



On Deception From the Perspective of Sociolinguistics

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Abstract

Human society is a mixture of truth and deception (short for DEC), Vrij in 2001 describes DEC as a successful or unsuccessful deliberate attempt, without forewarning to create in another a belief which the communicator considers to be untrue. To some degree, we can not deny DEC has already permeated into every corner of our lives. Because of the guidance of moral values, most of the linguistic studies are limited to truthful statement instead of DEC. Besides, the pioneers of research of DEC focus on ethnic, psychological and social psychological fields since 1940s and 1950s. Actually, the linguistic study of DEC is still on the infant stage. In addition, most of the studies from the linguistic perspective concentrate on the pragmatic, semantic fields and so on. The author here aims to explore DEC from the sociolinguistic perspective.

Key words: DEC; The cooperative principle; Gender differences of DEC

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INTRODUCTION

Human society is a mixture of truth and deception (short for DEC). Vrij (2000) describes DEC as “a successful

or unsuccessful deliberate attempt, without forewarning to create in another a belief, which the communicator considers to be untrue”. On average, people lie almost twice a day. To some degree, we can not deny DEC has already permeated into every corner of our lives and there might be an inexhaustible source of possible DEC. However, honesty is the supreme ethnic standard which governs our behaviors. Aristotle once said that hypocrisy was evil which deserved reproach and truth was virtuous which called for praise. Kant said telling the truth was a sacred supreme principle that governed our behavior (Aristotle, 1995). Such social norms are also demonstrated in the theory of some linguists. Grice held that the primary maxim of Cooperative Principle (CP) was the maxim of Quality and the observance of the Quality maxim was a matter of greater urgency.

When people intentionally violate the principle of honesty, the society never fails to lash them with shame and blame (Searle, 2001). The human history witnessed the safeguarding process of truth. To some degree, DEC is a stigma of immorality, while only honesty is well applauded.

Actually, we do not live in an ideal vacuum world of honesty. What’s more, we can not deny that DEC has great influence on our daily life. However, the linguistic study of DEC is still on the infant stage. In addition, most of the studies from the linguistic perspective concentrate on the pragmatic, semantic fields both at home and abroad. In this case, it was of necessity to approach DEC from the sociolinguistic angle, and the study of DEC based on empirical evidences from the sociolinguistic perspective is not only meaningful but also vital and urgent.

According to Oxford Dictionary, deception is “deceiving or being deceived.” Here “deception refers to making somebody believe something that is not true so as to make him do something or to deliberately mislead somebody” (Horn, 2002). Here the definition points out one of the prominent features when defining DEC,

namely, intention. However, this definition is not precise and comprehensive since sometimes truthful statements also turn out to be a kind of DEC. To define and have a clear understanding of DEC, we are also required to probe into the differences between DEC and some rhetoric speeches such as irony, exaggeration, metaphor and so on. They all share the same feature of stating something which is against the truth. So we hold the following questions to be necessary.

(a) What is the definition of DEC?

DEC is a linguistic mechanism which violates the maxim of Quality obviously. What's more, in order to cover the truth and make the hearer convinced, the addressers may either omit some important points or pass on more fabricated information than is required. So here the author decides to put forward the following questions.

(b) What are the relations between DEC and the other maxims of Cooperative Principle?

(c) Will the violation of the four maxims of CP necessarily lead to DEC?

DEC between different genders sometimes serves as a hurdle and sometimes as a lubricant to smooth the cross-gender communication which really arouses the author's interest. The sparse studies in the gender differences of DEC offer chances as well as challenges to students of linguistics. It is raised by Reis that women told more other-oriented lies in 1995. Their studies are rooted in the western culture. Endeavor is called for our Chinese learners to explore the manipulation of DEC between different genders. Here the author prepares to make a contribution to the research of the following questions.

(d) Are men or women more inclined to tell DEC?

(e) What are other differences between the deceptive statements in terms of genders?

(f) Who are more inclined to utter DEC to those with high social power and confide the truth to those who share high solidarity with them between men and women?

(g) Who is more likely to make fun of others by manipulating DEC between men and women?

(h) Will men and women forgive those who are dishonest equally?

