

A Comparative Study of Chinese and German Refusal Conversations in WeChat and WhatsApp

Qinyi Qi, Jing Jin

Southeast University

ABSTRACT

In the process of communication, people often reject others' requests, invitations or suggestions for various reasons. However, refusal itself is a kind of behavior that hurts one's own and others' face. While achieving the communicative purpose, how to implement refusal behaviors strategically, how to maintain the face of the other side as well as the social relationship between them, is a part of communicators' construction of refusal behaviors that needs to be processed. In this paper, we focused on the refusal speech acts in WeChat and WhatsApp under the theoretical framework of conversation analysis, and based on the three levels of analysis and the principle of priority in analyzing communication genres. Through the empirical analysis of the real corpus of WeChat and WhatsApp, the linguistic features, typical patterns and sequential organization about reject were summarized. A comparative study was then conducted to analyze the similarities and differences between Chinese and German refusal conversations, and to present the realization of refusal conversations in new media communication. This paper hopes to promote and improve the second language learners' cross-cultural communication on the Internet.

KEYWORDS

refusal speech act; conversation analysis; cross-cultural; comparison between Chinese and German

1 Introduction

With the aid of the developing technical equipment, people are able to communicate with each other on the internet through software such as WeChat, WhatsApp, Facebook. The reason for this is that, compared with written messages, those kinds of software also offer more multimedia options such as pictograms, photos, videos, audio and links for multimedia communication. In addition, messages are sent and received simultaneously and free of charge, with no limit on the number of characters. As the most popular forms of communication, WeChat and WhatsApp are used to carry out a wide variety of speech acts, including expressing disapproval. As defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), it is necessary to preserve the face of the rejected person and thus maintain social relations. Rejection in SMS communication has already been the subject of scientific research, however there are still hardly any studies on Chinese WeChat communication or comparisons between different cultures, for example WeChat in China and WhatsApp in Europe. The present paper is therefore an attempt to analyze authentic dialogues from the Chinese and German databases, examining refusal speech act from a linguistic and cultural perspective. The purpose of this paper is to describe structural and linguistic features of refusal as well as to identify prototypical patterns of this action. It also addresses the question of how similarities and differences between

Chinese and German rejection dialogues in WeChat and WhatsApp communication are interpreted. According to the interpretation, the paper hopes to inspire the development of Chinese and German teaching materials and classroom optimization from the perspective of contrasting linguistic and cultural differences, thus to improve the efficiency of language learning and cross-cultural communication awareness of second language learners in both countries.

2 Literature review

2.1 Research on refusal in China

Since the 1990s, there has been a lot of research on rejection in China from different perspectives. In terms of the object of investigation, Chinese research can be divided into four categories: research into forms of expression and strategies of rejection, research into the factors influencing rejection, research into rejection in second language acquisition and research into rejection in the context of Relevance-Adaptation Theory. The following part summarises the relevant research.

From a lexical-syntactic and pragmatic point of view, Ma (2000) analyzed the similarities between rejection strategies in China and English-speaking countries. At the lexical-syntactic level, Ma (1990) assumed that a refusal is characterized by the conversational tags such as 哎呀, 对不起, 呃 or similar, which represent regret, apology, delay or pause on the part of the refuser. Similar to conversational tags, discourse markers play the same role in German rejection dialogues as expressions of regret, motivation or thanks, which are usually placed before reasons for rejection and indicate implicit rejection. Some researchers are also interested in the factors that influence rejection. They argued that cultural background such as social relationships, gender, age and many other factors influence the process of rejection. Wang and Wu (2004) concluded that rejection is influenced by power, social distance, difficulty of rejection and emotion. With regard to research on rejection in second language acquisition, Wang and Li (2007), among others, focused on the pragmatic transfer when selecting certain semantic formulas and their enlightenment for English lessons. Then, many researchers turn more and more to relevance-adaptation theory in the field of rejection. Liao (2010), for example, focused her attention not only on the construction of rejection by rejecters, but also on the mechanism of interpretation by rejectees. The rejecters try to arrive at the optimal relevance between the rejection formulation and the communication intention on the basis of the assumption of the cognition of the other person. Appropriate rejection formulations are selected by the rejecters according to the context. And the rejected interpret the meaning of the rejector's statements according to the conclusion based on their own understanding.

