

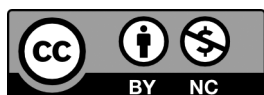
A Study on Second-Person Deixis Translation Between Chinese and English Under the Cooperative Principle: A Case Study of “You”

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Abstract: Deixis constitutes a crucial component of pragmatics, with person deixis—primarily manifested through personal pronouns—serving to demarcate the relationship between participants in linguistic activities and the discourse itself. This study holds significance for linguistic communication in two aspects: First, it conducts a pragmatic contrastive analysis of the similarities and differences in the usage of second-person deixis between English and Chinese, alongside their resultant pragmatic effects. Second, grounded in Grice’s Cooperative Principle under the framework of conversational implicature, this paper examines second-person deixis in English-Chinese translation phenomena through analysis of spoken language corpora from the CCL parallel corpus.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle; Second-Person Deixis; Corpus



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1 Introduction

1.1 Person Deixis and Its Unconventional Usage

The term “deixis” derives from ancient Greek, referring to linguistic elements that reflect the relationship between discourse and context through grammatical structures. These include personal pronouns (e.g., I, you), demonstrative pronouns (e.g., this, that), possessive pronouns (e.g., my, your), tense markers, verbs indicating movement, temporal and spatial adverbs (e.g., now, here), certain appellations, and social relational terms in specific contexts. This paper focuses on person deixis within the broader category of deixis.

Person deixis refers to the mutual appellations used by participants in a conversation to convey information (He Ziran, 1988). It encompasses first-person deixis (referring to the speaker), second-person deixis (referring to the listener), and third-person deixis (referring to entities other than the speaker or listener). First- and second-person deixis are typically realized through corresponding personal pronouns, while third-person deixis may employ not only

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pronouns but also nouns or noun phrases (Wang Gang, 1987).

In recent years, numerous scholars domestically and internationally have conducted research on person deixis. Levinson (1983), He Ziran (1988, 1997), and He Zhaoxiong (1989, 2000) explored person deixis in their respective monographs, focusing primarily on its conventional usage. Building on prior studies, Chen Zhian and Peng Xuanwei (1994) further investigated person deixis, yet their work centered on the lexico-grammatical manifestations of contextual selection and pragmatic implications. Huang Guowen (1999) specialized in deictic personal pronouns in verbal communication but approached the topic from stylistic and discourse analysis perspectives. He Ziran and Ran Yongping (2006) defined person deixis as linguistic markers identifying participant roles in conversations, primarily realized through personal pronouns. In other words, interlocutors recognize their own and others' roles in speech events (Huang Yan, 2007) through mutual address using person deixis (He Ziran, 1988).

In summary, person deixis constitutes symbolic references to speakers, listeners, and third parties, encompassing traditional personal pronouns, kinship terms, titles, appellations, and other nominal phrases (Huang Yan, 2007). It reflects speakers' emotions, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships toward other participants in verbal interactions. In practice, person deixis frequently deviates from its conventional usage, sparking heightened scholarly interest in exploring its non-conventional applications (Du, 2003). Existing research predominantly remains confined to the aforementioned dimensions, with limited dedicated studies on the pragmatic implications of unconventional person deixis usage.

This paper employs unconventional second-person deixis phenomena from the CCL Corpus as primary data to analyze the pragmatic interactions and effects of second-person deixis when interchanged with first- and third-person deixis.

The so-called linguistic convention refers to the current norms of vocabulary, grammar, and semantics that must be shared between speakers (or writers) and addressees (or readers) (Zhang, 1999). The conventional use of person deixis, specifically, denotes a normative framework recognized by communicators (speakers/writers and addressees/readers) that adheres to general, customary, or agreed-upon principles governing the employment of person deixis. In this study, the unconventional use of person deixis is defined as a linguistic phenomenon wherein speakers (or writers) deliberately deviate from conventional usage norms to achieve specific pragmatic purposes. According to Grice's discussion on adherence to and violation of the Cooperative Principle, such alternations in person deixis should be categorized as intentional non-compliance with a conversational maxim, compelling the listener to infer the pragmatic implications beyond the literal meaning of the utterance.

1.2 The Cooperative Principle and Its Violation

In 1967, the renowned American philosopher of language Paul Grice introduced the concept of conversational implicature during the William James Lectures at Harvard University. Later, he formalized the core concept of the Cooperative Principle (CP), stating: "We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (*ceteris paribus*) to observe, namely: Make your 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. We may call this the Cooperative Principle" (Grice, 2002). Grice further proposed four specific maxims: the Maxim of Quantity, the Maxim of Quality, the Maxim of Relation, and the Maxim of Manner.

