

A Study of Conflict Talk among Family Members in Breeders Based on the Impoliteness Theory

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Abstract: In our daily interactions, the employment of impolite language often serves as a significant catalyst for conflict. According to this fact, it is not groundless that this paper utilizes impoliteness theory proposed by Bousfield (2008) to analyze conflict discourse. On the basis of Bousfield's impoliteness theory, this paper studies the conflict discourse in the American series *Breeders*, which gives a real portrayal of family life and includes many a family contradiction. This paper categorizes the various impolite utterances employed by speakers and the corresponding response patterns exhibited by listeners within conflict discourse, aiming to deepen our understanding of conflict communication in familial settings. After detailed data analysis and discussion, this study draws the following conclusions: firstly, this thesis finds nine impoliteness output strategies used in *Breeders*, including be uninterested and unconcerned, disassociate from the other, criticize, sarcasm, command, use taboo words, seek disagreement or avoid agreement, snub, hinder or block. In addition, three response patterns of impoliteness discourse are fully reflected in conflict discourse of this series. Thirdly, the pragmatic functions of impoliteness strategies in conflict discourse include negotiation, the expression of emotions, and the establishment of boundaries.

1. Introduction

Conflict is phenomenon that one party disagrees with the utterance and deeds of the other party or both parties hold different opinions on someone or something. It is often associated with impolite behaviors and impolite speech, so combining conflict discourse with impoliteness theory can facilitate a better understanding of the former.

In view of the theoretical structure of impoliteness strategies, the objective of this paper is to explore conflict talk in an American family. Due to the privacy of conflict discourse, a popular TV series is chosen as the object. This hot American TV series is *Breeders*, which represents many scenes of conflict talk occurring in daily life. And the detailed research procedures are as follows: firstly, the dialogues made between speakers and listeners are extracted as text; then according to Bousfield's impoliteness framework, the impoliteness strategies employed by the speakers and the

response patterns adopted by the listeners are labeled. At last, the percentage of each impoliteness strategy and the response patterns are calculated and analyzed.

In brief, this study concentrates on conflict discourse based on impoliteness theory of Bousfield. It takes the American series, *Breeders*, as the language material and aims to find out what impoliteness strategies and response patterns are employed in conflict talk. In the meantime, it devotes to exploring the key elements which triggers impoliteness utterance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foreign Research

The study of conflict discourse originated from people's attention to the phenomenon of verbal arguments in the 1970s. But at the beginning, studying conflict discourse is not very popular for most of the scholars dare not to study this negative, disorder discourse. They entertain a thought that it is meaningless to pay attention to argumentative talk. As conversation analysis and other research theories develop, this kind of thought changes. They gradually realized that the research on conflict discourse can help improve the quality of communication and promote a harmony interpersonal relationship.

In the late 1970s, foreign scholars mainly conduct researches on daily communication. Brenneis, Lein, and Boggs were the pioneering scholars to delve into argumentative discourse. In 1977, Brenneis and Lein made a comparison of quarrels among children of varying ages across three distinct cultures and race. Lein emphasized the structural aspects of children's arguments, outlining three primary patterns: repetition, inversion, and escalation. While noting similarities, scholars observed significant differences. For instance, white and black children were attentive to each other's intonation changes, rarely allowing overlap in quarrels. Conversely, Indian children's arguments often exhibited overlap^[1]. Boggs (1978) examined the evolution of speech debate in Hawaiian children, finding they frequently employed "not" to spark conflicts^[2].

In the 1980s, as discourse analysis progressed and deepened, foreign research achieved notable findings in the field of conflict discourse. From a speech act and communicative perspective, Jacobs and Jackson (1981) argue that argumentative discourse is both a speech act and a communication process. They identified two types of conflict discourse in daily life: one stemming from a single party's speech act, and the other from the verbal interaction of multiple parties^[3]. In 1988, Brenneis released over 200 works examining conflict discourse from various perspectives, including discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics.

