

Politeness Strategies of Conversational Implicature in Romance of Our Parents: Understanding Chinese “Face”

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Abstract: As the 2014 CCTV opener, the TV serials *Romance of Our Parents* which became a hot hit in China after its release has received rave reviews and heated discussions among audiences. Many scholars have analyzed it from the perspectives of family relationships and film & television appreciation. However, few interpret it from the perspective of politeness in linguistics. Therefore, based on Brown & Levinson's face theory, 22 pieces of dialogues between the hero Jiang Defu and the different people around him are extracted as the studying data. Through analysis, the study finds that Brown & Levinson's Face Theory has applicability in *Romance of Our Parents*, but some limitations are mainly determined by the characteristics of Chinese politeness and face. In addition, the communicator's personality and social changes will make a difference in the selection of politeness strategies. Based on the research, this article may help the audience comprehend the conversational implicatures better and thus have a better understanding of *Romance of Our Parents*. Besides, the article will also provide some references for people's usage of politeness strategies in their daily communication.

Keywords: Conversational Implicature; Politeness Strategy; Face; *Romance of Our Parents*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication, the basic act of human contact, occurs wherever there are human beings. One of the dominant communicative devices is through language which is called verbal communication. In the process of human communication, polite speech is of vital importance to promote the success of both communication and interpersonal relationship. In the past few years, researches on (im) politeness have witnessed an increase in studying Chinese data within western (im) politeness theories (e.g., Kádár & Pan, 2012; Kádár, 2019; Xia & Lan, 2019; Chen & Ren, 2020). However, few have taken film and television works as a testing ground of western theories of (im) politeness.

Since the plot and dialogue of some TV dramas are highly concentrated from real life, taking them as data is quite ideal for research. This study, on the basis of Brown & Levinson's Face Theory, aims to study how politeness strategies are embodied in *Romance of Our Parents* by collecting the conversations between the hero Jiang Defu and other people around him as studying data from the TV serials.

The TV serials *Romance of Our Parents* is based on the novel of the same name by Liu Jing, a contemporary Chinese writer. The serials mainly tell a romantic love story between a navy officer Jiang

Defu and a beautiful lady An Jie from a bourgeois family and how they accompany each other stepping into their twilight years against the background of the country’s development and social changes. In the serials, Jiang Defu on one hand is illiterate, rough, direct in speaking, but on the other hand, he is a person with a sense of uplift, determination, modesty, tolerance, humor, and high emotional quotient to deal with different people around him and melt family conflict by his witticisms. By contrast, An Jie, a well-educated, romantic young lady leads a life of luxury and privilege, but a little bit finicky and eloquent. It seems that they are on two parallels that never join, but unexpectedly, they get married and support each other for more than 50 years with different family backgrounds and living habits. Though their love story is not always smooth sailing, it brings warm and touching feelings to the audience.

As the 2014 CCTV opener, *Romance of Our Parents* quickly gained popularity after its release. The audience rating leaped to 2.39% on the fifth day and topped the rating list. It is popular and has become a hot topic for its simple and romantic story with a sense of ages. Meanwhile, the interesting and humorous conversations become the serials’ big anticipation which covers a lot of wisdom of communication and politeness strategies. Therefore, this study is expected to verify the universality of Brown & Levinson’s Theory of Politeness Strategies by extending the research to linguistics and analyzing the usage of politeness between the hero—Jiang Defu and people of different genders, ages, social or family distance in the TV serials. Practically, the article will help people get a better understanding of *Romance of Our Parents* by interpreting conversational implicature in it, which also provides a reference of using politeness strategies to daily life conversations. Besides, the author tends to prove whether Brown & Levinson’s theory can give explanation to some conversational implicature under Chinese culture and try to find out if other factors can influence the usage of different politeness strategies.

2. POLITENESS AND CHINESE “FACE”

Politeness refers to take the hearer’s feelings and desires into consideration when speaking and acting. Therefore, politeness can be expressed both verbally and nonverbally in actions (Leech, 1983: 140). Regarding verbal politeness, positive and honorific language is the main manifestation (Shibatani, 1990; Fukada & Asato, 2004). According to Ashizuka *et al.* (2015: 3), different from animals’ submissive behavior, human verbal politeness is very sophisticated and often related to multiple dimensions of social hierarchy, such as “social intimacy/distance, age, profession and family/kinship”.

