

Critical discourse analysis of gender language differences in the workplace

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Abstract. In recent years, the study of gender equality has gradually enriched with the development of feminist thought, among which the issue of gendered language has steadily attracted the attention of more and more people. And the workplace, as one of the social environments greatly affected by gender differences, can reflect the differences in gender language. The research in this area is scarce. Therefore, this research explores the current gender language differences in the workplace environment. This paper extracts 32 groups of dialogues from the Taiwan drama "The World Between Us" as the analysis corpus. At the same time, Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method is used to explore the social factors behind this difference, with Lakoff's female language characteristics as an auxiliary method. This shows the current development of Gender Equality in practice, It not only provides some enlightenment for the development of a harmonious and positive workplace environment but also provides some perspectives for the research of gender issues.

Keywords: Gender Language; Critical discourse analysis; workplace.

1. Introduction

With the development of feminism, the research on gender differences has become more and more diverse and has been widely discussed in various fields. As one of the important categories, gender language has also made many achievements. For example, Lakoff summarized the characteristics of female language in 1975 [1]. In addition, scholars pay much attention to the groups at the center of public opinion. Altman Yuzhu Peng studied public coverage of female sports athletes and found that people use different language to describe athletes of different genders [2]. For the study of gender language, most scholars will take traditional media texts or public reports of modern media as research objects to analyze text terms. Gender language differences in real-life scenes are less involved. However, the workplace, as a place with more significant gender differences, has attracted the attention of some scholars. Different from the reprocessed language texts of the reporting category, the gender differences in the workplace are more straightforward. The relationship between employees of different genders, work performance, and labor compensation, can be a way to express gender differences. Gender language differences also exist in the workplace. Schnurr, S and Mak, B used the linguistic characteristics of work emails to point out that female leaders use language that male leaders do not have to use to achieve their goals, to increase their leadership recognition [3]. It can be seen that research on gender language differences plays an important role in solving gender problems in the workplace. At the same time, the social background and other factors of its obvious existence in the workplace are worth exploring.

Fairclough defines discourse as "the use of language as social practice"[4]. He believes that an important function of critical discourse analysis is to expose the ideology and power struggles behind language [5]. Critical discourse analysis is studied at three levels: text analysis, discourse practice, and social practice [4]. This research will be analyzed according to the above three dimensions. To better carry out text analysis, the auxiliary analysis will be carried out in combination with the female Language features proposed by Lakoff in "Language and Woman's Place". This study mainly explores whether the characteristics of gender language differences in the current workplace environment are similar or changed from the traditional view. And is there a clear difference in gender language at the leadership level in the workplace?

The purpose of this study is to understand the gender language differences in the current workplace. Through the use of critical discourse analysis, the study explores the social factors of gender language differences in the workplace. In theory, it broadens the idea of gender language difference research and also provides some reference ideas for solving the problem of gender difference in the workplace in practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender differences and critical discourse analysis

Foreign studies on gender differences and Critical Discourse Analysis began with Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), which was the first time that the author used this method to explore the linguistic characteristics of female communication in the workplace [6]. Since then, more studies have been conducted based on the FCDA framework. Mark Nartey used the podcast of Ghanaian feminists as a research object to point out the gender issues faced by women in Africa [7]. Margaret Lebold combined the FCDA framework with feminist political economy theory to explore the inequality of female nursing staff in the working environment [8].

Compared with the diversified research of foreign scholars in this field, domestic scholars do less research on critical discourse analysis and gender differences, and domestic researchers mostly choose traditional media texts or groups concerned with public opinion as research objects. Li Jiewei took People's Daily's coverage of male and female athletes in the Summer Olympic Games as the research object to explore the language differences in mainstream media's coverage of male and female athletes in the same profession [9]. Cheng Yi researches the linguistic expression of women's issues on the Bilibili platform, focusing on the linguistic characteristics of women as producers and the audience's response to such production content [10]. However, domestic scholars are less involved in gender language differences in the traditional workplace environment and lack dialogue analysis in specific work scenes.

2.2. Gender Differences in the Workplace

There is much research on workplace gender differences in China, but there is little research on workplace gender language differences. Duan Luyao researched the workplace environment of talk shows and believed that female talk show performers had certain difficulties in workplace expression because they exceeded the traditional gender language norms when pursuing humorous effects [11]. In addition, most studies on gender language differences in the workplace take dialogue scenes in movies and TV dramas as research objects. Liu Yiqi took "The Good Wife" as an example, and concluded that current gender differences in workplace language show convergence [12]. By analyzing the dialogue scenes of transgender conflict in the Newsroom, Li Hanqi pointed out that women adopt behaviors contrary to gender stereotypes to communicate in the workplace [13].

