Relational Work in Peer Advice in a Chinese Corporate Online Discussion Forum

Relational work en el asesoramiento por pares en un foro corporativo chino de discusión en línea

中国公司在线论坛中同伴建议的关系工作研究

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Abstract: Former studies on advice has been focused on health and educational settings either online or offline, where the advice-giver usually enjoys an advantageous power relationship with the advice-seeker. Studies of advice in Chinese discourse are no exception. Given the insufficiency of studies on advice given by peers of equity power relations in Chinese discourse and the necessity to investigate into relational aspects, this study explores peer advice given by coworkers in a Chinese corporate online discussion forum, analyzing the advising strategies and the relational work involved. Analysis of data shows that Chinese make use of direct advising strategies more often than either conventionally or non-conventionally indirect strategies. Further examination of peer advice texts indicates that people are doing various types of relational work in giving advice to others online: mock closeness, impoliteness, solidarity and non-politeness. This study may, hopefully, help to deepen our understanding of advice-giving and relational work in Chinese discourse, especially in online discourse.

Key Words: Advice-giving; Peer advice; Relational work; Online discussion forums.

Resumen: Estudios previos sobre el asesoramiento se han centrado en entornos educativos y de salud, ya sea en línea o presenciales, donde el asesor generalmente disfruta de una situación de poder privilegiada frente a la persona que busca consejo. Los estudios de asesoramiento en el discurso chino no son la excepción. Dada la insuficiencia de estudios sobre el asesoramiento brindado por pares con equidad en sus relaciones de poder en el discurso chino y la necesidad de investigar otros aspectos relacionales, este estudio explora el asesoramiento brindado por pares, compañeros de trabajo, en un foro de discusión corporativo chino en línea, analizando las estrategias de asesoramiento y el trabajo relacional que conlleva. El análisis de los datos muestra que los chinos utilizan estrategias de asesoramiento directo con más frecuencia que las estrategias indirectas, ya sean convencionales o no convencionales. Un examen detallado de los textos de los pares indica que las personas están haciendo varios tipos de trabajo relacional para dar consejos en línea: cercanía ficticia, tosquedad, solidaridad y falta de cortesía. Se espera que este estudio puede ayudar a profundizar nuestra comprensión del trabajo de asesoramiento y relacional en el discurso chino, especialmente en el discurso en línea.

Palabras clave: Asesoramiento; Consejo de pares; Trabajo relacional; Foros de discusión en línea.

摘要：在以往国内外研究关于线上与线下的医疗与教育机构下的建议研究中，建议的交际双方往往处于权力不对等的状态。鉴于汉语话语研究中缺乏对权力对等双方关系中建议的研究，对网络交际中建议话语的人际性考察不够充分，该研究以一家公司网络论坛中的同伴建议为语料，探讨分析网络交际话语中同伴建议策略的使用情况及其关系工作。结果显示，在网络交际话语中，人们更多地使用直接的建议策略，比规约性与非规约性的间接建议策略都要多。结合语境分析发现，网络交际话语中直接与间接的建议涉及包括假亲近、不礼貌、建协同以及非礼貌等不同的关系工作。希望该研究可以深化我们对中国话语，尤其是中国网络话语中的建议和礼貌问题的理解。

［**关键词**］建议；同伴建议；关系工作；在线论坛

1. Introduction

Advice is a pervasive act in our everyday communication. People seek advice and receive advice in private conversations between friends, relatives and coworkers as well as in professional consultations with health

workers, legal experts or educationalists (Decapua and Huber, 1995). With the popularization of the Internet, advice frequently appears on professional websites (e.g. "Lucy Answers", Locher, 2006a, 2006b; Locher and Hoffman, 2006), discussion forums and other social media.

As a kind of speech act, advice has less directive force than requests in the sense that it just tells the hearers what is the best for them (Searle, 1969). Meanwhile, it is also regarded a face-threatening act as it indicates that the speaker thinks the hearer "ought to (perhaps) do some act" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 66), which impedes the hearer's freedom of action. For this face-threatening act, people may employ different redressive measures to alleviate the threat. That is to say, despite its inherent benefit, advice is often associated with the issue of relational work in former studies.

