

Exploring the Relational Identity Constructions of Wechat Group Message Senders: An Address Form Perspective

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Abstract. Address form refers to an essential category in communication, which copes with how people address others. Wechat group message fulfills essential function in online communication, while chatting, the message sender plays a pivotal role through specific address forms. Previous research has delved into how online address forms serve its purpose in building communicator's relational identity (e.g., online/off-line education and online business). However, online chatting on the most frequently used social media platform has been underexplored. To fill the niche, this empirical study would collect data from Wechat group chatting in reality, so as to investigate what kind of online address form would the message sender tend to employ, and delve into how the use of address forms help with the relational identity construction of Wechat message senders. The results showcased: (1) Wechat message senders employ nine basic address forms when sending group messages, which play a significant role in building and maintaining different relations. (2) Three relational identities from the closest to the furthest of Wechat message senders are constructed, i.e., the close relational identity, the additional relational identity, and the social relational identity. The exploration would be of great importance to pragmatics, especially in the aspect of construction of pragmatic identity; it exerts inspirational influences in further probing into the use of online address forms.

Keywords: Address Form; Relational Identity Construction; Wechat Group Message; Online.

1. Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background: Wechat Group Message, Address Form and Relational Identity

WeChat group chatting is widespread in China's society today, especially among the young and middle-aged generations. As of 2023, statistics indicate that there are 1.15 billion WeChat users in China, and each user often belongs to numerous WeChat groups, serving various functions from work to social interaction. These groups generate thousands of messages daily, fulfilling both work and personal needs through interaction.

In WeChat group chatting, the use of address forms is crucial. Senders are expected to specify the message's recipient and provide message context. Specific address forms can also help establish relationships between the sender and receiver, contributing to the formation of relational identities.

On the one hand, address forms refer to certain wordings by which the speakers can adopt to designate the person in communication (Fasold, 1990; Chen, 2002), and they can be an essential factor influencing politeness (Proctor, 1978) and interpersonal relationship (Li, 2000). Therefore, the appropriate use of address forms fulfills a profound function in Wechat group communication.

On the other hand, identity has always been a hot topic, which draws attention of scholars from sociology, social psychology, linguistics, etc. There has been a discursive turn (Benwell, B., & E. Stokoe, 2006), which motivates scholars to explore the constructivism, reckoning that identity is constructed through discourse; moreover, speakers could choose particular discourses for desired identities according to the communicative needs (Chen, 2014). Therefore, via proper use of discourse, people are likely to construct relational identities as they want and better enhance communication.

The use of address forms is closely linked to relational identity, impacting both real-world and online interactions. In the realm of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), where perceiving the same environment and emotions as in the real world is challenging, conscious or subconscious adaptations are necessary. In this context, the construction of relational identity on WeChat may differ, requiring individuals to adapt their language choices (address forms) for effective communication. Address forms play a significant role in building online relational identity, but further exploration in this area is needed.

1.2. Research Goals and Significance

This study focuses on address forms and online relational identity within WeChat group messages. It aims to understand the address forms used by senders and how they contribute to relational identity construction. The research also addresses the current interest in online identity inquiry.

The study provides theoretical insights into online address form usage and relational identity construction. It offers a contextual analysis of address forms in WeChat group messages, contributing to the understanding of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).

On a practical level, the research explores language production in online communication, factors influencing address form choices, and offers guidance for individuals to use language effectively, establish appropriate relational identities, and maintain positive relationships.

2. Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Bases

2.1.1. Address Form

Much have been delved into the address system. Address forms refer to words or phrases by which the communicators can adopt to define a person in communication (Fasold, 1990; Chen, 2002).

In terms of the classification system, it can be various; for instance, by part of speech (Braun, 1988), by structure (Gu, 1992) and by relation (Tian, 1998)...among them Cui has proposed a relatively comprehensive categorization standard in 1996 and this research adopts this standard as one theoretical lens.

