Conversational Analysis of Power and Solidarity in Chinese Community Correction Discourse

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This paper mainly discusses the power and solidarity among participants in the community correction discourse from sociolinguistic perspective by adopting the methodology of conversation analysis. Through the comparative study of the steps of Initial Evaluation and Entry Ceremony in community correction, this paper analyses the power and solidarity in the features of adjacency pair and turn-taking, and finds that the step of Initial Evaluation is relatively negotiable and represents the social relationship of solidarity, while the step of Entry Ceremony stresses more on social distance and power relationship. The reasons that cause the power and solidarity in the Initial Evaluation and the Entry Ceremony from the perspective of social identity and social purposes are also explored.

Keywords: power, solidarity, community correction, conversation analysis

Restorative Justice in China: Community Correction

In 1960s, restorative justice had been promoted as a legal process of jurisdictions in countries like UK, US and Canada. Unlike the traditional retributive justice, where crimes and criminals are punished by legal penalty and imprisonment, restorative justice is trying to realize social justice by repairing the damaged social relations between criminals and society, or the victim and criminals (Braithwaite, 2002). “With crime, restorative justice is

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about the idea that because crime hurts, justice should heal” (Braithwaite, 2004). Therefore, crime is conceived not simply as law-breaking but as “a violation of people and relationships”, hence justice is considered less a matter of retributive/punishment and more an effort to involve “the victim, the offender and the community in a search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation and reassurance” (Zehr, 1990, p. 181). Restorative justice in China takes the form of Community Correction, which has been progressing and developing since the early 21st century.

Community correction is a social process under legal background as well as a special genre of restorative justice (Zheng & Yuan, 2018). Community correction is a penalty in contrast to imprisonment that offenders are given a verdict of guilty and sentenced by the court, thus serve their sentences in community, aiming at correcting the offender’s criminal mentality and problematic behavioral habits and helping them to reintegrate into society. Community correction has specific procedures ruled by Chinese legal documents that includes Initial Evaluation, Entry Ceremony, Follow-up Education, Return Visit and Release Ceremony. This paper mainly focuses on two steps of the whole community correction: the Initial Evaluation and the Entry Ceremony.

Initial Evaluation is a process that social workers finish an evaluation questionnaire during the face-to-face talk with the criminal who is being corrected in community (hereafter referred to as correctee) to get some basic information (e.g. criminal record, education/work experience, financial status, family and marital status, living environment, hobbypeer groups, drug and alcohol dependence) about them. The Initial Evaluation is the first step of the whole community correction that evaluates the new correctee’s social harmfulness and possibility of reoffending and judges whether they are suitable to service the term in community. Based on the result of this evaluation, the social workers who provide their services to the justice bureau can make appropriate plans for further correction.

Whereas Entry Ceremony has more participants, such as the officers of the community correction, district prosecutor, police officers of the justice bureau, people from the neighborhood committees and legal guardians of correctees who constitute the special correction team for the correctee. The primary function of the Entry Ceremony is to inform the correctees of their liabilities, the provisions that should be observed, the legal consequences of violating the provisions and some prohibitions during the correction.

Power and Solidarity in the Discourse of Community Correction

Power and solidarity are two popular topics in linguistics. Interpersonal relationships have been described as varying along both vertical dimension and horizontal dimension (Diefendorff et al., 2010). The vertical dimension of relationships refers to the power or status differences between individuals (Hall et al., 2005). The horizontal, or solidarity, dimension refers to the degree of interpersonal closeness between individuals (Locke, 2003). If power relationship is to create the alienations between participants in a conversation, solidarity is to enhance affiliation, narrowing down the social distance of participants.

Though Initial Evaluation and Entry Ceremony are both procedures of community correction, they are different stages based on different social identities of participants, main purposes, and social settings, which leads to changes in power and solidarity in the conversations. In order to have a clearer view of the relationships of power and solidarity in community correction, this paper adopts the methodology of conversation analysis (henceforth referred to as CA), such as the concepts about adjacency pair and turn-taking.
Methodology

The present study began with the co-construction of a practice-instruction platform of Community Correction Discourse Research and Language Service by Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and the Judicial Bureau of Guangzhou, the authors of this paper, who serve as researchers in this platform from 2017-1019.

