

COMPARISON OF LINGUISTIC REALIZATION OF ADVICE GIVING BETWEEN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND NATIVE SPEAKERS IN PEER-TO-PEER
ONLINE FORUMS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the pragmatics of advice giving between English native speakers in UK and nonnative speakers in Hong Kong in peer-to-peer advice forums. Forty eight and fifty two advice messages were respectively collected from an online forum in UK and an online forum in Hong Kong. The form and content of the advice messages were analyzed in terms of discursive moves. The results showed that English native speakers in UK and nonnative speakers in Hong Kong perceived similar knowledge on the elements that consists an advice giving event, but the syntactic realization and the sequencing of the discursive moves in the advice messages showed some differences. Compared with native speakers, nonnative speakers in Hong Kong tended to offer directions and suggestions in more direct sentence type, and the advice messages are organized in a straightforward way.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my professors and TLAC advisors who gave me constructive instructions and inspirations, and helped me grow as a student and new researcher. I would like to give thanks to my committee members: Dr. Eslami, Dr. Dixon, and Dr. Tong, for their time, and their advice on this study. And I am thankful for Dr. Burghardt, who is not a member of my committee, yet generously offered me with abundant support and guidance on those Friday mornings. I would like to thank the our TLAC graduate advisors Ms. Rios, Ms. Nardini, and Ms. Bond, for their help throughout the process. I would also like to give thanks to Elissa Barnett, my University Writing Center consultant, for her advice and encouragement during my writing procedure.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Advice seeking and advice giving happens in various ways in our lives, from daily life situation to institutional contexts, from peer-to-peer small talk to professional advisory situation, from face-to-face oral communication to written text. The rapid development of internet in the recent decades has provided a broader platform for people to share information, exchange ideas, and give advice. Compared with advising situations in real life, internet eliminated the restriction of time and location, and could better protect advice seeker's privacy behind the screen. For English language learners (ELLs), internet can be used as a platform for interaction with wider English language users, and it is also very useful for seeking and giving advice.

Previous studies have done a thorough research on the speech event of advice giving in online context. Numerous researches have investigated the pragmatics of advice giving among ELLs from various backgrounds. However, online advice provided nonnative speakers remains under-researched.

In order to address this gap, this study investigated the pragmatics of advice giving in two peer-to-peer online discussion forums that focused on the problems concerning work and career, for example, troubles at work, career change, etc. Particularly, it compares the linguistic realization of advice giving between ELLs in Hong Kong and native English speakers in UK.

The study first examined the type, frequency, as well as the sequence of discursive moves that contributed to the form and content of the advice giving messages in both forums, and then discussed the sentence types in the advice moves. The results of the study provided a general pattern on the linguistic realization of advice giving in online peer-to-peer forums, and the comparison of the two forums showed the similarities and differences on advice giving between

English native speakers in UK and nonnative speakers in Hong Kong in an online discussion forum context.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Speech Act of Advice Giving

Definition of advice. Searle (1969) studied advice from the point view of speech act, indicating that it carries a directive meaning for the audience. He defined advice as a weak directive, whose illocutionary force is to suggest a future action to the hearer that the speaker believes will benefit the hearer. According to Searle, the occurrence of the advice giving indicates that the speaker and the hearer, to some extent, believe the action is beneficial to the hearer; however, there is no strong expectation that the hearer would behave as such. Locher (2013) added that, due to the hidden nature of weak directive and suggestion of future action, advice giving is also related to assessing and judging.

Advice giving in different cultures. The speech act of advice giving reflect different cultural values. Hinkel (1994) concluded that East Asian countries like Japan, Korea, and China, consider advice giving as a sign of friendliness, empathy and involvement. In Indonesian culture, advice carries the meaning of care and concern. In Arab culture it serves as a way of building group-belonging. However, in Anglo-western cultures, it can be considered as a risky speech act that invades in the advice receivers' privacy.

Politeness and face threatening speech acts. Usually, the advice provider is considered as a knowledgeable, reliable and trust worthy figure, thus cause an asymmetry that challenges the advice receiver's identity as a capable and independent social figure (DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000). For the same reason, advice giving in English is considered as a face threatening act (Goffman, 1967; Brown and Levinson, 1987). Goffman (1967) used the word "face" as a metaphor for the self-image and interactor intends to build in

social interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe advice giving as “an intrinsically face threatening act, even where the speaker indicates that he or she does not intend to avoid impending the addressee’s freedom of action” (p. 65). To reduce the effect of face threatening nature of advice giving, and to increase the politeness of the interaction, advice givers are likely to use various strategies. For example, using more indirect sentence structure to reduce the illocutionary force, softening the tone with lexical hedging, and mitigating the advice receiver through non-agentive sentences (Locher, 2013).