Most of research into the refusal in China refer to many different aspects such as strategies, factors influencing rejection, second language acquisition. These contrastive studies between Chinese and English make up a large proportion. And the data used in these researches are mostly obtained through Discourse Completion Test (DCT).

2.2 Research on refusal across culture

Culture is one of the essential factors that affects individuals' preferences for refusal strategies (Al-Eryani, 2018), and it has attracted a lot of research attention. Liao and Bresnahan (1996) conducted a contrastive study of refusals between American English and Mandarin Chinese,

revealing a series of interesting findings. Their data are collected via a six-scenario written DCT comprising situations with different social and power relationships. The Chinese participants tend to use fewer strategies in refusals than their American counterparts because they prefer to end the

awkward topics quickly. What is more, most Americans and Chinese tend to offer vague reasons in refusing a request from a higher-status person, but considerably more Chinese give specific reasons when refusing a high-status person. It is also found that in both cultures, females are more status-sensitive than males in refusing. Jiang (2006) carries out a cross-cultural comparison of request and refusal strategies between the US and China. Unlike most other refusal studies, this study utilizes naturally-occurring data, US and Chinese press conference data on the topic of the North Korea nuclear crisis. The research shows that avoidance and insufficient answers frequently occur in the Chinese data, while direct refusals and reasons are prevalent in the US data. Furthermore, the author discusses the differences from ideological and cultural perspectives. In a more recent cross-cultural study, Siebold and Busch (2015) compare Spanish and German refusals in varied situations using the method of open role-plays. The results indicate that Spanish speakers tend to adopt indirect refusal strategies and give vague answers, while German speakers prefer more direct refusal strategies and provide more explicit answers.

From the review of the research carried out so far, it is clear that there is a lack of empirical research using authentic data and contrastive studies between the two languages Chinese and German, which explains why this paper focuses on the rejection interaction in new media WeChat and WhatsApp.

3 Theoretical foundations and methodology

3.1 Conversation analysis

Conversation Analysis (CA) derives from the 1970s, which was put forward by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson for the sake of analyzing institutional talk, e.g., business negotiation discourse, and doctor-patient communication discourse and telephone conversations. Currently, CA is a naturalistic and qualitative approach whose primary goal is to observe, describe, analyze, and understand talk as a fundamental component of human social behavior. The notion of “sequential organization” (Sacks, 1974), which is specific to talk-in-interaction, is put forward, indicating that what an utterance actually means and performs depends on its sequential position. The speech act of rejection in WeChat and WhatsApp communication can be assigned to the area of conversation analysis. A rejection is organized interactively by the rejecting and rejected parties using the new forms of communication WeChat and WhatsApp. In the course of the communication, the interacting parties process a topic in relation to each other. The act of rejection in WeChat and WhatsApp communication is not only a reaction to the previous action such as a request, invitation or offer, but also creates the basis for the subsequent action of the rejected person. In this sense, every rejection is at the intersection of a chained interaction process. The choice of linguistic means plays a major role in how this works. The rejecters should use these to express their rejection precisely (action) and make their intention comprehensible to the rejected, whereby the face of both should also be saved. The rejected should try to interpret the intention, the explicit or implicit rejection of the other person in rejection dialogues (understanding). The two try to maintain their social relationship. In summary, it can be said that it is quite possible and appropriate to analyze rejection dialogues from a linguistic, conversation-analytical perspective.