Furthermore, considerate work has gone into which factors may affect the use of address forms, and until now, age, status, power and solidarity have been confirmed (Brown, & Gilman, 1960; Eevin-Tripp, 1972; Fasold, 2000).

To sum up, the above probing could furnish this study with sufficient theoretical support.

2.1.2. Online Identity Construction

To begin with, the relation between language and identity has always been a focus in pragmatics (Grad, & Rojo, 2008), and much more scholars have agreed that identities could be constructed by discourse (Androustopoulos, & Georakopoulou, 2003; De Fina, D. Schiffrin, & M. Bamberg, 2006; Yuan, & Chen, 2013). Joseph (2019) reckons that the choice and use of certain discourse could reflect people's identities. Chen (2013a) points out that pragmatic identity embodies speaker's real identity, and further define the discourse identity as the identity of speaker, hearer and other ones that the speaker consciously or subconsciously chooses in a certain context.

Next, discourse relational identity exist both in the real world and the online virtual world, and recent years an increasing number of scholars have paid attention on the relational identity in virtual world (Benwell, & Stokoe, 2006; McKinlay, & McVittie, 2011). Different from identities in the real world, people's identities are not exactly the product of people's family situations or the social settings where they live. Instead, but the online identity is a kind of non-physical existence (Cherny, 1995; Davis, 1997), which depends more on discourse.

Therefore, by the exploration of address forms, this study could observe how will the Wechat group message sender choose his online relational identity taking account of different message receivers. Meanwhile, the relation between Wechat group message sender and receivers can be delineated.

2.2. Empirical Investigations

Apart from theoretical probing, the past decade has witnessed a burgeoning body of empirical studies investigating topics about address forms and identity construction.

Firstly, in the field of education, Zhang (2022) has investigated the types of pragmatic identities a college English teacher constructed in the online classroom and discovered four types of pragmatic identities (i.e., authoritative, knowledgeable, peer and amiable), which is helpful in creating the high-quality teacher-student interaction and a harmonious online classroom. In terms of address form, Shen (2018) has delved into teacher's use of address forms in middle school class, and how it affected the teacher-student relations, providing a light in building harmonious learning atmosphere.

Secondly, in other fields, He and Chen (2015) have explored the address forms in online shopping websites and demonstrated three relational identities (i.e., default, variant and compound) constructed by address forms. Yuan and Chen (2013) have dig into the pragmatic identity construction in medical advice with the perspective of Verschueren (2000)'s adaptation theory, providing new angle in the identity construction.

In conclusion, empirical studies upon address form and identity construction in different field and circumstances have become an important issue, and there is a call for deeper explorations on this topic in other fields, both off-line and online.

2.3. Research Gap

Considerate work has gone into address forms and identity construction, but there still remains a paucity to be further explored.

To begin with, regarding the research genres, previous studies mainly focus on address forms in education and marketing, but explorations of daily chatting address forms on social media remains limited and inconclusive, especially on Wechat group message sending.

Secondly, concerning the research circumstance, research on address forms and identity construction online are relatively under-explored.

Furthermore, with regard to methodology, previous study tend to use relatively monotonous channels to acquire data, while this study would be innovative in first-hand data collection and analysis via both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

To sum up, in order to fill the niche, this empirical study aims to collect data from Wechat group chatting in reality, so as to investigate what kind of online address forms would the message sender tend to employ, and delve into how the use of address forms help with the relational identity construction of Wechat message senders, under the theoretical lens of Tracy (2002).

2.4. Research Questions

Via the address form perspective, the study aims to explore what kind of online address form would the message sender tend to employ, and inquiry how the use of address forms helps with the relational identity construction of Wechat message senders. The research questions are as follows.

Q1: What kind of online address forms would Wechat message sender like to use when delivering a group message? What are the possible reasons that message sender chooses to use certain address forms in different circumstances?

Q2: Via the use of address form, what kind of relational identities of Wechat group message sender are constructed?

