



外语·文化·教学论丛

Cultural Differences in the Use
of English Modal Adjunct

英语情态附加语使用中的 文化差异

杨 竹 著



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前言

Preface

本书旨在描写并解释不同文化背景的英语使用者使用情态附加语(modal adjunct)所体现出的差异。本书的理论基础是文化影响语言使用,即不同文化背景的同语言使用者在语篇中常常体现出各种差异。前人研究尚缺乏关注不同文化背景的英语使用者在语篇中使用情态附加语的差异。

本书采用一个用来描写语篇差异与文化差异之间相互联系的理论框架。该框架提供了对语篇进行功能分析的手段,并将语篇功能与文化中的面子系统联系起来。

本书以比较中美文化背景为例,以分别具有两种文化背景的作者在英文媒体发表的个人评论文章为语料来源,相应建立了规模相当的两组有控制的书面语料,并采用严格的分析方法,比较了两组语料间使用情态附加语的差异。结果显示以下主要的差异:美方语料中使用的情态附加语在频率上显著高于中方语料,并且美方语料中使用的情态附加语的类型也多于中方语料;这些差异尤其体现在其中某些语义类别的情态附加语的使用上。

在对差异进行详尽描写的基础上,本书结合理论框架,深入地分析了情态附加语在语篇中的“参与”(involvement)功能。情态附加语的使用能促进话语双方参与语篇中信息的构建和磋商。参与强调话语双方作为话语参与者的身份,侧重话语双方构建信息和语篇的权利,并强调双方对话距离的拉近。因此,情态附加



语的使用差异反映了作者在语篇中体现参与的程度差异。参与是“连带面子系统”(solidarity face system)的核心特征,因此该差异进而反映了在连带面子系统上的文化背景差异:美国文化背景的语言使用者在表达、建构和磋商信息的时候比中国文化背景的语言使用者更多受到了连带面子系统的影响。

本书通过揭示情态附加语的使用差异与使用者的文化背景尤其是面子系统差异间的联系,有助于加深我们对语篇中微观语言特征差异的文化涵义的认识,有助于拓展社会语言学中语言使用差异研究和跨文化语篇差异研究等领域的视野,也对文化与语言相互关系的理论探索有一定贡献。

本书得到了广东外语外贸大学陈建平教授的悉心指导,在此谨表谢忱。

杨竹

2012年12月

首字母缩略词

List of Abbreviations

AAJ	Argument-adjunct
A-Q	Adjunct-quantifier
ARG	Argument
CLM	Clause linkage marker
D-Q	Determiner-quantifier
ENL	English as a native language
ESL	English as a second language
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELF	English as a lingua franca
FG	Functional grammar
FTA	Face threatening act
LDP	Left-detached position
PER	Periphery
PoCS	Postcore slot
PrCS	Precore slot
OT	Optimality theory
RDP	Right-detached position
RRG	Role and reference grammar
SAT	Speech act theory
SFG	Systemic functional grammar
XP	Phrase of any category
WE	World Englishes



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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Scope of the Study

Research on the cross-cultural differences in the use of modal expressions has recently received increasing attention (e.g. Vold, 2006; Aijmer, 2002; Høye, 1997), but few studies have compared the use of English modal adjunct across cultures. The present study focuses on a description and an explanation of the differences in the use of English modal adjunct in written texts between advanced users from different cultural backgrounds.

Modal adjuncts are a coherent set of modal expressions. The use of modal adjuncts in written texts is illustrated in the following extracts:

(1.1)

A. Whatever it is that makes CNN's commentators "the best political team on television," it *certainly* isn't a sense of humor. *In fact*, it was *downright* grotesque to see Bill Bennett and L.A. City Councilman Bernard C. Parks holding forth on the magazine's racial insensitivity. (Rutten, T. 2008-07-16.)

B. *Unfortunately*, this perception of our mortality does not *always* motivate acts of virtue... *Apparently* Pausch's view was based firmly on the assumption that some things are so important that doing them alone affords the highest degree of satisfaction imaginable. *Of course* this view is an oversimplification, *especially* when you consider how easy it is for children



to get instant gratification today. (Wan Lixin. 2008-08-02.)