International research on gender differences in the workplace is more biased towards the actual workplace environment. Judith Baxter uses interactive sociolinguistics to analyze how female leadership authority is challenged by gendered language [14]. Lia Litosseliti uses post-feminist concepts to illustrate how gender equality policies can be practiced through language in the workplace [15]. Francisco Perales' team studied transgender language in the Australian workplace and the degree of inclusion of sexual minorities in workplace projects [16].

To sum up, although there are some studies on gender language differences in the workplace, most of them focus on the analysis of language representations, and few explore the driving factors such as the social environment. Critical discourse analysis establishes the connection between text and social practice. This method not only studies the phenomenon of gender language difference in the workplace but also explores the social motivation behind it from the perspective of social practice.

3. Methodology

Since it is difficult to collect dialogues in real-life scenes, this study uses the case analysis method, and the research objects use the workplace dialogues in the Taiwan drama “The World between Us” broadcast in 2019. The characters of the drama are mainly news and social workers, and most of the scenes are set in the workplace environment, which is convenient to provide corpus materials. In addition, the proportion of men and women in the workplace environment in the series is relatively average, and there are both men and women in different levels of jobs, which is conducive to the research of gender environment in the workplace. In the process of data collection, the authors watched the episodes and eventually excerpted 32 sets of scene dialogue that fit the study theme. The following three requirements are the criteria for selecting cases. First, the conversation needs to take place in a workplace environment. Secondly, the conversation must take place between individuals of different genders, or there must be an observer of a different gender present during the conversation. Finally, the dialogue should be serious, which can increase the accuracy of subsequent analysis.

The following is an excerpt of the dialogue scene in this drama that meets the requirements, and the relevant information of the dialogue is marked. To facilitate expression, recurring characters in the data will be replaced with letters. Song Qiaoan is represented by A, Liao Niushi is represented by N, Li Dazhi is represented by Z, Liu Zhaoguo is represented by G, Wang She is represented by S, Lin Yijun is represented by J, and Song Qiaoping is represented by P, male employees are represented by M and female employees by F, the leader is represented by L as shown in table 1.

Table 1. List of examined excerpts from The World between Us.

Number	Names	Episode	Time of appearance	status difference
1	A&Intern	1	5:40	Yes
2	A&N	1	6:05	No
3	A Ling&N	1	7:13	Yes
4	Z&A	1	7:50	Yes
5	G&S	1	8:42	No
6	M&F	1	15:20	No
7	G&A	1	17:05	No
8	A&S	1	33:55	No
9	Z&A	1	34:20	Yes
10	Z&N	1	34:51	Yes
11	L(M)&A	1	35:26	Yes
12	A&M&F	1	36:34	Yes
13	A&N	1	40:41	No
14	A&N&Z	2	14:45	Yes
15	A&N&M&F	2	17:24	Yes
16	M&F	2	19:00	No
17	A&N	2	24:01	No
18	A&N&L(M)	2	31:31	No
19	A&N&L	5	1:30	Yes
20	A&M	5	6:30	Yes
21	Z&A	5	7:37	Yes
22	A&N	5	22:30	No
23	Z&A	6	2:49	Yes
24	A&N&M&F	7	43:12	Yes
25	A&N	7	47:40	No
26	A&N&L	8	2:00	No
27	P&J	8	8:30	No
28	A&N&L	9	34:20	Yes
29	P&J&L	9	39:49	Yes
30	P&J	9	41:33	No
31	A&N&L	9	46:39	Yes
32	A&N&L	10	1:50	Yes

3.1. Text dimension

3.1.1. The Perspective of Swear Words

According to the research on traditional gender language, women prefer to use euphemistic and polite words, while men use more swear words. According to the comparison of the collected data on swear words in the Taiwan drama "The World between Us", about 53% of them are male and 47% are female. The usage gap between men and women is relatively small.

In the workplace, swear words are less common than in everyday life, and are usually used to express negative emotions such as anger. At the same time, because it is a work environment, there will be cases of superiors using swear words to subordinates due to the advantage of being in a higher position. With the development of society, higher-level positions are no longer limited to men, and the living space of women in high-level positions is increasing. This situation is also evident in the study subjects, which is one of the reasons for the small difference in the use of swear words between men and women.

A: "What's going on exactly? Why is there a typo in the title again? Were you sleeping through your Chinese classes, or are you an idiot? 'I'm sorry', can it solve the problem in your mind? Get out of my sight immediately, and don't come to work tomorrow. What attitude!"

N: "Yesterday was a rush and we were short-staffed, why do you have to throw such a big tantrum?"