3. Chapter 3. Research Methodology

3.1. General Procedure

This empirical study combined quantitative and qualitative methods. It collected WeChat group message screenshots and conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 proficient participants. From these, 200 valid WeChat group messages with clear online address forms were coded and analyzed for sender identity construction. Four experts in pragmatics and address forms reviewed the data to ensure reliability.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 25 native Chinese Wechat users (composed of 16 females and 9 males ranging from 16 to 55 years old from all works of life) who took good command of Wechat group message sending. Before gathering and filtrating the group message screenshots, all the participants were given a brief train about how to recognize address forms. What's more, in order to protect privacy, participants were allowed to cover the relevant information with mosaics. Each participant was supposed to get the research reward.

3.3. Data Collection and Data Coding

Overall, research data would be collected through the screenshots and interview recording (online/offline) provided by participants. In the data coding, the group messages extracted from screenshots were firstly transcribed in Chinese and then translated into English, followed by the accurate statistics and classification. The interview data from representative message senders was transcribed by Nvivo.

4. Chapter 4. Results and Discussions

Whether one appellation belongs to address forms should be determined by whether it refers to the current communicator. The research has collected 100 address forms in total. According to the classification criteria of Cui (1996), this study have divided the address forms from Wechat group messages into 9 categories, i.e., deictic address form, kinship address form, intimate address form, relation address form, social relation address form, title address form, name address form, banter address form as well as the use of more than two address forms. The exemplifications of representative address forms appearing in the data and the corresponding analyses are as follows.

4.1. Statistics of Online Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

As vividly described, in the 200 Wechat group message containing obvious address forms, the use of kinship address form takes up the largest proportion (18.5%), which is followed by mixed use of address form (17%, which will not be elucidated in 4.2) and deictic address form (15.5%). In this sequence, relation address form, intimate address form and social address form also occupy relatively large proportions, accounting for 13.5%, 13% and 9.5%, respectively. The using frequency of title address form, banter address form and name address form could be the lowest, occupying 5%, 4.5% and 3.5%, respectively.

4.2. Classification and Motion Analyses of Address Forms Used in Wechat Group Messages

The following contents are expected to elaborate representative case of specific uses of address forms in Wechat group message. Note that address forms are all marked in bold in the following tables; the speech acts (Searle, 1969) belonging to one certain case conveyed by the message sender are classified and annotated in each English translation's brackets.

4.2.1. Deictic Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

Table 1. Deictic Address Form Cases

Chinese Case Exemplifications	Translations
(1)请于今晚18:00前发给我。	(1) Please send me before 18:00 p.m. today (commanding).
(2)俺的调研,可否麻烦各位填个问卷?	(2) Here's my research, and would you mind helping filling out this questionnaire (requesting)?
(3)我们的小组作业按照以上提纲去做怎么样?	(3) How about doing our group work according to the above syllabus (suggesting)?
(4)咱们的可还行?	(4) Is our work OK (asking)?
(5)大家这周末又要去参加或者想去看北京马拉松比赛的嘛?	(6) Is there anyone who'd like to join or watch the Beijing Marathon this weekend (asking)?

Deictic address forms used by the message sender in case (1) to (5), for instance, “Wo”, “Women”, and their homophonic variations “An”, “Zan”, “Zanmen” in Chinese (corresponding to “I”, “me”, “my”, “we”, “us”, “our”...in English) are expected to draw the attention of Wechat group members and make them engage in the present activities and; it should be noted that in case (1) the group message sender is kind of a group manager, so that the deictic address form “Wo” fulfills its function in strengthening the authority of group notice. Furthermore, “Gewei”, “Dajia” (corresponding to “everyone” or “everybody in English) in case (2) and case (5) could also be the variants of deictic address forms, indicating that the group message sender pose himself/herself with the same position as other group members, hoping to greatly close the group relations.