The Maxim of Quantity requires communicators to provide information that is neither insufficient nor excessive.

The Maxim of Quality demands truthfulness and avoidance of unsubstantiated statements. The Maxim of Relation emphasizes relevance to the conversational topic. The Maxim of Manner calls for clarity, brevity, and avoidance of ambiguity or obscurity.

“The Cooperative Principle is grounded in human rational behavior. Communication is purposeful; when speaking, people rationally assess the context to determine how best to achieve their goals” (Feng Guangwu, 2005). Translation, as a high-level interlingual verbal communication activity, is “closely tied to meaning and the functions that determine its formal manifestations, particularly the source language (SL) form as the ultimate carrier of meaning” (Liu Miqing, 2005). Although authors, translators, and readers do not engage in synchronous direct dialogue, their tripartite interaction constitutes a rational process of meaning inference.

“The translation process begins with source-language communication, which itself originates from the speaker’s ostensive process and transitions into the listener’s inferential process. To ensure that target readers correctly identify the speaker’s informational intent, translators are obligated to provide necessary inferential cues based on the shared cognitive environment” (Wang Jianguo, 2005). Here, the object of meaning inference is the linguistic entity (the source text), aiming to excavate and explore the full semantic connotations of the original. Thus, authors, translators, and readers operate within the framework of the Cooperative Principle, guided by communicative goals, while rejecting subjective semantic interpretations to maintain consistency.

Regarding translation studies based on the Cooperative Principle, domestic scholars have primarily focused on interpreting practices or literary dialogue translation, with insufficient exploration into parallel corpora-based translation research.

1.3 Violations of the Cooperative Principle through Personal Deixis

Personal deixis is used to reflect the relationships between participants in verbal communication and between participants and other relevant roles. Grammatically, first-person deixis represents the speaker, second-person deixis represents the addressee, and third-person deixis represents third parties other than the speaker and addressee. However, in actual communication, the selection of personal deixis by communicators is influenced by factors such as communicative purposes and intentions, social relationships between participants, and the context and environment of the interaction. This imbues personal deixis with highly complex meanings, endowing it with rich pragmatic and interpersonal functions. The pragmatic functions of personal deixis are often manifested through violations of the Cooperative Principle.

2 Data Collection and Analysis

2.1 Data Collection

Using the Peking University CCL English-Chinese Parallel Corpus, the author selected “you” as the search term and restricted the text type to spoken language. The CCL Corpus is a large-scale English-Chinese parallel corpus encompassing rich linguistic materials and is widely used in contrastive linguistic studies and translation research. Through the search, 22,881 English-Chinese parallel entries were initially retrieved. However, due to system limitations,

only 20,000 entries could be downloaded, resulting in a final dataset of 20,000 English-Chinese parallel entries.

Subsequently, the author conducted meticulous manual screening of these entries, specifically selecting sentences where second-person deixis alternated with first-person or third-person deixis. The screening revealed three unconventional patterns in cross-linguistic translation: (1) mutual translation between second-person and first-person deixis, (2) mutual translation between second-person and third-person deixis, and (3) omission of person deixis. Detailed data are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Through an in-depth analysis of these selected examples, the author explored the similarities and differences in the usage of second-person deixis between English and Chinese, as well as the pragmatic effects generated by these usages in real-world communication.

Table 1 Translation Patterns of Second-Person “You”

Category	Conventional Use	Non-Conventional Use
Frequency	15567	4433
Percentage	77.84%	22.16%

Table 2 Subtypes of Non-Conventional Usage

Subtype	Second-First Person Shifts	Second-Third Person Shifts	Person Omission
Frequency	173	840	3420
Percentage	3.90%	18.95%	77.15%

2.2 Corpus Analysis

2.2.1 Interchangeability Between Second-Person and First-Person Deixis

Second-person deixis can sometimes be expressed through first-person deixis. In contexts requiring an intimate tone, people tend to use “we” or “us” to refer to “you” or “your group.”

Example 1:

Original English: The reason why **[you]** wearing the gloves and **[your]** masks and things like that, those articles are for their protection.

Chinese Translation: 我们戴手套、戴口罩，都是为了保护病人。

Example 2:

Original English: A few months from now **[you]** will have a fresh understanding of **[you]** rselves and a new attitude towards **[your]** work.