A: "One by one, they're all 'strawberry tribe', and he even throws things at me." (The term "strawberry tribe" is an internet slang in the Chinese context, referring to young people who may have a shiny exterior but lack inner strength, are easily frustrated, and have low-stress tolerance.)

N: "You must have been influenced by this scoundrel's news, right?"

(Episode 1)

This passage is the dialogue initiated by the female character Song Qiao'an to the employee after he fails to complete the work task. She used the abusive swear words "idiot" and "get out" to express displeasure with the employee's behavior. At the same time, she also took advantage of her higher-level workplace status as a deputy director to speak swear words in public workplaces, reflecting her irritable feelings. When her work partner comforted her, she responded by using the specific Internet phrase "strawberry tribe," using mild swear words to continue expressing dissatisfaction. But as the gender of the speaker changes, so does the type of swear words used. The male character, Liao Niushi, uses the abusive swear word "scoundrel" to give his friends emotional recognition and comfort so that it is easier to reach an emotional resonance expression during the dialogue.

3.1.2. The Perspective of Intensifiers

In the use of emphasis words, the traditional view is that women prefer to use exaggerated and emphatic words. John Gray believes that women use exaggerated means to express instant emotion in the hope of impressing people or attracting men's attention. [17]

However, from the data collected in this study, the proportion of emphasis words used by men is 43%, and that of women is 57%, which does not have a significant gap. At the same time, in the process of using accent words, women not only use them to express emotions, but they will also increase their self-judgment through accent words, while men will also use accent words to carry out deeper emotional expression.

A: "If you're looking for click-through rates or viewership, just say so, I'm more than willing to cooperate. What do you mean by not being able to change the length, not being able to change the title, and not being able to change the content? If you can't make changes, then don't come to me."

G: "It's precisely because we can't change things that we can understand whether the audience truly wants this news or not. You always do superficial news to deceive the audience. Then you're very happy when you get a viewership increase of 0.01 percent. What's the point of that?"

(Episode 1)

In this dialogue, the female character Song Qiao'an uses "more than" to express her cooperative attitude. Although the surface is a positive expression of willingness to cooperate, in connection with

the scene and the next sentence at that time, its expression is actually that it does not want the other side to make too many demands on its news field, otherwise, it will not cooperate. In addition to expressing dissatisfaction, it also conveys its rejection of the event of cooperation. Liu Zhaoguo, as a male role, used such strengthening words as "always", but also to express dissatisfaction with the other side's news stance, believing that the other side violated the principles of news to gain more traffic. The expression of both sides is more to express negative emotions, rather than to express the actual meaning of how to better cooperate.

3.1.3. The Perspective of Intensifiers

In the survey data of the TV series, 48.9 percent of the question intonations were from male characters, while 51.1 percent were from female characters. Although women use it more frequently, the difference in frequency between different genders is not significant. When expressing doubt, the reasons for questioning by different genders include not only conveying inquiries but also emphasizing emotional implications. This is different from Lakoff's earlier view that women often "lack self-confidence" in society, and they often use additional questioning sentence patterns in communication and have more "ambiguous" words in their discourse [1].

Ding Liwei: Are you a good doctor? If you don't help your boss retain patients, where does your salary come from?

P: Going home is the patient's right. May I ask which law are you using now to prevent him from going home?

Ding Liwei: You all find it hard to coordinate. Just now your leader also told me that everything can be coordinated. Coordinate what exactly?

(Episode 9)

"Where does your salary come from?" This question is not asking about the source of salary but is meant to express ironic feelings, intended to mock the interlocutor if the patient is discharged from the hospital, the possibility of salary reduction. The female character Song Qiaoping says this sentence "May I ask which law are you using now to prevent him from going home?", and it is not to ask the interlocutor to put forward the legal basis to her, but to refute that he has no right to let the patient stay in the hospital. Both of them use the question expression here to take advantage of its emotional function rather than the function of collecting information.

3.2. Discourse practice dimension

In discourse practice analysis, Fairclough believes that it is necessary to cover the entire process from the production to the reception of discourse. Therefore, the research process should mainly include two levels: one is the discourse producers using existing discourse to create texts, and the other is the text recipients using their discourse to interpret the texts [18]. Intertextuality is an important method proposed by Fairclough. It includes rhetorical devices such as quotation and irony, which can better reflect the social relations behind the dialogue interactors.

3.2.1. Quotation

Quotes are also called "discourse descriptions" by Fairclough. Fairclough focuses not only on "verbal reporting" in the traditional sense but also on the way people cite words and the role that quoted words play in the text [19].

Male leader: We got lucky this time, as audiences are now tired of the rush for speed. What they want is broader and more in-depth reporting. We can't always use surveillance footage and internet leaks as news. 'If you don't study when you're young, you'll end up as a journalist'. This is how the public now evaluates media reporters.