In the above extracts, the syntactic constituents marked in bold (*certainly, in fact, downright, unfortunately, always, apparently, of course and especially*) belong to what is referred to as modal adjunct in this study. As is shown, modal adjunct is realized mainly by some lexical items of adverb, prepositional phrase and idiom. It occurs in a periphery or detached position of sentence and expresses modal meaning, including cognition and affect.

Modal adjunct is widely used in a range of discourse types, from common speech to academic paper; however, its use may vary according to a variety of extra-linguistic factors, among which is the cultural background of user. Few studies are known to have ever addressed the use of modal adjunct in relation to user's cultural background. This study represents such an attempt to address this issue. The overall rationale for concentrating on user's cultural background is the assumption about the influence of culture on language use, i.e., language use is relative to culture and differences in the cultural background of users are widely reflected in their differences in language use.

In this study, I will illustrate with the differences in the use of English modal adjunct between users from American versus Chinese cultural backgrounds, and argue that the differences reflect an underlying difference in the face systems of the cultural background between the users.

1.2 Modal Adjunct in a Cross-Cultural Perspective

This study examines modal adjunct in a cross-cultural perspective, which is one of the perspectives that can be loosely subsumed under Functionalism. We take the initial assumption that function is a primary factor that shapes the structure and use of language. This functional emphasis in language study is a redress to the Saussurean under-treatment of social variation and the Chomskyan preoccupation with the formal grammar at the cost of functional constraints. We take the functionalist viewpoint as the start-point for the study of the use of modal adjunct.

The use of modal adjunct can be dealt with basically as a pragmatic phenomenon, since pragmatics is not only the "syntax-semantics-pragmatics" pragmatics but also

the language-use pragmatics, in a combined perspective from analytical philosophy and sociology. The pragmatic function of modal adjunct in the former sense can be perceived from the structuring of information in utterances, since pragmatic function is primarily concerned with the specification of the informational status of constituents within discourse context (Dik, 1978, 1980, 1997a, 1997b; Langacker, 1987; Van Valin, 1993; Lambrecht, 1994; Goldberg, 1995; Finegan, 2005). The pragmatic function of modal adjunct in the latter sense can be perceived from the interaction between discourse participants. The pragmatic perspective reflects the essentially social nature of language: language is used for conveying information and negotiating interpersonal relationship (e.g. Brown and Yule, 1983; Halliday, 1994; Scollon and Scollon, 1995/2001). All utterances in communicative situations are assumed to have information value, i.e., utterance production is the presentation of information; meanwhile, utterance is the locus for the negotiation of speaker-addressee relationship, i.e., the dialogical relationship between discourse participants. It will be maintained in this study that modal adjunct modifies information and, on this basis and due to its semantic property, the use of modal adjunct functions to promote interpersonal involvement in the construction of information in discourse.

Beyond the purely pragmatic perspective, the use of modal adjunct is approached in this study from a wider social perspective, which has a focus on the differences in language use between different groups of users. In this wider perspective, differences in language use are not only related to the mechanism of human language faculty (Cornips and Corrigan, 2005), but also related to factors belonging to the social and cultural context (Labov, 1969; Wolfram and Fasold, 1974; Bod and Kaplan, 2003). In particular, a lot of evidence in the literature suggests broad differences in the use of language between users from different cultural backgrounds.

It is justifiable to take such a cross-cultural perspective to the use of modal adjunct in discourse. The use of modal adjunct not only has pragmatic functions in discourse, but also has cultural significance in that it is covertly related to the cultural background of user. This cultural significance is demonstrated in this study by the comparison for differences in the use of modal adjunct between English users from different cultural backgrounds.



1.3 Rationale and Objective

The use of modal adjunct is a noteworthy sociolinguistic phenomenon. The rationale for studying it in a cross-cultural perspective is explained as follows.

Culture is a major factor that underlies the differences in language use. Culture is a ubiquitous phenomenon in social life, and it is widely reflected in language system and language use in very subtle ways. In Schiffirin's (1996) words, "The meaning, structure, and use of language are socially and culturally relative." Culture influences language use generally in the form of the cultural background of user, the "context of culture" that defines the potential of user's linguistic behaviors (Malinowski, 1923). Differences in users' cultural background tend to be reflected in the differences at all linguistic levels in their discourse. Therefore, culture, viz., the cultural background of user, is usually employed as an exploratory or heuristic tool for the description of the differences in discourse.

