"Ye Bu Shi (Shuo) Bu + Partial Repetition of the Prior Turn" at the Second Assessment Position

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Abstract

This research adopts conversation analysis as its research methodology and selects daily telephone conversations as the research objects. Finding that "ye bu shi (shuo) bu + partial repetition of the prior turn" at the second assessment position is a kind of conversational practice used by communicators in Chinese daily conversation to start a turn of which the stance conflicting with that of another speaker. The conventional practice shows that the speaker responding to the initial assessment not only maintains the alignment of the initiator's structure, but also expresses the disaffiliative stance about the referent in the assessment sequence. Compared with the direct expression of disacceptance or dissatisfaction with the evaluation object, the speaker of "ye bu shi (shuo) bu+ partial repetition of the prior turn" not only euphemistically shows his emotional stance, but also maintains the harmonious interpersonal relationship between the two parties.

Keywords: ye bu shi (shuo) bu TCU, the second assessment position, alignment, affiliation, Conversation Analysis

1. Introduction

Otto Jespersen considered that the double negative structure in Chinese refers to "two negative words limiting the same concept or the same word." "It's not that I don't (say) no" is a very typical double negative structure in Chinese, which means "negative word (is not) + negative word (not) + X," expressing the negation of a negation. However, previous research has shown that the double negative structure cannot be simply understood as a format containing two negative components and expressing a positive meaning.

In existing studies, the interpretations of "It's not that I don't X" mainly include three findings: first, reinforcement of affirmation, when "X" in "is not no X" is a verb, it often expresses an excessive affirmation; second, euphemistic affirmation, when "X" in "is not no X" is a comparative adjective, in this case, "is not no X" does not equal "X," and the expressed affirmative tone is less than general affirmation; third, negation, when "is not" is a coordinating conjunction or a choice conjunction, "is not" does not negate the proposition expressed by "not X," but negates the appropriateness condition expressed by "not X." "Is not" often acts as a quotative negation marker or focus marker, highlighting the negative meaning of

"not X." Previous scholars' research on "It's not that I don't" has achieved results that cannot be ignored. From a semantic point of view, the response position "It's not that I don't" + X discussed in this paper falls into the second category: comparative adjectives, used to express euphemistic affirmation. The existing research on "It's not that I don't" is mostly conducted from a semantic perspective. The summary and description of the semantic and discursive functions of "It's not that I don't" explain some of its features well, but viewing "It's not that I don't" merely from lexical, syntactic, and semantic aspects does not consider the real speech communication situations, its role in turn construction components, and the actions performed in the sequence. Therefore, this paper uses conversational analysis research methods, starting from the actions performed by language and the sequence environment, applies common sense reasoning and practical reasoning to the existing corpus, and focuses on studying the characteristics and rules of "It's not that I don't" as a conversational convention in real speech communication environments when situated in the second evaluative position. In the collected corpus, turns starting with "It's not that I don't" are common, with few instances of "It's not to say I don't"; considering the communicative function of Chinese variants, we believe that there is not much difference in essence among these variants in communicative activities, so this study encompasses these two variants, forming the expression "It's not that I don't."

2. Research Methods and Corpus Collection

The conversational analysis research method adopted in this paper was established by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson in the 1960s as a sociological research method, which is "a qualitative, empirical, inductive research method that focuses on social interaction." The primary goal of conversational analysis research is to identify, describe, and explain the ordered and recurring methods or conventions that interlocutors use to complete social actions.

Since corpora from novels, scripts, and film and television works are not natural, they are insufficient to reflect the objective reality of people's specific language use. Therefore, this study adopts the conversational analysis research method, using real telephone conversations as the corpus source, focusing

only on "It's not that I don't + X" (where X belongs to the category of comparative adjectives) occurring in the second evaluative position, to explore the application rules of this position's "It's not that I don't" and the specific social actions performed. The corpus used in this paper is selected from a total duration of 206 minutes of everyday telephone conversations, with interlocutors being friends, relatives, colleagues, etc. All corpora are transcribed using Gail Jefferson's transcription system (1984).