According to Goffman’s (1967) theory, “face” is the most basic part that every communicator claims for themselves in a particular contact. It is a kind of positive value, divine and inviolable. On the basis of Goffman’s concept of face, Brown & Levinson (1978) proposed Politeness Theory (also called Face Theory). Their concept about face is more specific and their theory illustrates the specific politeness strategies, which is by far the most influential one in the research area of politeness.

2.1. Face

Face is a central concept of Brown & Levinson’s theory. They (1978) regard face as a kind of public self-image and every member in the society wants to claim or earn for himself. Also, according to Brown & Levinson, face includes two related aspects: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to a person’s want that his or her self-image can be appreciated while negative face is a person’s want for freedom and not be imposed on by other people. Brown & Levinson (1978) believe, in people’s communication, there are always some potential and ineluctable acts that threaten people’s face. For instance, some speech acts threaten the speaker’s face, some speech acts threaten the hearer’s face, and sometimes, the speech acts can threaten both the speaker and the hearer’s positive or negative face or

both. They detailed these situations into the following four types:

- a. Those that offend the speaker’s positive face: apologies, acceptance of a compliment, confessions.
- b. Those that offend the speaker’s negative face: expression of thanks, acceptance of the hearer’s thanks or apology, unwilling promises and offers.
- c. Those that offend the hearer’s positive face: complaints, expression of disapproval, criticism,
- d. Those that offend the hearer’s negative face: orders, requests, suggestions, threats, and warnings.

Since in communicative activities, some verbal behaviors are inherent with the nature of threatening face, communicators tend to utilize some politeness strategies to reduce the threat and save face for the communication participants according to face risk and their communication purpose.

2.2. Politeness Strategies

Brown & Levinson (1978) point out that in the context of vulnerability of face, any rational person will seek to avoid the face threatening acts above, or will adopt certain politeness strategies to minimize the degree of face threatening. According to the level of threat and the degree of the want to maintain face, they (1987) propose five politeness strategies and divide them into two general kinds: 1) “do FTA (Face-threatening Act)” and 2) “don’t do FTA”.

By doing FTA, the communicator can employ On-record or Off-record strategies. The former can be further divided into three different strategies depending on whether redressive action is taken or not. Bald on record politeness is to do the face threatening baldly, without any redressive actions. It involves doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible. By redressive action, it means the action that gives face to the hearer, which is the attempt to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA. The redressive action includes two forms, that is, positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive Politeness is oriented to the positive face of the hearer and the self-image the hearer claims for himself. That is to say, positive politeness tends to satisfy the hearer’s desire of being praised and respected, so as to maintain the hearer’s face while the negative politeness strategy is the opposite. The latter, off-record politeness strategy, with a vaguer and more equivocal speech act, gives the hearer a chance to understand the speaker's intention. Through unclear expression of intention and pretended failure of understanding, the communicators can maintain face for both by avoiding embarrassment.

If “do the FTA” needs the speaker to say something more or less relevant to his intention, then “don’t do the FTA” expects the speaker to say nothing relevant. It simply means that the speaker will, by all means, refrain from doing FTA and avoids offending the hearer. By “not do the FTA”, the speaker may have a greater possibility of failing to achieve his communicative goal since the speaker's verbal behavior is too polite to convey the intention, and the hearer may understand it or have got it but just choose to ignore, however, it causes no damage to the face of both sides even if the communication fails.