The theoretical grounds of these hypotheses are the male and female differences in speech and the theory of power and solidarity.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Domestic linguists have largely overlooked the study of DEC for many years and only left some fragmentary arguments on morality, ethics, and communicative skills. As is mentioned by Grice in 1975 before, DEC is an outright violation of the maxim of Quality. However, few

scholars explored into this field in detail. Grice said that a participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfill a maxim in four ways. Then the author also aims to review the four ways and to probe whether the manipulation of the language in the above four ways may all give rise to DEC. Thus the author embarks on the study between DEC and the Cooperative Principle.

The Cooperative Principle is a principle of conversation proposed by Grice in 1975, stating that participants expect that each will "make the conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Yule, 2000). Grice believes that the assumption of cooperation can be elaborated in four sub-principles called maxims including quality, quantity, relation and manner.

(a) Quality Maxim

Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Grice once mentioned that the observance of the Quality maxim is a matter of greater urgency than is the observance of others.

(b) Quantity Maxim

Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

(c) Relation Maxim

Be relevant. Here the maxim of Relevance ensures that no excess of information will be given to lead to any side effects or cause any confusion.

(d) Manner Maxim

Avoid obscurity of expression

Avoid ambiguity

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)

Be orderly (Jiang, 2005)

Among the four maxims, the most prominent one is Quality Maxim. The followings all belong to the insincere speech, which violated the maxim of Quality.

(a) Metaphor

For years her cries of "Fish for sale" were in vain. She had no home, no family, no friends and her life was a basket of unsold fish. Here the fisher woman's life is compared to a basket of unsold fish because her life is so miserable. Here the metaphor also violates the maxim of Quality.

(b) Humor

Here is one example. A person promised to buy a gold necklace for his girlfriend. When the jeweler quoted a price for him, he lets out a long, low whistle. "And how much are they then?" he asked, pointing to another two necklaces. "You, sir," replied the jeweler, "about three whistles." No one will believe that a gold necklace will be worth three whistles. Here the jeweler only intends to say that another necklace is three times as expensive as the first one. The jeweler obviously does not abide by the maxim of Quality.

(c) Deception

The definition of DEC is a successful or unsuccessful deliberate attempt, without forewarning to create in another a belief, which the communicator considers to be untrue. Hence, the violation of the maxim of Quality will result in DEC.

From the above study, we draw the conclusion that DEC does not necessarily mean the violation of the maxim of Quality, which also does not produce DEC.

2.2 Related Literature

Deception in human is commonplace, usually in its verbal form. It is an issue concerning morality, psychology, sociology, linguistics and so on. The earliest study of DEC can be traced back to the medieval period. From then on, the studies of DEC mainly concentrate on the ethnic fields. In the last five decades, it has raised the interests of the scholars in the psychological and developmental psychological fields. The fruits of studies are flourishing. In the past couple of decades, more and more papers are devoted to the study of DEC from linguistic fields in China. In the following parts, the author will make a sketchy description of the research concerning DEC.

2.2.1 The Study of DEC From Ethnic Field

Ethnic is the study of morality. DEC is disdained and rejected both in western and eastern countries. Some scholars such as Augustine also mentioned the classification of DEC. As St. Augustine wrote, "To me, however, it seems certain that every lie is a sin." Later, philosophers like Immanuel Kant again adopted this uncompromising moral stance when arguing against lying. He said speaking truth is a sacred supreme principle that governs our behavior. Mark Twain once said that no one could bear someone who was too frank. He also said that lying was universal. A genuine person is one who is devoid of any hypocrisy or pretence with respect to the expression of his or her thoughts or feelings. From the above review, it is safe to draw the conclusion that the focus they dispute lies in whether we should utter DEC or not. No matter what the result is, we can not deny DEC is widespread in daily life.

2.2.2 The Study of DEC From the Psychological Standpoint

The studies in the psychological fields concentrate on the detection of DEC with excessive attention attached to the definition and classification of DEC. Most of the researches focus on psychological and physiological features that accompany deceptive behavior, rather than on language itself. These studies include (a) Statement Validity Analysis: It includes a validity checklist of individual characteristics and motivations of a subject and criteria-based content analysis that deals with the verbal aspects. (b) Reality Monitoring suggests that true memories yield greater sensory information, whereas created memories use more internally created details and

subjective information. (c) Sapir's Scan Training Program: it believes that deceivers use lengthier introductions, unnecessary connectors, and important pronoun deviation. (d) Lexical Diversity argues that suspects trying to appear truthful display low lexical diversity by means of type-token ratio because language behavior under increased drive becomes stereotypical.