Chinese Translation: 几个月之后，我们对自己的认识，对工作的态度，都会面目一新。

In both examples above, the interchange between second-person deixis (“you”) and first-person deixis (“we”) serves a shared communicative purpose: to foster a sense of solidarity between the speaker and the listener, thereby encouraging the listener to accept or align with the speaker’s perspective.

The italicized English phrases employ the second-person deixis “you,” yet their Chinese translations substitute “you” with “我们” (we). This violates the Quantity Maxim of the Cooperative Principle, as the translation introduces addi-

tional information (i.e., expanding “you” to “we”) beyond what is strictly required for clarity or relevance.

2.2.2 Intertextual Use of Second-Person and Third-Person Deixis

The substitution of third-person deixis with second-person deixis can sometimes shorten the psychological distance between interlocutors and create a sense of intimacy.

Example 1:

Original Translation: And here are some more coffee words for **[you]**.

Chinese Translation: 这里为大家介绍一些与咖啡有关的词汇。

Example 2:

Original Translation: It is well known that when **[you]** do anything, unless **[you]** understand its actual circumstances, its nature and its relations to other things, **[you]** will not know the laws governing it, or know how to do it, or be able to do it well.

Chinese Translation: 大家明白, 不论做什么事, 不懂得那件事的情形, 它的性质, 它和它以外的事情的关联, 就不知道那件事的规律, 就不知道如何去做, 就不能做好那件事。

In the above examples, the intertextual use of second-person (“you”) and third-person deixis (“大家”) reduces the authoritative tone of the speaker. It fosters psychological proximity between the addresser and the audience. Such translations violate the Relation Maxim.

Through corpus analysis, we observe that the pragmatic functions of personal deixis predominantly breach the Quantity Maxim and Relation Maxim of the Cooperative Principle, while rarely violating the Quality Maxim or Manner Maxim. This phenomenon arises because:

The Quality Maxim requires truthfulness in propositional content, which comprises both the subject (referent) and predicate (assertion). As personal deixis primarily functions as subjects/objects rather than predicates, unconventional usage alone cannot violate this maxim.

The Manner Maxim demands clarity and conciseness through modifiers (adjectives, adverbs, etc.) and sentence structure. Since personal deixis lacks inherent descriptive capacity, isolated deviations in deixis usage cannot contravene this maxim.

Thus, pragmatic deviations in personal deixis typically manifest through violations of the Quantity Maxim (insufficient/excessive information) and Relation Maxim (contextual irrelevance), rather than through breaches of truthfulness (Quality) or clarity (Manner).

3 Conclusion

Context serves as the pivotal foundation for generating conversational implicatures. In analyzing the unconventional selection of person deixis, pragmatic meanings inherently rely on contextual support. Through comparative analysis, it becomes evident that while the forms of person deixis are structurally simple, their usage can be remarkably complex. This is particularly true for second-person deixis (e.g., “you” or the polite “nín” in Chinese), whose referents and

semantic implications within sentences often depend on discourse context and speaker intent.

For instance, second-person markers like “you” or “nín” may refer to distinct individuals or groups across different contexts. This flexibility and complexity necessitate careful consideration of situational factors during interpretation. Variations in cultural backgrounds, social hierarchies, and communicative goals can significantly alter the usage and connotations of such deixis. In this process, Grice’s Cooperative Principle plays a critical role. The principle, comprising four maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner—provides a framework for understanding and applying person deixis effectively.

The Maxim of Quantity demands sufficient information to clarify referents. Ambiguity in using “you” may require additional contextual cues.

The Maxim of Quality ensures truthful and accurate references to real entities.

The Maxim of Relation emphasizes relevance, guiding appropriate deixis use aligned with the topic.

The Maxim of Manner prioritizes clarity and conciseness, avoiding ambiguity or redundancy.

Thus, effective communication hinges on contextual comprehension of the speaker’s beliefs and intentions, encompassing not only explicit utterances but also environmental factors, social roles, and interactional goals. Research into person deixis and their unconventional usage enhances both pragmatic understanding and communicative competence. Such studies align with the core objectives of pragmatics: unraveling the intricate meanings and mechanisms underlying discourse. Grice’s Cooperative Principle, in this regard, underscores its practical value in analyzing real-world interactions, ultimately enriching our ability to navigate and optimize linguistic exchanges.

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