3. Consistency/Inconsistency and Emotional Stance of Agreement/Disagreement

In the process of conversational responses, interlocutors will show whether they cooperate with another speaker in terms of structure or emotional affiliation. In the evaluation sequence, the initiator of the evaluative act reveals their emotional stance towards the related event through the design of their turn; similarly, the responder shows through different response methods whether they maintain structural consistency (alignment) and emotional agreement (affiliation) with the initiator.

4. Analysis

The use of "It's not that I don't (say) + partially repeating the previous turn" in the second evaluative position is a conversational convention in everyday Chinese interactions for initiating turns that conflict with another speaker's stance. This convention demonstrates that the responder to the evaluative act maintains alignment with the initiator of the evaluative act in terms of the structural development of the sequence while expressing their emotional stance of misalignment with the initiator regarding the event in question. Through the double negative structure of "It's not that I don't (say) no" indicating a euphemistic affirmation and the repetition of the previous turn, it reflects the current speaker's continuation of the content of the initiator's turn and acceptance of their role as a responder to the evaluative act, and to some extent, advances the development of the current evaluative sequence. Moreover, the misalignment with the emotional stance of the initiator exhibited by the responder through the conversational convention "It's not that I don't" can find related evidence in the turn design at the position of evaluative response or in the subsequent expansion of this sequence.

例 1 [烫头发 00:07:00-00:07:34]

65 艳茹: 他>这个<头是(.)为了来见我们特意烫:的吗.

66 海荣: eng::应该是吧

67 艳茹: ((笑))

68 海荣: $要[来跟我比一下美: $

69 艳茹: [° 不过°

70 艳茹: 不过-.hh 不过我觉得:

71   他这样一烫还挺-还:显得挺<儒雅>的,还挺<好看>的.

72 (0.3)

73 海荣: eng::我觉得((嘴喷一声))eng.好不好看的.

74   反正:也不是<u>不好看</u>,就是吧,他那几根毛吧,$<u>不值这个钱</u>:$

75 ((两个人笑))

76 艳茹: $就你-就你那个毛<u>值</u>这几个钱:$

77 海荣: 我这可是<<u>原生自然毛</u>>.

Regarding Yanru's inquiry in line 65, the structurally consistent response is either an affirmative or negative reply (Raymond G, 2003, pp. 939-967), Hai Rong initially provided a relatively affirmative answer in line 66, then provided a basis for her previous affirmation in line 68. In line 71, Yanru makes an initial assessment of the object under discussion, through which the speaker can perform one or more actions (Heritage J & Atkinson J M, 1984, pp. 346-369). In Yanru's turn design, positive descriptive words such as "elegant" and "good-looking" are used to perform the act of praise, thereby displaying her positive stance towards the evaluated object. The appearance of the first assessment provides relevance for the emergence of the second assessment (Heritage J & Atkinson J M, 1984, pp. 346-369), Hai Rong makes the second assessment through the phrase "also not bad looking" in line 74. In the turn design of line 74, Hai Rong repeats the "good-looking" from Yanru's turn in line 71, showing her continuation and response to the content and viewpoints discussed, indicating that Hai Rong has accepted her role as the second evaluator in this sequence, maintaining the development of the evaluation sequence, and demonstrating structural consistency with Yanru's first assessment in line 71. However, before giving the second evaluation, there was a gap in turns, meaning Hai Rong did not immediately provide the following part of the "evaluation-agreement/disagreement" adjacency

