

A Discourse Analysis of Zuckerberg's Pragmatic Identities' Construction Based on Adaptation Theory

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ABSTRACT

People construct different pragmatic identities in everyday talk and the process of building identities usually adapts to the context. To be specific, entrepreneurs represents himself and the company when uttering to the outside society and the construction of entrepreneur's identity is related to the company's image. They are inclined to use intertextuality resources to build connection with the potential audience. Therefore, in this research, the author analyzed an entrepreneur's speech discourse to describe what pragmatic identities are constructed and how does the construction adapt to the speaking context. To answer these questions, the author conducted a discourse analysis to illustrate relationship between the language use and physical, social and mental world based on Adaptation Theory. The results presented that the entrepreneur builds various master identities, interpersonal identities, and personal identities with intertextuality language resources to adjust to the speaking context. This study suggested that entrepreneurs are supposed to improve the skill of manipulating their discourse strategies to build close connection with potential listener.

Key words: pragmatic identities; Adaptation Theory; intertextuality; graduation speech

INTRODUCTION

Identity plays a vital part in our communication. As a research area, it gains much attention from philosophy, sociology, social psychology, culture studies and literary criticism (Yuan, 2008). In the past, from the perspective of the traditional essentialism, researchers tend to refer people's identity as fixed and presupposed. Social constructionism holds a rather more popular statement that identity is dynamic and could be constructed, negotiated, managed and communicated (Chen, 2013). Just as other disciplines, pragmatics linguists conducted researches on identity based on social constructionism. Those studies focus on the representation, practice and even make-up of social identities in the context of language communication, which presupposes that participants in the conversation may construct one or more different identities from their original identities considering their own needs. To distinguish with the original identity and highlight the process or effect of construction, identities created or just mentioned by both speakers and listeners in some certain context are referred to "pragmatic identity" or "identity in use" (Chen, 2013). In the studies of identities construction, several types of discourses are highly preferred respectively as daily conversation, organizational discourse and corporate discourse (Yuan, 2013).

Adaptation Theory (Verschueren, 1999) considers the process of language use as making choices (He, 2007). Three key notions are included in the process of making choices: variability, negotiation and adaptability. Verschueren (1999: 68) noted that the dynamics of adaptability is no doubt the central task of most specific pragmatic investigation. Dynamics concerns the nature and development over time of the relationship between context and structure. Therefore, language and its pragmatic function are not clearly correlated and the process of realizing pragmatic functions becomes negotiable because of the varied context.

In this article, the author will apply the Adaptation Theory to illustrate how the pragmatic identities are constructed in Zuckerberg's public speech at Harvard's graduation ceremony.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatic identities

Until the beginning of the 21st century, researches on pragmatic identities have rarely been seen at home. Articles about identity construction mainly focus on the final construction of certain identities rather than the variability and negotiability of identities. Therefore, the salience and characteristics of pragmatic perspective couldn't be exhaustively shown. In 2011, the definition of pragmatic identity was proposed and had a huge influence on lots of researchers (Yuan, 2011). Since then, many scholars make attempts to explore the construction of speakers' pragmatic identities in various kinds of discourses such as daily conversation, organizational discourse, media discourse, business discourse and academic discourse. Firstly, academic discourses are relatively popular, researchers analyzed the identity construction from pragmatic perspective and collected data from academic conversation or interactions with tutors, lectures in universities, abstracts of Master thesis, acknowledgement of Doctor thesis, and MC (master of ceremony) scripts of academic meetings and forums etc. (Sun, 2015, Xu & Chen, 2015, Chen, 2016, Li, 2016, Ren, 2016, Li & Jing, 2019). Secondly, analysis of daily conversations also gained a lot of attention. For instance, Yuan and Chen (2013) explores the medical consulting discourse to see how the consultants construct their pragmatic identities. Besides, some researchers analyzed business discourse such as business consulting conversation (Yuan, 2013) and commercials (Wang, 2015) to describe speakers' identities. The literature above proves that speakers interacting with the other party often construct various pragmatic identities based on different context. However, entrepreneurial discourse, whose audience or listeners are different stakeholders, is always used as a tool to build close relationship with potential customers, seem to be neglected in the research area.

Years passed after the definition of pragmatic identity was given, researchers couldn't consolidate their ideas and researches didn't showcase the pragmatic characteristics. Thus, there is no significant difference with other disciplines that also pay attention to identity construction, which is not good for the growth of pragmatics. To better highlight the features of pragmatics, Chen (2014) concluded five research approaches. Among those approaches, the key role of context was mentioned. Adaptation theory, as a basic framework in Pragmatics, argues that the process of language use is making choices and underline the influence of context. Therefore, adaptation theory could be persuasively applied to the construction of pragmatic identities.

