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Constructing the Notion of “Desirable” Men and Women in Chinese TV Dating Shows

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Abstract

The current study wants to explore the particular identity, desirability, from two Chinese TV dating shows. The theoretical frameworks of this study adopt interactional sociolinguistics, specially contextualization cues and conceptual metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics. The data of this study derive from two particular TV dating shows in Taiwan and Mainland China respectively. The results indicate that the males in Taiwan and Mainland China both construct themselves using positive perspectives, such as kind or knowledgeable. However, one applies words related to the spirit level, while another adapts words related to the physical level. The female or male desirability can be expressed by using metaphor. By analyzing those metaphor examples, we as readers can understand the criteria for being a desirable female and male.

Keywords: desirability, TV dating shows, interactional sociolinguistics, conceptual metaphor theory

1. Introduction

This study aims to construct one particular identity, so-called “desirability,” from one particular interaction, TV dating shows. Specifically, this study will explore how the notion of desirability that people use in TV dating shows is constructed by using sociolinguistic discourse analysis, especially interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication approaches and the theory of metaphor. These three approaches are adopted to investigate gender. Holmes ([1]:195) points out that linguistic behavior expresses complex social meanings. Also, as many researchers have demonstrated in their works, language is used to symbolize different social identities, and in any particular interaction we use its symbolic power to construct a particular identity or identities ([2–6] cited in Holmes [7]:195). In TV dating shows, females and males use certain discourse elements to convey their identities; in other words, they want to construct themselves as desirable people in order to attract other participants’ attention. The following section will discuss the notions of gender and the studies related to gender, followed by a discussion of the theories in sociolinguistics and cognitive sociolinguistics.

2. Literature review

Since this study investigates gender as its primary theme, the notion of gender and studies related to gender and language usage are discussed in Section 2.1. Under

the theme of gender, there are two large fields in the current proposal: discourse analysis (in Section 2.2) and cognitive sociolinguistics (in Section 2.3). In discourse analysis, I also cover theoretical notions in relation to interactional sociolinguistics. Then, I review the literature related to reality TV shows (RTV). Since a TV dating show is a kind of RTV, it is necessary to review some studies in this field. Finally, the theory of metaphor in cognitive sociolinguistics is discussed.

2.1 Gender

Overall, there are three waves of changes in language and gender. First, gender is an emergent feature of social situations, both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society ([8]: p. 126). More specifically and traditionally, gender nominates a set of categories that people can give labels to cross-linguistically or cross-culturally because those categories have some connections to sex differences [9]. Second, Tannen [10] proposes that women and men speak differently because of fundamental differences in their relation to their language. This has been taken as representative of the second wave of studies on gender and language ([11]: p. 1). These kinds of gender studies focus on the correlation between pre-determined macro-level social categories and particular linguistic variables. However, there is another paradigm that emerged in the study of language and gender ([11]: p. 4). It relates to how women and men speak and how they are spoken of. For these kinds of gender studies, analysts view gender as involving what people “do” ([11]: p. 4). Gender is continually produced, reproduced, and indeed changed through people’s performance of gendered acts [11]. Third, Cameron [12] points out that gender is socially constructed, rather than “natural.” In other words, gender has to be constantly reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms ([12]: p. 339). This performative model sheds an interesting light on the phenomenon of gendered speech ([12]: p. 340). In other words, gendered speech is a kind of “repeated stylization of the body” ([11]: p. 340). The difference among Shapiro [9], representing the first wave, Tannen [10], representing the second wave, and Cameron [12], representing the third wave, is that Shapiro [9] seems to view gender as a pre-figured and well-defined category, with gender being equal to sex. The second wave seems to view gender in terms of males and females having different ways of speaking. The third one seems to view gender as performing or styling, and gender is separate from sex in this view. People *do* perform gender differently in different contexts, and they do sometimes behave in ways we would normally associate with the “other” gender ([12]: p. 340). Based on the view of gender performance, Cameron [12] further points out that masculine and feminine styles of talking that have been identified by researchers might be thought of as the result of repeated acts by social actors trying to constitute themselves as “proper” men and women.