pair after the antecedent appeared, but there was a 0.3-second silence instead, and the silence between turns likely signifies the occurrence of a dispreferred action (Schegloff E A, 2007, pp. 13-27). And in Hai Rong's turn design in line 73, the repeated use of delaying tactics such as the prolonged "eng," "I think," and "clicking her tongue," all project the possibility of dispreferred actions appearing later, followed by the ambiguous statement "whether it looks good or not," which itself shows Hai Rong's incomplete endorsement of Yanru's evaluation of the discussed object's hairstyle as "good-looking." Moreover, after "also not bad looking," Hai Rong further explains, as communicators tend to provide more detailed explanations when displaying inconsistent emotional stances or expressing negative views than when expressing positive views or strongly agreeing with the interlocutor. By using the euphemistic affirmation (which also implies euphemistic negation) "also not bad looking" as a mitigating strategy, the strength of the non-priority structural discourse is minimized or weakened as much as possible. The appearance of the non-priority structure to some extent reflects the speaker's disagreement with the first speaker's emotional stance. This stance of disagreement is also fully confirmed in the next turn construction component of Hai Rong after "also not bad looking" ends, "Those few hairs of his, not worth the money." The appearance of laughter between the two parties in line 75 shows the communicative significance of initiating the expression of an inconsistent stance with "also not TCU".

例 2 [买衣服 00:00:04-00:00:35]

03 张: ((叹气))哎::呀::我<跟你说::>

04   我今天<u>又</u>:出去逛了一圈,结果(.)<u>还是</u>>啥也没买上<

05 赵: ((笑))又逛了一圈,还是买衣服呢¿

06 张: 对啊,买件新衣服:就这么难?

07 赵：姐姐,是你眼光<u>太挑剔</u>了吧.

08 张: >不不不<,你不:知:道:,现在<u>外边儿</u>的衣服都长一个样

09 赵: 我怎么不知道[啊:, 咱俩 ne 天不是还一起去看来着么.

10 张: [哎呀::° 不是°-

11 赵: ne 个白的就<u>很好看</u>啊.

12 张: 哎:呀::也不是说不好看,只是因为它们太像了:,显得<u>很</u>没有特色.

13 赵: 你啊你,

14 张: ((笑))没事儿,离过年还有很[久呢,=

15 赵: [°我看°,你 这样-

16 张: =我再看看.

17 赵: 行,我看你最后到底能买个什么样的.

Please help me translate the following into English. In line 03, Zhang's opening with a sigh and a drawn-out "alas" conveys a negative stance in the turn construction, indicating that the following parts might contain multiple components constructing the turn. In line 04, the turn construction component belongs to the candidate problem narration sequence (Jefferson G, 1988, p. 418-441) in introducing a problem (approaching trouble). In line 05, Zhao partially repeats line 03 by Zhang, indicating a change in Zhao's state of knowledge, and uses a question to correct his own guess, initiating a repair (Schegloff E A, Jefferson G & Sacks H, 1977, pp. 361-382) to address any misunderstanding or information asymmetry between the two speakers. In line 06, Zhang responds with "Exactly" to Zhao's question, achieving intersubjectivity (Heritage J & Atkinson J M, 1984, pp. 346-369). In this line, Zhang employs rhetorical questions to express his concerns, but Zhao's response in line 07 does not solve Zhang's problem; instead, it evaluates the reasons behind his concern. In lines 08 and 09, Zhang and Zhao vie for epistemic stance (Heritage J, 2012, pp. 30-52), with Zhang using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz A, 1986, pp. 219-229) "all looking the same" to construct a legitimate and complaint-worthy scenario. This use of extreme case formulation shows Zhang's extreme dissatisfaction with the style of clothes. The turn construction components in line 08, "You don't know, the clothes outside all look the same," and in line 09, "Didn't we go see them together just the other day?" are evidence provided by Zhang and Zhao for their stances. In line 11, Zhao provides more specific evidence and evaluates a specific item, demonstrating a strong possession of knowledge. Zhao's use of the adverb "very" combined with the emotion-laden "pretty" and intensified tone reveals a positive stance. The phrase "that white one" utilizes non-recognitional forms (Sacks H & Schegloff E A, 1979), while in line 12, Zhang's successful recognition of the previous item confirms that both speakers share the same category of knowledge and have achieved