3.2 Communicative genre

A communicative genre is a distinctive type of communicative action, characterised by a socially recognised communicative purpose and common aspects of form (Günthner & Knoblauch, 1994). When analyzing communicative genres, Luckmann (1988) divided the structural characteristics into

three levels: internal structure, external structure and intermediate structural level. Günthner and Knoblauch (1994) referred to the intermediate structural level as the situational realization level. The internal structure includes those verbal and non-verbal elements. Verbal elements consist of prosodic phenomena, lexico-semantic phenomena, morpho-syntactic elements, etc. Situational level of realization concerns the interactive context and the sequentiality of the conversation, while external structure refers to the connection of genres and social milieus, ethnic and cultural groupings, etc. (Günthner, 2007). The following part of this paper is dedicated to the intensive analysis of internal structure and situational realization level of the speech act rejection.

3.3 Preference organization

Sacks (1995) provides a structural-interactional point of view to illuminate its organizational features, dismissing the psychological meaning of the term. There is sequential order in every conversation, in which an orderly and interrelated sequence of different linguistic actions can be determined. Acceptance is marked as preferred as an action that can be expected from the counterpart, but rejection is marked as dispreferred. This as preferred or dispreferred label does not represent a personal psychological preference or dispreference, but is related to social norms (König 2015). Although social and sequential features of preference organization rely on individual factors, the investigation of the conversation analysis focuses only on the structure and sequence of preference organization (Yu, 2018).

3.4 Data

Conversation analysis concentrates on using a qualitative method to analyze everyday communication in natural situations using a qualitative method. This means that the data analyzed should be authentic. Based on this principle, both Chinese and German data in this analysis come from the new forms of communication WeChat and WhatsApp. The analyzed data comes from the MoCoDa database. The Mobile Communication Database is a corpus and a research project initiated by Wolfgang Imo. For the illustration, statements in Chinese or German rejection dialogs are translated into English in the following analysis. There is also a morpheme-by-morpheme translation and a sense-by-sense translation, as shown in the following example:

A: 今天去逛街嘛?

Today go shopping [particle]

Will you go shopping today?

B: Shade, 我明天有个pre

regret [particle] I tomorrow have a pre [particle]

It's a pity, I will have a presentation tomorrow.

4 Analysis of rejection

The fourth part is devoted to the intensive sequential analysis of the authentic Chinese and German data on the internal structure and situational level of realization (Günthner & Knoblauch 1994), which makes it possible to identify linguistic and sequential features and summarize typical structures of the rejection dialogues.

4.1 Refusal in Wechat

By inspecting the data, it is noticeable that most rejecters in the Chinese data avoid explicitly

rejecting a dating attempt or a request from the other person, instead leaving it to the rejecters to reconstruct. In other words, explicit negation words 不 can seldom be found in dialogs. The indirectness of the rejection expression includes either reasons or, in addition, the discourse markers such as apology phrases, expressions of regret, expressions of motivation. The exemplary structures of rejection communication are described in detail (Auer & Günthner 2003).

Pattern 1. Reasons as an implication for rejection

A: 老师点名了

teacher order name [particle]

Teacher takes a roll call.

B: 点到我的话, 可以和老师说我之后交假条嘛?

call at me word [particle] can with teacher say I later give leave note [particle]

If I am called, can you help me to tell teacher that I will give the leave note later?

A: 这要导师打电话的

this need tutor call [particle]

This needs the call of tutor.

It is conventional in China for teachers to call students' names (in Chinese "点名") before or after class to check whether they are present, which is the reason for this communication. As fellow students and roommate of A, B wants A to help cover up her absence, but is refused. An objective reason is given to show that the rejection is due to an external reason rather than unwillingness, contributing to minimizing the face threat.

Pattern 2. Reason with suggestion

In this pattern, as in the first, rejection is also verbalized implicitly. There are no explicit negation words in rejection dialogues. In addition to a reason, the rejecters then usually offer a solution or appointment proposal, which is based on the "good news exit" of König in order to show interest in further contact. In the data examined, due to the structural combination possibilities the proposal is placed after or before the justification.

