory, this speech act may also lead certain difficulties to L2 learners for its dependence on contextual variables (Waring, 2012). Considering the relationship between greeting and contexts, a range of researches about greeting collect data through a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). By using DCTs, participants are asked to finish the discourse they prefer, thus performing in different given context (Cohen et al., 1985). In Shleykina's study (2016), the researcher designed a DCT including 16 situations to compare the semantic formulas in greetings performed by Russian EFL learners and English native speakers. The finding shows that there is a significant difference between non-native speakers and native speakers in terms of frequency and content of greeting strategies. The similar method is also applied into the cross-country comparative study, like Almegren's study (2017). Almegren compared individuals' greeting strategies in Saudi region and America. He recruited native speakers in each region as participants, who are required to join DCTs. This aims to investigate the influence of different social variables such as social distance and social status on speakers' greeting ways. The findings show that different greeting ways are obviously addressed in two groups: compared to American native speakers, Saudi Arabic speakers tend to focus more on the social distance and hierarchy. As could be concluded from the two studies, both Shleykina's and Almegren's studies inform us that the greeting strategies indeed depend on different social contexts.

2. Rationale

According to the above theoretical perspectives, despite numerous literature on pragmatics and speech acts, there is insufficient study about greeting. Greeting have not received much attention compared to other speech act like refusals and request, as it is fairly usual and do not involve much complex formulaic expressions. However, the existed findings imply that greeting strategies are dissimilar in different regions; and sometimes the incorrect greeting way may lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, greeting in different contexts and cultures could be laid more emphasis on. As Kakiuchi (2005) states, greeting is a "door to the target culture" (p. 63). Greetings are thus the stepping stone for L2 learners to know about the target culture and guarantee smooth intercultural communication. Hence, the aim of this research is to investigate greeting under different contexts in an English movie called Love Actually. The research questions are as follows:

(1) To what extent do different greeting styles display in terms of frequency in *Love Actually*?

(2) How are greeting politeness strategies chosen in *Love Actually*?

Based on the two questions, the research adopts a qualitative method and the instrument of the research is the researcher herself. She firstly watched the movie carefully and downloaded its screenplay. Then, with the screenplay, she identified characters' utterance that contained greeting, which aligned with the objective of this study. In data analysis stage, the researcher categorized the greetings based on Ebsworth et al.'s category (2009) and noted their frequency. Brown and Levinson's politeness strategy theory (1987) was also used to investigate people's greeting ways under different contexts. Finally, the researcher formed the conclusion about greeting strategies in English-speaking countries and also critically discussed the limitation of the study and its implications for second language learning.

3. Results

This section presents the research findings on the use and functions of greetings in the movie.

3.1 Categories of Greeting in Love Actually

According to Ebsworth et al.'s category (2009), there are 8 ways of greeting. The research investigates the occurrence of these 8 greeting ways in the movie (See Appendix C). The contexts behind these categories are also listed in Appendix C.

It can be seen from Appendix C, speeding greeting, chat greeting, business greeting and introductory greeting are the 4 most frequent greeting styles in the movie, of which speeding greeting occurs 13 times at the top. On the one hand, this shows that in most times of greeting, interlocutors exchange the information within a short time. On the other hand, long greeting exits very seldom, at the least frequency of 2 times.

3.2 Politeness Strategy Behind the Greetings

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, there are five politeness strategies. Based on the

discourse analysis of the movie, the following findings will combine the greeting ways with three politeness strategies.

As for bald on record strategy, it usually happens in family members' and friends' communication where efficiency is more important and there is almost no greeting. We can see dialogue 1 in Appendix A. After Jamie says "hello", he asks his brother what he is doing and gets a direct response with no greeting formulaic expressions. Here, the degree of politeness is limited because the more important thing for Christ is to answer his brother's question.

In addition, positive politeness strategy shows a high level in speeding greeting, introductory greeting and business greeting. Specific formulaic expressions, such as "How are you feeling" in Dialogue 2 (See Appendix A) and "Really pleased to meet you" in Dialogue 3 (See Appendix A), can function well in protecting the hearer's positive face and show the speaker's receptiveness.

Furthermore, negative politeness strategy also presents in speeding greeting when the prime minister seeks Natalie's house in the street (See dialogue 3 in Appendix A). He knocks on the stranger's door and asks carefully. Since he and the host have not seen each other before, the prime minister uses "sorry to disturb" after saying hello. This means he does not want to impede the freedom of the host and respects the host's desire to choose the next action freely.

4. Discussion

The study shows that characters' choices of greeting are dissimilar in different situations in the movie. Speeding greeting, chat greeting and business greeting ranks the highest use in the movie. This is mainly due to the movie's setting, in which the interlocutors are usually relatives or colleges. For these people who know each other well, greeting is just a kind of formalism without enough meaning for them. Hence, they just exchange the information shortly and always regard greeting as a form. In contrast, long greeting exits very seldom, at the least level of frequency of 2 times. This is also because these characters often have a stable relationship to show love and they do not need to use long greeting to maintain a lasting relationship.