Since the 1990s, numerous foreign scholars have turned their attention to the study of conflict discourse so that research on conflict talk flourishes. From a cross-cultural perspective, William Corsaro and Thomas Rizzo (1990) conducted a cross-cultural study comparing conflict discourse among kindergarten children in the US and Italy. Their findings revealed that Indian children experienced more disputes than American children did, with controversy being a key feature of their aristocratic culture. Corsaro's (1990) categorized and outlined conflict discourse based on its content and form in his book^[4]. Pietikinen (2018) studied the phenomenon of silence in couple conflict discourse within a cross-cultural context^[5]. From the perspective of pragmatics, Kakava (2002) examined conflict talk among modern Greeks. He observed that Greek was commonly used in family and friend interactions, while English prevailed in classroom settings. His analysis of contextual and cultural factors revealed that specific affectionate expressions and interjections reduced conflict intensity among family and friends. In contrast, classroom disagreements were often followed by justification. Kakava emphasized the significance of context in understanding conflict talk^[6]. Bar (2004) and Hartwick (2004) identified three key characteristics of conflict discourse: divergence or exclusion, negativity, and interference. They emphasized that these

characteristics mutually influence each other in interpersonal communication. From the perspective of conflict discourse resolution^[7]. In addition, Nguyen (2011) focused on conflict discourse that arises between patients and pharmacists during medication consultations, publishing *Boundary and Alignment in Multiparty Conflict Talk*. Nguyen's dedication aims to introduce conflict discourse to the realm of medical communication^[8].

In brief, since the 1990s, scholars have analyzed conflict discourse through various research perspectives, leading the study of conflict discourse itself to shift from the surface to the deep, from singularity to diversification. This provides Chinese scholars with a reference for the study of conflict discourse. But the researches conducted by those scholars have limitation. That is, few of them study conflict discourse within the context of a whole family.

2.2 Domestic Research

Domestic researches on conflict talk didn't come forth until 21st century. And researches have been done from the perspectives of conversation analysis and pragmatics, sociolinguistics and cognitive linguistics, but the former is the mainstream.

Chen Xiaochun (2001) pioneered the study of argumentative discourse in China, essentially equating it to conflict discourse. His work introduced German linguists' research on discourse coherence, emphasizing non-linguistic factors like personal, social, and situational contexts. Since then, conflict discourse has garnered increasing attention among domestic scholars^[9]. Ran Yongping (2010) analyzed the divergent orientation caused by conflict talk from the perspective of the Adaptation Theory of interpersonal communication in pragmatics. Ran Yongping maintains that when two sides of the communication have different views and positions, there are disagreements. And this kind of disagreement can cause debate. When the speaker's discourse information tended to be the language from the hearer's position, the hearer was easily attracted. When participants had a lot of differences in the process of communication, there was opposition or exclusion, which might lead to the conflict. In addition, he also proposed that conflict talk had two pragmatic functions, that is, the positive practical function and the negative practical function. The positive function helped to construct an interpersonal relationship, while the negative function had the opposite effect^[10].

Later on, research on conflict discourse has been furthered. Chinese scholars begun to combine conflict discourse with the theories in which they are interested. Liu Yang (2012) explained how to use the conversational strategy combined with the structure to analyze conflict talk from the perspective of conversational analysis^[11]. Zhang Xiuwen (2013) examined conflict discourse through speech act theory and the cooperative principle, categorizing it into nine types. She then analyzed the linguistic patterns of both initiators and responders, exploring structural forms and common discourse strategies in real marital conflicts. Her research culminated in a comparative study of conflict discourse in China^[12].

In recent, Guo Yadong (2020) employed interpersonal pragmatic theory and Watts' social cognitive theory to delve into identity construction in conflict discourse^[13]. Zhang Wenjing (2021) explored workplace conflict discourse, attributing its causes to failure to adapt the physical, social, and psychological worlds. She identified four pragmatic functions: safeguarding self-interest, expressing negative emotions, achieving work consensus, and attacking others^[14]. Xun Yaqi (2021) examined the sources of English teachers' conflict discourse outside the classroom. She finds the causes of conflict discourse is different conceptual and situational presuppositions^[15].

In sum, in the early stages of conflict talk research, scholars primarily focused on the theoretical definition of conflict talk and its pragmatic functions. However, they did not deeply integrate conflict talk with actual situations, making the research somewhat concrete. Nowadays, conflict talk

research is no longer a castle in the air but is closely linked to actual situations. Many scholars have integrated conflict communication with actual context on daily basis. However, they also have limits. Few of them use impoliteness theory to study family conflict discourse. Differently, this paper adopts the rarely-used impoliteness theory and pays attention to family conflict communication.