A: "The opinions of these keyboard sour grapes are just too worthless. Now it's the internet age, and the core value of news is different from before. Audiences who want to watch international news will go online to choose from CNN, BBC, NHK, or special global reports that air around ten o'clock, not our six or seven o'clock news.

(Episode 5)

The reason for this dialogue is that the male leader only puts forward many vague requirements for his position, and he uses the obscure meaning of “If you don't study when you're young, you'll end up as a journalist” to express his dissatisfaction. Since he represented an official figure, he could not use language that clearly expressed negative emotions, so he chose colloquial quotations. On the one hand, he wants to project an image of being well-versed in the news industry; On the other hand, he also hopes to consolidate his discourse power in that particular situation.

3.2.2. Verbal Irony

Irony is also a common rhetorical method, which refers to one thing by seeming to say something else. Surface mining to express the emotion that the speaker wants to express in the process of dialogue.

N: How could you reassign our most passionate and professionally proficient Deputy Editor-in-Chief to oversee those content editors who just patch together and rehash news, those so-called 'content farmers'? This must be intentional, right? Do you even know how to manage people, do you have any grasp of management at all?

Li Ziqi: I understand your concerns, but I want to rely on Qiao An's seriousness and professionalism to lead our new media... Who else do you think has the qualifications for our Taste News? I may seem insincere, but I like to think of myself as a cunning businessman with some brains, don't I?

(Episode 10)

In this dialogue, Li Ziqi, the male leader, uses the irony of "a cunning businessman" to describe himself, where he has successfully transferred Song Qiao'an to achieve revenge and express a smug mood. At the same time, as the highest-ranking male leader of the news station, he hopes to show his smart and capable management and can be close to his subordinates. Irony can do just that.

In the workplace, women in the drama use more direct language to express their attitudes, rather than too much intertextual rhetoric. Women are more inclined to directly express their demands in dialogue and interaction to better achieve their goals. Rather than first demonstrating and reinforcing one's gender and social status in the conversation.

4. Discussion

4.1. Social practice dimension

As the third level of critical discourse, social practice analysis studies the interpretation of text and discourse practice in the context of overall social and cultural development. The aim is to discover the relationship between gender discourse differences and social influencing factors.

The characteristics of female language expression in the current society are different from the traditional view, and the main reason behind this is the awakening of female self-consciousness. Under the background of the play, female leaders have gradually been accepted and recognized by the public. Gender language differences have a certain reverse impact on women in the workplace environment. Female leaders use more words with male language characteristics in traditional concepts to make themselves more masculine, to improve their leadership persuasiveness. The reason for this change is not only the shift in women's sense of autonomy but also the acceptance of women in the workplace environment. More and more companies or government departments may be willing to accept women as leaders, either voluntarily or under the pressure of female consciousness. However, the reality is similar to the problems in the show, most women even at the leadership level face some kind of gender discrimination or traditional issues about how to balance family and work. Society has provided opportunities and platforms for female working groups but still has not fundamentally solved the problems related to women's difficulty in entering high-level jobs. This makes it difficult for women to maintain their leadership positions for a long time, or the work pressure caused by gender factors has certain physical and mental damage.

5. Conclusion

Starting from the two questions raised, this study finds that the gender language difference in the current workplace environment has a certain change from the traditional difference. Due to the difference in work levels in the workplace environment, gender language has little difference in the workplace. In order to obtain more equal identities with men, women choose to use more traditional language features used by men. In the workplace, women in leadership positions are more likely to use swear words than men. On the one hand, it may be due to the gradual increase in the space given to women in high-level positions in the current workplace environment, this has consequently given women more opportunities to speak up. On the other hand, the social stereotype of women is reduced, and politeness and etiquette are no longer forced to associate with women. In the current workplace environment, the probability of men and women using intensifiers is similar, emotional expression is no longer exclusive to women, and sensibility is not an inherent label of the female gender. Men and women use question expression less frequently, and women use it as an information-gathering tool as well. They are less likely to make up for negative feelings such as a lack of confidence by using an interrogative tone in their conversations.

Although female leaders can get a certain opportunity to show themselves in the current workplace environment, society has not taken fundamental measures to solve the work problems caused by gender differences.

Because this study only takes a single film and television series as the study case, there are certain limitations. At the same time, in the process of research, the author only paid attention to the single influencing factor of job level in the workplace, and other important factors such as job nature and age may also affect the gender language difference. Therefore, in the process of improving the research in the future, the number of research cases can be increased, and the influencing factors can be taken into account. In addition, fieldwork scene investigation can be used to obtain more effective research results.

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