There have been many studies on the relationship between language and gender [1, 13]. Erlandson [14] indicates that research exploring language use has identified several language features that differentiate women and men. Coates [13] has a specific chapter that discusses gender differences, with extensive evidence from various studies showing that women and men speak differently in their use of language. Coates [11] lists eight aspects: minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing, taboo language, and compliments. For example, research on the use of minimal responses such as “yeah,” “right,” and “mhm” is unanimous in showing that women use them more than men ([1], cited in [13]: p. 87). In the aspect of commands and directives, Goodwin [15] gives an example of observing a group of players in a Philadelphia street; she notices that among this group, boys use different sorts of

directives from the girls. In their conversation, Goodwin notices that boys use “gimme” and “get off” in their speech, and Goodwin calls these “aggravated” directives. The boys use aggravated directives to establish status differences. In contrast, the girls typically use more “mitigated” directives like “let us” or “gonna” [15]. Meanwhile, West [16] explores doctors’ usage of directives when they talk to patients. The results indicate that male doctors like to use aggravated forms like “lie down” or “take off your shoes,” whereas female doctors use mitigated ones more commonly, even sometime using “we” in their directives, such as “so let us stay on what we are doing.” In the final aspect, compliment, researchers in New Zealand [17] and the US [18] both indicated that women both give and receive more compliments than males [13]. Holmes [17] uses a New Zealand’s corpus that contained 484 complimentary exchanges; after analysis, the author found that 248 out of the 484 exchanges were given by a woman to another woman, with only 44 out of 484 being given by a man to another man. Further, in Herbert [18], the author found that women like to use more personalized forms, like compliments with a first or second person focus, whereas men prefer to use more impersonal forms, like a third person focus.

In the previous literature, there remains a research gap that this study aims to address, namely the gender identities displayed in TV dating shows. The notion of “desirable” females and males is constructed via TV dating shows; therefore, in this study the meaning of “desirability” will be discussed in detail. According to Harrington [19, 20], there are seven traits that scientists have found that make women more attractive to men. First, men are more attracted to women who are ovulating. Second, men like women who laugh at their jokes, since it touts their egos. Third, men prefer honest women, particularly for long-term relationships. Fourth, men gravitate to women wearing red, and vice versa. Fifth, men like it when women subtly mirror their actions. Sixth, women appear even more attractive in groups, a phenomenon referred to as the “cheerleader effect.” Seventh, men prefer women with positive personality characteristics, like openness, kindness, and assertiveness. If a woman has all the traits mentioned above, she is more likely to receive the attention of males, according to the author. Harrington [19, 20] also lists 11 qualities that scientists have thought attract women. First, good looks can be a factor, though this is not necessarily a factor, as women typically choose better-looking men for flings, but not for long-term relationships. Second, a sense of humor can make men seem more intelligent. Third, women prefer altruistic men who are kind and who do good deeds for long-term relationships. Fourth, women choose men who appear to be wealthy. Fifth, women may like older men because they have had time to accumulate more resources. Sixth, do what you want with your face, you will attract the right mate. Seventh, “playing hard to get,” or appearing to be unavailable, can be an effective way to attract women. Eighth, men with dogs do better with ladies. Ninth, women are more attracted to men who are mindful, as it suggests they are attentive and nonjudgmental. Tenth, men wearing red seem to be more attractive. Finally, women like men who take heroic and primal risks, like saving people’s lives.

The above two articles list some potential traits about “attractive” females and males in Western societies. But what are the traits of “attractive” females and males in Eastern societies? In Chinese societies, the desirable males have a different name, 新好男人, or “good new man.” There are many articles online that list the characteristics of a 新好男人. The Chinese definition of 新好男人, from the official definition of the Ministry of Education, is as follows:

民國八十年代末期對男人要求的新形象,為求取性別關係平衡過程中所提出的一種看法。綜合概念為具幽默感,能讓人舒適、可信賴,生活態度真誠、認真,堅持道德與理性,有為有守,尊重生命,體貼女性等。

“In the late 1990, new image of men required for obtaining a balanced view of gender relations in the process. Comprehensive concept as having a sense of humor

can make people comfortable, reliable, the attitude of life of honest, serious, moral and rational insisted; have moral integrity and be promising; respect for life; care about women.”

However, Shi [21] criticizes the official definition for its lack of mention of family-related qualities, such as being a loving husband or taking care of children (愛慕妻子, 照顧子女). In other words, there is still sexual discrimination contained in the official definition of 新好男人. There are also many blog articles (e.g., 小牟 [41], Yanlkce [39]) that mention many criteria of 新好男人. For example, Yanlkce [39] mentions that a 新好男人 must have “four highs plus ten bonuses” in order to be a good husband: first, 耐操度高 (first, men are able to work hard under a tight schedule); second, 出席率高 (second, men are high attentive); third, 鑑別率高 (third, men are able to distinguish themselves and stand apart); and fourth, 紅利高 (fourth, men have unique advantages). The definition of 新好男人 in this chapter has major differences from the one created by the Ministry of Education. This study adds one more criterion to complement the definition, i.e., that a good husband must be willing to take care of children. From all of the above-mentioned definitions of 新好男人, it can be seen that the definition has undergone some changes. The definition of 新好男人 in Chinese societies has a different focus from the one in Western societies. In Chinese societies, males need to be geniuses, with a broad range of skills, if they are to be seen as desirable.