3. Bousfield's Impoliteness Model

The concept of impoliteness is complex and challenging to pin down with a precise definition. Mills (2008) contended that “impoliteness” represented a breach of the behavioral norms widely recognized within a given community. Culpeper (2003) provided their definition of impoliteness--“communicative strategies adopted to attack people’s face and attracted social conflict and discordant communication”. Researchers like Culpeper (2005) also contended that the awareness and assessment of the listener played a pivotal role and, therefore, ought to be incorporated into the condition.

Table 1: Bousfield’s Impoliteness output strategies

NO.	Impoliteness output strategies	Explanation
1	Snub	Ignore the other’s presence
2	Exclude the other from an activity	Prevent the other from attending an activity
3	Disassociate from the other	Deny association or common ground with the other
4	Be unconcerned, uninterested, or unsympathetic.	Be indifferent; show no sympathy
5	Use inappropriate identity markers	Use a title or surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains
6	Use obscure or secretive language	Mystify the other by using a jargon or code known to others in the group, but not the target
7	Seek disagreement or avoid disagreement	Select a sensitive topic
8	Make the other feel uncomfortable	Use silence, joke or small talk
9	Use taboo words	Use abusive or profane language
10	Call the other names	Use derogatory nominations
11	Frighten	Instill a belief that something detrimental to the other will occur
12	Condescend, scorn or ridicule	Be contemptuous; not treat the other seriously; belittle the other
13	Invade the other’s space	Do something (e.g. ask for or speak about information) which is more intimate than the relationship permits
14	Explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect	Personalize by using different pronouns “I” and “you”
15	Put the other’s indebtedness on record	
16	Criticize	Dispraise the other’s personality or action
17	Hinder/block	Interrupt, deny to take turns
18	Enforce role shift	Force the other to give up the original social or discorsal role
19	Challenge	Ask the other challenging questions

Taking into account the preceding explanations of the term impoliteness, an encompassing definition suitable for the current study has been formulated. In essence, impoliteness involves any action that explicitly manifests the speaker’s intent to verbally or non-verbally assault the listener’s

face, and this intention is perceived as such by the listener. Next, this paper introduces Culpeper's and Bousfield's impoliteness models.

Bousfield found that four strategies were not mentioned by Culpeper, "Criticize", "Hinder/Block", "Enforce role shift", and "Challenges". Then he added them into Culpeper's impoliteness output strategies, making the impoliteness output strategies more comprehensive. His impoliteness output strategies are presented in Table 1.

In the table above, Bousfield added the other four strategies that were not mentioned by Culpeper. They were "Criticize", "Hinder/Block", "Enforce role shift", and "Challenges". All these output strategies made Bousfield's model more comprehensive.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Question

Based on Bousfield's impoliteness output theory, this thesis aims to answer the following question:

- (1) What are the impoliteness output strategies used in the conflict discourse in this series?
- (2) What are the response patterns adopted in this series?
- (3) What are the pragmatic functions of conflict discourse?

4.2 Research Collection

Breeders is one work of American director Chris Addison. The primary conflict in *Breeders* revolves around the challenges and complexities of parenting. The main characters, represented by Paul and his wife, Ally, face numerous difficulties in raising their children. This causes feelings of anxiety, exhaustion, and even a sense of wanting to "kill" their own offspring—an overblown expression of the overwhelming emotions parents can experience.

In this paper, dialogues involving conflict have been selected carefully from the series. In this study, qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis are combined. The qualitative method is used to interpret pragmatic function of conflict discourse, and the quantitative method is used to count and calculate the number of impoliteness output strategies and response patterns.

4.3 Research Procedures

In this thesis, Bousfield's impoliteness theory is adopted as the theoretical framework.

First, a number of documentations, especially the documentations about the impoliteness output strategies and response patterns are consulted and sorted out.

Secondly, the dialogues are transformed from verbal form into written one. And the speaker's impoliteness output strategies and the listener's response patterns are classified.

Thirdly, percentage of impoliteness output strategies and response patterns will be counted and analyzed.

Finally, the pragmatic function is explored.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The research is mainly carried out from the following three aspects. The first is output strategies of impoliteness; the second is response patterns of impoliteness, and the last is the pragmatic function of conflict discourse. Next, from the perspective of impoliteness theory, conflict discourse selected from *Breeders* will be analyzed in detail.

