
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysis on the Pragmatic Functions of Chinese Discourse Marker “haojiahuo”

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ABSTRACT

“好家伙” (haojiahuo) as the network buzzword in 2020 has been widely used both online and offline. The study attempts to make an analysis of how and why people use the discourse marker “好家伙” from the adaptation-pragmatic perspective. Through analyzing the blogs collected from Weibo, it is found that people use “好家伙” on Weibo as a means of adaptation to contexts consisting of communicative and linguistic contexts. To be more specific, language user employs “好家伙” as a dynamic process to adapt to the mental, social and physical world as well as specific linguistic contexts. As a result, the functions of “好家伙” in the adaptation process can be summarized as follows: managing topics, constructing discourse, expressing emotions, filling speech blanks and mitigating face threats. The first two are discourse functions, and the last three belong to interpersonal functions.

KEYWORDS

Discourse marker; Adaptation Theory; pragmatic function; “好家伙”

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1. Introduction

“好家伙” (haojiahuo) as, one of the top 10 Chinese network buzzwords in 2020 has received more attention than ever before. Many people use “好家伙” both online and offline for its polyfunction. “好家伙” originated from a northern dialect and has gone through a grammaticalization process in recent years, which means its conceptual meaning is weakening and its procedural meaning is strengthening. As a result, “好家伙” gradually evolves into a discourse marker. The current research approach cannot reveal its nature and role in interpersonal interaction. So, the present thesis is going to make an analysis of how and why language users use the discourse marker “好家伙” in Weibo based on Adaptation Theory and probe into its pragmatic functions.

The main research significance can be concluded as follows: Firstly, this thesis aims to investigate how language users use “好家伙” under the Adaptation Theory and conclude the polyfunction of discourse marker “好家伙”, which can greatly fill the gap in the study of discourse marker. Though a lot of scholars carry out analysis on discourse markers, they mainly focus on foreign discourse markers, and research on Mandarin discourse markers from an adaptation-pragmatic perspective is limited. The analysis of “好家伙” and its pragmatic functions are even fewer because “好家伙” has developed into a discourse marker and become pervasive just in recent years. In addition, language is in an ever-changing state. The present thesis collects the latest corpus, thus enriching the corpus of study discourse marker. Lastly but importantly, the thesis may deepen people’s understanding of the discourse marker “好家伙” and its pragmatic functions; thus, the discourse marker “好家伙” as cohesive and communicative devices can be fully known and used to achieve discourse coherence and ideal communicative goal.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Discourse Marker

Previous foreign studies on discourse markers started in the 1970s, and Chinese linguistics began to investigate discourse markers in the late 20th century. Discourse markers are analyzed mainly from four different research perspectives: coherence-based,

syntactic-pragmatic, relevance-cognitive, and adaptation-pragmatic (Pan, 2020). In terms of the study of mandarin discourse markers, Yu Guodong and Wu Yaxin (2003) make an adaptive interpretation of discourse markers. Discourse markers are often used by language users as adaptations to context and can be divided into three types. In addition, the functions of mandarin discourse markers include constructing discourse and facilitating communication. Ran Yongping (2004) investigates the pragmatic functions of the Chinese discourse marker “ba” and its contextual adaptability in verbal communication. He summarizes the functions of “ba” as a question indicator and face-threatening mitigator. Li Chengtuan (2008) proposes that “small words” as ma can perform various dynamic functions and play a role in interpersonal interaction. Most of the related studies focus on foreign discourse markers like “I mean”. The studies of mandarin discourse markers based on the Adaptation Theory are very few, which calls for more research attention.

2.2 Adaptation Theory

Adaptation Theory was first put forward by Verschueren in 1987; then, it was viewed as a relatively mature pragmatic theory in his work *Understanding Pragmatics* in 1999. Based on Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, Adaptation Theory highlights that making linguistic choices should adapt to social, physical, psychological and other elements in order to meet the ideal communicative goal. Verschueren claims that “using language must consist of the continuous making of linguistic choices, consciously or unconsciously, for language-internal (i.e. structural) and/or language-external reasons” (Verschueren, 1999). Three key notions should be clarified in order to understand the process of ‘making choices’.