Entrepreneurial discourse

There are varied categories in entrepreneurial discourse such as letters to shareholders in CSR reports or annual reports and public speeches. Compared to written discourse, spoken discourse like speeches are more interactive with the audience. For example, there is trend that universities prefer to invite entrepreneurs to give graduation speeches. Actually, graduation speeches have been a research hit in the past decade. Previous studies on graduation speeches at home could be broadly divided into several parts given its research perspective, such as cognitive linguistics, systemic functional linguistics (SFL), pragmatic linguistics and stylistics. From cognitive point of view, metaphor in those speeches are analyzed to see how does it work (Yang, 2018). For SFL, there are studies that tend to analyze the interpersonal functions of graduation speeches (Li & Yang, 2011, Zhang, 2018, Liang, 2019), investigate grammatical metaphors which plays a key role in structure the text (He, 2018) and evaluate language resources from graduation speeches with appraisal system (Li, 2017; Zhang, 2017). For pragmatics, researchers tried to explain how the speaker uses metadiscourse to boost the understanding of audience and realize appealing function (Chen, 2014). Also, some researchers study the writing style, appeals and structure from the aspect of stylistics (Hou, 2012; Mei, 2013).

Entrepreneurial identity

The word "entrepreneur" origins from French and it refers to the operator or organizer of a certain venture. One French economist Shire Kantilon defined entrepreneur as someone who could exploit the potential business opportunity and make achievements in the market. Identity is an expression of self and is how individuals define and locate themselves within individual, relational and organizational contexts (Newbery et al., 2018). Thus, an entrepreneurial identity may be regarded as when individuals "see and talk of themselves as entrepreneurs" (Down & Reveley, 2004: 234).

The researches of entrepreneurial identities could be conducted from many perspectives such as macro-economics, organization theory, management, social constructionism and linguistics and sometimes the researches intend to combine two of the theoretical perspectives. For the entrepreneurial identity studies abroad, there is a tendency from the predominately quantitative and psychologically based studies that have tried to pin down "what leadership is" to a discursive approach to leadership that focuses on "how leadership is achieved as practice" (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012). For instance, many scholars took an interest on the influence of narrative or stories on the construction of entrepreneurial identities (Watson, 2009; Anderson, 2011; Clifton & Jonathan, 2014). Furthermore, Clarke and Holt (2017) made an attempt to analyze the how entrepreneurs use visual metaphor to make sense of their entrepreneurial identity by the drawing methodology. However, studies at home mainly focus on the effect of entrepreneurial identity on economic growth and corporate performance (Gao, 2011; Dai, 2020) and there is very limited literature at home represents the contribution of linguistic perspective to the study of entrepreneurial identities.

To conclude, the amount of literature that scrutinize the construction of pragmatic identities in entrepreneurial discourse is limited. Therefore, in this article, the author will make an analysis of Zuckerberg's graduation speech in Harvard University to examine constructed identities based on adaptation theory. To be specific, three questions will be answered after the analysis: (1) What pragmatic identities are constructed in Zuckerberg's graduation speech?

- (2) How does the language device of intertextuality be used?
- (3) How does the property of adaptation work to construct Zuckerberg's pragmatic identity?

METHODOLOGY

In this section, the author will make a specific description on how the research was conducted in terms of data collection and data analysis.

Data collection procedure

This article intends to scrutinize how does Zuckerberg construct his pragmatic identities in public speeches. Although he has given lots of speeches in different scenarios, here only one of them is chosen as the research subject. The researcher finds that the graduation speech of Zuckerberg in Harvard University is worth of more attention. As known to all, a group of top talents in different disciplines floods into Harvard every year, which means that the operation of Harvard is connected with the development of American society. Thus, the graduation speeches of this school usually get much attention from society. In 2017, Zuckerberg was invited to Harvard and made a public research and the whole speech could be divided into two parts. In the first half, he guided everyone to recall those wonderful memories that they made in Harvard. And then Mark persuaded graduates of 2017 the importance of "purpose" from three aspects.

To better conduct the research, the author downloaded the video of Zuckerberg's speech in Harvard University and then transcribed it into text. The whole text contains 3927 words and the author locates 28 vertical intertextuality resources.