From the above paragraphs, it can be seen that there are many standards or criteria for the meaning of “desirability.” However, what are the criteria or standards of the notion of desirability for males and females in TV dating shows? Do they require the same criteria as mentioned above, or do they vary to any degree? This is a question worth investigating.

2.2 Discourse analysis

In this section’s discourse analysis, the particular sociolinguistic theory and Van Dijk’s [22] notion of “discourse analysis as ideological analysis” are reviewed, and these will serve as the main theoretical frameworks.

The sociolinguistic theory is interactional sociolinguistics. Interactional sociolinguistics is based in anthropology, sociology and linguistics, and it shares the concerns of all three fields with culture, society and language ([23]: p. 97).

Gumperz’s contextualization cues play an important role in his sociolinguistics of interpersonal communication. His contextualization cues are the aspects of language and behavior (verbal and nonverbal signs) that relate what is said to the contextual knowledge that contributes to the presuppositions necessary to the accurate inferencing of what is meant ([23]: 99–100). The contextualization cues can affect the basic meaning of the message, so when listeners share speakers’ contextualization cues, subsequent interactions proceed smoothly ([23]:100). In Schiffrin ([23]:102), the author mentions that the key to Gumperz’s sociolinguistics of interpersonal communication is a view of language as a socially and culturally constructed symbol system that is used in ways that reflect macro-level social meanings, such as group identity, and create micro-level social meanings like what one is saying and doing at a particular moment.

Van Dijk [24] mentions “ideological analysis of discourse,” a different line of research that deals with discourse. Ideological analysis of discourse views the relations between socioeconomic infrastructures and cultural superstructures ([24]: p. 8). That is to say, it is the fundamental triangulation of discourse, cognition and society [25]. Here, ideologies are defined within a multidisciplinary framework that combines a social, cognitive and discursive component [25]. They consist of social representations that define the social identity of a group [25]. Ideologies are

abstract mental systems that organize socially shared attitudes (Van Dijk [22]: 18). Using more simple explanations, they are primarily some kind of “ideas” or “belief systems” ([25]: p. 116). Those belief systems can be shared widely and quickly, and they sometimes become part of the generally accepted attitudes, obvious opinions or common sense of an entire community. Based on this, the present study asks the question: what ideologies can be found in the particular communities of TV dating shows? Van Dijk’s [22] “discourse analysis as ideological analysis” is used as one of the theoretical frameworks for addressing this question.

2.2.1 Language use in reality television (RTV)

When we think of language use, we think of activities in which language plays a necessary role [26]. Because it is so common, people sometimes forget it is unique and value and even neglect the social meanings behind the language. We can view language use in many ways. One way is to treat it as a class of human actions [26]. Another way, which is a more common view, is to treat language use as a product or expression of people’s competence in a language [26]. In order to narrow down this body of research, this study will discuss the literature related to language use in reality television (RTV).

Reality television (RTV) takes place within an institution, that of broadcasting, and can therefore be regarded as public discourse (Lorenzo-Dus and Garces-Conejos Blitvich [27]. Ren and Woodfield [28] propose that because of the difficulty in collecting sufficient naturalistic data for analysis, the RTV program provides an unprecedented opportunity to investigate how individuals interact and to gain insight into the ways they express politeness. Therefore, academic interest in RTV has grown steadily, especially post-2000 [27].

2.3 Cognitive sociolinguistics

Cognitive sociolinguistics is a field that explores language use by merging the methods and theoretical frameworks of cognitive linguistics and sociolinguistics [29]. Liu mentions that cognitive linguistics and sociolinguistics are interested in analyzing the contextualized meaning of actual language use in objective ways (2010:2845). In other words, it extends cognitive paradigms into social patterns ([30], cited in [31]: 5).

In cognitive sociolinguistics, gender issues can be treated as the product of everyday language and participants’ experience of meanings. This study tries to clarify the variation of the notion of “desirable” that is observed with one particular speech community, TV dating shows. Fiksdal [32] also points out that, within cognitive sociolinguistics, there is extensive literature on the study of metaphors, and researchers have begun to examine variation in the use of metaphor in naturally occurring conversation. Therefore, the gender issue in cognitive sociolinguistics can be viewed as a combination of empirical methods such as how participants construct the notion of desirability with the social aspect of language.

2.3.1 Conceptual metaphor theory

Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* [33] is considered a classic study of metaphor. In their book, they introduce conceptual metaphor theory (CMT). In this theory, conceptual metaphors are defined as systematic sets of correspondences, or “mappings,” across conceptual domains, whereby a “target” domain is partly structured in terms of a different “source” domain ([34]: p. 5).

