

A Study of Medical Insurance Negotiation from the Perspective of Pragmatic Identity Construction

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Abstract: This paper conducts an analysis of the medical insurance negotiation dialogues in China ranging from 2019 to 2023, utilizing the framework of identity construction theory. The objective is to delineate the identity of negotiators within the Chinese Medical Insurance Administration and to offer overarching conclusions and insights that may contribute to the success of future medical insurance negotiations. Specifically, the study aims to explore the identities that are constructed by the negotiators of the Chinese Medical Insurance Administration during their interactions with foreign pharmaceutical companies, as well as the linguistic practices through which these identities are established in the context of complex medical insurance negotiations. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide valuable assistance for forthcoming medical insurance negotiations.

Keywords: Linguistics; Identity Construction; Chinese Medical Insurance Negotiation

1. Introduction

Identity has always been an important and hot topic in the humanities. With the shift of discourse in identity research, more and more scholars study the process of identity construction in discourse from the perspective of social constructivism, and the research of identity construction has become a hot topic in pragmatist research.

The concept of pragmatic identity is put forward by Chen from the perspective of pragmatics, which refers to a specific social identity of contextualization, which is closely related to communicative context and communicative intention, featuring communicative dependence, dynamic selectivity, communicative resource, and discourse constructiveness^[1]. Pragmatic identity is a kind of acting resource, which means that the initiator or receiver of a conversation reflects their linguistic choices in communication according to the context, so as to achieve better communication needs^[2]. The dynamic identity construction of negotiators from the Chinese Medical Insurance Administration needs to be realized through discourse. Studies on pragmatic identity in institutional discourse span a variety of domains, such as classroom discourse, academic discourse, and business discourse^[3].

In terms of negotiation discourse, previous studies focuses more on diplomatic negotiation discourse and business negotiation, however, little attention has been paid to the national medical insurance negotiation, where both side bargain the questions whether this medication can be covered by Chinese medical insurance and at what price, with one side from the Chinese Medical Insurance Administration while the other from the pharmaceutical company. Negotiators from the Chinese Medical Insurance Administration, on behalf of the right of national citizen to access suitable medicine at a lower price, keeps working on balancing the profit of pharmaceutical company and the price of medicine which can prevent millions of patients and families from collapsing. Indeed, it's of tremendous necessity and value to study how identities are constructed through linguistic practices shown in the Chinese medical insurance negotiation, which intends to help more negotiators better understand and adjust linguistic choices to enhance the chance of successful negotiation and further improve interpersonal communication.

2. Research Design

During the negotiation between the negotiators from Chinese Medical Insurance Administration and pharmaceutical companies, the price of the medication has been successfully controlled within a reasonable range, ensuring that it is affordable for the China Medical Insurance Administration without

causing excessive loss of profits for pharmaceutical companies. Two research questions are listed as follows:

- (1) What identities of negotiators from Chinese Medical Insurance Administration are constructed?
- (2) How identities of negotiators from Chinese Medical Insurance Administration are constructed through linguistic choices?

2.1 Data collection

This paper transcribed a 3678-word video of the 2021 medical insurance negotiation dialogue concerning expensive drugs with 30 samples, ranging from 2019 to 2023. Generally speaking, videos of medical insurance negotiations are not available in public, and the related videos found on the internet are no more than 10 minutes. Thanks to the voice-over and comments in the video, the understanding of the entire negotiation context is enhanced, thus facilitating a holistic grasp of the negotiation. All the videos are available on the website <https://www.bilibili.com/>.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Pragmatic identity refers to the presentation of social identity in specific linguistic communication, that is, the identity presented by the speaker in discourse practice and the identity of the other party involved at the moment^[4]. The study of identity from the perspective of pragmatics reflects the choices communicators make in the process of discourse communication according to the dynamic context, which can promote the realization of communicative goals^[2]. Based on the theoretical framework of pragmatic identity construction put forth by Chen, this thesis analyzes the multiple pragmatic identity construction of negotiators from Chinese Medical Insurance Administration in interrogation, so as to explore the dynamic identity construction^[1]. The type of each identity is coded through BFSU qualitative coder 1.2. The linguistic practices classification adopts the revision version put forth by Chen, which is demonstrated in the following Table 1^[1].