Syntactic linguistic realization of advice giving. The actual piece of language that functions as advice giving can be conducted in various forms. It can appear in declarative, interrogative, imperative sentences that suggest actions, conditional clause followed by “should/could (not)”, as well as non-agentive sentences that mitigate the subject (DeCapua & Dunham, 2007; Limberg & Locher, 2012). Depending on the situation in which advice giving occurs, the interactants would use language accordingly to adapt the directiveness and politeness of their language. There are numerous factors affects people’s linguistic realization in advice giving, from the type of speech activity, culture, to hierarchical differences as well as the role of expertise, etc. (Limberg & Locher, 2012). Therefore. Leppänen (1998) advocated that “the study of advice should both carefully explicate the details of the production of advice and show how these details are systematic products of the interactants’ orientations to specific features of the institutions” (P. 210).

Advice Giving on the Internet

Online advice giving sites: Types and features. Advice giving on the internet happens in various forms and is influenced by different factors. From the aspect of technological format, there are synchronous advice (such as online chatting room) and asynchronous advice (like email

and discussion forums). In terms of functions, advice sites could be divided into three major types (Griffiths, 2005): (1) information dissemination, (2) peer-delivered therapeutic/support/advice (such as a self-help support group), and (3) professionally delivered treatment (P. 556). These sites offer advice in relation to topics covering every corner of life, including health, relationship, child rearing, career, technical support, advice on buying car, etc. Degree of interactivity varies among advice offering sites: some allow advice givers respond directly at advice seekers' situation, others do not offer advice according to the advice seeker's problem, instead, advice givers edit information rely on their experience (for example, the Frequently Asked Questions section). Furthermore, compared with sites that clearly identify their purpose as advice giving, such as advice column "Lucy Answers" (Locher, 2013), some sites do not impart advice message in an explicated way. A good example would be peer-supported discussion forums, which provide a platform for people to exchange opinions and experiences. Often these opinions and experiences functions as advice for action (Morrow, 2012; Placencia, 2012).

Online advice forums: form and content. Locher (2006) conducted a study on advice giving messages in an online advice forum called "*Lucy Answers*", which was supported by a team of health consultants, aimed at offering help to participants' health-related issues that covers topics including alcohol and drugs, fitness and nutrition, emotional health, general health, etc. Advice seekers could leave their advice seeking messages on the website, and would receive advice letters from "Lucy", the agony aunt identity supported by a team of health consultants. In the study, a nearly one-million-word corpus was collected, and a sub corpus containing 280 advice messages was used for qualitative analysis, in which both content structure and the relational work of the advice message were studied.

The aim of analyzing the content structure is to identify what elements are usually included in the advice messages, and separate the part of language that functions as “advice” from other elements. In order to do that, Locher adopted the idea of discursive moves from Miller and Gergen (1998) -- the “kind of contribution that the entry made to the ongoing interchange” (p 193). The analysis on the content structure of the advice messages showed that the most frequent type of discursive move was “advice” – directions on what should people do (36%), followed by “general information” – the deliverance of facts and information (19%), and “assessment” – the evaluation on advice seekers’ situation (15%). To take a closer look at the discursive move of advice, the researcher found out that more than half (52%) of all advice moves were achieved by declaratives, 36% were imperatives, and 11% were interrogatives. Therefore, Locher concluded that the advice givers in the online forum “*Lucy Answers*”, (the expert health counselors), prefer to offer advice in a more indirect way – instead of telling people what to do, they would rather offer them feasible directions.

In order to explore how the advice givers mitigated or emphasized their advice messages, Locher also analyzed the relational work of the advice messages. Relational work is “the process of defining relationship in interaction” (p 52). Overall, hedging, as the face saving strategy, is the most frequently used strategy (48%). This is followed by the involvement strategies (37%), which include empathizing, praising, and bonding. In addition, the remaining 16% of the relational work is face threatening strategies (boosting and criticizing). Also, Locher found out that there are certain types of strategies which happen more frequently in specific discursive moves. For example, involvement strategies (including empathizing, praising, and bonding) mainly occurs in the assessment moves, while the face-saving strategy of hedging is mainly spotted in advice moves.

Based on the previous research, Locher (2013) further discussed the extent to which the advice messages in “*Lucy Answers*” are influenced by computer mediation. She stated that both medium factors and situation factors are influencing the linguistic realization of the advice messages in “*Lucy Answers*”. Specific medium factors included persistence of transcript, anonymous messaging, and message format; situation factors included participation structure, participation characteristics, the purpose, tone, and the norms of language. Among these factors, the persistence of transcript and the participation structure are considered the two aspects most influenced by computer mediation.