Some of the politeness strategies can be further divided into many sub-strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 56-59):

Strategy 1— bald on record

Strategy 2— positive politeness

(1) claim common ground: seek agreement; avoid disagreement; joke; raise common ground; exaggerate; notice, attend to H; intensify interest to H; use in-group identity markers;

(2) convey that S and H are cooperators: offer, promise; assert S’s concern for H’s want; include both S

and H in the activity; assume reciprocity; be optimistic;

(3) fulfill H’s want for some X: give gift to H

Strategy 3 —negative politeness

(1) be direct: be conventional indirect

(2) don’t presume/assume: question, hedge

(3)don’t coerce H: minimize the imposition ; be pessimistic; give deference

(4) communicate S’s want to not impinge on H: apologize; impersonalize S and H; state the FTA as a general rule; nominalize

(5)redress other wants of H’s: go on record as incurring a debt.

Strategy 4— off record

(1) Invite conversational implicatures: understate; overstate; be ironic; use rhetorical questions; use metaphors; give hints; give association clues; presuppose; use tautologies; use contradictions;

(2) Be vague or ambiguous: be ambiguous; be incomplete, use ellipsis; be vague; over-generalize; displace H;

According to Brown& Levinson (1978), there are three parameters that people can use to compute the weightiness of an FTA, which in other words, the influential elements of employing a politeness strategy. Among the three parameters, the “social distance” (D) refers to the degree of intimacy or familiarity of the speaker and the hearer; the “relative power” (P) is that to which degree the speaker can impose his will on the hearer. And the “absolute ranking”(R) can be both the “rank order of impositions requiring services” and the “rank order of impositions of requiring goods.” It is that to which degree the hearer can accept the imposition.

2.3. Chinese Face and Politeness

As Mao (1992: 83) pointed out, “to understand Chinese politeness, it is necessary to study face (*mianzi* and *lian*)”. Face, which is of vital importance to different people under different cultures in the world, is especially indispensable to Chinese people nurtured by traditional culture. There are a large number of sayings on “face” which in Chinese are called “*mian zi*(面子)” or “*lian mian* (脸面)”. For instance, “人要脸, 树要皮 (*rényàoliǎn, shùyàopi*)”, “*银钱如粪土, 脸面值千*(*yínqiánrúfèntǔ, liǎnmiànzhíqiānjīn*)”, “*宁可身骨苦, 不叫面皮羞*(*nìngkěshēngǔ kǔ, bú jiào miàn pí xiū*). All those sayings stress the importance of “having face”. In the first saying, the Chinese people compare their face to the bark, since without the bark, the nutrient cannot be carried and the tree will die; in the second saying, they depreciate the money to nothing while their “face” is extremely precious; as for the third saying, they would rather undergo sufferings of flesh than being humiliated.

Face is also the core of Chinese politeness. As for “giving face”, sayings go like “不看僧面看佛面(*bú kàn sēng miàn kàn fó miàn*)”, “打狗还看主人面(*dǎ gǒu hái kàn zhǔ rén miàn*)”. It seems a live-in-peace principle and a polite behavior for Chinese people to seek any possible excuses to give face to others, because their “face” is more social-oriented.

Since “face” is so important to Chinese people, in their communications, the communicators would prefer to try all means to meet the wants of face for each other, even sometimes disregard their own face. Here the author mainly talks about three features: be euphemistic; be courteous; and be humble. Being euphemistic, generally speaking, Chinese people prefer to express themselves in a rather vague and

indirect way and take others' feelings into consideration to give them face and maintain friendly relationships when they give suggestions, show disagreements, or criticize others. By being courteous, Chinese people are used to hiding their real feelings and perform politely to keep grace instead. And by being humble, it refers to belittle oneself and esteem others, which is an important feature of politeness that bases on the sacrifice of one's own face to satisfy others' desire of face.

Due to these politeness features in Chinese culture, especially being euphemistic, people are more likely to express their ideas indirectly with the consideration of their own face, the hearer's face, or the third person's face, so their speech acts are more than the literal meanings and from which generates the conversational implicature. Considering that Brown & Levinson's theory puts much more emphasis on “face threatening” and “face saving” which can explain most of speech acts better, and it also has something in common with Chinese people's politeness of “giving face”, so the author will employ their theory as the foundation of the study.