Data analysis procedure

This research adopts a discourse analysis to explore how does Zuckerberg construct his pragmatic identities in his public speech. From the micro perspective, among all the language resources that are used in the discourse, the researcher will focus on the resources of intertextuality because it is very common and effective for the speaker to refer other discourse to evoke the audience existing knowledge so that the interaction between them could be well-established. From the meso perspective, the author is going to apply the Adaptation Theory to illustrate how does these intertextuality resources adapt to the context of physical, social and mental world. From the macro perspective, this article tries to scrutinize what pragmatic identities does Zuckerberg construct by using those language resources based on the Tracy's (2013) categorization of identities.

Adaptation Theory

The reason for choosing Adaptation Theory as the link between the language resources and the context is that it considers pragmatic problem from a different aspect compared to the traditional views. Verschueren argues that pragmatics is "a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior". Verschueren (1999:55-57) believes that the use of language is a process of continuous making of choices, consciously or unconsciously. Those choices could be located at many levels of linguistic form: phonetic/phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical and semantic. Participants make those choices among various language resources to satisfy their own communication needs in specific context. Speakers are allowed to make all those choices or selections is language's variability, negotiability and adaptability. Firstly, variability is the

property of language which defines the range of possibilities from which choices can be made (Verschueren, 1999: 59). Hymes also stressed that "in the study of language as a mode of action, variation is a clue and key" (1974: 75). Then it comes to the negotiability, according to Verschueren (1999: 59), negotiability is the property of language responsible for the fact that choices are not made mechanically or according to strict rules and fixed form-function relationships, but rather on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies, which means that the negotiation of those language choices is based eminently on flexibility of conventions and propositions. Adaptability, in Verschueren (1999:61)'s words, is the property of language which enables human beings to make negotiable linguistic choices from a variable range of possibilities in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs.

In communications, speakers make choices of their language to construct pragmatic identities and those choices are supposed to adapt to the communicative context. If the Adaptability Theory is put forward to explain speaker's intention and purpose in communicative context, then questions like "what exactly does those choices adapt to?" should be answered. Verschueren (1999: 75) made a sketch of the ingredients of communicative context showing the factors involved. After viewing the sketch of general picture of what are involved, ingredients of the communicative context could be summarized as language users, physical world, mental world and social world. To be specific, language users refer to the utter(U) and interpreter(I). Physical world consists of elements such as temporal reference, spatial reference and utter and interpreter in the physical world, as well as the gesture, physical appearance and biological property. The social world is composed of power, distance, rights and obligation, social setting and culture, also, some other parts such as religion, level of education, gender or social class. For mental world, aspects like personality, emotions, beliefs, desire and wishes are covered. Apart from those, there is another contextual objects of adaptability and it deserves some attention. Linguistic context make allusions of choice making of communicated forms and it pointed out the effect of contextual cohesion, intertextuality and sequencing.

The analytical framework

Discourse analysis attached importance to social, cultural and historic context towards discourse structure and strategies, which points out communication couldn't work well without the consideration of context. The author think that the construction of pragmatic identities also couldn't live without context. Thus, the author conducts a discourse analysis by using Adaptation Theory as the meso level analysis and the analytical framework of this study is shown as follows:

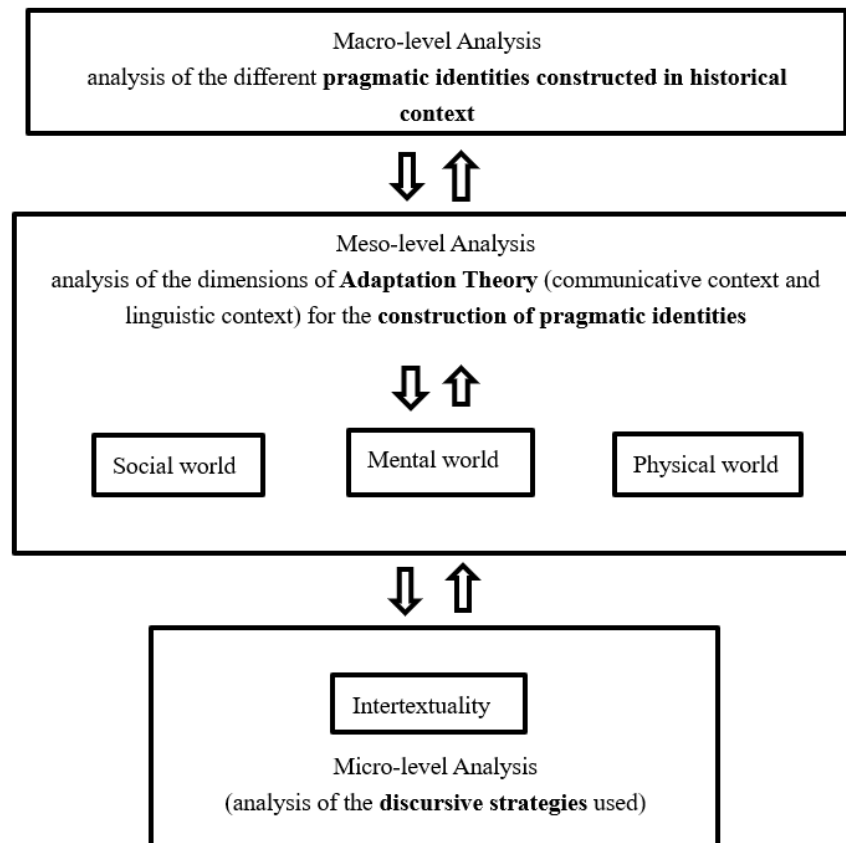


Figure 1: The analytical framework

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the analysis and the first two research questions will be answered. It begins with scanning the distribution of intertextual resources in the data, and then proceeds to summarize what pragmatic identities are constructed. Due to space constraints, the presentation of intertextual resources will focus on the most crucial ones.

General distribution of intertextual resources

The first research question is about the distribution of intertextual resources. After scanning the whole speech, 28 intertextual resources are located and here some significant examples are presented. The speaker adopts various intertextual language resources during the graduation speech, such as quotation, presupposition, reference etc. Some examples of intertextuality are given as follows:

- I'm honored to be with you today because, let's face it, *you accomplished something I never could*. If I get through this speech, it'll be the first time I actually finish something at Harvard.
- That movie* made it seem like *Facemash* was so important to creating Facebook. It wasn't.
- Oh, you know what else movies get wrong about innovation? *No one writes math formulas on glass*. Okay? All right. Okay?
- How about stopping *climate change* before we destroy the planet and getting millions of people involved *manufacturing and installing solar panels*? How about *curing all diseases* and getting people involved by *asking volunteers to track their health data and share*

their genomes? You know, today our society spend more than 50 times as much treating people who are sick than we spend finding cures so people don't get sick in the first place. It makes no sense. We can fix this. How about modernizing democracy so everyone can vote online, and how about personalizing education so everyone can learn?

- e) *J.K. Rowling* got rejected 12 times before publishing *Harry Potter*. Even *Beyonce* had to make hundreds of songs to get *Halo*.
- f) I am reminded of a prayer, *MiShebeirach*, that I say whenever I face a challenge, that I sing to my daughter thinking about her future when I tuck her at night.

The above examples are chosen because they represent intertextuality in interdiscursive dimension. Interdiscursivity refers to those text resources exists interdiscursively such as different types of genres, discourses, and styles. In speech, the application of interdiscursivity could help to build connection with the common knowledge that the speaker and audience share.

Types of pragmatic identities constructed in Zuckerberg's speech

The second research question is about the pragmatic identities of Zuckerberg. In Tracy's (2013) categorization, people's identities are composed of master identity, interactional identity and personal identity.

Master identities refer to aspects of personhood that are presumed to be relatively stable and unchanging: gender, ethnicity, age, national and regional origins. Interactional identities refers to specific roles that people take on in a communicative context with regard to specific other people (Tracy 2002). Personal identities include features of self that are treated as relatively stable, even though they may vary from situation to situation. Also, People's relationship with others are classified into personal personal identities too, such as warm or hostile; equal, superior, or subordinate; close or distant. According to this categorization approach, the pragmatic identities Zuckerberg constructed are shown in table 1:

Table 1. Pragmatic identities constructed during the speech

	Types of pragmatic identities	The specific identities
1	Master identity	Male, white, American, 33-year-old (in 2017), born in Judaism
2	Interactional identity	Harvard student, entrepreneur, philanthropist, millennials
3	Personal identity	Personality: humorous, loving, friendly, easy-going Relational identities: equal, close

This table indicates that the construction of people's identity could be both dynamic and static. Master identities are more fixed but interactional and personal identities are always varied based on specific situation or context.

DISCUSSION

From the last chapter, the author makes an investigation about the pragmatic identities that Mark constructed in this public graduation speech and stresses the application of one language devices——intertextuality. In the following section, the second and third research questions will be answered. How does the language device of intertextuality be used? How does the property of adaptation work to construct Zuckerberg's pragmatic identity?