Cross-cultural studies have revealed that Chinese giving advice for the sake of the establishment of solidarity by show concern or friendliness for the advice-receivers (Hinkel, 1997). Whether such a conclusion applies to advice in online communication remains an issue to be explored. The present study aims to investigate into advice given by anonymous peers in a corporate online discussion forum by particularly looking at the following the research questions:

a. What advising strategies do repliers use in peer advice in Chinese corporate online discussion forums?

b. What relational work do they do when giving advice online?

The remaining of the paper consists of the following parts. Section 2 is to present a brief review of previous studies on online advice and studies of relational work in CMC. After description of our data collection and analysis process, Section 4 will provide answers to research questions and discuss their implications. Finally, Section 5 is the concluding part of the study.

2. Research background

2.1. Studies on advice-giving

Due to its prevalence in everyday life, advice is a speech act much investigated in health care settings (e.g. Heritage and Sefi, 1992; Leppän, 1998) in educational institutions (Waring, 2006) and in non-face-to-face interactions in newspapers or magazines, on helplines (e.g. Pudlinski, 2005) or on radios (DeCapua & Dunhanm, 1993; Hudson, 1990; Hutchby, 1995). These studies help to consolidate the view that advising act is problem-solving oriented—advice "is based on and deals with the recipient's problem, either indicated or implied" (Vehiläïen, 2009: 163). The major findings of

these research lie in the identification of structural features of advice in health (e.g. Heritage & Sefi,1992) or academic (Waring, 2006) settings, semantic and syntactic features (Hudson, 1990) and types of strategies (DeCapua & Dunhanm, 1993). Studies on advice in Chinese discourse are mostly concerned with syntactic features of some advice expressions (Zhou & Wang, 2020), pragmatic features of advice (Xu & Hao, 2019) in everyday encounters, advice sequences in medical consultations (Shen & Liu, 2012; Wang & Zhang, 2020; Yu, 2009) or in academic settings (Ren, 2013).

As advice seeking becomes an activity that permeates social interactions in online communication(Kouper, 2010), studies on CMC (computer-mediated communication) also witnessed scholars' explorative efforts in online advice, either in institutionalized settings (e.g. Locher, 2006a; Locher & Hoffman, 2006; Rundblad & Chen, 2015; Wood & Griffiths, 2007, etc.) or everyday online encounters (e.g. Kouper, 2010; Mao & Huang, 2016). Both Locher (2006a) and Kouper (2010) discuss the strategies people use in advice-solicitation. Focused on expert advice in an online column, Locher (2006a) report that health professionals made use of hedging, praising and humor strategies while giving advice. From her investigation into peer advice in motherhood in an online blogging community, Kouper (2010) evaluates the directness of advice given online and concludes that members of the community mainly use directly advising strategy and describing personal experience strategy. Rundblad and Chen (2015) find, on the basis of their datasets of weather commentaries in two online news agencies, that weather-related advice features prominently in weather forecasts, especially in cases of extreme weather events. Beyond the issue of strategy use in advice, Locher and Hoffman (2006) go further to probe into the identity issue in online advice-giving and they list some recurring strategies the professional health educators use in constructing the identity of Lucy the advice-giver, thus contributing to popularizing the counseling site. Mao and Huang (2016) identify syntactic and pragmatic features of advice in online discussion between ordinary people and find no gender difference.

These studies mentioned above help us to understand some linguistic and discourse features on advice either online or offline. The existing literature seems to have paid more attention to advice in professional institutions. In other words, in the above-mentioned studies, there exists power difference between advice-givers and advice-seekers (but Kouper, 2010; Mao & Huang, 2006; Waring). Considering this imbalance, we still need to conduct more research in peer advice in online discourse, especially in Chinese discourse where scholar seem to be more inclined to put their investigative efforts in advice by professionals enjoying power advantage.

2.2. Studies on relational work in advice

Regardless of the possible benefits to advice-seekers, advice may be either viewed as impeding the freedom of action or as falling to support his/her positive face (Goldsmith and Fitch, 1997). Concerning the relational/interpersonal aspects in advice, it is found that advice-givers make use of strategies of mitigating, bonding, criticism and expertise for the purpose of easement of face-threatening potential in advice utterances (DeCapua & Dunham, 2012), that regard for face is closely related to the effectiveness, appropriateness, helpfulness and sensitivity of advice given to people suffering from depression (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000), that positive and negative politeness strategies are identified in advice in post-observation meetings (Vasquez, 2004) and that the use of accounts in different positions in the conversation and revealed advice-givers' face concerns for the advice-seekers in graduate peer tutoring sessions (Waring, 2006).