In addition, as has been introduced, the data in this study are selected from Chinese. Leech (2005) pointed out that “despite differences, there is no East-West divide in politeness.” That is to say, despite the cultural specifics underlying the notion of face and politeness, the basic want for face and the essential elements of the face remains the same. Hence, the author attempts to apply the theory to the analysis of politeness in *Romance of Our Parents*, in which the conversations are in Chinese.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Questions

Considering that politeness is a general concept, the present study will focus on the analysis of politeness strategies of the conversations in the serials. The research questions to be explored are as follows:

- (1) Whether Brown & Levinson's theory can explain some conversational implicatures under Chinese Culture?
- (2) If other factors can influence the usage of different politeness strategies?

3.2. Data collection

Compared with the written corpus collection, the collection of spoken corpora is of relative complexity. The dialogues in the TV serials *Romance of Our Parents* extracted as the study data requires the author to view all 44 episodes and transcript the conversations one by one, then take Jiang Defu's dialogues with people of different families or social distance as the mainline to extract again the materials with study value.

This study mainly employs qualitative research to analyze the data. By collecting and analyzing the hero's conversational implicatures with different people around him in *Romance of Our Parents*, the study attempts to make it clear that how Brown & Levinson's politeness strategies are embodied in the TV serials. That is to say, a large number of examples will be taken to illustrate how Brown & Levinson's politeness strategy works in *Romance of Our Parents*. After detailed analysis, there will be related statistics to illustrate the employment of politeness strategies in the TV serials in the form of tables.

In this study, some typical conversations in *Romance of Our Parents* are extracted as studying data in which the author finds that there is a time clue in it since the serials are a narrative. The story spans more

than half a century from the foundation of the People's Republic of China to the new century. And there are two important turning points—the Cultural Revolution and the Reform & Opening-up which divide the serials into three main stages:1) before Cultural Revolution(from episode 1 to episode 16), 2)between Cultural Revolution and Reform &Opening-up(from episode 17 to episode 32), and 3)after Reform & Opening-up(from episode 33 to episode 44). The author groups the data into three main stages according to the clue and analyzes them respectively.

At the same time, Jiang Defu, the leading character of the serials, will be chosen to analyze the politeness strategies in *Romance of Our Parents*. The main reason why the author takes Jiang Defu's conversations with Principal Cong, An Jie, Lao Ding, Ouyang Yi, and Jiang Yafei as studying data is that the five people are intimate to his family and social life, especially An Jie, Lao Ding, and Ouyang Yi who runs throughout all his life since the serials begins, so the three people's conversations with Jiang Defu are the main study material which will appear in all the three stages.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Analysis of Typical Conversations

Example 1

Strategy 2——making promise

Principal Cong: 江德福，不是我批评你。当初你口口声声说要到资本家家里去改造改造他们，我还当你是深入虎穴，是孤胆英雄呢，谁想到你本末倒置，倒让人家给改造成这幅熊样了，你丢了你自己的人不说，关键是你丢了解放军的人。你自己说吧，怎么办

Jiang Defu : 我改，我改，我一定改 (wǒ gǎi, wǒ gǎi, wǒ yī dìng gǎi)。

Principal Cong : 你怎么改？

Jiang Defu : 我喝了这杯酒。

Principal Cong : 一杯行吗？

Jiang Defu : 我喝两杯，不，我喝三杯 (wǒ hē liǎng bēi, bú, wǒ hē sān bēi)。

(From episode 5)

After getting married to An Jie, Jiang is required to eliminate lots of bad habits, one of which is no noise while eating. When Jiang is invited to Cong's for dumplings and he behaves gently and eats without any noise, which is a sharp contrast to what he used to be. Cong feels uncomfortable and criticizes him for not only losing his own face, but also the whole liberation army's faces in a rather direct and bald way, and by three questions to impel Jiang to give him a satisfactory answer which actually hurts Jiang's negative face, but Jiang still responds positively by making a promise that he will definitely not perform like that and drinking for apologies. Actually, eating without noise is a traditional table manner, of course, Cong knows this, so he just makes fun of him.