4.2.2. Kinship Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

Table 2. Kinship Address Form Cases

Chinese Case Exemplifications	Translations
(1) 姐妹们冲啊!	(1) Come on, girls (appealing)!
(2) 集美们(姐妹们)求赞!	(2) Please give your likes, my sisters (requesting)!
(3) 兄弟们,布洛芬我今晚上班放操作室,都写上名字了,记得去拿。	(3) Hey guys, I would leave the <i>Ibuprofen</i> tablets in the operation room tonight and have write your names on them. Remember get it (stating and directing).
(4) Jrm(家人们),好像明天要做核酸。	(4) It seems that tomorrow we have to take a PCR test, my family members (guessing).
(5) 祝王哥新婚快乐!	(5) Happy wedding, Brother Wang (congratulating)!

As the above table showcased, the kinship address forms, for example, “Jiemeimen”, “Xiondimen”, and their homophonic variations “Jimeimen”, “Jiarenmen” (corresponding to “sisters”, “brothers”, and “guys”... in English) in case (1) to (4) show that the Wechat group message sender would like to position himself/herself as a family member of other members, so as to provide group sense of belonging; for the meantime, the group unity and solidarity could be enhanced. No matter what speech acts the message sender would like to convey, kinship address forms help them better accomplish their wishes and strengthen the bonds.

It's a truth that group members do not have such real kinships, but the group message sender tend to employ such kinship address forms, obviously flouting the quality maxim in cooperative principle (Grice, 1975), with the hope of narrowing the mental distance to Wechat group members. It could be ensured that a family-like group atmosphere where kinship address forms are frequently used provides group members with enough sense of happiness and content.

Furthermore, when a kinship address form is targeted to a certain group member, as shown in case (5), that is, the congratulation part, the family ties between the message sender and message receiver could also be strengthened. In the meanwhile, one message sender use such a kinship address form, other group members would like to follow this use and the whole relations between group members could be closer.

4.2.3. Relation Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

Table 3. Relation Address Form Cases

Chinese Case Exemplifications	Translations
(1) 开学以来咱班有没有 同学 第一次提交入党申请书呀（补本科档案材料的除外）？	(1) Is there any student who has submitted the application for CPC the first time (supplement of undergraduate archives are excluded) since this term (asking)?
(2) 希望有空的 同学们 来观看比赛，为学院加油。	(2) Hope students who are free come to watch the game and cheer for our school (requesting).
(3) 同志们 加油。	(3) Comrades , come on (cheering)!
(4) 还有四位 朋友 ，记得截图给我看一下。	(4) Here remains four friends , please send me your screenshots (requiring).
(5) 先祝 友友们 节日吃席快乐，学业节节升，感情日日增！	(5) Here I'd like to send my wishes to dear friends . Happy holiday! I wish you academic progress and strengthened friendships (Blessing).
(6) 小盆友们 抓紧进会议了。	(6) Is there anyone who'd like to join or watch the Beijing Marathon this weekend (asking)?
(7) 身边爱看演出的 小伙伴 拉一拉进群，谢谢支持。	(7) Please invite your little buddies who like to watch performances to the Wechat group, thanks (requesting).
(8) 想请 学长学姐们 ，帮忙投个票哈哈哈，26号谢谢。	(8) Could you please vote for No. 26 hahaha..., my senior schoolmates
(9) 别见外，以后叫我 师兄 就好。	(9) Don't regard me as an outsider. Just make me your senior fellow .

The most frequently used relation Address forms illustrated in the table 3 could be “Pengyoumen (with homophonic variations ‘Youyoumen’ and ‘Penyoumen’), “Tongxuemen (with homophonic variation ‘Tongxiemen’), “Tongzhi (men)”, and “Huoban (with homophonic variations ‘Xiaohuoban’) in Chinese Pinyin System, corresponding to “friends”, “comrades”, and “buddies” in English respectively, illustrating that the message sender is likely to provides friendly sense. In case (8) and case (9), the relations between message sender and viewers are enhanced more forward, for that the connotative meaning delivered by “senior schoolmate” and “senior fellow” suggests the message sender and the and other Wechat group members have closer interpersonal relationships beyond friendship.