Shie [35] states that metaphor is conceptualized as a process of cross-domain mapping that produces systematic correspondences between the source domain and the target domain. There is a famous metaphorical example “life is a journey,” where “life” is the target domain and “journey” is the “source” domain. In this metaphor, people correspond to travelers, action to forward movement, choices to crossroads, problems to impediments to travel, and purposes to destinations ([34]: p. 6). More specifically, target domains typically correspond to areas of experience that are relatively abstract, complex, unfamiliar, subjective or poorly delineated. In contrast to target domains, source domains typically correspond to concrete, simple, familiar, physical and well-delineated experience ([34, 36]). In general sayings, the knowledge of the source domain and inferences appropriate to it determine the comprehension of and reasoning in the target domain ([35]: p. 1322), [37–41].

Therefore, the three research questions are as follows:

1. How is the notion of desirable men and women constructed in the two TV dating shows?
2. What are the similarities or differences in the construction of desirable men and women between the two TV dating shows in Taiwan and Mainland China?
3. How are metaphors used in the two TV dating shows?

The first research question aims to analyze in detail how people construct the notion of desirability in two TV dating shows. The second question explores what the similarities and differences are (if they are found) in constructing the idea of desirable men and women between Taiwan’s and Mainland China’s TV dating shows. The third question is related to cognitive sociolinguistics; in people’s usage of language, how are metaphors used? After presenting an overview of how metaphors are used in the two TV dating shows, a more detailed analysis of language use will be presented. The differences in the usages of metaphor in the two TV dating shows are also discussed.

3. Methodology

In this section, the methodology of the construction of the notion of “desirable” in Chinese TV dating shows is discussed. The data collection and data analysis of this study are arranged as follows. In the data collection, the choice of the two TV dating shows is presented. These shows are then introduced in order for people to understand and realize the background and the procedures of the two TV dating shows. After the introduction of the two TV dating shows, the data analysis of this study is given.

3.1 Data collection

Two TV dating shows are selected from two areas in order to explore the three research questions. “Take Me Out, Taiwan (王子的約會)” is chosen to represent Taiwan, while “Take Me Out (我們約會吧)” is chosen to represent Mainland China. Regarding the other TV dating show chosen for this study, Take Me Out, Taiwan is the only TV dating show that is produced and broadcasted by Taiwan Television Enterprise, Ltd. (台灣電視公司; 簡稱台視) in Taiwan.

The data of this study is collected from the above two TV dating shows. “Take Me Out, Taiwan (王子的約會)” launched on 18 August, in 2012 and was off the air on 26 April in 2014. But the duration of data collection is from February 2013 to August 2013. In contrast with “Take Me Out, Taiwan (王子的約會),” which aired

once weekly, “Take Me Out (我們約會吧)” aired twice a week, and Tuesday and Wednesday. But the duration of data collection is from August 2012 to August 2013.

3.2 Data analysis

After collecting the episodes from both TV dating shows, they are first categorized according to country, Taiwan or Mainland China. The three research questions can be further categorized in two fields. The first Section 3.2.1, concerns the first two questions, or how the notion of desirable is constructed and the similarities and differences in these constructions. The second Section 3.2.2, relates to the usage of metaphor and the differences between each show.

3.2.1 The first two research questions

The conversations in the TV dating shows are analyzed and compared using the theories of interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication and Van Dijk’s discourse analysis. In this part, to examine how males in Taiwan and Mainland China construct the notion of desirability, I not only select males who successfully got a date but also those who were unsuccessful. This is done in order to look at both possible scenarios, as this can provide clear comparisons and also reinforce the audience’s memory. As for the how the females in Taiwan and Mainland China construct themselves as desirable people, I look at females’ conversations towards the male contestants as well as towards the hosts. The reason for this is that females sometimes express their own criteria of desirability when having conversations among males or hosts. I not only look at how they convey their criteria for desirability in obvious and expressive ways but also analyze meaning hidden in the contexts of the conversations, as these hidden meanings sometimes reflect people’s perspectives or reflect certain unique cultural values.

In the following examples, the males and females in the two areas are listed separately and with explanations. In the following set of examples, the first example is the male who successfully gets a date. The second example is a male who does not get a date.

(1) The Taiwanese males

a.

A男：我平常興趣是喜歡看喜劇，因為我覺得如果人要活得快樂的話，必須要。把生活的所有事情都看做喜劇一樣，這樣就可以活得很坦然。而對於我喜歡的女孩子呢！！如果你要我搞笑我可以搞笑給你看，但是如果你需要一個傾聽者的話，我可以靜靜的待在你身邊陪著你...

Male A: I like to watch comedy in my leisure time because, in my opinion, you have to regard everything in a relaxed way to live happily and comfortably. As to the girl I fancy, I can do whatever she wants. I can amuse her, and I can also be a good listener.

b.