In China, the scholars managed to uncover the psychological change of the liar and dupe to warn people not to be cheated by the liar. Liu Rengang explored DEC through the college graduates' resume (Liu, 2006). He drew the conclusion that almost two thirds of the college graduates deceive their employers in job hunting.

In general, the fruits of the psychological studies of DEC will directly serve the society. However, few comprehensive psychological theories have been put forward to explain DEC. In addition, the excessive efforts are devoted to the detection of DEC and the studies of the language of DEC are sparse.

2.2.3 The Study of DEC From Developmental Psychological Perspective

The studies in the developmental psychological fields are mainly concerned with the children's cognitive development of DEC. For example, Jing and Liu (2002) once pointed out that the age of 3 to 4 is the turning point for a kid to understand DEC. It is not until 9 years old that children will judge DEC by taking the motives and context into consideration. According to Wang and Xin (2007) apart from the clues, intention and belief, different contextual factors, such as the context of communication will have a bearing on children's behaviors of lying.

2.2.4 The Studies of DEC From Linguistic Perspective

The following part is the examination of DEC from the perspective of linguistics. Grice's Cooperative Principle, Austin's Speech Act theory and prototype theory proposed by Rosch, all played an important role in the study of DEC.

2.2.4.1 The Study of DEC From the Semantic View

In domestic, Ma (2001) and Wang (2006) explored DEC from the angle of semantics. Ma distinguished the differences between false statement and DEC. The former was defined in terms of content and the latter was from the perspective of intention. This is of great importance in conceptualizing DEC. Ma also put forward the idea that the deceptive presupposition might lead to the falsity of the whole sentence. For instance, if it's well-known that Jim does not have a wife and someone says "Jim's wife is coming". Since the presupposition of this sentence that Jim has a wife is deceptive, the whole sentence is DEC. Wang made a further study between DEC, presupposition and entailment.

2.2.4.1 The Study of DEC From Pragmatic Perspective

Hu (1990) has analyzed DEC mainly from pragmatic angle and put forward some instructive views. He

mentioned that one kind of DEC is conveyed when the addressors deliberately omit some information when encoding which lead to the addressee to misunderstand and incorrectly decode the meaning. Grice's Cooperative Principle is adopted by him to illustrate this kind of DEC. By violating the maxim of Quantity the goal of deceiving can be reached. He also mentioned that some deceivers aimed to cheat others by the violation of the maxima of Quality. The most adequate illustration of DEC from the pragmatic angle stems from He Ziran and Zhang Shuling in domestic. They drew the conclusion that DEC is produced when the users of language intend to adapt to the psychological, social, and physical world (Zhang & He, 2006).

3. MAIN CONTENT

DEC is a kind of communication under the guidance of morality. It is important to establish the argument that it is dependent on the culture and context. In different cultures, power and solidarity together with the male and female differences in speech will be used as the over-arching means to distinguish deceptive communication between males and females.

3.1 The Violation of Each Maxim of CP and DEC

DEC might be an omission of the required information. Hu Fanzhu once mentioned that the violation of each maxim might lead to DEC, but he did not explore it in detail.

3.1.1 Quality Maxim

Grice believes that the speaker who violates Quality maxim is lying and lying is a moral offence. In daily speeches, people often violate the maxims of CP.

3.1.2 Quantity Maxim

Make your contribution as informative as is required. For example, it was Christmas and the judge was in benevolent mood as he questioned the prisoner. "What are you charged with?" he asked. Doing my Christmas shopping early, replied the prisoner. "That's no offense." replied the judge. "How early were you doing this shopping?" "Before the store opened," answered the prisoner. Here the sentence "doing the Christmas shopping too early" not only violates the maxim of Quantity but also violates the maxim of Manner because the reply is too ambiguous.

3.1.3 Relation Maxim

Here the Maxim of Relevance ensures that no excess of information will be given to lead to any side effects or cause any confusion. For example, A lost his purse and asked B whether B saw his purse or not. B said that he saw C went out when he came in. He just expected to mislead A to believe that C was the one who picked A's purse.