intersubjectivity. Influenced by the conditional relevance of adjacent pairs, after giving the first evaluation, Zhang needs to make a second evaluation (line 12). To alleviate the conflict in epistemic stance and promote harmonious communication, Zhang uses "It's not that I don't + partial repetition of the previous turn," repeating the positive term "pretty" to show acceptance of the role as the second evaluator and recognition of the previous topic and discussion. This TCU maintains structural consistency with the previous turn and facilitates the development of the evaluation sequence. Moreover, Zhang's initial turn preface, the drawn-out "alas," indicates the likely execution of a non-preferred structure. The tactful affirmation of "It's not that I don't" TCU also makes it easier for Zhao to accept Zhang's non-preferred structuring of discourse. The emergence of the non-preferred structure reflects Zhang's negative stance towards the evaluated item, providing support for his stance in the second part of his turn, confirming the function of "It's not that I don't" TCU as introducing a speaker's emotional stance different from the previous speaker.

5. Discussion

Based on the analyzed data, it is observed that the turn construction "It's not that I don't + partial repetition of the previous turn," situated in the second evaluation position, mainly exhibits structural consistency with the first evaluation in that the responder uses the double negation "It's not that I don't" to indirectly affirm the structure and partially repeat the main points of the evaluator's turn, showing acceptance and recognition of the object discussed by both communicators. Influenced by the conditional relevance of adjacent pairs, the appearance of "It's not that I don't" TCU indicates that the speaker accepts the role of the second evaluator and attempts to maintain the development of the evaluation sequence. However, this conversational norm also reveals that the second evaluator maintains a different emotional stance from the first evaluator beyond mere structural consistency. The specific aspects of this difference include: typically, the speaker may use silence between turns, pre-turn delays, formal agreement, specification, and explanation among other strategies associated with executing a non-preferred structure. The use of "It's not that I don't TCU" belongs to the strategies of executing a non-preferred structure

in conversational organization. Additionally, the turn-taking mechanism reveals the internal order of conversation and the rights and obligations between communicators, such as the speaker's responsibility to understand and respond to the previous turn (Schegloff E A, Jefferson G & Sacks H, 1977, pp. 361-382). If a second evaluator cannot align emotionally with the first evaluator's assessment, an explanation (Schegloff E A, 2007, pp. 13-27) must be provided. The issuance of "It's not that I don't + partial repetition of the previous turn" by the second evaluator to express dissatisfaction and disapproval of the evaluated object is an execution of a non-preferred action, indicating an emotional conflict with the first evaluator. "It's not that I don't," while affirming the first evaluation to some extent, reduces the impact of non-preferred discourse, making it easier for the communicative partner to accept the non-preferred structure offered by the second evaluation. Lastly, using "It's not that I don't" corrects or prevents potential misunderstandings or misperceptions in previous statements, making the expression more accurate and thorough. Sentences in Chinese that typically contain "It's not that I don't" often have a contrasting relationship with previous statements.

The above demonstrates the role of "It's not that I don't TCU" in continuing the structure expressed by the previous evaluator and introducing the second evaluator's different emotional stance. Compared to directly expressing conflicting views, "It's not that I don't + partial repetition of the previous turn" conveys a structural affirmation that makes it easier for the first evaluator to accept the differing views of the second. This conversational norm, characterized by its politeness, can reduce the degree of conflict between opinions, thus maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships. The selection of this conversational norm reflects the communicator's desire to maintain good social relations and demonstrates its social attributes.

6. Conclusion

In daily communication, to avoid awkwardness and displeasure between parties, speakers unconsciously employ a range of conversational conventions. This paper uses conversation analysis to explore the specific characteristics and rules of the conversational convention "It's not that I don't + partial repetition of the

previous turn" located in the second evaluation position. Compared with semantic studies, the data in this paper, drawn from real everyday phone conversations, more objectively demonstrate the real communicative situations of "It's not that I don't TCU" in daily life, its role in the turn construction components, and the effects and impacts of the actions performed in the sequence. Additionally, using real everyday conversations for research can provide effective references and guidance for people in daily communication, playing a significant role in maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and promoting good social interaction.

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