5.1 Output Strategies of Impoliteness

On the basis of Bluefield's impoliteness models, the impoliteness strategies have been discussed in the corpus collected from American series *Breeders* in the subsequent table 2, along with their frequencies and percentages.

In the following part, some major strategies used by the speakers in the communication are well analyzed with examples one by one.

Table 2: Distribution of the Output Strategies of Impoliteness

No.	Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Criticize	3	15%
2	Command	4	20%
3	Use taboo words	4	20%
4	Dissociate from the other	2	10%
5	Sarcasm	2	10%
6	Be uninterested and unconcerned	1	5%
7	Seek disagreement or avoid agreement	2	10%
8	Hinder or block	1	5%
9	Snub	1	5%
	Total	20	100%

5.1.1 Strategy of Command

Command is defined as an order or instruction given to someone or something to perform a specific action or task. In the course of communication, the one with power transforms its symbolic power into pragmatic power, which is easier to make the target submit and thus manipulate the discourse process (Li Yuansheng, 2014). Therefore, the party with power can threaten the other party through command discourse, so as to achieve the pragmatic effect of making the other party submit.

Example 1

Paul: Ava, what the hell were you playing at?

Running off like that. Jesus Christ.

What have we told you? You never do that again!

You got it? We thought you were dead!

Do you understand me?

We thought some had taken you and you were dead!

You never do that again. Okay?

Ava:...

Finding Ava lost, father Paul, a man with higher position of power in the family, angrily order Ava by saying "You never do that again!" in front of other people. Paul adopted the strategy of commanding to warn that such a risky action is not allowed for a second time, hoping that her daughter will realize her wrongness. From the perspective of children, this is impolite. Paul ignored the discourse environment and Ava and Luke's feeling so as to make Ava sentimental and Luke anxious.

5.1.2 Strategy of Using Taboo Words

Taboo words are the words that people unable, afraid, or unwilling to say with unpleasantness for some reasons. When the speaker says this kind of words, it will make other people feel

uncomfortable. It is a frequent output strategy for positive impoliteness.

Example 2

Leah: Excuse me?

Ally: This bitching about Alex. You've had a lifetime of terrible relationships, and now, for once, you've got a shot at a good one with a decent man who loves you, so stop being a prick, and live you fucking happy ever after.

Leah: Well, if that's what you think.

In the dialogue, the speaker uses swear, hostile and abusive words very clearly to show impolite attitude to the listener. Ally highlights her mother Leah always had a terrible relationship before. But now the man she lives with is decent. Ally thinks that Leah should cherish him, not be picky about him. Ally expresses her anger and show dissatisfaction with Leah by using taboo word "prick" to show her anger. For mother Leah, this word mentioned by her daughter threatens her face and makes her sad. But she choose to compromise without quarreling with her.

5.1.3 Strategy of Criticize

Criticism, as an impolite strategy, has some common features with the strategy "challenge". There is no clear edge between them, so it may be not easy to distinguish them. So just as Bousfield (2008a) states, criticism can be underlined in the other strategies or can be a component part of the other strategies, and where there is the latter condition, there is the "challenge" impolite strategy.

Example 3

Ava: That's the second time you've humiliated me in front of my friends. First the birthday party, and now this.

Ally: The birthday party wasn't my fault.

Ava: I didn't want it. You made me have it. And when dad had to leave home because of Luke, you didn't care about me or what I wanted.

Ally: That's not true. And that's your dad's choice.

As an adolescent, Ava is reluctant to have a birthday party, because she doesn't want to accept the gap between gaining attention and then losing it. However, her mom still holds it for her. When her friend Grace comes to her birthday party, Ava thinks Grace steals her attention from her so as to make her embarrassed. On the other hand, nobody cares about her when father leaves home. As things accumulates, Ava's emotions explode. She is dissatisfied with her mother by saying, "I didn't want it... what I wanted."

5.1.4 Strategy of Dissociate from the Other

When the participant adopted this strategy, it means he or she want to draw a clear line with the listener. His intention is reflected in the dialogue using "I", "we", "my", "our", and "you", "your" and "yours". This will widen the pragmatic distance between listener and speaker.

Example 4

Ava(to Luke): Why does it always have to be about you and your stupid anxiety? Why is it always about your feelings? Maybe other people are anxious and depressed, but we don't whine and whinge about it.

Mother: Ava, Luke's anxiety is as real as any other illness and calling it "whining" is...