3.1.4 Manner Maxim

Sometimes the addressor misleads the addressee to believe his DEC by uttering ambiguous speeches. The

following is one example underwent by the author the other day. Once I was wandering on the street thirsty, suddenly, the crying of one peddler struck me. He shouted that the juice with ice added was worth one RMB. I assumed that he intended to say that the whole icy soda water was one RMB. Then I bought one glass and enjoyed it. To my surprise, he charged me 3 RMB. I exclaimed that he was lying: He replied that the soda water was worthy of 2 yuan together with the 1 yuan ice, 3 yuan in all. Here they distort the maxim of Manner to cheat others. In fact, many cheaters always mislead the naive fooled by adopting the ambiguous expressions.

It is no doubt that the violation of the 4 maxims will lead to DEC, which helps to make a contribution to the study of CP.

3.2 The Study of DEC Between Different Genders

Men and women belong to the different sub-culture. It is safe to assume that the male and female hold different views toward DEC. We can not deny that gender is a very important variable in the study of DEC. Here the author gets some conversations between men and women.

(a) (A conversation between Andrew's mom and the policeman after Andrew knocked over an old woman in a speedy car in the neighborhood.)

P: What were your family members doing when the accident happened?

M: We were enjoying the TV show.

This is a harmful deception, in which the mom uses the false testimony to keep her son away from suspicion and severe punishment. The deception is intended by the addressor to deceive the addressee for achieving the goal beneficiary to her son.

(b) (Two students are talking about their academic reports.)

A: "How about your reports"?

B: Not very high. I did not study for the exam.

Actually, B did study very hard for the exam but still failed. He deceived in order not to be regarded as a slow classmate by other fellow students, which are self-beneficiary without harming the addressee.

From the two examples, we can see that men and women sometimes may tell the lie and violate the Cooperative Principle.

According to Liu Rungang, several psychologists conducted surveys between the male and female differences in speech in terms of DEC. They also made great breakthrough. Sararni in 1994 pointed out that girls started to utter other-oriented DEC in their childhood. Reis in 1995 upheld that females were more inclined to utter other-oriented DEC than males. Females were more probably to flatter and avoid offending others than men. Part and Kiser in 2002 carded an experiment by inquiring 310 enterprisers to see whether they had been deceived by the applicants. It's revealed that 26% of them had been cheated, among which, males accounted

for 33% and females held 21%. This indicates men were more likely to utter self-oriented DEC. Studies of gender-specific variation are often diversified, depending on the author's implicit assumptions about sex and gender, the methodology, the samples used, etc. Florian Coulmas stated, "women's language has been said to reflect their conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurture, emotional expressivity, connectedness, sensitivity to others, solidarity. And men's language is heard as evincing their toughness, lack of effect, competitiveness, independence, competence, hierarchy, control." (Coulmas, 2001) Grice's speech's conversational maxims have been criticized as being restricted to white middle-class contexts. She argued that, when talking to men, men can not conform to the maxim "Do not say what you believe to be false". Because of the male dominance, women have to make understatements (and sometimes overstatements). On the other hand, women may lose the habit of telling their minds straight even in contexts where they are not being dominated, as with their female peers.

3.3 Power and Solidarity

To some degree, speech can mirror the social relationship between the addressor and addressee. A good case in point is power and solidarity. These terms and the related concepts were introduced into sociolinguistics by the social psychologist Roger Brown in 1961. Some linguistic forms have overt prestige because of the high social status of their speakers in the social-class hierarchy. The power varies from superior, through equal to most subordinate.

Solidarity concerns the social distance between people—how much experience they have shared, how many social characteristics they share (religion, sex, age, region of origin, race, occupation, interests, etc.). According to Spolsky (2000), solidarity, or common group membership, is an important social force that has a major impact on language.

According to Hudson (2008), there seem to be rather general "interaction styles", which tend to be associated with one sex or the other, though individually may of course be exceptions. As is mentioned by Hudson women pay more attention to solidarity and men pay more attention to power. In this case, females and males may or may not adopt the mechanism of DEC to people who are in different relationship of power and solidarity to them.