Example 2

Strategy 2——Give gifts to H

An Xin : 你们两夫妻一唱一和的。

Jiang Defu : 那叫夫唱妻和，呵呵呵。

An Jie : 是妻唱夫和。

Jiang Defu : 啊行行行, 你唱我和。只要你唱, 我就和 (ā xíng xíng xíng, nǐ chàng wǒ hè. zhǐ yào nǐ chàng, wǒ jiù hè)。

An Jie : 那我唱得不好你也和啊?

Jiang Defu : 你怎么能唱得不好呢(nǐ zěn me néng chàng dé bù hǎo ne) ?

An Jie : 要是唱得不好呢?

Jiang Defu : 那我也和, 只要你唱我就和(nà wǒ yě hè, zhǐ yào nǐ chàng wǒ jiù hè)。

An Xin : 太肉麻了, 不行, 我买的苹果呢?”

(From episode 5)

From the dialogue above, Jiang and An Jie flirt with each other to the very face of Anxin, An Jie's elder sister. Anxin teasingly says that the couple is in tune with each other which means one takes the lead and the other follows. To fulfill the hearer's wants to be loved and admired, Jiang gives gifts to An Jie by acknowledging her leading status readily and expressing his attitude that whenever An Jie takes lead, and no matter it is wrong or not, he will follow her. Here, positive politeness serves to make the conversation go harmoniously and make the communicators get more intimate.

Example 3

Strategy 2—Joke

Lao Ding : 我老婆和你老婆不一样, 都生了三儿子了。

Jiang Defu : 人和人不一样。

Lao Ding : 呵, 你老婆是资产阶级娇小姐, 我老婆是劳动人民, 你老婆比我老婆高一等。

Jiang Defu : 哎我不是这个意思啊。

Lao Ding : 那你什么意思啊?

Jiang Defu : 我的意思是我老婆是娇小姐, 那活该她猛吐啊(wǒ de yì sī shì wǒ lǎo pó shì jiāo xiǎo jiě, nà huó gāi tā měng tù ā), 你老婆是劳动人民, 那人家就没事啊, 我是心疼那粮食啊, 哗哗地就吐掉了, 可惜了。”

(From episode 5)

Jiang tells Lao Ding that An Jie has a strong pregnancy reaction and he worries about her. Lao Ding says that his wife has given birth to three boys and she is different from Jiang's. Here, Lao Ding actually takes pride in his wife. But when Jiang follows his words that the two women are different, Lao Ding suddenly gets sensitive and counters ironically. Since Lao Ding, a well-educated navy officer married an illiterate rural child bride, while Jiang, illiterate, divorced but lucky enough to have a beautiful charming wife with a bourgeois upbringing. He inevitably admires Jiang, so when Jiang agrees on his words, he gets unhappy and asks Jiang baldly what he means. However, Jiang senses that and immediately adopts a redressive strategy to save Lao Ding's face by a joke that his wife is delicate so she deserves the sickness and his heart aches for the food she wastes.

Example 4

Strategy 1

Jiang Defu : 亚菲呀, 你, 你是不是想淘汰我啊?

Jiang Yafei : 我也不想淘汰您, 但是没办法, 那是大家的意见。

Jiang Defu : 哪个大家呀？哪个混蛋呀？啊？(nǎ gè dà jiā ya? nǎ gè hún dàn ya? á?)

Jiang Yafei : 所长，政委，还有所里的工作人员，当然啦，我们还征求了一部分老同志的意见，大家一致认为吧……

Jiang Defu : 认为什么啊？

Jiang Yafei : 认为您欠缺了这么一点点。

Jiang Defu : 什么东西，你以为我愿意跑到这儿来，跳这破玩意儿啊？要不是支持你江亚菲的工作，你们就是八抬大轿请我来，我都不来(shén me dōng xī, nǐ yǐ wéi wǒ yuàn yì pǎo dào zhè ér lái, tiào zhè pò wán yì ér ā? yào bú shì zhī chí nǐ jiāng yà fēi de gōng zuò, nǐ men jiù shì bā tái dà jiào qǐng wǒ lái, wǒ dōu bú lái!)

