**The Realization of the Interpersonal Function   
in *Emma Watson's Plea* for Gender Equality Speech**

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**Abstract:** This thesis uses the interpersonal function theory of Halliday to analyze Emma Watson’s plea for gender equality speech. By selecting and analyzing mood and modality, the author finds out how the interpersonal function realizes in the speech, so as to reveal the relationship between the interpersonal expressive devices the speaker has chosen and the meaning the speaker wants to express, aiming to help the audience grasp the real intention of the speaker.

**Key words:** Gender Equality; Interpersonal Function; Mood; Modality

1.0 Introduction

Gender inequality has been a long-standing historical and global problem. For several decades, all the world has advocated gender equality, but the situation seems not to change much. Fortunately, the practice of feminism movement has never stopped. "He For She" is one of the most important movements for gender equality and the first campaign of its kind at the UN. Emma Watson, as a goodwill ambassador for the Women's Department made the speech held for "He For She" movement at the UN. The speech is aimed to let the males know that the issue of gender equality is also associated with their own, calling for their support for feminism and helping to eliminate gender inequality.

Historically, speeches about gender equality are slim and studies on such speeches are accordingly not much. Besides, linguistic researchers study public speech from different angles, such as stylistics, rhetoric, cognitive linguistics, pedagogics, while the studies from SFG (systemic functional grammar) are least. Therefore, the study of this speech about gender equality is necessary and the thesis combines the theory of interpersonal function with qualitative and quantitative methods to reflect how the speaker establishes a friendly relationship with the audience and how the speaker’s real purpose is realized in the speech.

2.0 The Interpersonal Function Realized in the Speech

Halliday's systemic functional grammar is often used to analyze discourses. In his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday makes clear that the purpose of the construction of Functional Grammar is to provide a theoretical framework for both spoken and written discourse analysis. He has divided the pure theory of systemic functional grammar into ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. The interpersonal function is regarded by Halliday as exchange of information and mainly realized by mood and modality.

2.1 Mood in the Speech

According to Halliday, in terms of role in exchange, the basic types of the speech role are giving and demanding, while the exchanged commodities are service and goods or information. Therefore, the exchanged roles and commodities can consist of four fundamental speech functions: offer, command, statement and question. Accordingly, they can be realized by different mood types: imperative mood, declarative mood and interrogative mood. In the persuasive speech, the speaker, on the one hand, provides certain information to the audience, showing his or her attitude and opinions; on the other hand, calls for the audience to take actions to support his or her claim. That is, the speaker should finish two speech functions---- “to give information” and “to demand service” , which can be realized mainly by declarative mood.

Table 1 Statistics on mood types in Emma’s speech

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mood types | declaratives | interrogatives | imperatives |
|  | 77 (89.5%) | 8 (9.3%) | 1 (1.2%) |

From the table above, we can see declarative mood occupies the most. In the speech, Emma uses plenty of declaratives to convince men from three angles: firstly, feminism pursues the freedom for all males and females to realize the social justice and efficiency. Secondly, men should support feminism for the sake of women, or at least those whom they are most concerned about. Thirdly, men should support feminism just for themselves.

2.1.1 Declarative Mood

At the beginning of the speech, Emma first helps people to eliminate misunderstandings to the word ‘feminism” and points out that feminism doesn’t refer to the statue of women's right, nor is it a privilege, but affirmative: that is, everyone has the equal rights to live, to be educated, to work, to choose, not to be bounded or concealed by the gender labels. Feminism pursues the equal opportunities and empowerment for each individual. That is “He for everyone”. For example:

“And the more I have spoken about feminism. The more I have realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating. If there is one thing I know for certain, it is that this has to stop. For the record, feminism by definition is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes.”

Later Emma uses declaratives to describe her own life filled with gender equality, and emphasizes that those inadvertent feminists can really make a big difference in pursuing gender equality. Obviously, personal experiences can best illustrate the theme of such persuasive speech. Imagine because of the female identity, your daughter cannot find a job after graduation and your wife gets different pay for the same job and cannot be promoted, and your mother, female relatives and friends are all likely to suffer from gender inequality, then what should you do? You should support feminism even just for those women you love and care, that is “He for she”.

“These rights I consider to be human rights, but I am one of the lucky ones. My life is a sheer privilege. Because my parents didn’t love me less because I was born a daughter. My school did not limit me because I was a girl. My mentors didn’t assume I would go less far, because I might give birth to a child one day. These influences were the gender equality ambassadors that made me who I am today. They may not know it. But they are the inadvertent feminists who were changing the world today.”

Then Emma shows the last perspective: the male can also benefit from feminism. She uses declaratives to show gender inequality also makes men suffering. For example, the social division of labor makes men bear the heavy burden of family and social pressure; the narrow "masculinity" renders men need to select a particular way of life and attitude to life, even if the way is very stupid, outdated and inefficient for themselves. Therefore, Emma uses “If ...” structure to strongly emphasize the important roles males have played in gender equality movement and demands males to take actions. That is “He for he”.

“I’ve seen young men suffering from mental illness unable to ask for help for fear it would make them less of man or less of “macho”. In fact, in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men between 20-49, eclipsing road accidents, cancer and coronary heart disease. I’ve seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted sense of what constitutes male success. Men don’t have the benefits of equality either. We don’t often talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes, but I can see that they are. And when the are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence. If men don’t have to be aggressive in order to be accepted, women won’t feel compelled to be submissive. If men don’t have to control, women won’t have to be controlled. ”

2.1.2 Interrogative Mood

In addition, there are 8 interrogatives. The interrogatives are, in general, regarded as a way to demand information, while in the persuasive speech, the interrogatives are used to drive people’s attention. For example:

“Why has the word become such an uncomfortable one?”