4.2.4. Social Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

Table 4. Social Address Form Cases

Chinese Case Exemplifications	Translations
(1) 帅哥美女们 ，25 号晚 7 点半天桥艺术中心阿云嘎主演基督山伯爵 1080 门票结 930，880 结 820，想要的联系我。	(1) Handsome guys and good-looking girls , here I have ticket of <i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i> at 7:30 p.m. on the 25 th this month...contact me if you want (offering).
(2) 群里特别感谢 张女士 对我的帮助。	(2) Here I convey my special thanks to Ms. Zhang for helping me (thanking).
(3) 在此祝 张先生 新婚快乐。	(3) Here I wish Mr. Zhang a happy wedding (congratulating).
(4) 符合条件的相关 人士 可以申请。	(4) Relevant people who are eligible could apply (stating).
(5) @ 所有人 ，还有9分钟开课！	(5) @ all , class starts in 9 minutes (reminding).

Viewing from the above case (1) to (4), it could be discovered that Chinese harbors a large sources of social relations address forms, for instance, “Xiansheng”, “Nushi”, “Renshi”, “Shuaigemeinu”, etc., corresponding to their English counterparts as “Mr.”, “Ms.”, “people”, and “Handsome guys and good-looking girls”. In case (5), the message sender uses the Wechat group noticing function with the symbol “@”, aiming to make that every Wechat group members aware of the message.

The following part showcases what a representative message sender have said in the semi-structural interview.

Message Sender 3: When I tend to use some official social address form cases, what I’ d like to do is conveying my intentions effectively and make everybody understand.

As abovementioned, social address forms employed in Wechat group messages suits to sender’s intention of conveying the communicative force more effectively.

4.2.5. Title Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

Table 5. Title Address Form Cases

Chinese Case Exemplifications	Translations
(1) 祝最最敬爱的 卞院长 生日快乐，工作顺利！	(1) To the most beloved Dean Bian , happy birthday and all the best in your work (blessing).
(2) 办公室 牛老师 辛苦了！	(2) Teacher Niu in the office is the toughest (thanking).
(3) 感谢本场 DM ，带来如此精彩的演绎。	(3) The DM has provided such a wonderful performance, much thanks (thanking).
(4) 夸一夸咱 学委 是真的负责。	(4) Let’ s brag on our commissary in charge of studies who’s very responsible (praising).
(5) 欢迎 顾客 进店品尝。	(5) Welcome customers (marketing).
(6) 新人 入群，请自我介绍，最好再爆个照。	(6) The new member into our Wechat group is supposed to give an introduction, and it would be better if you show your photo (directing).
(7) 请 群主 踢出此人。	(7) Group manager , please remove this member (requesting).

Compared with the social address form cases, title address form cases are prone to be more official and formal. Case (1) to (4) have manifested the social titles of certain people, helping message senders express their respect, while case (5) has clarified the business-customer relation, better helping the message sender with marketing. Case (6) and case (7) demonstrates the relation unique to Wechat platform, via the title using of “new member” and “group manager”, social relations and positions in Wechat group can be much clearer.

4.2.6. Intimate Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

Similar to the use of kinship address forms, the employment of intimate address forms in Wechat group message make relations of group members closer. The most frequent used intimate address forms could be “babies” and “dears”. The above case (1) to (3) reveal the group message sender’s love and care for group members. Case (4), case (5), and case (6) could make distance between business holders, i.e., the message senders and customer more intimate. Case (7) elucidates that the use of intimate address form cases make the common group member feel as they are beloved ones for each other and share common sense. In conclusion, with the employment of intimate address form, message senders could satisfy receiver’s mental needs for being well cared and loved.