In this conflict dialogue, Ava mentions "be about you", "your stupid anxiety", "your feeling" many times. It shows Ava's sadness, unhappiness and dissatisfaction to Luke because father and mother only pay attention to his feeling, while her feeling does not draw attention. Ava also further distances herself from her brother by saying "other people", "we". This is obviously impolite to elder brother, Luke. In this conversation, the use of this strategy destroys Ava's relationship with her

elder brother, and the impoliteness discourse destroys the intimate relationship.

5.1.5 Strategy of Sarcasm

Sarcasm means the speaker says something to compliment and praise the hearer, but in fact he is opposite of what he says. Sarcastic will damage the hearer's face, and the hearer's understanding of such utterances largely depends on the context, intonation and non-verbal behavior (Li Yuansheng, 2004). The impolite strategy can be used successfully only when the listener understands the meaning of the speaker.

Example 5

Ava: I'm sad, mom. I'm miserable. I hate my life. But that doesn't matter because you're on Luke's side.

Mother: No, you are being silly.

Ava: Oh, I'm being silly and he's having deep feelings.

Ava: Right. Because I'm the good one, the quiet one. Don't worry, I'll go back to being silent. Can I go now?

Mother: Yeah, of course.

In this conflict dialogue, Ava says, "I'm being silly and he's having deep feelings". On the surface, Ava is stating that her behavior is silly, and Luke's is not silly. But in fact, there is a sarcasm. That is, Ava and Luke's behavior is same; if she is silly, Luke is silly, too. Ava shows her dissatisfaction and implies that she is not equally treated by her mother, Ally.

5.1.6 Strategy of Seek Disagreement or Avoid Agreement

This strategy often arises from a divergence in interests or viewpoints on sensitive topics between the two communicating parties. Each side tends to assert their views emphatically and articulate the reasons behind their position. However, instead of striving for a mutual understanding or consensus, they resort to employing this tactic of threatening each other's social face, thereby creating impolite speech acts that hinder the prospect of reaching an agreement.

Example 6

Ally: No, that's – that's not how it works. Look, I'm sorry that you've had such a hard time, but... I've had a hard time, too, you know.

Ava: I know. But it doesn't change how I feel. I can't help feeling this way about you.

As we know, according to the social etiquette, apologies are always accepted and get forgiveness, but it is opposite in this context. After listening to Ava, Ally realizes that father Paul is so important to Ava. Then she apologizes to Ava for her neglect of Ava's feeling, in hope of getting forgiveness. Nevertheless, although Ava knows the meaning of apology, she still chooses not to accept the apology and deliberately runs against mother's hope. At last, agreement is not reached, and Ava's refusal to accept her mother's apology damages her mother's face.

5.1.7 Strategy of be Uninterested and Unconcerned

Li Yuansheng (2014) asserts that discourse is heavily shaped by communication goals and interpersonal relations. And these two are more or less related to pragmatic distance, which determines the degree of cognitive difference between parties. A wider pragmatic distance equates to greater cognitive divergence, while a narrower one fosters similar understanding. If a speaker intentionally widens this distance and displays indifference to topics or participants, it can spark conflict in the dialogue. This perspective underscores the role of pragmatic distance in managing successful communication.

Example 7

Luke: You know that having Dad my anxiety worse.

Ava: I don't care about your anxiety.

Luke: Great. Thanks.

In the example, the context is father's bad temper makes a negative effect on Luke. Then father moves out, which makes Ava think that all the family only care about Luke and that she is ignored for she hopes her father to stay with her. When Luke talks about his feeling with Ava, Ava says directly to Luke that she doesn't care about his anxiety, showing her indifference. Ava's unconcerned, unsympathetic attitude directly attacks Luke's face.

5.1.8 Strategy of Hinder or Block

Hinder means blocking a passage physically or interrupting communication. Block means preventing the addressee from taking a turn to express ideas. The aim of this strategy is to interrupt or block a participant's communication. Through some interruptions and denials, the speaker conveys disapproval.

Example 8

Jackie: Is Alex much of a cook?

Leah: Oh, he loves it. He sings Gilbert and Sullivan while he's cooking. It means he makes me want to drown myself in my soup.

Ally: Mom, stop it!