A女：可以問一下你上一段是因為什麼事情分手？

Female A: Can I ask the reason why you broke up with your ex-girlfriend?

B男：其實我跟上一段感情的女朋友還是很好，那會分手的原因是因為我覺得。交往就是要以結婚為前提，那如果最後可能因為雙方家庭的一些問題的話無法繼續在一起，不是因為個人感情因素，那最後還是當朋友會比較合適。

Male B: Actually, I am still in a good relationship with my ex-girlfriend. The reason why we broke up is because I date for marriage. If we break up due to family issues instead of emotional factors, then I think it’s better to stay friends.

From the two examples above, male A constructs himself as a wise, optimistic person and also a “desirable” boyfriend. He has a very bright perspective about always looking on the positive side. This shows that he has an optimistic personality and will not be daunted by anything. He has an image of being a strong pillar, suggesting that the female can feel comfortable when she stays besides him. This serves as a symbol of what he is going to say. Again, he presents a personality of someone who can accompany the female if she needs him. He is a good listener. He accepts everything that the female does not want just in order to make the female feel better. He wants to convey that he has both extroverted and introverted sides of his personality. He emphasizes that he can be a good listener with an introverted personality, as well as being a vivacious person with an extroverted personality. If males have both introverted and extroverted personality traits, they are considered to be desirable boyfriends to females. When mentioning his ideal girlfriend, he mentions that he has both extroverted and introverted sides to his personality instead of giving specific characteristics. If he were to give specific characteristics, it may easily offend other females who do not think of themselves as having these specific characteristics. For females, they may think that males are picky and nagging. If females have a bad impression of the male, it may lower the likelihood of successfully getting a date. Hence, for him, it is very clever that he does not mention specifics when answering this question. For male A, he constructs himself as having those previously mentioned advantages in order to attract females’ attention. Those advantages serve as the contextualization cues. In the end, he successfully gets a date.

However, for male B, the situation is different. He constructs himself as a “player” and a somewhat distrustful person. He not only mentions a so-called “forbidden” topic but also indicates that he is still friends with his ex-girlfriend. In the TV dating shows, the males’ results are miserable if they mention their ex-girlfriend. Hence the topic of “ex-girlfriend” is viewed as a forbidden topic. Meanwhile, the male says that he is still “friends” with his ex-girlfriend. This sentence touches on two things, “ex-girlfriend” and “still friends.” These two phrases serve as the contextualization cues. For females, it is generally not good to hear that our boyfriend is still friends with his ex-girlfriend. For girlfriends, the phrase “still friends” may suggest that they could potentially reconcile. Meanwhile, he gives excuses for this behavior; he states that if the reason for breaking up is not due to particular faults of either party, they can still be friends and have an intermittent relationship. With such statements, male B’s behavior makes females think he cannot be trusted and that he cannot be a pillar to the females. Therefore, in the end, male B is rejected.

From the above examples, how males construct themselves does matter. If the male constructs himself in positive perspectives, like being a pillar of females, an intelligent male, or a considerate male, it increases the likelihood of getting a date. However, if the male touches on forbidden topics, such as ex-girlfriends, or constructs himself as a distrustful person, the females do not hesitate to reject him.

(1) The males in Mainland China

c.

C男：我做過最讓我自豪的事情就是，做過很多的公益事業，比如說我們的汶川地震期間，我組織一些明星去義演，然後去籌款，捐了56萬，然後我剛剛又為我們的雲南魯甸地震製作了一首歌曲，來為災區的朋友第一時間送去溫暖。

Male C: The proudest thing I have done is that I do a lot of charity work. For example, after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, we raised RMB560,000 for charity. And I also produced a song for the 2014 Ludian earthquake, to comfort the victims.

d.

D男：我希望他跟我年齡群比較接近，最好不要是90後，因為我覺得他們還不夠成熟，謝謝。

Male D: I do hope her age is close to mine. It better not be after the 90s generation, because I think they are not mature enough.

主持人：為什麼你還在嫌棄他們不夠成熟？

Host: Why do you still turn away from people who you think are not mature enough?

D男：我覺得他們有點小孩子氣吧，有點那個拜金，完了之後他們那個喜歡熬夜熬到天量，好像目前很多身邊的人都不想結婚的90後太多了，不是我想要的那個類型。

Male D: Because I think they are a little childish, and they worship money. They also like to stay up late, even till dawn. Most people nowadays do not like to get married because there are too many people who grew up after the 1990s. Not my ideal type.

主持人：就是憑你接觸的幾個90後，完了一竿子把90後全打倒，一竿子打倒。任何一件事情，你帶來的就是炮轟。

Host: You paint all the post-90s generation with the same brush. If you do anything like this, you'll be admonished.