Like face-to-face communication, CMC also involve interpersonal aspects. Baym (1999) was among the earliest scholars to point out that managing interpersonal relationships constitutes an important function of posts in online communities. Studies concerning relational work in online advice are often about strategy use. Morrow (2006) presents the strategies of expressing solidarity, giving reassurance, encouragement and empathy in British Internet discussion forum about depression. Harrison and Barlow (2009) reports the use of indirect strategies, mainly personal narratives as politeness strategies in peer-to-peer advice-giving in an online community of people with arthritis. In her comprehensive study of advice in online health column, Locher (2006a) also analyzes the relational work in online advice and finds that preferred by health professionals are involvement strategies, including empathizing, praising and bonding strategies and that hedging strategies for face-saving and boosting and criticizing for face-threatening. In a more recent study, Morrow (2012) identifies bonding, empathizing and apologizing strategies for positive relations and emphasizes that apologizing strategy is culturally specific in Japanese.

The studies above demonstrate that relational work is involved in advice-giving either online or offline. Just as Morrow (2012) points out that some characteristics of advice can be specific in different cultures, it seems that more attention should be paid to the interpersonal aspects of advice in Chinese online discourse.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data description

The data used for the study were the type of one-to-many conversations (Morris and Ogan, 1996) collected from the colorful life section in a

corporate online discussion forum[1], which consists of different sections, e.g. reading, industry news, etc. According to O'Reilly (2007) and Yus (2011), social media has been one of the major tools for our daily communication. Online corporate forums are a form of social media where people can have conversations as much freely as they do in face-to-face communication; meanwhile the availability and anonymity (Locher, 2010) of online discussion forums provide convenience for people in need of peer advice. Similar to twitter, online discussion forums provide platforms where people can specifically address a person by the symbol @, make comments and repost others words by citation (Zhang and Kramarae, 2014). Just like Sina Weibo, the Chinese counterpart of Twitter (Jin and Chen, 2020), the corporate online forum is also accessible to visitors, which means open access and convenience for the authors to collect data. For the sake of anonymity, the posters were labeled as "PO X" and repliers were presented as "RE X".

The data were collected when the authors were browsing colorful life section and we selected the two posts which have a similar topic—both are related to the last name for a second child in a family. Our choice is based on the following concerns: firstly, people communicate on this discussion forum are supposed to be coworkers under different online names, which means anonymity and power balance; secondly, the topic is hotly discussed in China these days, because the first generation of only children born in the initial stage of China's one-child policy are now in their child-bearing period and choose to have two children in their new families and meanwhile the tradition in China is that kids are to be named after their fathers' last names, but in this new age many mothers want to name their second children after their own last names, usually for the sake of their own parents' expectations of carrying on the family lines. [2]

In the two selected online advice seeking and giving conversations, one has 260 replies and the other has 399 replies, which were mainly given by the coworkers and sometimes by the original posters. The dataset in

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[1] The name of the company is purposefully concealed here for the sake of privacy.

[2] Children born under China's one-child policy are now in their child-bearing age and many of them may choose to have two children as they want to make sure that their children will have company. Meanwhile, many of these women's parents require that their second grandchild is to be name after their daughter's last name in the hope of carrying their family lines. The tradition in China is that kids will be named after their fathers' last names. Despite the fact that women's right to pass down their last names is written in the constitution, the majority, especially males, find it unacceptable feeling their male dignity is compromised.

which the poster wants to name his second baby after his last name is labeled as FLN (father's last name), while the other is named MLN (mother's last name). Usually the original poster's response to these replies either specify their dilemmas or show their acceptance or gratitude, and are thus not counted as advice in the study. Besides, still some other netizens just take different stances on the issue under discussion, arguing against or even quarrelling with each other. These parts are, too, deleted from the data for analysis as they are not about giving advice and are not true answers (Kleinke, 2012).