In the example. Ally's mother, Leah keeps on picking on Ally's stepfather, Alex, although Alex is a good person. This is intolerable for Ally, so she adopts the strategy of hindering or blocking to interrupt her mum by saying, "stop it!" This apparent impoliteness cuts off the conversation and directly threatens Leah's face.

5.1.9 Strategy of Snub

The concept of this impoliteness strategy was originally introduced by Culpeper (1996), who emphasized that disregarding the presence or requests of another individual in a conversation can effectively constitute a threat to his social face.

Example 9

Luke: But you said that you would.

Paul: I don't care what I said. Fucking- Luke! Why haven't you emptied the dishwasher? You had one fucking job and you haven't done it!

In this conflict dialogue, the context is: at first, Luke has promised parents to empty the dishwasher, but he fails to keep his promise; so later when he goes to the kitchen ask father to fulfill his promise of helping with homework, his father is furious with him by saying, "I don't care what I said", indirectly ignoring Luke's request for help.

5.2 Response Patterns of Impoliteness

There are three types of impolite response patterns, namely, offense-compromise, offense-defense, and offense-offense. The frequency of each response pattern in Breeders is counted. And the figures and percentages are illustrated in the table 3 below.

From the table, we can clearly find that response patterns of offensive-compromise have the highest frequency, taking up 50% of the total number, followed by offensive-offensive and offensive-defensive, taking up 33.3% and 16.7% respectively.

The following part is a specific analysis of them in combination with typical examples.

Table 3: Distribution of Response Patterns of Impoliteness

No.	Response Patterns of Impoliteness	Frequency	Percentage
1	Offensive-Compromise	6	50.0%
2	Offensive-offensive	4	33.3%
3	Offensive-defensive	2	16.7%
4	Total	12	100%

5.2.1 Offensive- Compromise

Compromise response pattern refers to the listener accepting the speaker's impolite speech act and accepting its attack to his face, self-esteem and even interests (Li Yuansheng, 2004). Participants often compromise by way of obeying and apologizing during communication when they encounter different opinions or conflicts.

Example 10

Luke: You know that having Dad my anxiety worse.

Ava: I don't care about your anxiety.

Luke: Great. Thanks.

In this conversation, the two parties of the communication are brother and sister. Ava hates Luke's anxiety because it makes all the family around him and nobody cares about her. She says, "I don't care about your anxiety", which shows her rages and threatens Luke's face. However, Luke chooses to give in to her sister and employs response pattern of compromise to end the conflict discourse by saying "Great. Thanks", which effectively reduce face attack and promote the end of conflict discourse.

5.2.2 Offensive- Offensive

When listener uses an offensive strategy to response the speaker, an offensive- offensive pattern occurs. This pattern is usually used between parties with equal power and status, and often appears in intense conflict conversations, which ultimately leads conflict to be more intensified.

Example 11

Luke: You know that having Dad my anxiety worse.

Ava: I don't care about your anxiety.

Luke: Great. Thanks.

Ava: Why does it always have to be about you and your stupid anxiety? Why is it always about your feelings? Maybe other people are anxious and depressed, but we don't whine and whinge about it.

Mother: Ava, Luke's anxiety is as real as any other illness and calling it "whining" is...

In the example, Ava and Luke are brother and sister in equal status. They are having an argument with their own reason about their father's departure. After Luke says his living with father makes him more anxiety, Ava adopts the strategy of offending by directly replying that she doesn't care about Luke's anxiety. Although later Luke make a compromise, she still adopted the strategy of dissociating from the other to keep offending Luke. This intensifies the conflict, leading to a worse relationship between the brother and sister.

5.2.3 Offensive-Defensive

In addition to the offensive-compromise response strategy, offensive-offensive response strategy, the response pattern of conflict discourse may also be defensive. Defensive response pattern is

usually used in the party with weak discourse power. It is also the most common impoliteness response pattern to protect their own face and interests in daily life.

Example 12

Ally: Ava blames me for the fact that you moved out of the house. She thinks that I pushed you out, and don't you know what? I think you have allowed her to believe that.

Paul: That's batshit crazy. Ally!

Ally: it's not, it's the truth, and you need to listen to me! Everything had in this family can be traced back to you!

Paul: That's mad.

In this example, Ally enumerates the reasons why she thinks it is Paul that causes so many troubles. And these troubles exert a negative influence on her. When Paul faces the offensive words, he chooses to ignore the face attacks and just uses the words like "crazy", "mad" to describe Ally's thoughts in order to end the conflict discourse as soon as possible.

