Abstract

This study investigates the functions of speech act markers in Mandarin Chinese and develops a systematic classification of those markers according to their functions. Speech act markers are language elements that facilitate the realization of a speech act without adding propositional content. They help express the speaker’s opinions, attitudes, or feelings, or involve the hearer in the pragmatic markers have been studied extensively for Western languages (for a recent research on Chinese speech act markers is still scarce (e.g. Ran Yongping 2000, Feng Guanguo 2004, Wang Rui 2013). A list of 324 potential speech act markers was identified and a preliminary classification system was developed. To investigate the use and functions of speech act markers in modern Mandarin Chinese, we extract examples from various online corpora (the Media Language Corpus (MLC), the Center for Chinese Linguistics corpus (CCL), a corpus of TV series), and a small self-built corpus of informal conversations.

The ultimate purpose of this study is threefold: (i) show the range and distribution of functions each speech act marker can serve, (ii) show the range and distribution of expressions serving the various speech act marking functions, and (iii) produce a preliminary genre description of functions in the use of speech act markers. This poster presents steps toward the first two of these aims.

Multifunctionality of Speech Act Markers

<table>
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<th>Marker</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>主持人: 你认为用“咱俩”这个词可以概括这件事吗？嘉宾：我觉得你应该这么问。主持人：当然不能不加任何前提地认为女士一定是无辜的，但是越来越觉得离事实相差不远。他其实做了很多好的事情，怎么说呢？这些努力没有得到大家的认可。他其实做了很多好的事情，怎么看呢？这些努力没有得到大家的认可。</td>
<td>“Do you think the word ‘unlucky’ can be used to describe this event?” Guest: “I think, how can I say? (now) we can’t say for 100 percent that the lady must be innocent, but we feel more and more that she is innocent.”</td>
<td>Does “unlucky” always refer to the situation? It needs a little time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>听起来是这样的，然后我再具体说一下。你今天下午要和你妈妈一起去医院。</td>
<td>Let’s do it this way; I will accompany her to the hospital today. Don’t take the money from her, but from me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>你今天下午要和你妈妈一起去医院。</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Function Example Translation

Uncertainty

The following example demonstrates uncertainty. The guest is not sure if the statement is true or false. The host is not sure if the lady is innocent or not.

Mitigation

The mitigation marker mitigates the host’s certainty. The host is not sure if the lady is innocent or not.

Suggestion

The suggestion marker suggests an action. The host is not sure if the lady is innocent or not.

References


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