In the beginning of example (c), the male constructs himself as a compassionate person by mentioning that he does a lot of charity work. He wants to construct one particular concept, being an understanding and caring person, by providing a lot of evidence. Those pieces of evidence serve as the contextualization cues. By mentioning what he does, the females may have a good impression of him, which may increase his likelihood of getting a date. However, there are two other possible interpretations when he mentions what he does in his conversation. First, when he refers to raising RMB560,000 for charity, it expresses the notion that he is well-connected and that he knows a lot of wealthy people. It also implies that he, himself, may be wealthy, which accounts for his largesse. Second, he also conveys the notion of being a smart and well-educated person when he mentions that he has produced a song for disaster victims. Producing songs requires certain advanced skills and training, and lyricists must know how to write and arrange songs. This is therefore a means of conveying that he is smart and well-educated. In summary, male C constructs himself as a compassionate, well-connected, wealthy, well-educated and smart person. Rather than directly pointing out these advantages and appearing to show off, he uses “charities” to package those ideas. This proves again that he is smart and knows how to package himself. In the end, he successfully gets a date.

In example (d), he constructs himself as a picky, hard-to-please person. He directly points out that he dislikes the 90s generation, even criticizing them pointedly by referring to their immaturity, childishness, and worship of money, all of which are negative terms. However, he makes these judgments against the female guests whom he was meeting for the first time. In addition, he criticizes everyone onstage who comes from the 1990s generation, painting them all with the same brush in front of a national audience. That is why the host warns that such actions will result in admonishment; even the host, who is supposed to be somewhat neutral, is repelled by the male's statements. In the end, he is rejected completely by the females.

From the above two examples in Mainland China, it can be seen that males construct themselves in different ways. If a male constructs himself by using positive perspectives or intelligent approaches, he is more likely to get a date, but if he appears dismissive and confrontational, he has little hope of getting a date.

From the two sets of examples, both the males in Taiwan and the males in Mainland China construct themselves by using positive attributes, like supportive or compassionate, with the Taiwanese male in example (a) going so far as to mention more spiritual or philosophical concerns. One of the males, the male in Mainland China in example (c), focuses on mentioning physical or superficial aspects. It is important to mention that these are just rough findings, based on limited data.

(2) The Taiwanese female

A女：因為我好奇心還滿強，所以我覺得王子的博學多聞應該可以滿足我。 .

Female A: Because I am full of curiosity, I think a wealthy and knowledgeable person will suit me well.

(2) The females in Mainland China

a.

B女：我叫XXX，我也是跟在座的女嘉賓一樣也大你倆歲，不過我不介意你小我倆歲，因為我覺得你不成熟我成熟就夠了，而且我覺得你是一個表面看起來顯小，但是內心有大徹大悟得一個男孩兒，我覺得你說話啊以及你表現出來得那個氣場，我都覺得還不錯，而且我特別特別喜歡你這張臉，我很喜歡單眼皮得男孩兒。 .

Female B: I am XXX. I am two years older than you, same as the ladies here, but I do not mind that you are younger than me because I think I am mature enough to cover both of us. I also think you are more mature than your appearance. I like the way you talk and look, especially your single-eyelid.

b.

C女：我覺得咱倆如果在一起的話，我願意做你的美人魚，永遠不劈腿，你願意做我的小火車，永遠不出軌嗎？

Female C: I am willing to be your mermaid if we become lovers. I will never cheat on you, forever. Would you willing to be my little train and never cheat on me?

From the three examples above, the Taiwanese female constructs herself as a knowledgeable and curious person. These two words serve as the contextualization cues. The females in Mainland China, however, construct themselves in two different ways. Female B constructs herself as an intelligent and understandable person, as shown by sentences like, "I do not mind that you are younger than me" or "I also think you are more mature than your appearance." These two sentences have the function of contextualization cues. From these two sentences, it is clear that Female B is not concerned about dating a younger man because she thinks the male is more mature than his appearance. This is a crucial point. For her, whether the male is mature or not is more important than his age. If the male is mature, he will think twice and be a responsible man. For females, this is an important factor when considering spouses or boyfriends. That is why Female B constructs herself as an intelligent and understandable person.

Female C takes a different approach. She constructs herself as being a male's subordinate. In her metaphors, she chooses words like "mermaid" (美人魚) or "little train" (小火車), indicating that she views males in a dominant position. These are stark contextualization cues. A mermaid (美人魚) has no feet and thus cannot betray or run away from males. This implies her loyalty to males. However, it also begs the question of why males are not described as being mermaids. Also, "little train" (小火車) is an oppressive statement. Train (火車) has the meaning of leading something to a place, so the female's suggestion is that the male will be her train, leading her and thus taking on a position of dominance in their relationship. In saying this, she puts herself in a follower or subordinate place. Moreover, she states that

she will not disobey him; she views him as her king or her everything. She wants the male to lead her to their shared future. Finally, the use of the word “forever” (永遠) is quite powerful, as it means loyalty until death. She bets her entire life on the male, which puts her in an extremely low, passive, almost subservient position. This is a kind of oppressive relationship.