Table 1: Discursive practices related to identity construction

| Linguistic Practices | Description |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Code selection | The language, specific code or slang |
| Style selection | A set of talking features(e.g., formal style, casual style) |
| Textual features selection | Textual or discourse organization features (e.g., turn-taking) |
| Discourse contents selection | Discourse contents(e.g., topic, information, opinion, presupposition) |
| Discourse mode selection | the way of talking: the degree of expressing one's thoughts directly or indirectly and degree of involvement |
| Speech acts selection | The speech acts (e.g., criticizing, praising, advising, declaring) |
| Address forms selection | Address forms to prompt the identity of yourself, the other person and another person |
| Grammar selection | The grammatical features (e.g., personal pronouns, tag questions) |
| Words or expressions selection | Words or expressions(e.g., discourse marker, jargon, modal particle) |
| Speech sound selection | The ways of using one's voice (e.g., loudness, rate, pitch quality, accent, standard pitch) |
| Paralinguistic features selection | gestural means, distance and expressions in one's eyes |

3. Data analysis

In the negotiation, negotiators from the Chinese Medical Insurance Administration are found to have established four pragmatic identities: buyer, expert, patriot, and institutional representative. The linguistic practices and distribution of identity in this paper are demonstrated in Table 2 and Figure 1 respectively.

Table 2: Identities and Linguistic Practices Shown in the Interrogation

| Identity | Buyer | Professional | Patriot | Institutional Representative |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| linguistic practice | Bargaining tone | Use of jargon | Use of personal address | Use of directives |

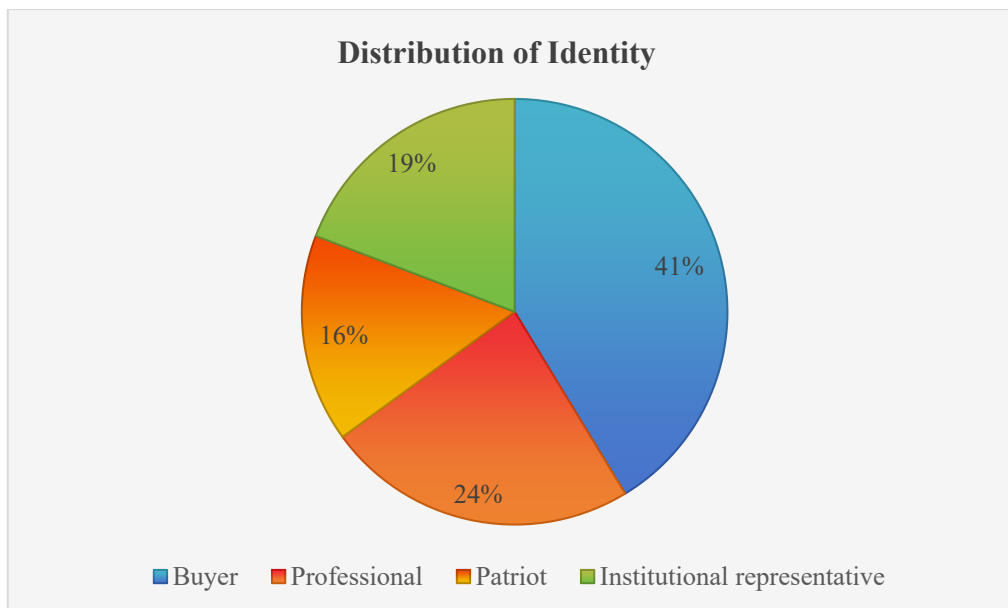


Figure 1: Distribution of Identity

3.1 The identity construction of buyer

In negotiation, Chinese negotiators engage in continuous bargaining to reduce the price of drugs, meticulously scrutinizing every cent. Negotiators may perceive pharmaceutical companies' prices as excessively high and employ a bargaining tone to persuade them to lower their prices, thereby facilitating a negotiation. Throughout this process, the identity of the buyer is constructed.

Example 1

Chinese Negotiator: So now you're offering me ¥4.4? Can you lower it by another 10 cents? Let's say, ¥4 is too high; it sounds unappealing to the Chinese. How about reducing it by an additional 4 cents to ¥4.36? Would that work?

Pharmaceutical Company Negotiator: Alright, I agree.

Chinese negotiators regard the quoted price as high and continually advocate for a reduction, using bargaining tone as "Can you lower it by another 10 cents?", "Let's say, ¥4 is too high", as if a common buyer in the market. They also employ homophones in their argument, for example, the pronunciation of "4" in Chinese is similar to that of the word for "death". During this conversation, they frequently leverage this reasoning to urge their counterparts to propose lower bids, rendering the construction of buyer identity.