Intertextuality contribution

In this part, the author will analyze those 6 instances listed in last section and make an illustration about how the speaker use intertextuality to build connection with the audience.

In (a), the audience burst into laughter after Mark says “*you accomplished something I never could*”, which might be a confusing scenario for those who know nothing about Mark’s legend as a Harvard student. Apparently, on one hand, graduates of 2017 have a knowledge that Mark dropped out from this university before getting the bachelor’s degree in order to pull himself into his career in Facebook. Thus, the present all achieve something that Mark could not: graduating from Harvard. On the other hand, this sentence also implies Mark’s remarkable performance on social network but Mark himself is too humble to describe his life to be perfect or defectless just because he establishes Facebook.

Sentence (b) and (c) both mention a movie which seems to be acknowledged by everyone for Mark even doesn’t need to speak its name. As a matter of fact, the name of this movie is called “*Social Network*” and it tells the story of Zuckerberg setting up Facebook just like an autobiography. Although this creation does win several prizes as a movie, it obtains many criticisms from the society for its adaptation to the original story. In this public speech, Mark itself even bashes it for being too ideal like portraying him to be someone who writes formulas on glass.

Sentence (d) takes this public speech to a climax even his wife Priscilla gives a big hand to him with tears in her eyes. By using a parallel of interrogative sentences, Mark enumerates a list of challenges that the whole world are confronted with such as global climate change, incurable diseases and unequal education and calls for some actions or contributions from the graduates of the greatest university in the world. The reason why the audience have such a big reaction is that the mentioned problems are exactly those obstacles that prevent our society from being a better world.

In sentence (e), Mark points out two leading figures who are both very well-know and successful in the area of literature and music, which is a exemplification to persuade all the students to face their own failures with courage.

Sentence (f) might be a difficult point of view to be understood by people believing in other religions. *MiShebeirach* is a prayer for healing said during a Torah service in Judaism. A “*mi sheberach*” is a public prayer or blessing for an individual or group, most often recited in synagogue when the Torah is being read. Because it is not an officially mandated prayer, there is a lot of room for creativity regarding whom to bless or how they can be blessed. Thus, there are *MiShebeirach* for just about any person in need of some divine goodness—most notably those requiring healing. In this speech, Mark uses this prayer as a blessing to everyone present and wish them find the courage to make their lives a blessing.

Pragmatic identity construction

In the last section, the author lists the constructed pragmatic identities of Zuckerberg in the speech: mater identity, interactional identity, and personal identity. In this part, an explanation will be given to illustrate how does Adaptation Theory work in the process of construction.

Identity construction

Though there are many pragmatic identities being constructed in the speech, the author only takes the interactional identities into consideration because this kind of identities change dynamically adapting to the communication context.

(1) Harvard student

As a dropout from Harvard University, Mark's identity as a student is constructed in the first half of the speech. To build the connection with the audience, Mark brings back every Harvard students the memories they made there by asking two questions: "How many of you remember exactly what you were doing when you got that email telling you that you got into Harvard? How many of you remember your first lecture at Harvard?" Two simple investigations make the present students feel grateful and proud to Harvard University. Most importantly, the title of "graduates of the greatest university in the world" wins a huge applause from the audience, which reminds those graduates of their intelligence and ability, and lays a good foundation for Mark's latter speech of their responsibility to the whole world.

(2) Millennial

Millennial, roughly refers to young people who grow up in this new age. This group of people is given great responsibility considering all the challenges they are confronted with in this fast-moving society. In Mark's speech, he highly stresses the common role of millennial that he and the audience share and some requirements are made to do some variations to the world and make it a better place. To start with, they are accountable to create new purpose for the society. For instance, more and more jobs and positions are taken by the technology of Artificial Intelligence and the generation where people could be safe with one stable work in their whole life has gone. Thus, the human being faces a risk of losing loads of values and millennials are supposed to help create new purpose not for themselves but for everyone. What's more, it's of great importance for millennials to redefine the definition of equality. "Previous generations fought for the vote and civil rights. They had the New Deal and Great Society. " A new social contract should be signed to adapt to the new condition of the society. Last but not least, one of the common sense reached by millennials is that they are accustomed to call themselves "citizen of the world". Millennial's horizon should not be limited to some specific countries or religions given that the globe share a great part of benefits and also face plenty of same problems, such as global climate, incurable diseases and the inequality of education. As a millennial, with the enormous resources from this information society, responsibility should be taken over to make some changes.