The present study is an empirical one in that all of the data are collected through observing and recordings the real setting of community correction. In order to obtain the data, the authors served as assistants of the social workers and observed the Initial Investment in which one social worker and one correctee are involved. Therefore, the data are all first-hand and the authenticity has been ensured. All participants in the Initial Investment and the Entry Ceremony knew the sessions were audio-taped, and transcripts were used for analysis after getting their consents.

There are altogether eight naturally occurring verbal data recorded a transcript of approximately 70,000 Chinese characters. Four cases of Initial Evaluation were collected from Guangzhou Baiyunhengfu Social Work Service Center and Guangzhou Sunshine Social Service Center and four case of Entry Ceremony were collected from Guangzhou Baiyun justice bureau. This paper adopts a qualitative study to do CA of the data, and two research questions are proposed as follows:

1. What are the different linguistic realizations of the power and solidarity in the Initial Evaluation and the Entry Ceremony of the community correction by adopting the method of CA?
2. Why are there different social relationships in the Initial Evaluation and the Entry Ceremony if social context is considered?

Adjacency Pair

One of the most important concepts in CA is the interactional sequence. When we talk, we produce utterances that convey meaning, which in turn, also expect responses. And one of the tasks of CA is to discover and describe the architecture of this structure (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 8). Normally, in a conversation, certain types of utterance can lead to specific response, such as a question can lead to an answer; a greeting may lead to a greeting. An adjacency pair is a sequence of two utterances which are adjacent, produced by different speakers, ordered as a first part and second part and typed, so that a first part requires a particular second, or range of second parts (Heritage, 1984, p. 246). There is a normative relationship between the turns that constitute paired sequences. A speaker’s production of the first part of a pair generates the expectation that an allocated next speaker should produce the appropriate second part. The second part of a pair is said to be conditionally relevant after the production of a first part. Therefore, the analysis of adjacency pair can illustrate the interactional relationships of the participants in conversations. When there are violations of these pairs and sequences, it can also present changes of social relationships.

In the first few stages of Initial Evaluation, there are many question-answer adjacency pairs, for example:

3. S: 您好，你是谁?
   C: 我是某某。
   S: 某某某是吧，今年多少岁?
   C: XXX.
   S: 某某某，how old are you?
In this opening stage of Initial Evaluation, the social worker and the correctee are in the opposite side of social identities; one is a criminal, while the other stands for judicial office. The social distance between them makes it almost non-negotiable in the conversation. However, in order to ease the tension between himself and the correctee, the social worker tries to ask questions that not only seek answers but also require comments, because the more correctee talks, the more information the social worker can collect, and the more correct evaluation result can be made concerning the correctee’s social harmfulness and possibility of reoffending.

Therefore, additional questions embedded in an adjacency pair can be found in the conversation as it unfolds. For example,

(4)

S: 你对工作评价如何?  
C: 我们外地人来到广州, 这个工作还是相当满意吧。
S: how do you evaluate your own work?  
C: We outsiders come to city, and (I am) quite satisfied with this job.

Asking about the correctee’s job is one of the questions in the evaluation questionnaire. In (4), After the preceding talk, the correctee and social worker contract their social relationship and gradually reach the affiliation. When facing a question, the correctee has more space to comment, so the first and last turn are a sequence of question and answer adjacency pair, with a comment and repetition sequence 还是广州这个城市比较包容 (Guangzhou is an inclusive city) and 包容性 (inclusive) embedded in this pair. And in the later talk, there are more question-comment sequences than question-answer sequences. The violation of adjacency pair illustrates this conversation becomes more negotiable, which, in turn, presents the social relationships change from power to solidarity.