We identified advising speech act on the basis of Searle's (1969) felicity conditions of advice: the speaker believes that some future act is to benefit the hearer and the hearer has some reason to believe that this act is in his/her benefit but neither the speaker nor the hearer is clear whether the hearer is to carry it out. That is to say, we read through the replies to see if they point to the illocutionary force of advice. As a result, altogether 527 pieces of advice are spotted and investigated in this study. The general information of data collected for the study is summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1: Information about data sources

Data sources	No. of words	No. of replies	No. of repliers	No. of pieces of advice
Father's last name for a second baby (FLN)	23175	399	258	281
Mother's last name for the second baby (MLN)	11883	260	188	246
Total	30128	648	443	527

3.2. Methods of Data analysis

In face-to-face communication, advice is carried out in step-by-step conversation between the interlocutors, but in online advice, advice is accomplished through different moves (Locher, 2006a). In discussion forums, most of the replies are short, our analysis advice in this study focuses on the advising head acts. The following screenshot from the dataset (FLN) is an example that shows the structure of advice on the corporate discussion forum. From the context, the target that has been evaluated as being pathetic is the poster's wife. Such a comment indicates the replier's sym-

pathetic attitude towards the wife, implying the stance that the replier is on the wife's side—the replier thinks that it is acceptable for the second baby to be named after the mother's last name. This comment serves to be the head act of indirect advice, while the remaining parts are the moves further explains why the wife is pitiable and will be referred to when we explore the relational work in online advice.

Figure1: A sample reply of advice commented by another netizen

3.2.1 Analyzing advising strategies

For the identification strategies in the head acts of advising, we followed the previous classifications by Kouper (2010), Li (2010), Martínez-flor (2010) and Ren (2012) and categorized the head act of advice into three broad categories—direct advising, conventionally indirect advising and indirect advising and these three categories are further classified into some subcategories. The description of these advising strategies is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Advising strategies

Categories	Strategies	Examples
Direct advising	Performative	我建议…… I suggest that you… 我的建议…… My suggestion….
	Imperative	（你）……/ 别…… (you)…/ Don't …
	Mood derivable	你要…… You need to
	Obligation Statement	应该…… You should… 得……You must…

Conventionally indirect advising	Interrogative formulae	为啥不能…… Why can't …
	Conditional	如果…… if…
	Possibility/ probability	可以…… (you) can…
	Query preparatory	是不是…… Isn't it…
Indirect advising	Hint	我女儿班上……A child in my daughter's class…

(Ba sed on Kouper, 2010; Li, 2010; Martínez-flor, 2005, 2010; Ren, 2012)

In direct advising strategies, the strategy of performative verbs and that of noun of suggestion Martínez-flor (2005, 2010) and Ren (2010) are combined into the subcategory of performative following Li (2010) as it is not significant to make a distinction between these two in data analysis. Unlike Martínez-flor (2005, 2010), this study makes no difference between imperative and negative imperative strategies, as both these two are explicitly directive and are labeled as the imperative category. The category of statements expressing personal opinions (Ren, 2010) is not included because the opinion expressions (e.g. "I think") show speakers' internal redressive efforts (Li, 2010) and they can be used in different subcategories of advising strategies.

3.2.2 Analyzing relational work in peer advice in online discussion forums

The post-2000 politeness research witnesses a discursive turn, in which contextual factors and text types are investigated when researchers discuss the relational issues (Kádár & Haugh, 2013). While analyzing relational work, we refer to the discursive contexts of advice. The discursive contexts include the supportive moves and other We follow Locher (2006a) and Morrow (2006; 2012) in the analysis of strategies for relational work, namely mitigating strategies, bonding strategies, empathizing strategies, boosting and criticizing strategies, on whose basis we judge the relational orientation by advice-givers. Along with the identification of these strategies, we also read through the data to look at the discourse content, or linguistic background to look at the orientations in relational work.

In the process of analysis, the two authors read and coded the data respectively and our inter-rater agreement was 86.2%. For the items which we did not have a consensus, we read our coding schemes repeatedly and discussed together until we reached an agreement.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Advising strategies in online discussion forums

After examination of 527 instances of advice, it is discovered that repliers make use of different types of advising strategies in online discussion forums.

