Diachronic Change of Title in New Media Platform from the Perspective of Speech Accommodation Theory

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Abstract: *Speech Accommodation Theory, as a social psychological model of studying linguistic variation, has proposed by Howard Giles and his associates. Speech strategies in this theory consists of two components, namely, speech convergence and speech divergence. This study, as an empirical research, focuses on the diachronic change of title in new media platform. The results can be concluded as follows. First, the style of title in new media platform obeys the rules of upward convergence, especially when reader-preferences change rapidly. Second, readers' language patterns do affectlanguage habits of new media, and administrators choose upward convergence strategies as feedbacks. Third, the convergenceis asymmetrical, with new media platforms struggle to adapt to readers language patterns whilereadersmaintain their language habits.*

Keywords: *Speech Accommodation Theory; Diachronic Change; New Media*

1. Introduction

This study is to analyze the diachronic change of title in new media platform from the perspective of speech accommodation theory. As for the notion "accommodation", it leads to social identity and bonding, or disapproval and distance. It often occurs either as an attempt to gain understanding, or as an attempt for approval. Accommodation theory has developed since the 1970s by Howard Giles and his associates, with a focus on the social cognitive processes mediating individuals' perceptions of the environment and their communicative behaviors.

Domestic scholars have introduced this theory into China. Along with having developed in 30 years, considerable works are conducted based on this theory. For example, Cui et al. (2013) notes that speech accommodation theory and code-switching have a significant impact on overseas students, a TV play. Within it, speech convergence and speech divergence are discussed elaborately. Besides, accommodation theory is applied to English teaching autonomic learning process (Li 2010). Although there are abundant studies towards accommodation theory, less attention has been paid to the application in new media. Therefore, this study focuses on the diachronic change of title in new media platform.

2. Speech Accommodation Theory

Accommodation Theory, as a social psychological model, highlights interactive aspects of communication and negotiative nature of communication. The purpose is to demonstrate the value and potential of social psychological concepts and processes for understanding the dynamics of speech diversity in social settings. In particular, it elucidates the cognitive and affective processes underlying speech convergence and divergence.

Speech strategies in Accommodation Theory consists of two components, namely, speech convergence and speech divergence (Coupland and Giles 1988). Speech convergence is essentially an adaptation to another's use of language. People who intend to communicate converge to where they believe their partners are linguistically located for both intellectual reasons and affective reasons. For example, if we talk to a baby, we will never use the normal way to communicate, instead, we tend to slow down and use easy word. Speech divergence, however, is the accentuation of linguistic and social differences, which can be seen as a symbolic tactic for maintaining social integrity, distance, identity and distinctiveness. In addition, language maintenance is often regarded as a kind of sub-type of divergence, which refers to a special communicative strategy under the control of which there is no

change in the communicators' language style as the communication goes. In the different speech accommodation strategies, convergence is used most frequently as well as studied most, thus it is considered as the core of speech accommodation theory. Although Speech Accommodation Theory has been applied in many fields of researching, there are still a number of concerns pertaining to the testability of the notions of it.

3. Gile's Descriptive Model for Pronunciation and Accent Shift

This section provides more details and development of accommodation theory. In Gile's descriptive model for pronunciation and accent shift, accent convergence can be divided into two components: upward convergence and downward convergence. Similarity, divergence can be specified as upward divergence and downward divergence.

When a sender is motivated towards gaining the receiver's approval, he or she may switch the accent so as to make it more similar to that of the listener. The upward convergence is to be applied if the speaker perceives that the listener's pronunciation pattern is higher in accent prestige. In downward convergence, if the sender notices the receiver possessing a lower accent prestige and wants to gain the approval, he or she will modify the pronunciation towards those less prestigious patterns. The effect of this speech shift is to lower the speaker's prestige in the listener's estimation. This choice is always a reduction in tension and a generally easier and more relaxed interaction.

Divergence is divided into two aspects: upward divergence and downward divergence. In upward divergence, it can be interpreted as indicating the sender's desire to appear superior to the receiver in social status and competence. In Gile's schema description, although sender's idiolect stays higher than receiver's accent, sender still uses superior accent which gets closer to acrolect.

4. Research Process

In this methodology section, data description and data analysis are presented. We choose Xinhua News Agency Wechat Official Account and China Science Communication Wechat Official Account as our data sources, one of which presents ordinary news to readers and another shows scientific information to us. New media has developed rapidly these years, therefore we compare the differences during year of 2014until 2021.

In Xinhua News Agency Wechat Official Account, titles in 2014-2016 are presented below. For example:

Environment | why the target of dealing with smog is hard to achieve.

Good news | some changes has occurred slowly.

In China Science Communication Wechat Official Account, titles in 2014-2016 are presented below. For instance:

Is it good to buy medicine followed by advertisement? | You know

Something you should know about quitting smoking | You know

The disaster in the Africa – a disease retrospect

It is found that titles during those years are like the ones in the traditional patterns, like newspapers. Titles are separated into two sections: one for category, another for content. To be specific, "environment" "You know" are the categories in the different official accounts. The parts left are the contents of the entire article. Readers in those years are more familiar with new media, not knowing how to make all the information present differently, which can be seen as a groping stage of new media title. Readers do not have clear preferences at that time. Subsequently, titles in 2018-2021 are demonstrated.

In Xinhua News Agency Wechat Official Account, titles in 2018-2021 are presented below. For example:

what are you watching about? When you look yourself at mirror…

The last time in 2020. We are waiting for…

1921 to 2020

2019, Xiaomi has done these thing.

In China Science Communication Wechat Official Account, titles in 2018-2021 are presented below. For instance:

Attention! Strong rains coming

The first time in history! Tokyo Olympics postponed

It is obvious change in these period. Based on the fatigue of watching similar sentence patterns, readers need more to stimulate their nerves. Categories has disappeared in recent years, instead, individual information has become a trend. Especially the former section of a title, they are always attractive by using punctuation mark, like exclamation point and question mark. In the latter section, ellipsis are common in the official account title. Besides, in sentence patterns, they tend to meet readers' speech preferences, especially the young people.

Seen from the diachronic change in title of new media platform, we have found that they obey the rules of upward convergence, especially when reader-preferences change rapidly. When there is the conflict between new media and readers, new media tends to use upward convergence strategies. It is obvious that if an article in the official account wants to be paid more attention, it is supposed to switch the quondam patterns to a more approachable accent. Title will be the key point of the bonding between new media and readers. If a reader is not interested in it, there is no any chance for further contact in the content of a whole article, therefore, the upward convergence has applied in this situation. Meanwhile, the convergence is asymmetrical, with new media platforms struggle to adapt to readers language patterns while readers maintain their language habits.

To sum up, the diachronic change of title in new media platform obeys the rules in speech accommodation theory which enrich the applicability of it. It is a typical possibility of asymmetrical convergence in our daily lives. New media platforms continue to use upward convergence while readers do not need the same responses to them.

5. Conclusion

Apparently, the study on the diachronic change of title in new media platform has been explained and tested by speech accommodation theory. However, this study still has a potential development on data capacity. In general, this research provides an empirical process based on the theory.

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