The following example documents the first variant, in which the refusing party offers a suggestion as a "good news exit" after giving reasons. Writer A intends to invite B to the off-campus shared flat. B gives negative feedback on this.

A: 你想不想在校外和我一起租房子住?

you want not want at campus outside with I together rent house live [particle]

Do you want to rent house with me outside campus?

B: 🙄 咱们课不多, 我觉得不需要租, 我的钱也不够 🙄

· we lesson not many [particle] I think not need rent [particle] my money either not enough [particle] 🙄

· We don't have many lessons, so I think we don't need to rent a house. I don't have enough money either. 🙄

B: 你回来住吧

you come back live [particle]

You come back and live.

Writer B begins her rejection with a face-sign emoji, a teary face with a hand over the eyes, usually illustrating embarrassment. One of the functions of emojis is to contribute to face-work in face-threatening activities. In Chinese WeChat communication, the emoji used in the rejection sequence mainly represents embarrassment and at the same time indicates a subsequent dispreferred response, followed by a justification and a relatively explicit negative feedback, which,

however, is only oriented towards the solution mentioned here. In the same message the same emoji 🤔 appears twice, which is used to help the rejecter get over embarrassment. As a "good news exit", writer B offers a suggestion that is described as a relief strategy in order to show that she does not wish to reject contact with Writer A.

Pattern 3. Apology phrase before the reason

In such rejection dialogues, rejection is still implicitly realized. Dispreference of rejection is marked in this pattern by the rejecters first apologizing for their non-acceptance and then giving their reasons. However, in the Chinese rejection dialogues, an explicit apology phrase such as “对不起”, “抱歉” or similar is rarely seen, especially in interactions between close friends, but the apology is usually verbalized using a Chinese phrase “不好意思”, which also expresses embarrassment to a large extent. This is demonstrated by the following example:

A: 宝~你下午有安排不?

baby~ you afternoon have plan not [particle]

Baby~ Do you have plan this afternoon?

A: 我想让你帮我交个材料

I want let you help me hand in one material [particle]

I want you to help me hand in a material.

B: 宝, 太不好意思了! 我下午要去看阿婆, 她说了好几回了 😊

baby [particle] so sorry [particle] I afternoon need see grandma [particle] she talk too many time [particle] 😊

Baby, I am so sorry. I need to visit grandma this afternoon. She has talked about that so many times. 😊

A: 好滴~没事的, 我再找找其他人, 你先陪阿婆

ok~no problem [particle] I again find find other person [particle] you first accompany grandma [particle]

Ok~ No problem. I will find the other people. You accompany the grandma first.

B: 真的太不好意思了! 这次没帮到, 下次我帮你~

Really sorry [particle] this time not help [particle] next time I help you~

I am really sorry for this situation! I will help you next time~

The intimate address contextualizes a close relationship. Without waiting for an answer, A asks B to do a favor for her. This is followed by a direct response to the request but by an edited statement consisting of three parts such as a salutation as a counter-greeting, an expression of apology and reasons for the request. The Chinese phrase “不好意思” is used in the literal sense to express embarrassment, but in everyday communication it is often associated with a feeling of remorse, making it clear that speaker B marks the coming rejection as dispreferred. Before the apology phrase, toning particles *really* and *very* are embedded, which reinforce the trustworthiness of the apology. Dispreferred marking can also be seen as a representation of the apology. In the same turn, writer B justifies her refusal by saying that she has to visit her grandmother. In addition, there is an expression of regret from B. By providing a suggestion, the face-threatening rejection is mitigated, thus maintaining the social relationship between the speakers. Although the interactants in this dialog have a relatively close social relationship, compared to the data examined so far, it is noticeable that the rejecter reduces the damage to the face of the rejected in a more polite way, namely by expressing an apology several times.

Pattern 4. A request as an implication for rejection

While a singular reason or a justification with an apology in the previously analyzed data are constructed as direct reactive moves with which rejection can be reconstructed, there are no similar discourse markers in the following dialogues, but a request is realized before the justification contribution, which can also be classified as a dispreference marker of a rejection.