As can be seen in Table 3, these netizens utilize the direct advising strategy most often (44.22%), among which imperative strategies are predominantly used (30.74%) and mood derivable and performative word are two strategies least adopted (3.23% and 3.80% respectively). They do not often use conventionally indirect advising strategies (only 20.30%) and prefer interrogative formulae (14.23%) to possibility (4.55%) in this category. Indirect advising strategy is realized through the use of hints, accounting for 35.48%, slightly exceeding the imperative strategy use. It should be pointed out that the Chinese netizens in this online forum did not use the "if I were you" conditional pattern in advice giving.

Table 3: Use of different advising strategies (N=527)

Advising strategies		Frequency	Percentage
Direct advising	Performative	20	3.80%
	Imperative	162	30.74%
	Mood derivable	17	3.23%
	Obligation statement	34	6.45%
Conventionally indirect advising	Interrogative formulae	75	14.23%
	Conditional	8	1.52%
	Possibility	24	4.55%
Indirect advising	Hint	187	35.48%

The result that direct advising strategy is most frequently used by repliers in their comments correspond to Kouper's (2010) finding. Meanwhile, imperatives accounting for the largest proportion in direct advising strategy is similar to the result in Locher (2006b). These results suggest that people adopt a rather direct style of communication in peer advice partly for the sake of economy (Crystal, 2006) as direct speech acts may involve less process efforts.

The fact that use of hint as an indirect advising strategy seems to confirm the finding that clarification of the problem and telling one's own or others' experiences are frequently employed by netizens in Chinese online advice (Mao & Huang, 2016). Although indirectness has often been considered a means of politeness, analysis of data in this study shows a different picture to be discussed in 4.2.

4.1.1 Direct advising strategies in online discussion forums

Direct advising strategies are those pieces of advice given through the use of performative words, imperative sentences, grammatical mood signals and words indicating obligation (Martínez-flor, 2005; 2010; Ren, 2012).

A. Performative

 [1] RE28: 建议别生了，徒增矛盾，何必呢@ PO2

 (The suggestion is that you should not choose to have another baby, as it brings nothing but troubles to you. Why? @ PO2)

(R3-9, FLN)

The first type of direct advising strategy is the use of performative words. In [1], the replier directly gives the suggestion.

B. Imperative

[2] RE41: 离婚。

(Get divorced.)

(R8, MLN)

The second type appears as positive imperatives which advise people to take the advice explicitly and negative imperatives for people to refrain from a certain act. In [2], the replier's advice is a concise and simple imperative to ask the poster to get divorced.

C. Mood Derivable

[3] RE60: ……但为了孩子不被两家老人区别对待，为了孩子成长过程的身心健康，两个孩子最好同一个姓氏……

(…….But to ensure that the kids are not to be treated differently by grandparents on two sides and that they will have good physical and psychological health, the two kids had better be named after the same last name.)

(R13, MLN)

Use of mood derivable in a sentence is realized through the use of grammatical signaling words. The example here uses *zuihao* (最好，had better) to give the advice that he two kids had better be named after the same last name.

D. Obligation statement

[4] RE 98：一胎男孩，二胎应该跟老婆姓。都是独生子女。女人生孩子也不容易。

(The first baby is a boy, so the second baby should take your wife's last name. (You and your wife are) both are the only children of your own families. It is not easy for a woman to have and give birth to a baby.)

(R25, FLN)

The replier in the example here advises the advice-seeker to let their second baby to adopt his wife's last name in a explicitly direct way by making use of *yinggai* (应该should).

4.1.2 Conventionally indirect advising strategies in online discussion forums

Conventionally indirect advising strategies are not that direct, but their intention are not difficult to understand, as the suggested idea can be quite easily inferred from the grammatical pattens of interrogatives and words indicating possibility. and talking about a preparatory condition.

A. Interrogative

[5] RE108: 生娃、带娃、教娃的都是你老婆，又不是你爸妈。跟老婆姓有啥不妥？

(It is your wife who gives birth to kids and brings them up, instead of your parents. Why isn't it appropriate for the second baby to be named after your wife's last name?)

(R33, FLN)

In rhetorical questions, the answer is conventionally indicated. By asking "why isn't it appropriate for the second baby to be named after your wife's last name", the replier means that such a practice is acceptable.

B. Conditional

[6] RE62: 如果你老公在家里地位强势，跟你姓没事。

(If your husband holds a higher status, it is OK that your second child is named after your last name.)