Adopting the same framework of Locher (2006), Morrow (2012) and Placencia (2012) analyzed online forums that are supported by peers. Compared with Locher’s (2006) study, their results showed both differences and similarities on the linguistic realization of advice giving messages from different online forums.

Morrow (2012) studied a Japanese online discussion forum “*Rikon*” through analyzing the discourse moves of the advice messages. *Rikon* is a peer-to-peer discussion forum, which is designed for people to offer advice and give information to those who are considering divorce. The result of the analysis found that “assessment” (137 out of 339 discursive moves) is the most commonly occurred discursive move, followed by “advice” (81 out of 339) and “explanation” (28 out of 339). Compared with Locher’s (2006) study, in which “advice”, “general information” and “assessment” are the three most frequently used moves, Morrow explained that this difference may be caused by the different status between the advice seekers and advice givers. In Locher’s (2006) study, the advice is delivered by experts, while Morrow’s study is targeted in a peer-to-peer forum, where advice givers may feel the necessity of supporting their advice through assessment. That is to say, different from expert delivered advice, peer advice givers

tend to use more assessment moves to improve the validity of their advice. As for the directiveness of advice moves, the advice givers in *Rikon* all provided their advice in an indirect way: no imperative sentence was spotted in the advice messages, all advice moves were achieved by interrogatives and declaratives. This shows a different result from “Lucy Answers”, in which 36% of the advice are realized through imperatives. This may be caused by the advice givers’ peer-to-peer status, or due to Japanese speakers’ tendency to be indirect in communications.

Placencia (2012) investigated in a peer-to-peer online forum “Spanish Yahoo!*Respuestas*” (YR) on the topic of “beauty and style”. She first considered some key features of YR as a peer-to-peer forum, and concluded that compared with traditional advice columns like “Lucy Answers”, YR shows a more interactive structure. Moreover, due to the absence of expert figure and editorial involvement, there is no fixed writing format in the forum. Through analyzing the discursive moves of the advice messages in YP, Placencia found out “advice” moves are the most frequently used one. It appeared in 54 out of 60 (90%) advice messages. “Assessment” appeared in 30% of the advice messages, and “own experience” covered 23%, ranked at the second and the third respectively. With regard to the “advice” moves, the researcher divided it in to three types: direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect. Among the 3 types, direct advice is used most commonly, with 80% of all advice moves, while conventionally indirect covered 18% and only 2% was non-conventionally indirect form. The result shows that the advice givers in YP forum tend to offer advice in a very direct way. The author argued that this advising style might be caused by the topic of the forum – “beauty and style” – which is considered as neither sensitive or serious, or a “domain under scrutiny” (p. 302). The advising style may change if the topic becomes more sensitive.

The three studies above analyzed the content of advice giving messages by exploring the discursive moves of the texts in different online forums. The results showed that the form and topic of online forums influence people's way of soliciting advice message. However, despite that the forums differ in forms and topics, discursive moves of "assessment", "advice", "general information" and "own experience" are most commonly used in the messages across different forums. Even though the proportion of each type of discursive move varies in different advising situations, the type and number of discursive moves in these situations seems to be a fair share.

Kouper (2009) investigated the pragmatics of a peer-to-peer online discussion forum in LiveJournal.com, on the topic of motherhood. She divided the advice messages into four categories according to its directiveness: direct, hedges, indirect, and description of personal experience. The analysis shows that the frequencies of each category, from the highest to the lowest, are direct advice (35.9%), personal experience (32.6%), hedged advice (22.7%), and indirect advice (10.6%). Even though direct advice using the modal verb *should* was preferred in the advice messages, when the situation of the advice seeking problem gets more serious or sensitive, personal experience sharing would be used more often in the advice giving messages.

The pragmatics of advice giving: Interlanguage and cross-cultural perspective

Research has showed that there are pragmatic differences in linguistic realization in advice giving between native speakers of English and non-native speakers (Al-Shboul, Maros & Yasin, 2014; Babaie & Shahrokhi, 2015; DeCapua & Dunham, 2007; Hinkel, 1997; Matsumura, 2001).