“Variability is the property of language which defines the range of possibilities from which choices can be made” (Verschueren, 1999). Choices are being selected all the time with varying communicative purposes. Variability can explain why euphemisms and metaphors exist in language.

“Negotiability is the property of language responsible for the fact that choices are not be made mechanically or according to strict rules or fixed form-function relationships, but rather on highly flexible principles and strategies” (Verschueren, 1999). Negotiability often occurs on both sides of the speaker and receiver. It reveals that choice-making is a dynamic process, and linguistic choices can be negotiated and renegotiated, whether on the production or on the interpretation side.

“Adaptability is the property of language which enables human beings to make negotiated language choices from a variable range of possibilities in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs” (Verschueren, 1999). The three notions are interdependent: adaptability is based on variability and negotiability, and variability can be reinforced through adaptation and negotiation.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this thesis were collected from Weibo. Weibo, also known as Sina Weibo, is a public platform for setting up real-time information and social chatting. Weibo has hundreds of millions of users covering all walks of life. So, the data sources are natural and rich. In addition, the post content, repost content, and user profile are all open access. The author searches the keyword “好家伙” in Weibo and sets the time span from December 1st, 2020, to January 16th, 2022. In total, 62 pieces were collected, and 15 pieces were selected as the proper corpus based on the definition and features of the discourse marker. Sensitive (like bad language) and private information (names) within the content are all removed or replaced.

The thesis explores the way Weibo users apply the discourse marker “好家伙” as the adaptation to context and its pragmatic functions. Under the definition and features of the mandarin discourse marker, the author reads through all the blogs collected identifies and codes the content in the blog. Finally, 15 instances are selected as the proper research corpus. Then, those instances are grouped into two categories based on the two kinds of context. In the process of analyzing instances, the author applies discourse analysis and multimodal analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

This research attempts to analyze how language users use the discourse marker “好家伙” as a means of linguistic adaptation and what pragmatic functions “好家伙” performs in Online media.

4.1 Adaptation to the Communicative Context

As mentioned in part two, communicative context can be divided into interlocutors, mental, social and physical world. This part will make an analysis of how and why language users apply the discourse marker “好家伙” in Weibo as an adaptation to the mental, social and physical world.

4.1.1 “好家伙” as Adaptation to the Mental World

The mental world includes mental states like personality, emotions, beliefs, motivations, intentions and so on. Verschueren proposes that the mental world is activated by cognitive and emotive elements. The former is to build a bridge between the mental world and the social world, while the latter is to show the language user’s attitude towards the social world (Pan, 2020).

Communication is, in fact, the exchange from mind to mind. Therefore, linguistic choices should be made by taking the mental states of both utterers and interpreters into consideration.

Discourse markers are often used to express feelings, emotions and attitudes without adding any conceptual meaning or affecting the truth-value condition. A discourse marker can indicate various attitudes in different situations. In the following, the author attempts to make an analysis of how the discourse marker “好家伙” adapt to language user’s emotions or attitudes.

(1) 好家伙，我直呼好家伙！新年第一天零点官宣回归·谁哭了我不说🥹👤 @YG TREASURE CHINA

Haojiahuo, the band, officially announce that they begin to reunite on the first day of the new year. I am even moved to tears.

(2) 好家伙，我要补b站跨年了 这哥的声音开口跪

Haojiahuo, I am going to catch up on the New Year’s Eve Party held by bilibili. The singer’s voice is so charming.

(3) 好家伙，我这一个一直在家工作的人·看到短信·去社区拿单子去做了核酸.....

Haojiahuo, I have been working at home these days, but I received the message suggesting me to take a nucleic acid test from the Center for Disease. So, I went to take the nucleic acid test.

(4) 好家伙原来今年是虎年，好恐怖呦，又迎来一次本命年，也太快了吧，我感觉我还是个小孩👤

Haojiahuo, this year is the year of Tiger, and I will meet my year of fate twice. Time passes so quickly I cannot accept the fact that I’m no longer a child.