“How can we affect change in the world, when only half of it is invited, or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?”

Those two interrogatives convey a relatively negative meaning, that is “The word should not become such an uncomfortable one.”; “We cannot affect change in the world, when...”. Compared with the declarative mood, the interrogative one has enhanced the urgent mood and expression.

“I’ve told myself firmly, if not me, who? If not now, when?”

“I am inviting you to step forward, to be seen and ask yourself. If not me, who? If not now, when?”

This is not only an interrogative expression, but an elliptical one. In the first example, "me" refers to Emma herself, and "now" refers to the time making the speech. Emma highlights her obligation as a feminist. In the second one, "me" denotes everyone, while "now" implies any time when the public begin to pursue the gender equality. Besides, the use of elliptical expression can be forceful and make the public feel an emotional outpouring around this issue.

2.1.3 Imperative Mood

There is only 1 imperative sentence. Imperative mood is often used to impose the willingness, suggestion or command on listeners, making them taking corresponding actions. For example:

“Reclaim those parts of themselves they abandoned, and in doing so, be a more true and complete version of themselves.”

Given the context, Emma emphasizes that feminism can help men to be themselves and lead a better life. By using the imperative mood, the speaker directly demands the male to eliminate gender discrimination and to support feminism.

2.2 Modality in the Speech

According to Halliday, modality is a collective description of intermediate degrees between the positive and negative poles. Halliday states that modality consists of two basic types ---- modalization and modulation on the basic of the distinction between the proposals and the propositions. The former considers the degrees of probability and usuality, while the latter considers the degrees of obligation and inclination.

In this speech, modality is realized by modal operators and interpersonal metaphor. In addition, modal operator can be classified into three degrees: low, median and high. Table 2 shows the frequency of modal operators employed by Emma in her speech.

Table 2 Modal operators employed in Emma's speech

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Modal operators | high | low | median |
| Positive | need 2 | can 8 | should 5 |
| might 3 | would 3 |
| may 1 | will 2 |
| Negative |  |  | won't 2 |

2.2.1 Modal Operator “Can”

Comparing with other modal operators, the speaker uses “can” most frequently. In general, the meaning of “can” refers to a possibility or the ability to do something; besides, it can also indicate a kind of permission. For example:

*“But sadly, I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights.”*

The first "can" refers to the possibility to show whether the thing will happen, while the second one refers to the meaning of permission, which means women are not allowed to receive their rights. By using "can", Emma implies gender inequality is a serious issue of the whole world and hopes that women will be allowed to receive equal rights.

*“How can we affect change in the world, when only half of it is invited, or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?”*

Here “can” represents the ability to affect change. Emma uses “can” to highlight the important role the male should play in this movement, seeking for their support. Besides, the use of “can” makes the mood softer, which is easier for the male to catch the point.

2.2.2 Modal Operator “Should”

The modal operator “should” can not only refer to the obligation or responsibility, but indicate that the speaker tends to command the audience to do something . For example:

*“For the record, feminism by definition is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.”*

*“Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong.”*

The modal operator "should" implies the recommendation and command that men and women are demanded to have the equal rights and to feel free, which is why Emma and other feminists sincerely invite the male to eliminate gender inequality.

*“I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body.”*

"Should" in this sentence refers to the responsibility that the speaker herself is responsible to decide her own body. Emma wants to let the female realize that only they are responsible for their own bodies.

2.2.3 Metaphor of Modality

According to Halliday, if a speaker wants to state explicitly that the probability is subjective or objective, he would interpret the proposition as a projection and encodes the subjectivity or the objectivity in a projecting clause, which are forms of metaphorical modality. Metaphor of modality usually reflects a mental process of cognition, making the speaker take charge of his or her attitude and judgment. For instance:

*“And I think it is right I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the politics and decision-making of my life. I think it is right the socially I am afforded the same respect as men.”*

The metaphorical variant “I think it is right...” corresponds to the congruent form “it is right...” with “I think...” as the primary clause. Actually, the proposition is not “I think...” but the rest clause “It is right...”, which are the metaphors of probability modalization. Emma use "I think..." structure to explicitly indicate her own voice in a more subjective way and to imply the probability of her point of view.

“I think...” structure is one of the most common variants for the expression of explicit subjective modality. Emma uses four “I think...” to give prominence to her point of view and highlight the subjectivity of her statement. It seems that “I think...” is her proposition; actually, the real proposition is “it is right...”. If we add a tag, it is not “I think it is right..., don’t I?” but “I think it is right..., isn’t it?” Therefore, we can see Emma uses such metaphorical modality to invite the audience to agree with her proposition.

3.0 Conclusion

In this paper, the author uses Emma Watson's plea for gender equality speech as a corpus to find out by what means the interpersonal function is realized. From the perspective of mood, it is found that the declarative mood is of the most frequent use in the speech. On the one hand, feminism, as one of the most arguable issues in the world, is serious and heavy; thus, declarative mood, which are of factual and smooth tone, can better conform to such topic. On the other hand, the purpose of the speech is to utilize information and personal experiences to persuade the audience to do something, so declarative mood is the most direct and soft way to convey the speaker's opinions and judgments. In terms of modality, the use of modal operators helps the speaker emphasize the obligation of the audience and convey the command to the audience. Through the analysis, the relationship between language and meaning can be elucidated and the purpose of the speech can be deeply understood. Actually, the study of interpersonal function includes many aspects, such as personal pronoun, tone, evaluation, which can be studied in further research.

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