(R14, MLN)

In talking about the condition-the husband holds a higher status in the family, the replier means that the suggestion is only workable under the specified premise. The advice is thus given in a conventionally indirect way.

C. Possibility

[7] RE88: @ PO2 不要二胎就可以了啊，，，，，，为什么非要二胎

(It is OK that you opt out of the choice of having a second baby…Why do you want to have a second baby)

(R46-4, FLN)

When the replier says "it is OK (*keyi*, 可以) that you opt out of the choice of having a second baby", s/he means that choosing not to have a second baby is a choice likely to be accepted.

4.1.3 Non-conventionally indirect advising strategies in online discussion forums

In giving non-conventionally indirect advice, repliers can be quite creative in various forms of language use.

[8] RE84: 你这不是生娃，是生个炸弹

(You are not to give birth to a baby, but a bomb)

(R16, FLN)

In the example above, the replier remarks that if the poster decides to have a second baby, it is similar to the choice of having a bomb. By comparing a baby to a bomb, the replier indicates the serious problems possibly brought about by the baby as the couples and their parents have not come to a consensus. He implicitly suggests that the couples should not have a second baby for fear that troubles should arise in their extended family.

[9] RE80: 建议：楼主也改姓，改成随母姓。这样你家娃给你姓，才完美。

能做到吗？

(Suggestion: Poster, you should change your last name into your mother's. In this way, it is going to be perfect if your child is to adopt your last name. Can this be accomplished?)

(R137, MLN)

This example is still regarded as an indirect advising strategy in spite of the use of the word "suggestion" because of the replier's ironic tone here. The replier seems to be giving advice by the word "suggestion" which, in general sense, means a speaker is to practice the speech act of advising, but the supportive move of taking about the benefit of such a practice unveils the true ironic intention behind. The irony is consolidated by the rhetorical question "can this be accomplished", which means that it is clearly impossible. That is to say, following the tradition of adopting father's last name is the replier's true proposal.

[10] RE99: 可怜，辛辛苦苦生了两个孩子，一个跟自己姓，还伤害长辈感情了……估计楼主要是在家做家务，也会伤害长辈感情吧。

(Pitiable. With so much toil and labor, she gave birth to and raises two kid, but passing down her last name to one child should hurt the feelings of the older generation...

It is likely that if the poster does some house chores, it will also hurt their feelings)

(R26, P1)

The advice in [10] is not given in a straightforward way. The replier firstly expresses his/her sympathy to the poster's wife by saying that she is pitiable on the ground that she has no right to name just one of her two children after her last name. The sympathy is underlined by the imagined scene in which the husband's doing housework injures his parents' feelings. By talking about the fact and the assumptive scene of hurting the husband's parents, the replier implies that the wife does not have equal rights at home, regardless of the fact that equality between men and women was written in Chinese constitution in 1954. As a result, it can be inferred from the assessment and accounts that the replier takes the side of the wife.

4.2. Discussion: relational work in peer advice in online discussion forums

4.2.1 Directness of advice and relational work

In traditional politeness studies, advice used to be regarded as a face threatening act (Brown and Levinson, 1987), but modern politeness research suggests politeness is not bound up with specific linguistic forms (Eelen, 2001; Terkourafi, 2011). That is to say, direct advice not necessarily has A close examination of the direct advising strategies employed by repliers displays various types of interpersonal relationships.

Mock closeness:

Use of intimate address terms usually helps to shorten the social distance between the interactants (He and Ren,2016), but even when a replier addresses the poster intimately, it does not necessarily mean the inclination for a close relationship.

[11] RE1: 亲亲，建议追溯一下族谱哈，看看你姥姥的姥姥姓什么，再做决定姓啥。

(Qinqin (Dear), the suggestion is that you should review your family pedigree to see what is the last name of your grandmother's grandmother on your mother's side before you make the decision concerning your baby's last name.)

(R98, MLN)

In [11], the replier makes use of an endearment address term qinqin (亲亲), a variation of the popular address term qin (亲) shortened for the term qin ai de (亲爱的, dear). This address term originated from the Chinese famous Alibaba website and is nowadays often used in either face-to-face or online conversations, indicating closeness between interlocuters or shortening distance between service people and customs in e-commerce setting. It seems to show the replier's intention to establish a close relationship with the poster.