(5) 好家伙，相亲相到00后了👤我要成大龄剩女了👤👤👤

Haojiahuo, the post-00s generation get involved in blind date. I may be the overage unmarried woman.

(6) @腾讯人工客服 好家伙，真是好家伙，你这叫处理问题？我谢谢你全家！

Haojiahuo, Tencent, you didn’t solve my problem at all. Thanks for you making no effort!

In example (1), the speaker is very surprised to see her favorite band back on stage on the very first day of the new year. She is even moved to tears. So, at the very beginning of the sentence, this netizen uses “好家伙” to show her surprise and excitement. It is noteworthy that “好家伙” has been used twice to emphasize the speaker’s strong sentimental color. In a similar way, in example (6), “好家伙” can also be used to indicate the speaker’s strong, unpleasant feeling. This Weibo user complains about the ineffectiveness of Tencent’s Customer Service Center, for her QQ account was closed for no reason. She wants to seek help from Tencent, but in vain. Together with the angry question and irony sentence, the repeated use of the discourse marker “好家伙” can directly express the speaker’s anger towards Tencent’. In example (2), the netizen reposts a video and writes his remark. He is totally amazed by the singer’s beautiful voice and uses “好家伙” to express his respect for that singer. Examples (3), (4) and (5) all use “好家伙” to reveal their shock with subtly different sentimental color. The speaker in example (3) uses “好家伙” to introduce the unexpected message in the following sentence; thus, it can naturally reflect the speaker’s puzzle and even dissatisfaction about the unexpected situation. Apart from shock, the person in example (5) applies “好家伙” to make a contrast between the previous information and the latter situation containing a sense of self-mockery.

In summary, the functions of “好家伙” as a means to adapt to a language user’s mental world can be concluded as follows: it can reflect subjective attitudes, express emotions towards certain things or events and help the receiver better understand information based on the strong sentimental color. The emotions “好家伙” carries can be further divided into two types: the first type includes surprise, amazement, excitement and admiration. The other types are anger, dissatisfaction, self-mockery and so on.

4.1.2 “好家伙” as Adaptation to the Social World

Human beings are highly socialized creatures, which requires each member of society to behave in a socialized and civilized way. Therefore, there are some invisible but conventional rules or principles guiding the way people speak and behave, which play an important role in keeping society in good order. People often use discourse markers as a means of adaptation to the social world in order to achieve successful communication and realize their ideal communicative goal. Netizens use “好家伙” to save face for themselves and others, to mitigate the unwelcome effect of a certain speech act and to make the conversation go on fluently.

(7) A: #2021第一天就翻车了#

好家伙 我在家盘着腿看电视 然后起来喝水 腿麻了.....把自己绊个大跟头 🤪
别问 问就是膝盖青了 🤪🤪

A评论：除了我自己就没见过自己把自己摔到的，还是在家里 🤪

B回复A: 史上第一人 🤪🤪🤪

A: #Messing up in the first day of 2021#

Haojiahuo. I watch TV with leg crossed at home, then I stand to drink water. Unluckily, due to my numb legs, I fall down and have a bruise on my leg.

A's comment: I have never seen anyone who fall down at home because of numb legs.

B replies to A: You must be the first person to do that.

(8) 急匆匆到医院看病 发现就诊报不到 问工作人员说你看一下你挂的是几号的 🤪🤪 好家伙 我这个蠢货挂的是昨天下午的号 日常社死 日常犯傻 🤪

I rush to the hospital only to find that I couldn't see a doctor. So I ask the staff to check the date of my register. Haojiahuo, I am such a idiot that the date I registered is yesterday afternoon. How embarrassed and silly I am!