Jiang Yafei : 我知道，我知道，谢谢爸爸的支持，谢谢爸爸的理解。”

(From episode 35)

Jiang and An Jie join the ballroom dancing competition, but Jiang sucks in dancing. Jiang Yafei, the team organizer, plans to change a person. Jiang asks her for sure, and Jiang Yafei admits in a quite euphemistic way that her father is still a little shy of the standard. Jiang knows that he is not good at dancing, but when someone points it out publicly and wants to disqualify him, especially this someone is his daughter, his positive and negative face are both greatly threatened. So he employs bald on record politeness and depreciates the dancing to nothing and accounts his participation to the support of his daughter's work to maintain his own face. Then Jiang Yafei, to save her father's face, acknowledges what Jiang says by showing that she knows what her father has done for her and expressing her thanks to her father so as to reduce the degree of face threatening.

Example 5

Strategy 4—Understate

Ouyang Yi : 革命尚未成功，你辈尚需努力啊。

Jiang Defu : 老兄啊，革命两个字从你嘴里说出来怎么那么别扭。”

(From episode 9)

After a quarrel with Jiang's sister, An Jie takes sulks and goes back to her brother's. Jiang fails to beg for mercy and take An Jie home, Ouyang Yi quotes a famous Chinese revolutionary pioneer's words which mean the revolution has not prevailed yet, so people still need to make efforts. Here, Ouyang compares taking An Jie home to a revolution that requires plenty of effort, he is encouraging Jiang but in a watch-the-fun tone. Then Jiang switches the leading role of the topic to Ouyang by wondering why it is awkward for Ouyang to say the word "revolution". Jiang doesn't say more but from his understatement, we know that he is threatening Ouyang's face in off record with an ironic tone since Ouyang is an intellectual with a bourgeois family background which was at that time the target of the revolution.

Example 6

Strategy 2—Avoid disagreement

Ouyang Yi : 我说你们家有没有白酒啊？你说老喝这色酒，什么时候能整到位呀？这，这喝起来不过瘾是不是？

An Xin : 干嘛啊你，你喝多了啊你。

Ouyang Yi : 这点色酒能把我喝多了？我告诉你，我离喝多还早着呢。

An Jie: 你现在也喝白酒啦？

Ouyang Yi : 现在才喝？（拍腿激动地说）我早就开始喝白酒啦！

Jiang Defu : 好，换白酒，换白酒，我也喝不惯这玩意儿，早知道一开始就喝白的了。

Ouyang Yi : 对对对！”

(From episode 22)

During the Cultural Revolution, Ouyang Yi was labeled as a rightist, and he lost his decent job and life and became a fisherman doing the labor work on the island with his family for years. And this is the first time he together with his family to visit Jiang's after the revolution, he gets rehabilitated. At table, he advises Jiang to drink Chinese spirit instead of wine. Actually, Ouyang and his family live a pretty wealthy life before and they prefer western-style food and drink, that is why Jiang treats them with wine. However, after suffering a lot these years, Ouyang gets very cautious in speaking and keeps a low profile which is totally different from what he used to be. And even, he learns to curry favor with people higher than him. He knows that Jiang dislikes drinking wine before, so to cater to Jiang's taste he pretends that he likes and he wants to drink spirit regardless of the discouragement from his wife. He even depreciates wine to the drink with colors. Jiang says that he also cannot get used to drinking wine and he should have treated them with spirit, which is in fact a white lie to avoid disagreement and to maintain Ouyang's face. And it is agreed by Ouyang with three repeated yes. Here, both of them adopt positive politeness to consider the other's face, and finally, they reach a consensus.

Example 7

Strategy 2——Avoid disagreement

Jiang Defu : 这个茅台呀，是特供的，是专门为人民大会堂特供的，来来来。

Ouyang Yi : 什么特供啊，就是为了方便赚钱，这个茅台酒不像过去那么珍贵了，普通老百姓都能喝得上，这叫“旧时王谢堂前燕，飞入寻常百姓家”，这茅台酒厂也不像过去那么当大爷，他得想方设法地赚钱，知道吧？

Jiang Defu : 对对对，你说得对(duì duì duì , nǐ shuō dé duì)。

An Xin : 让你喝茅台，你就喝不就行了吗，哪儿来那么多废话你。

Ouyang Yi : 我说什么了我，我就说点实际情况怎么了

An Xin : 那实际情况用得着你说？

Ouyang Yi : 我不说谁说？

(From episode 41)