The seemingly closeness the replier shows fades away when we read the direct advice carefully. The replier just advises the poster to see the last name of her grandmother's grandmother on her mother's side, implying that children in the past were never named after mother's last name. As taking father's last name is a tradition or even a social norm in naming kids, the poster should not waste any time in thinking about passing down her last name. Such a suggestion mildly criticizes the poster's intention. The closeness that might be associated with the endearment term qinqin is no longer existent.

Impoliteness:

Direct advising strategies implication of impoliteness is usually ascribed to the directive force involved (Searle, 1969), but due to the inappropriate discourse content.

[12] R115: 建议离婚，让你妈再找个金龟婿。瞧不上还结婚，按收入来比较家庭贡 献，真的土。

(The suggestion is that you get divorced so that you can find a good catch as your mum's son-in-law. You look down on him but you still married him. It is corny to talk about contributions to a family in accordance with one's income.)

(R58, MLN)

In [12], the advice is given in the form of a performative word, but the content is beyond acceptance for most people. In Chinese culture, people usually advise couples in conflict to make a compromise with each other rather than ask them to get divorced. The replier in this example seems to neglect this rule of thumb and asks the poster to get divorced. In addition, s/he also evaluates the poster as corny as she and her parents think that her husband does not have a good income and criticizes her for looking down on her husband, indicating the poster's snobbery. Although sometimes in Chinese culture direct advice can be regarded as polite acts because it is in the interest of the advice-taker (Hinkel, 1997), the direct advice in this example just shows that the replier has no concern for the interpersonal relations with the poster and that s/he is conspicuously impolite.

Building solidarity:
Building solidarity between interlocutors help to establish emotional connection (DeCapua & Dunham, 2012), which in turn shortens mental distance between them. More importantly, the solidarity between advice-givers and advice-seekers increases the possibility of the advice to be noticed and accepted (ibid). Building solidarity is often realized through empathy. In empathy, an advice-giver shares a similar experience with the advice-seek or expresses the understanding of the advice-giver's situation (Pudlinski, 2005). See [13]:

[13] RE 149: ......作为一个男人，在面对老二跟女方姓的时候，还是会有个心里门槛，总怕外界看轻，是家庭地位低导致。 就是我这么宽松的内部环境，自我感觉很 开明，还是有点膈应，我觉得楼主用父母来做自己的挡箭牌是可以见谅的！ 不过，这是自己的一个心理问题，正是因为自己内心不够强大，所以需要通过 外部的各种武装来强化自己的地位这是不可取的。最重要的是，自己强大起来 就无所畏惧流言蜚语，外部看法！
(...for a man, he is confronted with a psychological barrier when the second baby is to be named after the wife's last name for fear that he would be belittled by others who thought that their status in the family

is low. Even I would feel a bit uncomfortable although I regard myself as an open- minded person and I have a relatively free atmosphere in my family. Therefore, I understand that the poster talks about his parents as his shield. However, this is our own psychological problem. On account of this, it is not acceptable for us to arm yourself with external measures. What is most import is that you try to grow strong so as not to dread the gossips or others' opinions.)

(R70, FLN)

In [13], the replier wrote a lot concerning the general feelings for the second baby's last name and commented that this is a psychological barrier. He expressed his own responses and talked about his understanding about the poster. Before the explicit suggestion to the poster that he should grow strong to neglect gossip, the replier's expression of empathy reduces the psychological distance between him and the poster. Sharing the experience and the attitude of understanding builds solidarity with the poster.

4.2.2 Indirectness of advice and relational work

Indirectness used to be regarded as the main reason for politeness concern (Searle, 1979) and Lakoff (1973) suggests "no imposition" for the sake of politeness. However, indirectness does not ensure politeness intention of the advice-giver.

Non-politeness:

Non-politeness is the state that neither politeness nor impoliteness is involved (Culpeper, 2011). It is thus a kind of neutral state, akin to Watt's (2003) politic behavior.

[14] RE 39:这个无所谓, 我家生二胎时，我主动提出让跟老婆姓, 上户口时老婆说还是跟爸爸姓吧，免得别人误会不是亲兄妹。

(This doesn't matter. When we had a second baby in our family, I initiated the idea to let my second child named after my wife. When we had the residence registered, my wife said that let her take father's last name in case of the misunderstanding that they are not brother and sister.)