(3) Entrepreneur

As it is known to everyone that Zuckerberg is recognized for his creation of social network platform——Facebook. Thus, faced with such a group of talents who are very likely to change the U.S. and even the world. Zuckerberg constructed his pragmatic identity as a entrepreneur. During his speech, three points are given to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit of those graduates. First and foremost, by telling his own stories, he reminds people of the uncertainty of success. At the very beginning, Mark just intended to create a community where college students or friends could be gathered around and Facebook represents something bigger or some higher purpose. He says in the speech, "If I had to know everything about connecting people before I got started, I never would have built Facebook." Secondly, entrepreneurs have the freedom to lose. Before establishing Facebook, Mark went through much failure such as the

attempt of building chat systems, games, study tools and music players. Finally, he criticizes the social system of not providing protective backups for those who may fail in the process of starting up business and afterwards he calls for support for entrepreneurs from the society.

(4) Philanthropist

Except being a successful entrepreneur, Mark takes another important role, which is also constructed during this public speech——philanthropist. His protection and assistance towards the society mainly focus on two groups: entrepreneurs and teenagers who are not permitted to receive equal education. For the former, the author mentioned before that young and inexperienced entrepreneurs are supposed to obtain financial support from the society and of course those service is by no means to be free. Just as Mark says, “People like me should pay for it.” For the latter, this action is closely connected to Mark and his wife’s program: Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. Being greatly influenced by his wife, Priscilla, Mark makes two hours of his time every week to teach teenagers about product development and marketing. By the time of this speech, those kids have been the first generation in their families to be allowed to enter universities.

Adaptation

(1) Adaptation to the physical world

Given that the target audience of this speech are millennials, Mark accentuates the responsibility that this specific era has taken to them. Millennials refer to the group people who become 18 at the beginning of 21 century and their growth basically complies with the advancement of Internet or computer science. Born from 1984 to 1995, those people are regarded as one generation who are capable of operating several different work at the same time, whose mind are flexible enough to make full use of the technology to extend their strength. Hence, Mark reminds those graduates of their virtues and obligations as a millennial and encourages them to explore their own potentials, which adapts to the physical world of this era.

(2) Adaptation to the social world

The graduation speech is the last lesson that students take during their stay in university. In this kind of significant moment, Mark is invited to give this lecture and helps those graduates be ready for getting into society and the competitive world outside. During this speech, except from recalling memories which are made in Harvard, Mark gives an account of the essentials of getting everyone a sense of purpose by enumerating the approaches: by taking on big meaningful projects together, by redefining equality so everyone has the freedom to pursue purpose, and by building community all across the world. Mark’s speaking subject closely adapts to the social world.

(3) Adaptation to the mental world

After listening to Mark’s speech, the audience could feel that this young and successful entrepreneur is not arrogant or serious at all but humorous, loving and friendly, which leaves a deep impression on the audience. Also, by observing his interactions with Priscilla on Internet, it is easy to conclude that he is a caring husband and loving father. Hence, this graduation speech transfers a light of humanity and warmth to the audience, which adapts to Mark’s mental world.

Summary

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that the construction of pragmatic identities adapts to physical, social and mental world, which also indicates that the process of identity construction is dynamic and context-dependent.

CONCLUSION

This research investigates the construction of pragmatic identities by studying the language device of intertextuality from the perspective of Adaptation Theory in Zuckerberg's speech by discourse analysis. After the exploration, the author makes the following observations.

First and foremost, during the speech, Zuckerberg constructed several varied pragmatic identities such as master identity, interactional identity, and personal identity. Among all of those, interactional identity such as Harvard student, entrepreneur, philanthropist, millennials and personal identity such as humorous, loving, friendly, easy-going, equal, close are constructed adapting to the outside world. Secondly, to build a connection with the audience, Mark wields the language device of intertextuality, which indicates that his speech discourse is combined with many other discourses from different genres and styles. In the end, according to Adaptation Theory, people's speech acts are tightly related to the communicative environment and Mark's speech content is indeed adapting to the existing physical, social, and mental world.

The significance of this study lies in that it analyzed entrepreneur's identity from a dynamic perspective based on adaptation theory in a written discourse. It also reminds speaker of the value of intertextuality when building connection with the potential listener. However, the author must admit the limitation of this research. Only one entrepreneur's speech was explored to illustrate his construction of pragmatic identities, which may lead to a more personal result. In the future, a quantitative method such as corpus analysis could be applied to assist this research by enlarging the database and makes it more objective.

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