A: 萱萱, 给你买了件外套当礼物, 你看看样式喜不喜欢 😊
 xuanxuan [particle] give you buy one coat as gift [particle] you look look mode like not like
 [particle] 😊

Xuanxuan, I bought a coat for you as gift. Do you like this mode? 😊

A: 不喜欢咱换个其他的
 not like we change one another [particle]

If you don't like, we can choose another one.

B: 宝, 它发货了嘛?

baby [particle] it send package already [particle]

Baby, Has the package been sent?

A: 嗯嗯, 没事! 不喜欢咱退

Enen [particle] no problem [particle] not like we return [particle]

Yes, but don't worry. We can return it if you don't like.

B: 哈哈, 模特穿得好看, 但我好像不适合这个风格呢 😊

Hahaha [particle] model wear nice [particle] but I probably not suit this style [particle] 😊

Hahaha. It looks nice on model but probably doesn't suit me. 😊

A expresses her uncertainty and caution with the question. Therefore, she anticipates a suggestion "If you don't like it, I can buy another gift" for a possible negative response. Without an answer, B asks A. Here, a request is understood as a reactive action, which characterizes a dispreferred action due to the possible rejection, is postponed. This makes the rejection of the previous offer comprehensible for A. A's utterance shows that she accepts the rejection implied by the request: It doesn't matter. I can handle it if you don't like it. The fact that B first gives a positive evaluation for the gift in the message means that the "face work" is done. The particle 呢 at the end of the message creates a friendly constellation. This maintains the social relationship between the interacting parties.

Pattern 5. Explicit expression

A: 你去不去

You go not go [particle]

Will you come?

B: 明天几点能回来?

Tomorrow when can come back [particle]

When can we leave tomorrow?

A: 活动九点半结束

party nine half end [particle]

Party ends at half past nine.

B: 不去了, 我课都没备 (此消息是在间隔 47 分钟后发送)

not go [particle] I lesson not prepare

I won't go. I have not prepared my lesson.

A asks if B wants to come. Without an explicit answer to the question, B asks again about the time

of the end of the party. After hours, an explicit refusal (I won't go) is expressed, followed by a justification (I haven't prepared my lesson). This concludes the interaction. After inspecting the data, it can be seen that a direct refusal occurs after a significantly longer coordination phase, in which delay signals such as time intervals as well as more questions can indicate a refusal.

4.2 Refusal in Whatsapp

Compared to WeChat communication, the writers in the German data examined tend to express their intention with a single message. In addition to justification, regret is often verbalized in their rejection. The routinized patterns are summarized below.

Pattern 1. Reason as an implication for rejection

The same pattern can also be found in the German, where rejection is realized by giving reasons. The pattern is shown in the following dialogue that takes place between Niklas and Tara.

N: Tara Lust Freitag auf Trashpop?

Tara interest Friday on Trashpop [particle]

Tara Do you want to go Trashpop on Friday?

T: Hey, Niklas! Sandra und Freundin von uns feiern da ihren Geburtstag darum bin ich da raus hey [particle] Niklas [particle] Sandra and friend of us celebrate that her birthday am I at that time out [particle]

Hey, Niklas! Sandra and our friends are going to celebrate her birthday so I have to go there at that time.

N: Ach sooo Alles klar aber klingt ja auch sehr gut

oh this everything clear but sound yes also very good [particle]

I got it. But it sounds very good.

N: Dann ganz viel Spaß

then so much fun [particle]

Enjoy yourself.

T: Ja:)) Danke euch auch!

Yes:)) thank you also [particle]

Yes:)) Thank you very much.