In example (7), the netizen falls down at home on the very first of the new year. In the eyes of the Chinese, the first day of the new year is a new start. However, that netizen just falls down and has a bruise on her legs due to her long-time crossed-legs, which, to some extent, is an embarrassing and terrible thing. Based on the emoji and the following comments, we can clearly know that the netizen is extremely shamed about what she have done. So, she uses the discourse marker "好家伙" as a self-mockery before her describes the awkward story, which might create a humorous atmosphere and cover up the embarrassment. In a similar example (8), the person was mistaken about the register time and couldn't see a doctor, which is definitely an awkward situation. After using the discourse marker "好家伙", she then makes self-deprecating and claims herself as an idiot before being ridiculed by others. By applying "好家伙", this netizen can increase the self-mockery humour and mitigate the face-losing effect.

(9) 又停电了

这次是直接一天哦 说什么宿舍电路坏掉 🤪

以前学校待了三年都没有超过十分钟的停电

好家伙这学校三天两头停电

是想把祖国的花朵直接冻死吗

The power cut again

We are without electricity for a whole day because there is something wrong with the circuit in dormitory.

The power failure in my previous school never lasts over 10 minutes

Haojiahuo, the present school, blacks out frequently

Does it try to freeze us to death?

(10) 我爱听八卦绝对是遗传我妈

好家伙 她这么大个人了

天天竖着耳朵让我给她讲八卦 🤪

I must inherit my mom's loving for gossip

Haojiahuo, as an experienced adult

she still asks me to share gossip with her

(11) A:你别跟XXX说你去 给她个惊喜

B: 我都讲过了我X。 (“我X” is the civilized version of bad language)

A: 我X 🤔🤔 好家伙

B: 🤔🤔

A: 好家伙 嘴真快 🍌🍌

A: Do not tell XXX that you will come, I want to give her a surprise.

B: I have already told her.

A: What? ! 🤔🤔 Haojiahuo.

B: 🤔🤔

A: Haojiahuo, you have a big mouth.

In example, (9) and (10), language users all use the discourse marker “好家伙” as the adaptation to social conventions. The student in example (9) complains about the frequent power failure in her new school, and the netizen in example (10) criticizes her mother’s love for gossip. However, influenced by pre-Qin confucianism, Chinese social conventions always teach people to respect parents and authorities. So it might be improper for people to criticize their school and parents for both of them contribute to nurturing and nourishing a person. The use of the discourse marker “好家伙” in the two above examples creates a relatively happy as well as informal vibe, softens the force of criticism and mitigates the potential unwelcome effect for the hearers. In example (11), A is a little angry when her surprise for someone is leaked out by B, she even utters bad language to express her unpleasant feelings. However, she quickly employs “好家伙” as a buffer to press down her indigent emotion, to mitigate the face-threatening effect on the B and to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships.

4.1.3 “好家伙” as Adaptation to the Physical World

Temporal deixis and spatial deixis are the most studied and most visible ways of anchoring language choices into a physical world. (Verschuere, 1999). The use of discourse markers under certain circumstances has something to do with the concept of “time”.

(12) 我每天不想说话的时候就全部用好家伙去搪塞

室友：今天中午我吃的那个面好好吃

我：好家伙

室友：你们要去买衣服吗？现在打折了

我：好家伙 算了我不买了

When I don’t want to talk, I would use “好家伙” as my one-size-fit-all answer.

Roommate: The noodles I eat this afternoon is very delicious

Me: Haojiahuo

Roommate: Do you want to buy clothes? they are on sale

Me: Haojiahuo, I don’t want to buy them.

This is a short conversation between the netizen and her roommate, as she mentions in the first sentence. If she doesn’t want to talk with others, she will employ the discourse marker “好家伙” as a perfunctory response to delay time to search for appropriate words to say. So, “好家伙” here is a good time-delay method to fill the blanks in speech flow without adding any conceptual meaning. It gives the speaker a timely response and delays the time for the hearer to find an appropriate answer, which saves face for the speaker and avoids embarrassment.

4.2 “好家伙” as Adaptation to the Linguistic Context

As Verschueren points out, “discourse itself forms a dimension into which linguistic choices are contextually anchored” (Verschueren, 1999). The discourse has some basic features: contextual cohesion, intertextuality and sequencing. Discourse markers as cohesive means are often used to contribute to the fluency of utterances and to achieve discourse coherence. It is noteworthy that different positions of discourse markers have different pragmatic functions, which might be analyzed in the following cases as the adaptation to linguistic context.