At Jiang's, Jiang treats with Maotai, a kind of Chinese famous spirit. He introduces that the spirit is specially supplied for the Great Hall of the People to show it is precious. But Ouyang Yi objects that it is not the truth and even quotes a pair of classical poems to support his idea with an arrogant question “知道吧? (don't you know?)” He is such a person who likes to air his knowledge and rarely takes other's feelings into consideration except in the years on the island. His word here actually threatens Jiang's positive-face want by directly indicating his disagreement. But Jiang does not retort back, instead, he adopts the positive politeness strategy by admitting that he is absolutely right to avoid disagreement. By sacrificing Jiang's positive face, he maintains Ouyang's positive face, and to stop Ouyang and his wife's argument, he proposes to drink a toast with the explanation that the spirit was not precious but

they are well-intentioned so to defuse the embarrassment and save their face to a certain extent.

4.2. Findings

Based on the analysis of 22 examples, the politeness strategies used in the conversations of the serials can be illustrated more clearly in the following tables.

Table1. *Politeness strategies used by Jiang Defu in the serials*

Stages	Example (22)	Politeness strategies	Sub-strategies	Frequencies
Before Cultural Revolution	1	Strategy 2	raise common ground	Strategy 1—1 Strategy 2—4 Strategy 3—0 Strategy 4—3
	2	Strategy 2	making promise	
	3	Strategy 4	overstate	
	4	Strategy 2	give gifts to H	
	5	Strategy 1		
	6	Strategy 2	joke	
	7	Strategy 4	understate	
	8	Strategy 4	Be ironic; use rhetorical question	
Between Cultural Revolution and Reform & Opening-up	9	Strategy 2	joke	Strategy 1—1 Strategy 2—3 Strategy 3—0 Strategy 4—2
	10	Strategy 2	avoid disagreement	
	11	Strategy 4	be ironic; understate	
	12	Strategy 1		
	13	Strategy 2	attend to H ; avoid disagreement	
	14	Strategy 4	be incomplete, use ellipsis	
After Reform & Opening-up	15	Strategy 3	apologize	Strategy 1—3 Strategy 2—3 Strategy 3—1 Strategy 4—2
	16	Strategy 2	joke	
	17	Strategy 1		
	18	Strategy 2	raise common ground	
	19	Strategy 4	overstate	
	20	Strategy 2	avoid disagreement	
	21	Strategy 1		
	22	Strategy 1		

According to Table 1, the author finds that, firstly, the hero Jiang Defu mainly employs four kinds of politeness strategies: 1) bald on record; 2) positive politeness; 3) negative politeness; 4) off record. Among the four kinds of politeness, he adopts positive politeness 10 times which is the most frequently used politeness followed by off record for 6 times. And the least used politeness is negative politeness for just only once. The character's personality is a possible factor that influences the choice of politeness to some extent. Jiang Defu, though poor-educated, direct, he is somewhat refined in his rough way with a high emotional quotient to deal with different people. What's more, due to the “be euphemistic; be courteous, and be humble” features of Chinese politeness, he prefers positive politeness and off record.

Secondly, from the table, Jiang takes only one main politeness strategy in each conversation. However, it doesn't mean that Jiang just employs only one politeness strategy in communication. For instance, in example 10, Jiang firstly uses bald on record politeness by uttering “这话还配你说啊？我就是块烂木头，也不用你这个资产阶级的小姐来雕 (zhè huà hái pèi nǐ shuō ā ? wǒ jiù shì kuài làn mù tóu , yě

bú yòng nǐ zhè gè zī chǎn jiē jí de xiǎo jiě lái diào)” Actually, he is joking with An Jie, but his words baldly threaten An Jie’s face, so when An Jie gets angry and makes a complaint against him, he immediately changes his strategy and takes positive politeness to avoid disagreement and a potential quarrel by saying “哼，他奶奶的，我说不过你，我不跟你说 (hēng, tā nǎi nǎi de, wǒ shuō bú guò nǐ, wǒ bú gēn nǐ shuō)” and then goes away smiling. In this example, positive politeness is the main strategy and it’s mainly considered.