When Niklas asks if Tara would like to go to Trashpop on Friday, Tara doesn't turn him down literally. Instead, after greeting and addressing him, she tells him what she's up to. Tara explains that she can't accept his invitation because of a friend's birthday party. In her refusal, the time is not repeated as background knowledge, but is expressed with the adverb *da* (i. e. at the time mentioned). It is therefore up for Niklas to reconstruct that this move represents a refusal. With *Ach sooo* Niklas points out that he recognizes the explanation of the plan as a rejection. The repetition of "o" is similar to elongation in oral communication. communication. At the same time, he wishes Tara a lot of fun, which indicates that this rejection doesn't jeopardize their relationship.

Pattern 2: Expression of motivation before but-justification

The phenomenon that positive feedback or thanks precede a rejection can also be observed in German. The expression of motivation shows interest in the invitation, but the justification serves as an implicit rejection. The pattern is presented using the following example. It is a communication between Jonas and Lisa. Jonas is boyfriend of Lisa.

J: Wollte jetzt gleich mal laufen gehen.

want now immediately one run go [particle]

Do you want to go running now?

L: Wollte heute eigentlich trainieren gehen, bin aber richtig unmotiviert und draußen ist es mega kalt ☹️

want today really training go [particle] am but right unmotivated and outside is it so cold [particle] ☹️

I really want to go training today. But it is cold out. ☹️

Jonas: Pulli

jumper [particle]

Wear a jumper.

Lisa: Geh du ruhig laufen, ich esse dann

Go you quiet run [particle] I eat then

Please go ahead and run. I will eat something then.

In this example, Lisa's rejection takes place in two rounds. Firstly, she gives affirmative feedback for the request addressed to her that she actually wanted to training. However, the reason linked by an adverb shows that Lisa does not want to accept Jonas' invitation. In her explanation Lisa emphasizes her "real" reluctance because she is unmotivated and it is too cold. The final emoji depicts a woman with hand on eyes, which usually represents usually represents embarrassment or shame. For her reason for rejection Jonas offers a possible solution: a jumper. Lisa could wear a jumper and go running with him. This is followed by a hand-clapping emoji, which here acts as a "request" or "encouragement". In Lisa's second reaction, it is also that "jumper" is another invitation from Jonas, which is already understood by Lisa. With regard to the second invitation, Lisa refuses with no reason but only an imperative sentence "Go ahead and run". The omission of salutation and greeting in this example and greeting in this example also does not indicate rudeness, but stands for a closer social relationship.

Pattern 3: Expression of regret in the rejection sentence

In contrast to the Chinese rejection dialogues mentioned above, a common pattern in German rejection communication is that the feeling of regret is verbalised by the rejector at the beginning of the rejection by stating regrets such as "it's a pity (shade)" or "unfortunately (tut mir leide)". In addition, it is by a subsequent justification with a suggestion. The dialog is about an invitation to dinner. Martina and Ida are fellow students at the same university, but in different majors. It can also be seen that the proposal offered by Martin is also rejected.

I: Hey Martin, morgen zusammen in die Mensa?

hi Martin [particle] tomorrow together in the canteen [particle]

Hi Martin, can we tomorrow go to canteen together?

M: Oh man tut mir leid aber ich morgen wieder nicht in der Uni... Bin noch am schreiben aber am Freitag bin ich da.. Du aber wahrscheinlich nicht oder?

oh man [particle] unfortunately but I tomorrow again not in the university...am still on write but on Friday am I there. you but maybe not or [particle]

Oh, unfortunately but tomorrow I am not at school... I am still writing but I will at school on Friday. whether you are there or not?

I: Nee, leider nicht Morgen gibts Kartoffelwaffeln, Mensch!

no, sorry not [particle] tomorrow have potato-ice-cream [particle] human [particle]

No, I am not there on Friday. But tomorrow has potato ice-cream. Man!

After a greeting and salutation, Ida invites Martin to lunch on the second day. Martin talks about this at the beginning of with Oh and tut mir leid. Ida realizes that he will probably decline the invitation. This expression of regret also functions as a dispreferred marker by stating his reasons in the same message, that he is not at university at that time and has to finish a paper.