(13) 好家伙，班级采风住宿落单，和辅导员一个房间，我人死了。

Haojiahuo, I have to share a room with my teacher during the period of art collection. What can I do?

“好家伙” is placed at the beginning of the sentence to attract hearer’s attention and introduce the main content naturally, which is a good way to preface the sentence’s topic.

(14) 忽然想起来我昨天的王牌还没看呢 好家伙 得会加班不无聊了 🤔

It suddenly occurs to me that I haven’t watched yesterday’s variety show, haojiahuo; I get something to do later in my overwork time.

(15) 别人都叫我小刘

好家伙！

这来个叫我小益的。

They always call me Liu

Haojiahuo!

Here comes the one who call me Yi

Here, in example (14), “好家伙” is placed in the middle of the whole sentence and functions as a conjunction, not only connecting the two sentences together but also clarifying the relationship between cause and effect. In example (15), the language user uses “好家伙” to give the hearer a signal that there lies a contrast between the previous information and the latter one, so the hearer can have preparation. Both two examples reveal that the discourse marker “好家伙” serves as a transitional means to transfer topics naturally and give the hearer enough preparation to receive the ongoing information.

4.3 Summary of Pragmatic Functions of “好家伙” as Adaptation to Context

Based on the previous analysis in 4.1 and 4.2, the author is going to briefly summarize the pragmatic functions of discourse marker “好家伙” as an adaptation to communicative and linguistic context.

4.3.1 Discourse Function

It is well known that discourse markers are often used as cohesive ties to make utterance or discourse coherent; the same holds for discourse marker “好家伙”. If “好家伙” occurs at the beginning of a sentence, it serves as a signal to attract the hearer’s attention and naturally start the following topics or sentences. “好家伙” in the middle of discourse or sentence often plays a vital role in connecting the preceding and the following, gives the hearer a preparation in mind to receive the ongoing information, and lets the conversation go smoothly. To put it simply, “好家伙” has topic-managing and discourse-constructing functions.

4.3.2 Interpersonal Function

To start with, “好家伙” can vividly reflect language user’s attitudes, emotions, and evaluations towards information. Secondly, it can be used to fill the blank in speech flow and to serve as a buffer to delay the time, which to some degree might avoid silence and embarrassment and protect the speaker’s face. Lastly, “好家伙” serves as a self-serving and altruistic mitigator. It can soften the tone, weaken the face-threatening effect of speech act and forge a harmonious relationship between the two sides.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates how and why language users use the discourse marker “好家伙” on Weibo from the adaptation-pragmatic perspective. Through the analysis of authentic blogs collected from Weibo, the present thesis confirms that the use of the discourse marker “好家伙” as a process of constantly making linguistic choices adapts to contexts, including linguistic context and communicative context. Language users employ the discourse marker “好家伙” on Weibo mainly as a means of adaptation to the mental, social, and physical world as well as specific linguistic contexts. The functions “好家伙” performing in the adaptation process can be concluded as follows: The first is the discourse function, which is used to manage topic and construct discourse. To be more

specific, it can attract the hearer's attention to the following sentence and serve as a cohesive device to connect the preceding and the following. Besides, "好家伙" also plays an important role in interpersonal function, which can reflect emotions vividly, fill the blank in speech flow and weaken face threats.

By investigating how language users use "好家伙" based on the Adaptation Theory and concluding the polyfunction of discourse marker "好家伙", the thesis can greatly fill the gap in the study of discourse marker for the studies of mandarin discourse marker from the adaptation perspective are extremely scant. More importantly, the discourse marker "好家伙" as cohesive and communicative devices can be fully known and used to achieve discourse coherence and ideal communicative goal.

However, there are limitations in this study. The data collection and analysis are totally from the author's own understanding of the theory and research object, which in some way may reduce the objectivity of the study. The limited corpus from Weibo makes the findings at a fixed level. This thesis suggests that future research can focus on the mandarin discourse marker.

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