5.3 Pragmatic Function of the Conflict Discourse

Conflict discourse, especially within the parent-child relationship, is a complex linguistic phenomenon that reflects a diverse array of pragmatic functions. It often serves as a means of negotiation, expression of emotions, and establishment of boundaries within the family dynamic.

Firstly, conflict discourse can function as a negotiation tool. In such instances, both parents and children engage in a verbal tussle, attempting to persuade the other to see their perspective. This negotiation process can lead to compromises, understanding, and ultimately, the resolution of differences. Such as in example 5, Ava firstly is neglected. But by conflict discourse, she draws her mom's attention to think about things from her point of view, thereby promoting mutual understanding.

Secondly, conflict discourse serves as a vehicle for emotional expression. During disputes, individuals may voice their feelings of anger, disappointment, or hurt. This emotional outlet is crucial preventing the buildup of unresolved tension. In example 6, Leah finds faults with his new boyfriend, although he is a good person. Ally thinks mom's behavior is wrong, so Ally chooses to argue with her mother and voice her feelings of anger. Ally's words at last make Leah realize she has spoken wrongly. This stops the intensification of conflict, and thus facilitates the harmony of family.

Moreover, conflict discourse can establish boundaries within the parent-child relationship. Through arguments and discussions, both parties clarify their expectations, values, and limits. This boundary-setting process is essential for maintaining a healthy and balanced relationship. In example1 (5.1.1), Ava is so playful that she gets herself lost. After finding Ava, Paul shouts at her and warns her never do that again. In this case, the warning mentions that certain behaviors, such as running around without parent's permission, are unacceptable due to potential dangers. Establishing boundaries also fosters self-discipline and responsibility in children.

However, it is important to note that conflict discourse, if unchecked, can also have negative effects. It can lead to emotional distancing, decreased trust, and even long-term damage to the parent-child relationship. Therefore, it is crucial to manage conflict in a constructive and respectful manner.

In conclusion, conflict discourse in the parent-child relationship serves multiple pragmatic functions, including negotiation, emotional expression, and boundary-setting. Understanding these functions can help individuals navigate conflicts more effectively and maintain healthy relationships.

6. Conclusion

Through analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, in this American series, the strategies of “Command” and “Use Taboo Words” account for the largest proportion, each accounting for 20%; the strategies of “Criticize” accounts for 15%. The strategy of “Dissociate from the Others”, “Sarcasm”, and “Seek Disagreement or Avoid Agreement” each accounted for 10%, while the remaining three strategies accounted for 5% each.

In parent-child relationships, if a child’s behavior crosses boundaries, the parents may directly adopt the strategy of commanding, requiring the child to refrain from behaving again. They may also employ the strategy of using taboo words to frighten the child, causing them to feel afraid and desist from similar behaviors. The strategy of dissociating from the others is adopted to deny the relationship between the two parties, making the child feel distant from the other, and thus recognize the error of their behavior. However, when parents’ actions dissatisfy the child, the child may respond with strategies like criticizing to express their discontent with the unfair treatment. While in equal relationships, if one party feels dissatisfied, he or she is more likely to adopt relatively moderate strategies like dissociating from the other and sarcasm to voice their displeasure towards the other party.

Secondly, according to the statistics for response patterns, the Offensive-Compromise response pattern accounted for 50.0%, the Offensive-Offensive response pattern accounted for 33.3%, and the Offensive-Defensive response pattern accounted for 16.7%. When the responders adopt either the compromising or defensive response pattern by apologizing and acknowledging their mistake, the conflict tends to ease or even end. However, when the responder adopts the offensive response pattern, the conflict is mostly like to intensify.

Finally, this study summarizes the pragmatic functions of impoliteness in conflict discourse. It can function as a negotiation tool and a vehicle for emotional expression, and also establish boundaries within the parent-child relationship.

Although this paper analyzes the output strategies and response patterns of impoliteness discourse in detail and the causes of conflict discourse in *Breeders*. However, there are still some shortcomings in this thesis. On the one hand, the number of conflict discourses is not enough. On the other hand, the data is collected from TV series *Breeders*. If the data is authentic enough, this thesis will be more reasonable. In the future, collecting corpus from real life may be more significant to make the study of impoliteness more scientific and objective.

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