At the end of the explanation is a face with a drop of sweat, which is coupled with negative emotions of embarrassment. In the form of a “good news exit”, he simultaneously refers to the possibility of another appointment, that he is free on Friday, whereby the following sentence of assumption gives Ida options for either accepting or rejecting the proposal. The new invitation used as a “good news exit” is explicitly rejected by Ida in comparison to the preceding rejection with the negation word “no”. To weaken the force of a rejection, an expression of regret is unfortunately added. At the end of the move, Ida makes a joke to express his regret for the failed agreement. In this three-part dialogue, an implicit rejection is realized through an expression of regret, a justification and a suggestion, thus saving Ida's face as much as possible.

Pattern 4: Expression of thanks with reason for rejection and proposal

In the following sample, before the reason for refusal, the refusing party first thank for the invitation. Thanks are placed here as a positive reaction before the bad news, which serves to mitigate the damage of the following rejection and helps to maintain the relationship. Such a pattern will be analyzed using the next dialogue, which takes place takes place between Jan and Bärbel.

J: Guten Morgen, wie sieht es denn bei euch heute Abend aus? Man könnte den Grill auch zweimal anmachen. Wir sind zu Hause.

good morning [particle] how see it at all at you today evening out [particle] man can the grill also two times make [particle] we are at home

Good morning, how is your plan for today's evening? We can barbeque for the second time. We are at home.

B: Lieber Jan Danke für den Angebot. Leider sind wir heute Abend schon verplant Es ist immer so, wenn dann kommt alles geballt! Vielleicht klappt es morgen ja auch noch!

dear Jan [particle] thanks for the invitation [particle] unfortunately are we today already plan it is always so [particle] when then come everything annoy [particle] maybe clap it tomorrow yes also still

Dear Jan. Thanks for your invitation. It is unfortunate that we have already had a plan There is always something annoying when we want to do something. Maybe we can do that tomorrow!

J: Ok, hoffen wir mal, dass wir uns morgen sehen und wenn nicht, holen wir das so schnell wie möglich nach.

ok [particle] hope we one-time [particle] that we us tomorrow see and if not [particle] pick wie this so fast so possible later [particle]

Ok, I hope that we can see each other tomorrow. If not, choose another time as soon as possible.

B: Okay so machen wir es!!

ok so make we it [particle]

Ok it's a deal!!

As in the previous dialogue, Bärbel first thanks Jan for his invitation. This is followed by an expression of regret and his explanation, that he doesn't have time tonight. The final emoji represents negative feelings such as sadness and apology. By comparing the Chinese and German data, it can be found that there are no such cases in WeChat communication. In WeChat communication, the rejecters hardly express their gratitude for the invitation or offer from their dialogue partners. Instead, the rejecters always try to positively evaluate or praise their counterpart. Despite the expression of gratitude, it rarely appears alone in WhatsApp communication, followed by an expression of motivation or regret.

Pattern 5. Explicit rejection

Explicit rejection also occurs in WhatsApp communication. But in contrast to WeChat communication, the expression of regret “unfortunately” is integrated. As in the following dialogue,

Janine tries to make an appointment with Jette, but is explicitly refused.

Janine: Hast du morgen oder Dienstag zufällig spontan Zeit?

have you tomorrow or Tuesday random spontaneous time [particle]

Do you have free time tomorrow or on Tuesday?

Jette: Nein leider nicht.. morgen fängt wieder die Uni an.

No [particle] unfortunately not.. tomorrow begin the university [particle]

No, unfortunately not. The class of university begins tomorrow.

For the Janine's enquiry, explicit negation words no and not appear, in which an expression of regret "unfortunately" embedded in an expression of regret to mitigate the harm to other persons. Her justification comes belatedly after the explicit rejection.

5 Comparison between Chinese and German refusal

By observing and analyzing the dialogues, it becomes apparent that the rejection behavior is comparable in both new media forms. In this part similarities and differences between Chinese and German data are analyzed data are summarized based on the analysis of components and sequential patterns.