(R6, FLN)

In [14], the replier makes a declarative statement "this doesn't matter", which implicitly advises the poster not to care about the last name of his second baby. This indirect advice has no indications of (im)politeness.

Then the replier goes on with his own experience—both he and his wife are considerate in this regard and makes concessions to each other, which serves to illustrate that he and his wife do not care too much about the last name for their second child. This explanation does not do any particular relational work either. Therefore, in this example, non-politeness orientation is self-evident.

Impoliteness:

As shown earlier, some advice conveys negative message to imply the replier's opinion on the issue at hand. Repliers may comment on the whole event negatively by making use of some negative evaluative words or even some nasty words directly. In these advising acts, the repliers choose not to pay heed to the interpersonal relations with the poster. To put it differently, despite the indirectness of advice, it may involve rudeness. Consider the following example:

[15] RE 105: 这是我见过的最奇异的事情，除了新冠病毒。
(This is the weirdest thing that I have ever seen, except the nova-coronavirus.)

(R 47, MLN)

The replier's assessment of what the poster talks about is negative, implicitly suggesting that the second baby should not take the mother's last name. More than this advice, the relational wok involved here can be perceived as being negatively marked in that the replier thinks this weird, which indicates the proposal for the second baby's taking mother's last name does not conform to social norms. Going against social norms can be regarded as something approvable only when evoked by such evaluative words as "creative", "brave", etc. The word qiyi (奇异，weird) is negative in attitude (Martin & White, 2005) and it is even mentioned together with the nova-coronavirus, both underlining the replier's neglect of the interpersonal relationship.

In addition to comment the whole event in a nasty way, some repliers may even explicitly attack the post starter personally, which is ostensibly beyond the social norms (Culpeper, 2011) and is obviously rude. Consider:

[16] RE 142: 一方面，你老婆也不是什么善类，另一方面，你是个耙耳朵。

(First, your wife is not a good person; second, you are henpecked.)

(R63, FLN)

By judging the poster's wife as someone not so good and labelling him as a henpecked husband, the replier's advice is indicated through the judging. Criticizing the poster as a henpecked person shows the repliers unsatisfaction—the poster should not listen to his wife or the second baby should not be named after the wife's last name. The ad hominem attacks at both the post starter and his wife, for one thing, show that the replier does not approve of the wife's opinion or practice and expects that the husband will stop being henpecked, and for another his unfavorable attitude toward the couple in handling the issue is manifested in the criticisms. As far as the interpersonal relationship is concerned, the replier just neglected the rapport between them (Spencer-Oatey, 2005; 2008).

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze peer advice in a corporate online discussion forum with regard to the use of advising strategies and their implications in relational aspects. What sets the study different from the former studies lies in the fact that there exisits not power difference between advice-seekers and advice-givers and it paricularly looks at peer advice in Chinese online discourse.

Close examination of data shows that among the direct, conventionally and non-conventionally indirect advising strategies, people use direct advising strategy most often and also often make use of non-conventionally indirect advising strategy. In the data, people do not make use of such conventionally indirect advising strategies as conditionals and preparatory queries. As far as relational work is concerned, people's orientations in relational work can be impoliteness, mock closeness, solidarity and non-politeness and they are not closely related to the degree of directness involved in advice.

However, the findings of our study should still be viewed in light of the following limitations. Firstly, the listing of different relational work types is not exhaustive and other types of relational work may be identified if different sets of data are observed. Secondly, while reading through the data, the authors found that many replies consist of supportive moves which help to validate the advice given. Discourse structures will be discussed in our follow-up study. Thirdly, we also find that peer advice given in online discussion forum are not always serious —some of the repliers are not always serious— they are sometimes jocular. Such a distinction can be made when further research is to be conducted to investigate into the

effectiveness, appropriateness, helpfulness and sensitivity of peer advice (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000).

In spite of the aforementioned limitations, this study can still give some insights into the online discourse of peer advice, particularly in Chinese context. Given the abundance of peer advice in online discussion forums, related studies concerning online peer advice in Chinese and other cultures deserve further research.

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