There is a need to describe the use of modal adjunct from a cross-cultural perspective. Modal adjunct is a special type of modal expression in term of semantic and structural properties. Although previous studies have generally discussed the use and function of modal adjunct, few have addressed the relevance of culture in this respect. Modal adjunct is a self-expressive device in communicating information and previous studies show that self-expression or self-disclosure in discourse is likely to be influenced by cultural factors (e.g. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988; Dindia and Allen, 1992; Macaulay, 2002). In addition, there is growing tendency to examine the cross-cultural differences in the use of modal expressions in certain types of discourse, as cited at the outset, but few studies have focused on the use of modal adjunct. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the use of modal adjunct in this perspective.

In general, the present study pursues a sociolinguistic objective: It aims to describe and explain the differences in the use of English modal adjunct in a certain type of written discourse between users from different cultural backgrounds. By employing cultural background as a heuristic construct in the comparison for differences, we may reveal some deep-seated cultural influence that is covertly reflected in discourse. Taking a cross-cultural perspective to the use of modal adjunct is both theoretically and empirically grounded.

1.4 Overview of Methodology

Like previous researchers who study cross-cultural variation in discourse, we adopt a theoretical framework for this study. The framework is adapted from Scollon and Scollon (1995/2001), which provides a discourse approach to the systematic differences in culture. This framework then provides the description of the differences in language users' cultural background and the functional analysis of discourse in cultural context. The methodology is in accordance with the framework.

Following the framework, we specify two different cultural backgrounds, Chinese and American cultures. It is attested to by the literature that the two cultures have very noticeable differences in many aspects, so that we choose them for illustration. Controlled and comparable linguistic data produced by comparable users from the two cultures are collected. The study has significant dependence on the nature of the linguistic data, since cultural patterns of discourse may be different among discourse types. We delimit the data to a type of written discourse produced by advanced users of English. The data are compared for the description of the differences in the use of modal adjunct.

For an interpretation of the differences, we analyze the pragmatic function of modal adjunct in discourse, since a functional analysis can lead to a fuller understanding of how groups of users achieve communicative goals (Cheshire, 2007). This framework provides analytical tools to analyze the functions of discourse features as systematically related to the face systems of culture. Some analytical tools are especially appropriate for the functional analysis of modal adjunct and they will be applied for this purpose.

In this way, the differences in the use of modal adjunct can be functionally interpreted in relation to face systems, and therefore an explanation can be advanced in terms of the cultural background of user.

1.5 Book Organization

This book contains six chapters. This chapter has provided an introduction of the



scope of this study, the perspective of this study, the rationale for this study, the objective of the study, and a methodological overview.

Chapter 2 is a review of literature on modal adjunct (including its meaning, structure, and function in information structure), literature on sociolinguistic studies of modality, and literature on cross-cultural differences in language use. Through the review, the previous studies are evaluated and the perspective taken in this study is justified. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology of this study, including the research questions, operationalization of constructs and key terms, the theoretical framework, and data collection & analysis. Chapter 4 reports the results of data analysis and presents a general interpretation of the results. Chapter 5 presents an interpretation of the results in terms of the function of modal adjunct. The results are functionally interpreted and a discussion of the differences in the cultural background of the users is advanced. The theoretical significance of this study is also discussed. Chapter 6 concludes this book with a summary of the study and a discussion of the implications of this study, limitations in this study and some suggestions for future research.

In addition, some particular points in this book-writing need be explained. In this book, “discourse” has roughly the same sense as “language use,” “linguistic interaction” or “communication,” both process and product, unless where specific delimitation is made. Throughout this book, *user* is used in a broad sense that is identical to *author* or *writer*, and in many cases it is interchangeable with *speaker* unless specific delimitation is made. All the examples and extracts are numbered successively within each chapter. Most linguistic examples are taken from empirical data, except for a few ones constructed for specific purposes. Linguistic examples used for reporting and discussing the results are all specified for their source. Modal adjuncts in linguistic examples in question are marked in bold type-face.