3.2 The identity construction of professional

In negotiation, Chinese negotiators often employ various jargon to establish themselves as professionals exhibiting a high degree of vocational expertise, to elicit a justifiable price from the negotiators of pharmaceutical companies in a manner that is both cogent and persuasive. The use of jargon not only can enhance the formal and professional character of the negotiation process but also cultivate trust between the negotiators from both sides, thereby facilitating a reduction in drug prices^[5].

Example 2

Chinese Negotiator: In our medical insurance negotiations, as well as in the implementation of other policies, we aim to promote the R&D and market entry of innovative drugs through the services provided by medical insurance. Are you confirming the first round's quoted price of ¥5.54? Do you confirm this?

Pharmaceutical Company Negotiator: After careful consideration, we confirm the initial offer.

Chinese Negotiator: The quote has successfully entered the range of 115% of the bottom price.

The specialized vocabularies that go with occupations, sports, or hobbies are labeled jargon^[6].

Indeed, “the R&D and market entry” means the research and development of and market entry for medicine, which is associated with medical occupations, rarely appearing in daily communication among common people. Meanwhile, “the first round’s quoted price” and “the bottom price”, these terms highlight that the dialogue takes place in a rather formal and regulated context, characterized by clearly defined procedural constraints. The Chinese negotiators’ use of such jargon further underscores their professional competence, thereby cultivating an authoritative professional identity.

3.3 The identity construction of patriot

In negotiation, Chinese negotiators strive for the interests of the people and the nation, often expressing pride in their country and a deep concern for the lives of its citizens. Behind these negotiators are countless Chinese patients and families, which is why they frequently reference the strength of China and the significance of preserving human life during negotiation. The use of address helps to shape their identity as principled patriot.

Example 3

Pharmaceutical Company Negotiator: After our discussions, we have revised the initial offer to ¥48,000 per bottle.

Chinese Negotiator: Chinese health insurance fund has been through challenges this year, especially considering the reductions and deferrals related to the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe foreign enterprises may also have benefited from corresponding concessions in this regard. China has spared a significant portion of medical insurance fund for the cost of vaccines. Therefore, our national health insurance administration’s ongoing willingness to engage in negotiations this year truly reflects a strong commitment to prioritizing the health of the people.

Pharmaceutical Company Negotiator: Let’s discuss it again.

In the conversation, the Chinese negotiator used personal address. Personal address means the label we give to terms used to refer to a person in his or her presence^[7]. China faced numerous challenges in 2021, with a continuous reduction in the health insurance fund. However, in the interest of the health of the Chinese people, the National Health Insurance Administration chose to actively engage in negotiations to ensure that more patients have access to affordable medicines. Throughout the negotiations, Chinese negotiators frequently referenced the personal addresses which associate them with the image of China, such as “Chinese health insurance fund”, “China” and “our national health insurance administration”. The use of these personal addresses demonstrate their alignment with China and the National Health Insurance Administration, which further reflects their strong sense of national identity, constructing their identity as patriots.

3.4 The identity construction of institutional representative

Negotiation discourse is characteristic of typical institutional discourse and possesses the features associated with it^[8]. In medical negotiation, Chinese negotiators also establish the identity of institutional representatives, particularly evident in their use of directive language. They have the authority to command the other party to take actions, such as making a bid or directing them to consult with their company further.

Example 4:

Chinese Negotiator: Let’s get straight to the main topic of our negotiation. For this medication, you should proceed with your first round of bidding.

Example 5:

Chinese Negotiator: I ask each representative to present your proposed payment standards, which will serve as our initial quotation.

In negotiation, Chinese negotiators control the turn and often employ directives to command negotiators from pharmaceutical companies to take the next steps. Directives are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to get someone else to do something^[9]. They express what the speaker wants. In addition, Directive speech act is closed to the high social status^[10]. In institutional discourse, the power of the communicating parties are typically unequal. Power is constantly negotiated and constructed in the interaction between participants^[11]. By using directives, negotiators construct a more authoritative identity as institutional representatives, which not only helps to lower drug prices but also facilitates the

ongoing health insurance negotiations.

4. Conclusion

This study employs the pragmatic identity theory to examine the types of identities constructed by Chinese negotiators in health insurance negotiations, as well as the linguistic strategies employed in their construction, thereby further elucidating the dynamics of communication within this context. The Chinese negotiators establish a total of four pragmatic identities: buyer, professional, patriot, and institutional representative. The buyer identity is primarily constructed through the use of a bargaining tone, while the professional identity is largely formed through the incorporation of specialized jargon. The patriot identity is predominantly manifested through personal addresses, and the identity of the institutional representative is chiefly conveyed through the employment of directives.

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