3.4 Male/Female Differences in Speech

Labov was the first to notice the important role of sex/gender as a sociolinguistic variable. To explain socio-phonological variation he used the social-logical concept of "prestige" emphasizing language attitudes as a casual factor in choosing a certain right from the beginning. Social linguistic research on gender and sex started in the early 1970s. Specifically two domains of language

behavior were investigated: speech behavior of men and women on the phonological level, and the interaction behavior (conversational styles) between women and men in discourse.

In 1980s, research in linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and communication sciences investigated subtle differences in the speech behavior of men and women. They took context and power into consideration.

According to Florian Coulmas, Deuchar in 1990 and Kotthoff in 1992 said that Female usage of the standard language is intended as a means of improving their inferior position in a society. The weaker a woman's position, the more she is forced to be polite. A number of linguists have taken a keen interest in the male/female differences in speech. American sociolinguist Deborah Tannen published two best-sellers in 1986 and 1990 which focus on middle-class Americans and put forward the following viewpoints. (a) Men are more concerned with power and women with solidarity. (b) For men, conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others' attempts to put them down and push them around. Life, then, is a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure. (c) In contrast, for women, conversations are negotiations for closeness, in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus. They try to protect themselves from others' attempts to push them away. Men are said to prefer a one-to-many pattern, where a single speaker has the rest of the group as audience, while women tend to break a larger group into a number of smaller conversation groups. The consequence of this difference which presumably has major implications for men's and women's career prospects is that the male style prepares them better for public speaking-asking questions after lectures, talking in committees. Another difference in behavior is that females tend to put more effort than men into keeping a conversation going by giving supportive feedback. Hirschman (1994) once mentioned that the women used "we" and "you" far more than the men who tended to prefer "I". In other words, the women tended to include the person addressed among the people discussed, whereas the men tended to focus on themselves. Both male and female have to pay attention to face both solidarity' face and power face. In fact, males and females strike different balance between power and solidarity. Females give priority to solidarity and concentrate on building and maintaining the social bonds that hold communities together. For males, priority goes to power, the struggle for independence. These differences put females at disadvantage in the world of work, and males at disadvantage in the family and other important places where relationships are a premium. They are also potential source of misunderstanding wherever males and females have to communicate. All the above conclusions

are obviously of enormous importance and interest. DEC, as a very effective pragmatic mechanism to preserve others' positive and negative faces, to give support and reach consensus with others might be adopted by males and females in different degree. For males, since they are at an inferior position and care more about others' feelings (Wardhaugh, 2000). Hence, the author assumes that females are more inclined to utter DEC to those with high social power and they are more likely to protect others from punishment, embarrassment and harm.

Based on the theory of male and female differences in language and power and solidarity, the author explores the differences of DEC between the male and female.

(a) Generally speaking, females are more inclined to utter the deceptive speech to the addressee's advantages.

(b) Both males and females are more inclined to utter DEC to those with high social power and confide truth to those who share high solidarity with them.

(c) Females are more inclined to utter DEC to those with high social power than men.

(d) When facing a dilemma of revealing the truth or offending others, men are more inclined to divert the talk by bringing new topics. And women are more inclined to raise new topic to divert the conversation when they face a clash between revealing the truth and one's own benefits. To some extent, we can see men are more sophisticated.

In general, the male and female's action always disagree with their opinions of each other in terms of honesty.

CONCLUSION

Although the sociolinguistics study of deception is valuable as it focuses on the addresser and the addressee's cognitive interaction. There are still some limitations and there is still much room for further research on it.

It is of great importance to notice that speech has a social function, both as a means of communication and also as a way of identifying social groups, and to study speech without reference to the society which uses it is to exclude the possibility of finding social explanations for the structures that are used. In this thesis, it was of necessity to approach DEC from the sociolinguistic angle. Up to now there is not a comprehensive and systemic theory of DEC in the sociolinguistic field. It is hoped that the scholars in sociolinguistic field will pay great attention to DEC since it is of great importance and interest. In fact, it is reasonable to hold the viewpoint that people of different ages, social backgrounds, classes and educational background might vary greatly in the manipulating DEC. It is expected that the studies of the

male and female differences of DEC will help to smooth the social communication between the two genders.

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