5.1 Similarities

A general common feature is that every rejection message contains the same component: Justification. As a face-threatening act, a rude rejection is usually avoided by those involved in the dialogue. Practically all rejectors try to indicate their interlocutors by formulating the reasons that they have to refuse at this point. A single reason is occasionally interpreted as a rejection (such as pattern 1 in Chinese and pattern 1 in German data). In other cases, however, justification does not come alone, but is accompanied by either a suggestion or a solution for the failed attempt. Suggestion is also a common component in both data. As a "good news exit", a suggestion or a solution helps the rejecter to leave the dialogue politely or without embarrassment. Furthermore, the suggestion shows that rejection is only directed against this request or invitation, whereby the relationship between the two should not be affected.

In contrast to oral communication, dispreference of rejection in written communication can hardly be marked by time breaks or delay signals. Here, discourse markers can function as markers of dispreference. Such rejection is made up of two components: statement of motivation or request and justification (like pattern 4 in Chinese and pattern 2 in German data).

Another similarity is illustrated by the multimedia implementation of the new media. Emojis are a common tool in the data analysed. Although the emojis used are not the same due to the different forms, they have the same functions. They are used to express the rejector's feelings such as sadness, regret or embarrassment, or to emphasize the feelings already expressed verbally. They are also most often positioned at the end of the message.

In terms of sequence patterns, similar or even identical patterns are found in Chinese and German rejection dialogues are specifically "single reason" (like pattern 1 in Chinese and pattern 1 in German data) or "discourse marker before justification" (such as patterns 3 in Chinese data and patterns 2, 3 and 4 in German data). Such formulation variants for a rejection in both data can be attributed to avoid explicit rejection and thus to minimize the threat to the social relationship. Both the components used and the sequence patterns sequence patterns are jointly aimed at mitigating the face-threatening rejection.

5.2 Differences

As opposed to German rejection dialogues, the dialogue components in Chinese data almost never show explicit expressions of regret such as "leider" (太可惜), "tut mir leid" (这令人遗憾) or "shade" (遗憾). In Chinese culture, it usually appears officially in literary works or emails. New media such as WeChat or WhatsApp are forms of realization that can be classified as colloquial expressions. Similar to expressions of regret, thank you for an invitation can hardly be identified in Chinese data. It is also noticeable that in some Chinese cases the speech act of refusal is realised through a request. In such cases, the rejecters do not respond directly to the previous action such as the invitation or the offer, but instead they ask a question, which almost never occurs in German data.

To summarize, the differences between Chinese and German data lie mainly in components that can be explained more in terms of culture and language use.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, rejection dialogues in WeChat and WhatsApp communication are empirically described and analysed with the help of authentic data. As part of the conversation analysis, the communicative genre, preference organisation in Chinese and German rejection dialogues are examined.

The analysis shows that rejection in WeChat and WhatsApp communication is usually formulated implicitly. The rejecting parties try to avoid explicit negative reactions, instead they express their rejection with reasons. Sometimes the justification not occur alone, but is accompanied by other components such as suggestion, apology, regret, motivation or similar. With regard to the structure, it is also noted that the rejection dialogues in everyday life are also highly structured. The structural patterns such as "reason", "reason with suggestion" and "discourse marker before reason" and the other forms can be found in data.

And the similarities between the two forms of communication in terms of linguistic means and formulation structures are mentioned in section 5, whereas the differences are mainly in the use of language. The German refusal also differs from the Chinese data in the explicit use of expressions of regret or apology phrases. All above provides enlightenment for further research. The differences can certainly be explained by the cultural background which offers us further starting points for research work. In this respect, this work can be expanded and deepened from a variety of perspectives.

About the author

Qi, Qinyi (1999-), female, from Nanjing Jiangsu, postgraduate in Southeast University, research direction: applied linguistics and second language acquisition.