In Initial Evaluation, there is a process of affiliation to reflect solidarity and equality, while in Entry Ceremony, there is alienation in this special institutional setting. Apart from the correctee, the other participants are all standing for the judicial field, and unlike the social workers who are trying to weaken the opposite social identities between them and the correctees, these participants in Entry Ceremony intend to stress on the different identities and enhance the social distance. In otherwords, the solidarity is discharged and power relations are foregrounded. What worth noticing is that technically these tag questions cannot function as questions to seek answers, but to seek confirmation of the aforesaid statements or comments, for example,

(5)

J: …明白了吗?  
C: 明白。
J: Don’t think you are the cleverest one. You cannot deceive yourself or anyone, or you are irresponsible for your family, your children and your own life. Life is precious, and don’t expect to spend your life in prison. Do you agree with what I

J: …Do you understand?  
C: Yes, I understand.
放在监狱里面度过，同意我说的吗?
C: 同意。
J: 走私也好，贩毒也好，违法也好，都是社会上有
什么新花，犯罪的新花样，政府就出台什么相应的法律手段去对付你们犯罪的功能，
明白我说的吗?
C: 明白。
J: 湖南。是来这边工作?
C: 打工的。

In (5), the first turn and the second, the third and the fourth turn and the fifth and the sixth turn are three
adjacency pairs. There are no other questions or comments sequence embedded in these adjacency pairs. The
correctee makes no response to the statements but only the tag questions, indicating his dominated linguistic role
in Entry Ceremony.

**Turn-taking**

Turn-taking is another important aspect in CA because people normally take turns to talk in face-to-face
conversations. Talking in turns is a fundamental structural feature of social life. Unlike the normal conversation
in daily life, one of the characteristics in institutional talk is that some of the topics are planned and the turns are
pre-allocated. As in the setting of community correction, participants assume that the conversations are all about
the correctees and their criminal behaviors, and their roles in the settings are also pre-decided. The participants
from the judicial field are distributed more power to choose topics and take the initial turns, and may also have
more turns to talk, while the correctees are in the position of being controlled. But there are still differences in
Initial Evaluation and Entry Ceremony concerning turn-taking.

In Initial Evaluation, though the social workers are pre-allocated the priority in turn-taking, in practice, the
power relationship has been weakened with social workers’ withdrawals from some of their turns and
permissions for the correctees to choose the direction of the next turn. For example:

(6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S: 自己平时，工作闲暇的时间会做些什么?</th>
<th>S: What would you usually do in your spare time?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C: 闲暇的时候啊?</td>
<td>C: In my spare time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: 嗯.</td>
<td>C: Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: 现在，平常有时，出去走一走啥。</td>
<td>S: Go for a walk, or with family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| C: 因为我们住那里，附近呢有个湖，我就是
喜欢也是运动运动啊，经常出去跑个步，
晚上回来才睡的舒服。 | C: Because there is a lake near to where we live. I like excises
and often go running, so I can have a better sleep at
night. |
| S: 临近 xx 湖了? | S: Near xx lake? |
| C: 在我们公司后面. | C: In the back of our company. |
| S: 那还是属于 xx。 | S: That is still in the xx area. |
| C: 不是，是 x 了那里。 | C: No, it is in xx. |
| S: 那现在... | S: And now...
| C: 到大城市旅游我们也 跟不上。 | C: Traveling in the big  city, we can’t keep up with
(others). |
| S: 跟不上。 | S: Can’t keep up with (others). |
C: 一家人就是在那里走一走，还是坐公交车去那些，白云山这边啊，市区。

C: I just go for a walk around with families, or take a bus to Baiyun Mountain, or the city area.

When the question-answer adjacency pair is finished, the turns of this topic should have been completed and the social worker starts another turns of talk. However, in (6), the correctee takes the next turn by uttering 闲暇的时候啊 (In my spare time) and continues talking about the same topic, showing that when the pre-allocated turns are violated, the social worker subjectively transfers the turns to the correctee, and thus expands CT’s dialogical space to provide more information. In Initial Evaluation, the social worker stresses more on solidarity with the correctee and less on creating unequal power relationship between them.

While in Entry Ceremony, the alienation and the inequality in social relationships are relatively strengthened. All the participants follow the turn of talking and topics prescribed by legal documents and rules. And those files certainly do not have instructions about what the correctees should respond, but face-to-face conversations are interactional actions, so the correctees have their turns only as a response to tag questions. This leads to an extremely contracted turns of talking. For example,

(7)

J: 如果违反社区矫正监督管理规定,将视情节给予警告、治安管理处罚、撤销缓刑、撤销假释、收监执行。明白了吗?