In these three examples, the females in the two areas have the tendency to construct themselves with positive perspectives, like being a knowledgeable and understandable person. However, the females in Mainland China have the tendency to lower their position in order to cater to the males. This is quite a unique phenomenon in Mainland China. Besides lowering herself, the females in Mainland China also have the tendency to mention more superficial factors, such as physical appearance. In contrast, the Taiwanese female tends to mention inward things like being curious or knowledgeable. Again, these are just the rough findings.

3.2.2 The third research question

In TV dating shows, females and males have the tendency to use metaphors in their examples. The use of metaphors allows them to express themselves without directly stating their thoughts or intentions. In TV dating shows, participants, both male and female, all have the same goal, that of finding their desired spouse. Hence, the criteria for desirable males or females can be found in their conversation. The following examples relate to the participants’ use of metaphors. By analyzing the usage of metaphor in the examples, the males’ and females’ criteria for desirability can be seen.

(a)

A女：我覺得王子的所有條件都很好，可是唯一有一點讓我很害怕的就是，我不太喜歡男生肌肉那麼明顯，我比較喜歡五花肉。 .

Female A: I think that the male has many advantages, but there is one thing that I am very afraid of, which is that I do not like males who look macho. I prefer a male who has a “pork belly.”

In this example, the female expresses her notion of a “desirable” male by using the concept of food, stating that she likes a male with a “pork belly.” The phrase “pork belly” here is a metaphor. The literal meaning of “pork belly” is the fatty, oily belly of pigs. Female A contrasts “macho” men with men who have a “pork belly,” with the implication that she prefers men who are slightly overweight or who have a “beer belly.” In this example, “pork belly” is the source domain, and the target domain in example (a) is fatty and oily, which is more abstract. Therefore, she applies the pork belly, the concrete notion, to the abstract notion, fatty and oily. In this example, the female clearly shows what her criterion for a desirable male is. For her, she wants the male to be soft and overweight rather than muscular, “macho” men.

(b)

B男：今天我給大家推薦一款產品，他外觀時尚、功能強大，而且還終身保修。 .

Male B: Today, I want to recommend one particular “product” to everyone. This product has a fashionable appearance, powerful function, and, importantly, has a lifetime warranty.

In this example, the male expresses his criteria of desirable males by adapting the concepts of electronic goods. In the literal meaning, there is no relationship between “products” and desirability. However, he uses the metaphor of “products” to express himself. The elements of the product are appearance, function, and warranty. These three elements are the key elements that customers will consider when buying the product. Hence the male adapts these three characteristics in his example. When customers select products, they consider the above three ones. In the same logic, if

females want to choose their spouse, they will also consider the same criteria. Hence the “product” in his example refers to the male himself. He maps the target domain, “product” with the source domain, “himself.” Next, “fashionable appearance” not only means the appearance of the goods, but also means the appearance of the male. It means that the male is handsome. “Powerful function” means the male can do plenty of things, like cooking, cleaning, or taking care of the female, which further suggests that he is intelligent. If he says there is a lifetime warranty, it can have two meanings. First, it means that all of his characteristics, like being good-looking or multi-talented, will last forever. Second, it means that he will never cheat or betray the female. As the product has a warranty, it means that if there are any problems or if something is broken, it can be repaired or renewed. Therefore, we can say that the female has the male words of always loyal to the female. The male maps concrete concepts like appearance, function and warranty with the abstract concepts, handsome, capable, and loyal.

In example (b), the characteristics of a desirable male are conveyed using a goods metaphor. For this particular male, he considers that males need to be handsome, capable and loyal in order to be considered desirable.

(c)

C女：我已經含苞代嫁，但是男嘉賓實在是無法下嚥，太嫩了！

Female C: I am a budding female. But the male is still too tender to swallow.

In this example, the female does not directly mention the age problem. Instead, she uses a metaphor to express her thought. First, she uses the metaphor of a flower to express that she is in her prime. “Budding” means the flower is ready to bloom. Once the flower blooms, it quickly withers. Hence the “budding” has the meaning that she is ready to get married and that she is at her most beautiful. Once she gets married, she will no longer have that value of being a single woman. She uses a budding notion to convey that she is ready to get married. Here “flower” is the source domain, and “ready for marriage” or “at the prime age” is the target domain. Second, “budding” can also mean that she has a lot of life experience and is ready to show her experience. The flower being in bud means that it has gone through a lot of challenges and is ready to bloom. Again, she uses “flower” as the source domain and “a lot of age or life experience” as the target domain. In the first part of the example, the metaphor of “flower” can be mapped to have the meanings of “ready for marriage,” “at the prime age” and “a lot of age or life experience.”