Thirdly, for better communication, more than one sub-strategy is employed in some cases to make the communication go more smoothly or express the speaker’s intention better.

Table2. Types of politeness strategies for each communicator

Communicators	Politeness strategies			
	Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3	Strategy 4
Principal Cong	0	2	0	0
An Jie	0	4	1	1
Lao Ding	3	2	0	1
Ouyang Yi	0	2	0	4
Jiang Yafei	2	0	0	0
Total number	5	10	1	6

From Table 2, firstly, to different people, Jiang mainly takes different politeness strategies. To Principal Cong, his leader, he adopts positive politeness; to An Jie, his wife, he uses positive politeness most of the time; to Lao Ding, his best friend as well as his brother-in-law, he mainly takes bald on record; to Ouyang Yi, his brother-in-law, off record is chiefly used; as for Jiang Yafei, his daughter, bald on record is employed.

Secondly, since the five people have different social or family distances with Jiang Defu, the degree of intimacy is taken into consideration when he employs politeness. For instance, both Lao Ding and Ouyang Yi are Jiang’s brothers-in-law, but for the former, he mainly takes bald on record while for the latter, off record is the dominant choice and there’s no bald on record used for the reason that direct speaking and imperative words are often used between intimate people without being taken as commands(George, 2000). In the serials, Lao Ding is Jiang Defu’s comrade in arms, colleague, as well as a best friend, they have a lot in common. One of these similarities is that they are direct in speaking and they can accept the direct words as well, so for Lao Ding, Jiang can directly express his intention without worrying about the consequence, which is the same case for his daughter Jiangyafei; but for Ouyang, they have different family background and upbringing, Ouyang is arrogant for most of his life, so Jiang tends to be courteous and use euphemistic words to maintain his face to some extent, which embodies the features of Chinese politeness.

Thirdly, as for An Jie, the most intimate person in Jiang’s life, he rarely speaks baldly, and mainly takes positive politeness. One reason is that An Jie is in facta well-educated young lady and she is eloquent so her family members including Jiang avoid threatening her face baldly. But the principal reason is that Jiang is ready to bend towards his wife and maintain her face even with the sacrifice of his own face, it is the watching focus of the serials, therein lies the romance.

5. CONCLUSION

On the framework of Brown & Levinson’s Face Theory, the author analyzes 22 pieces of the data which are extracted from the serials *Romance of Our Parents*. The data are separated into pieces so as to analyze them one by one according to different stages and different communicators. And then two

tables are made to present the hero Jiang Defu’s preference of employing different politeness strategies. Some findings are obtained and listed as follows:

Firstly, the analysis of politeness strategies of the 22 Chinese conversations in the serials on the framework of Brown & Levinson’s Face Theory is smoothly going, and it can be said that their politeness strategies are adaptive to the serials *Romance of Our Parents*. That is to say, Brown & Levinson’s Face theory is international and of universal value. Thus, the universality of the theory can be further verified in the serials.

Despite the applicability of the theory in the serials, it has also some limitations which are mainly determined by the features of Chinese politeness and face. According to the analysis of 22 examples, the author finds that the three parameters (D, P, and R) proposed by Brown & Levinson in estimating FTA are not completely adaptive to the conversations in *Romance of Our Parents* for that the story happens after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, and Jiang Defu is an amiable officer, therefore, the absolute ranking and relative power are not so obviously embodied. The social distance, in other words, the degree of intimacy of the speaker and the hearer, does influence the preference of politeness strategies.

Secondly, besides the degree of intimacy, the author finds that two other factors can influence the communicator’s preference for politeness: the communicator’s personality and social changes. To different people with different personalities, Jiang Defu will take different but proper politeness strategies. As for the factor of social changes, Jiang Defu takes different politeness strategies to maintain others’ face according to their current situations. However, the analysis of the study in nature bears inherent subjective nature, which is inevitable. Further study may focus more on the data’s analytical width and depth.

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