J: If the community correction supervision and management regulations are violated, a warning, public security management punishment, suspension of probation, suspension of parole and imprisonment will be given according to the circumstances. Do you understand?

C: 明白。

C: I understand.

In the judicial polices’ turn, he talks about the hash consequences of violating the regulations of community correction, and leaves his statement non-arguable by using an statement and adding tag questions 明白了吗 (Do you understand). While in the correctees’ turn, she only answers the question by making a confirmation of 明白 (Understand). There is no space for them to argue or challenge, or to skip or initiate a turn. The participants from the judicial field purposely make this setting a stern legal context and concentrate on the power relationships based on their identities.

Analysis of Social Context

Participants were allocated to different roles to play in different social contexts, which directly influence the way they communicate. Thus, this paper analyses the reasons of different social relationships in Initial Evaluation and Entry Ceremony from the perspective of social identities of participants and different social purposes of each step.

The first reason that causes the differences between Initial Evaluation and Entry Ceremony in power and solidarity is the different social identities of participants. Labov (2006, p. 380) argues that “the linguistic behavior of individuals cannot be understood without knowledge of the communities that they belong to”.

In Initial Evaluation, the social workers technically are not officers from the police station or the court. They are hired by and provide their service to the justice bureau. Meanwhile, they also provide their service to the correctees, such as offering psychological counsel to the correctees. Therefore, the social workers are possessing dual identities in one context. On one hand, they stand for the judicial bureau to do official work, which means they represent the legal authority; on the other hand, judicial social workers take “help them to help themselves”
as the basic value orientation, and they adhere to the basic working concept of “equality, respect and acceptance”. This directly leads to their attitudinal affiliation with the correctees, demonstrated by their language use in conversations.

The Entry Ceremony has more than one participant from the judicial offices. This social setting has an unequal power from the start, demonstrated by the asymmetry of language resources and turn-taking structures. The social identities of the participants decide their primary role is informing other than counseling. The correctees’ identity as criminals are also intensified, resulting in more alienated relationships between them.

Another reason that causes the different language use in Initial Evaluation and Entry Ceremony is different social purposes in the general genre. The discourse demonstrates specific characteristics in CA according to the tasks in each stage and phases. Though both of the Initial Evaluation and Entry Ceremony belong to the genre of community correction and the final aim is to correct criminal behaviors, different stages have different targets. Initial Evaluation is to collect basic information about the correctees, and the more information social workers can get, the more accurate the evaluations are, furthermore, more options can be chosen to make a correction plan for the following correction. So the affiliation between social workers and the correctees is necessary to reach this target. An equal social relationship can invoke an active involvement of the correctees.

The main purpose for Entry Ceremony is to declare the correctees’ beginning of correction and inform of their legal liabilities. The alienation among participants constructs a wall based on the authority of law, which indicates that one side of the wall is justice, and the other side is crime. The power relationships represented by language is another evidence of defending the law and education of the criminals. Though the whole community correction is a form of restorative justice, the correctee first must have a clear recognition of the illegal actions they have committed, then willingly and subjectively correct the wrongful behaviors. The Entry Ceremony functions as a reminder of their rights as a citizen as well as the liabilities as a convicted criminal.

**Conclusion**

The power and solidarity in different steps of community correction can be detected through the language use in conversation. By analyzing the conversations, we can reveal the linguistic phenomena underlying the social affiliation and alienation among participants in interaction. Initial Evaluation is a relatively negotiable conversation setting, and violations of adjacency pairs and rules of turn-taking are allowed. On the contrary, Entry Ceremony is non-negotiable, and the conversations proceed just as the typically institutional talk where power relationships are obvious to detect and the rules of adjacency pairs and turn-taking are observed. Social identities and purposes of the interaction directly lead to the change of social relationships. Community correction, as a new form of restorative justice, conforms to the legal reform in global judicial practices and demonstrates the development of legal process in China. CA of language use in the Initial Evaluation and the Entry Ceremony offers a new angle to the study of community correction and makes contribution to the improvements of restorative justice in China.
References