Table 6. Intimate Address Form Cases

Chinese Case Exemplifications	Translations
(1) 宝宝们看群公告，有详细说明。	(1) Babies , please check the group notice for detail (directing).
(1) 宝子们上午好！	(2) Good morning, babies (greeting)!
(2) 北鼻们记得明日找我领材料。	(3) Babies , remember to ask me for materials tomorrow (reminding).
(4) 亲爱的，这是本群给到的最大福利了。	(4) Dear , it' s the best we can offer (offering).
(5) 亲人们，复课啦，今天晚上可以正常体验及预约上课了。	(5) Dears , our class has resumed. You can start booking or experiencing the class from tonight (noticing).
(6) 连花清瘟到货了，有需要的亲们可以过来，货源充足。	(6) <i>Lianhuaqingwen</i> capsules have arrived and in sufficient supply. Dears who need it can come (noticing).
(7) 亲们，网络学院能查到自己的证书了。	(8) Dears , the college of online education has provided the certificate for checking (noticing).

4.2.7. Name Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

Table 7. Name Address Form Cases

Chinese Case Exemplifications	Translations
(1) 苟富贵，无相忘，以后咱群指望胡工了。	(1) If you become rich and honored one day, don' t forget us. Everyone in the group is counting on Hugong (blessing).
(2) @吕怀生，有没有人收到通知啊？	(2) @ Luhuaisheng , has anyone gotten any notice (asking)?
(3) 生日快乐啊，安子，永远二十，柿柿顺意！	(3) Happy birthday, Anzi . I wish you all the best and keep your youth forever (blessing).

As the above-mentioned, when Wechat group message senders are excessively familiar with the message receiver, they tend to call their names directly, so that the message receiver would not have sense of isolation or estrangement, and the close friendship is maintained.

4.2.8. Banter Address Forms in Wechat Group Messages

Table 8. Banter Address Form Cases

Chinese Case Exemplifications	Translations
(1) 女明星们冲，创造奇迹！	(1) Cheer up! Female stars , let' s make a miracle (cheering).
(2) 这就得看某艺术家的表现了。	(2) It depends on how that artist performs (stating).
(3) 单身狗们（群内长时间单身的人），快看！	(3) Hey, bachelors , look at that (reminding).

In China, the “fans culture” has prevailed among all works of life; therefore, groups of female or girls who have star dreams tend to hear others call them “Numingxing (female star in English)” as shown in case (1), the message sender caters to message receivers needs of being emphasized as celebrities; meanwhile, effects of humor take into play. Similarly, when message senders tend to use “that artist” in case (2) and “bachelors” in case (3), they may intend to make fun of the message receivers or make the dialogue humorous. It is undoubted that the message sender would like to show that they are close friends of the receivers consciously or subconsciously.

4.3. The Relational Identity Construction of Wechat Group Message Senders

Oliveira (2013) illustrated that address form should be an indispensable part in virtual communication, for that it plays a pivotal role in building and maintaining people's relations directly and effectively; therefore, the research places emphasis on relational identity constructed by address form.

Constructions of Relational identity of Wechat group message senders can be classified into three sorts, according to the identity building theory of Tracy (2002) and Han (2019), i.e., the close relational identity, additional relational identity and social relational identity. From the closest to the furthest, three identities are sequenced from the left to the left, as depicted in the figure below.

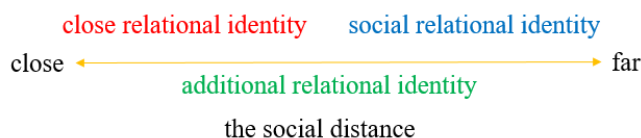


Figure 1. Social Distance of Three relational Identity

4.3.1. Close Relational Identities of Wechat Message Senders

Close relational identities of message senders are mainly constructed via kinship address forms, intimate address forms, and part of name and banter address forms.

Instead of strangers or acquaintances, the abovementioned address forms are frequently used among beloved ones, relatives and the closest friends. It is found that although sometimes the group message sender and receiver are not relatives in truth, kinship address forms are mostly chosen, indicating Wechat group message senders make great efforts to keep intimate relational identities via the use of relatively close address forms.