Meanwhile, behind the greeting styles are the different preference for politeness strategies. According to Qian's (1996) opinions about greeting, he puts forward the following formula based on Brown and Levison' politeness theory:

$$X= D\,(S,H) + P\,(H,S) + ...$$

Here, X refers to the politeness degree of greeting. D represents social distance and P is relative power. X will change if D or P changes. In this movie, positive politeness and bald on record strategy are the most frequent strategies used by the interlocutors, because most of them are familiar with each other. The researcher conducts an analysis of the application of the formula in the movie. We can see from Appendix B that when interlocutors have a close relationship, they will choose chat greeting and intimate greeting. If interlocutors do not know each other well, they tend to adopt bald on record strategy and positive politeness strategy. When one of the interlocutors has more power, both interlocutors will show their positive politeness using speeding greeting; business greeting is also employed when two speakers do not have emotional relationship. And when interlocutors are strangers, they tend to use negative politeness to indicate more politeness. Such the finding supports the claim that the choice of greeting depends on the context of the encounters, e.g., social relationship and status (Ellis,1994). It also indicates the influence of social status on greeting strategies. This can be verified well in the prime minister's attitude to talking with different people: he uses "sorry to disturb you "to strangers but "how are you" to his subordinates. This supports the previous work about greeting by Shleykina (2016) and Almegren (2017).

The study can deepen our understanding of people's preference for greeting styles in different contexts. We can draw insights from the work that it is important to notice the appropriate greeting ways and raise pragmatic awareness to develop pragmatic competence (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2010). As a result, the implications for L2 learners are raised in the following. As Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2006) state, it is necessary for individuals to be exposed to particular speech acts as a way to enhance pragmatic competence. Hence, instructors are advised to give explicit instruction to L2 learners about greetings (Liu, 2006). The study also shows that politeness theory can be combined with greeting strategies in L2 classrooms. As a carrier of pragmatics knowledge, textbooks can involve more authentic information such as corpus-based materials or screenplay from the movie (Kakiuchi, 2005). Furthermore, as a more specific method to raise learners' consciousness about proper greeting strategies, keeping a daily greeting journal is suggested to be a good way for learners to reflect on daily greeting ways they observed (DuFon, 1999).

Despite many findings can be drawn from this study, the study is not general enough to be applied to other contexts. This is because the researcher selects only one movie, which may bring bias to the findings. Meanwhile, most of the characters know others at the beginning, thus the communication between strangers is limited and the overall finding is not representative. Besides, as the text is from movie, it is difficult to assume the real frequency of positive politeness strategy used in the real life.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above findings and discussion, the study conclusion can therefore be addressed. As for the first research question, speeding greeting, chat greeting, business greeting and introductory greeting are the 4 most frequent greeting styles and long greeting presents limitedly. This is because most characters know each other and thus greeting has no valuable meaning for them. In terms of the second research questions, greeting politeness strategies are highly related to the social context. Family members or friends often choose bald on record strategy and positive politeness strategy, while negative politeness fits more well with strangers. As for implications to the second language curriculum, the movie can offer us inspiration about the import of authentic information in the textbooks. And both the instructors and learners are suggested to develop their pragmatic awareness of greeting and politeness theory, so as to avoid misunderstanding in intercultural communication.

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Appendix A

Findings of Greeting Ways in *Love Actually*

Categories of Greeting	Context	Frequency	Percentage
Greeting on the run	Interlocutors don't have enough time to talk.	5	10.4%
Speeding greeting	Interlocutors exchange the information shortly.	13	27.1%
Chat greeting	Interlocutors have a topic for conversation.	8	16.7%
Long greeting	There is a need to have connection for long time	2	4.2%
Intimate greeting	Sometimes interlocutors initiate conversation with hug or kiss.	3	6.3%
Business greeting	Formal occasion such as work office.	7	14.6%
Introductory greeting	Two strangers who have never known each other.	7	14.6%
Re-greeting	Interlocutors see each other repeatedly after last communication.	3	6.3%

Appendix B

Transcript in *Love Actually*

Dialogue 1 Chat Greeting

(Jamie and Chris are brothers)

Jamie: Hello! What the hell are you doing here?

Chris: Oh, I just popped over to borrow some old CDs.

Dialogue 2 Business Greeting

(Prime Minister and his subordinate)

Annie: Welcome, Prime Minister.

Prime Minister I must work on my wave. How are you?

Annie: How are you feeling?

Prime Minister: Cool. Powerful.

Dialogue 3 Introductory Greeting

(first time to meet each other)

COLIN: Yahoo! Now, this is Harriet.

HARRIET: Hi. Really pleased to meet you.

TONY: Hello, Harriet.

HARRIET: I hope you don't mind.

Dialogue 4 Speeding Greeting

(Two interlocutors are strangers)

Prime minister: Hello. Sorry to disturb. Does Natalie live here?

Mia: No. She lives next door.

Prime minister: Ah. Brilliant.

Appendix C

Choice of Greeting Politeness Strategies in *Love Actually*

Forms of Greeting	Relative Power	Social Distance (Relationships of interlocutors)	Politeness Strategies
Greeting on the run	×	Close relationship	Positive Politeness/ Bald on record strategy/
Speeding greeting	×	fit for all the relationship	Positive Politeness /Negative Politenss
Chat greeting	×	Close relationship	Positive Politeness/ Bald on record strategy
Long greeting	×	fit for all the relationship	Positive Politeness
Intimate greeting	×	know each other very well	Off-record Strategy
Business greeting	focus on formal occasion	don't have emotional relationship and behave respectfully	Positive Politeness
Introductory greeting	×	first time to meet each other	Positive Politeness
Re-greeting	×	fit for all the relationship	Avoidance of FTA

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