In the second part of her example, she uses a metaphor in relation to “vegetable” by mentioning that the male guest is too tender to swallow. People often use “tender” to describe the condition of vegetables. So “too tender” can mean that the male guest is young and lacks life experience. Hence, he is not ready to get married. Here, the “vegetable” is the source domain and the age or life experience is the target domain. Besides having the meaning of “young” or “naïve,” “vegetable” can also have the meaning of being a vegetarian. The male is refused, with a metaphorical implication that the female is carnivorous. The male is too young, naïve and vegetarian, and that is why the female refuses him. Again, “vegetable” can be mapped to have the meaning of “young, naïve and vegetarian” in the second part of the example. Meanwhile, the verb “swallow” is also a kind of metaphor. “Swallow” means taking something into the stomach without chewing it. It corresponds to what was previously said. She wants to swallow the male without chewing, and she also suggests the meaning that she does not have time to chew the male. This indicates that she is eager for getting married. The word “swallow” is the target domain and can be mapped to have the meaning of “desirous of getting married,” the source domain.

In example (c), the female uses three different things as the metaphor, such as flower, vegetable, and the notion of swallowing, to express her thoughts while saving face for the male. For her, a desirable male has to have enough life experience or maturity.

(d)

D女：我覺得這匹野馬我駕馭不了，我們家也沒有草原。 .

Female D: I do not think that I can ride this wild horse. We do not have grassland at home.

In example (d), she does not directly mention the male's personality; instead, she uses metaphor to express her thought. She uses a “horse” to describe the male guest's personality. In reality, horses already need to be trained and taught in order to be tame, and this is especially true of wild horses. The wild horse is untamed and cannot be trained, which means that the male's personality is similarly too profligate and unrestrained. Moreover, it can imply that the male has a tendency to cheat on the female. The female maps a “wild horse,” a concrete concept with personality and affair, with the abstract concepts. Besides “wild horse,” the verb “ride” also serves as a metaphor. Riding horses has the meaning of getting control over the horse. Here, she maps “ride horses,” the target domain, with the meaning of “getting control of the male,” the source domain.

In the second part of her example, she uses “grassland” as a metaphor. “Grassland” means the space for the horse to gallop freely. It also has the meaning of someone's breadth of mind. In example (d), it means that the female's breadth of mind is limited. She cannot tolerate his profligate and unrestrained personality, such as if the male cheats on her. She maps the “grassland,” the concrete concept, with the abstract concepts of “unrestrained personality” or “having an affair.” Additionally, she uses “we” and “our family” to strengthen her points. None of her family members, including herself, have an unrestrained personality or has had extramarital relations. That is why she refuses him.

In example (d), she uses two simple and easily understood objects, horse and grassland, in her utterance to express her actual meaning. She avoids directly pointing out his personality so that he can save face. Again, for her, the desirable male has to have a good personality and also be loyal to her.

In conclusion, from the above examples and explanations, the answers to the three research questions are proposed. For the first and second research questions, the males in Taiwan and Mainland China both construct themselves using positive perspectives, such as kind or knowledgeable. However, one applies words related to the spirit level, while another adapts words related to the physical level. For example, the male in Mainland China mentions that he organizes the benefit performance and donates money to the victims, whereas the male in Taiwan tends to use mental expressions, like accompany, when constructing desirability. These are the differences and similarities between the two males in Taiwan and Mainland China. The females in Mainland China and Taiwan all construct themselves by using positive perspectives, just as the males in Taiwan and Mainland China had done. The females in the two areas are thus similar in this way. Regarding their difference, Taiwanese females tend to adapt inward concepts, while the females in Mainland China tend to mention the males' appearances in their utterances. Also, the females have the tendency to pander to the males. In other words, she degrades herself by using an oppressive relationship. For the last research question, we can realize that female or male desirability can be expressed by using metaphor. By analyzing those metaphor examples, we as readers can understand the criteria for being a desirable female and male.

There are three theoretical contributions in this study. First, few studies use Chinese TV dating shows as the data resources. TV dating shows are still a new

area for researchers to research. Meanwhile, few studies have explored females' and males' language usage in TV dating shows, and there has been no discussion of how they use language to construct the notion of desirability. Second, few or no studies have adopted conceptual metaphor theory to analyze the language usage in TV dating shows. Third, this study provides cross-field analysis of the language usage in TV dating shows, including analysis from sociolinguistic, cognitive sociolinguistic, and sociological perspectives. Therefore, the practical application of this study is that it integrates these new perspectives to analyze language, thus providing a whole new view of how people use language to construct their identity.

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