4.3.2. Additional Relational Identities of Wechat Message Senders

In WeChat group messages, unconventional use of address forms, such as kinship and deictic forms, helps construct additional relational identities. These variants make messages more expressive. For example, “童鞋们” as a substitute for “同学们” adds humor and emotional richness. Statistics show that these variants are more common than conventional forms, contributing to the construction of additional relational identities, aligning with Han's research (2017).

4.3.3. Social Relational Identities of Wechat Message Senders

Compared to close and additional relational identities, social relational identities are more common among strangers or those less acquainted. Social relational identity, also known as courteous relational identity, is built when people use relation and title address forms to greet each other. It serves to convey politeness and respect, as well as establish interpersonal roles such as teacher-student, boss-subordinate, or seller-customer, shaping social relations between the sender and receiver.

4.3.4. Summary of Message Senders' Relational Identity Construction

Based on the adaptation theory (Verschuere, 1999), use of certain pragmatic form could be an adaptation to the following context and certain communicative goals could be achieved. Thus, certain use of online address forms helps with building and maintaining people's relations and defining different roles of different people.

In Wechat group chatting, via the use of group message, message sender's relational identities are correspondingly constructed. In the process of using address forms, whether a kind of relation is distant or intimate can be defined. Moreover, address forms, by no means are lifeless symbols; instead, they can carry many emotions (Han, 2017) in Wechat communication. When the message sender tries to construct his relational identity, the emotions carried by address forms are added to sender and receiver, which can be illustrated by love, fondness, dislike, hate, etc; and therefore whether their relations could be either narrowed or widened.

5. Chapter 5. Conclusion, Limitations and Implications

5.1. General Conclusion

In order to delve into the basic use of address forms in Wechat group message and how message sender's relational identities are constructed, this study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to make exploration. The findings could be interpreted as follows, which give general answers to the two research questions:

Question answer 1:

Nine deictic address forms, namely, the kinship address form, intimate address form, relation address form, social relation address form, title address form, name address form, banter address form and mixed use of address forms were found in Wechat group messages, of which the kinship address form is the most frequently used (18.5%), indicating the message sender tend to create a kind of group unity and make Wechat group more friendly or vigorous; while the some address forms, such as relation address forms and title address forms are less used, for that it may widen the social relation among people in online chatting. Overall, the difference of use frequency implies a tendency that in modern society message sender prefer to use more intimate address forms than other forms that are too official of formal, and the online environment could be more vital and free.

Question answer 1:

With regard to research question 2, three relational identities of Wechat group message senders via the use of address form are constructed, that is, close relational identity, additional relational identity and social relational identity (from the closest to the most distant). Close relationship plays an instructive role in maintaining intimate relationships; some unconventional address form use help with building the message sender's additional relational identity, and plays its unique role in conveying message emotions; then social relational identity could clearly define formal relations.

In summary, this study not only provides sufficient evidence indicating the role of online address forms in constructing Wechat message sender's relational identity, but also sheds critical light on the progress of identity building theory.

On a theoretical level, the exploration of Wechat group message address forms enrich research achievements in pragmatics, and puts forward novel ideas from the perspective of sociology.

On a practical standard, deeper explorations of address forms and identity building in pragmatics echoes human's thirst for knowledge and consistent pursuit of truth, exerts conducive influences on the development of socio-linguistics, as well as serves a feasible purpose in the fields of online chatting, online sales, online teaching...

5.2. Limitations and Future Directives

Apart from time and source limitation, it's a pity that the current study remains at the stage of text analysis. Besides the address forms in the form of text, Wechat emojis (memos) may also deliver meaning, create language force, or help with the message sender's identity building and relation maintenance. In this research, emojis were not taken into consideration.

For the future implication, a multimodal research perspective can be adopted on Wechat group chatting, address form using and relational identity building, for that it may render the study richer resources and analysis approaches.

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