DeCapua and Dunham (2007) argued that non-native speakers from different cultural backgrounds give advice differently with English native speakers in both form and content categories. In the study, 32 native speakers of American English and 51 non-native speakers

from various cultural backgrounds were asked to write advice letters to situations commonly seen on online advice forums related to familiar topics like relationship, health, work, and family. Through analyzing the advice letters of the participants from both form categories and content-based categories, the researchers assured that non-native speakers produced comparatively brief and formulaic responses, while native speakers produced narrative responses that required coding and analysis based upon content categories. For example, compared with native speakers, non-native speakers have a higher average instance of using should (not)+verb, and showing a higher strength of illocutionary force than native speakers. On the other hand, native speakers employed more content-based strategies such as offering alternatives to the advice seeker, using elaborations to support the advice giving message, expressing empathy, emphasizing the importance of individual choice, as well as introspective questions.

Al-Shboul, Maros & Yasin (2014) investigated in the advice giving pattern of Jordanian English language learners (ELLs) and native speakers of English, and found that the two groups of participants have different perceptions on the reason of advice giving, therefore causing differences in their linguistic realization choices. There were 20 Jordanian graduate students and 20 American English native speakers participating in the study, in which they were given a Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) that contained eight advice soliciting situations, followed by three multiple choice options: direct advice using modal verb “should”, hedged advice, and indirect comment that does not explicitly suggest any direction for action. The result of the questionnaire has shown that, American English native speakers preferred to choose indirect comments compared with Jordanian learners. The researchers have suggested that this result is probably due to the collectivist culture of Jordanian ELLs, in which they consider offering advice as a friendly behavior that shows their care and concern to other people.

Another study by Babaie & Shahrokhi (2015) demonstrated similar result on Iranian ELLs. In this study, the researchers applied Discourse Completion Test (DCT) that asked participants to write down their verbal reaction to 24 advice seeking situations. There were 82 Iranian ELLs as well as 20 native speakers of English who participated in the study. The Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) classification was used in the data analysis process, which divided the realization of advice into three levels according to its directiveness: direct offering advice, conventionally indirect offering advice, and non-conventionally indirect offering advice. The result of the analysis shows that compared with English native speakers, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners used less indirect use in advice giving.

Mastumura (2001) focused his study on the pragmatic of advice giving among Japanese EFL students and English as a Second Language (ESL) students, suggesting that with in a same amount of time, the gap between ESL students and English native speakers has been narrowed. The initial purpose of the study is to investigate in Japanese students' pragmatic competence in advice giving, but it also revealed the difference in the pragmatics of advice giving between native English speaker and Japanese ELLs. Two groups of participants were involved in the study. The EFL students were 102 university students in Kyoto, Japan, and the ESL group were 97 Japanese students who joined a one-year study abroad program in Vancouver, Canada. Additionally, 71 native speakers were included as the standard of the comparison. MCQ were used to collect advice giving preference from EFL group before and after the study abroad program. The result has shown that students in ESL groups has acquired the more native-like responses in certain situation. For example, they performed more indirect speech act in situations on classmate's course registration choice, while provided more direct advice on problem happened with venting machine.

Hinkel (1997) conducted a study among Chinese speaking ELLs and English native speakers. MCQ were given to 40 Taiwanese Chinese and 40 American English speakers, in which situations were explained, and they were asked to choose the most appropriate answer from direct, hedged, and indirect advice. The result of the questionnaire shows that native speakers made more choice on indirect comments. and non-native speakers prefer to use more direct or hedged advice.

The previous research has shown the pragmatics of advice giving messages in online forums among native speakers of the language. Their results showed that the advice giving pattern online is influenced by the sensitivity or seriousness of the topic, the relationship between advice seeker and advice givers, as well as the characteristics of the language used in the forum. However, the components of the advice messages do not have much differences. From an interlanguage and cross-cultural perspective, the differences of advice giving pattern between native speakers and non-native speakers was discussed in real-life situations through DCT or MCQ. The results showed that the perspective of appropriateness on advice giving is influenced by nonnative language speakers' culture of their native language, and the solicitation of their advice giving can be influenced by the culture and language proficiency. However, no research has been done on the differences between English native speakers and non-native speakers when it comes to advice giving online. Therefore, this study investigated two online peer supporting discussion forums, one for ELLs in Hong Kong, another for English native speakers, both related to the topic of "work". The analyzation and comparison of the two advice giving corpora is intended to answer the following questions:

1. What are the preferred ways of linguistic realization of Hong Kong ELLs on the topic related to "work"?

2. What are the preferred ways of linguistic realization of English native speakers on the topic related to “work”?
3. What are the differences in advice giving on a given topic between ELLs and native speakers?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The Setting

The data of the study was collected from two peer-to-peer online forums: one from UK, and the other one from Hong Kong. Both forums are communicated in English, and are designed for users to discuss problems concerning their work and career, such as troubles at work, career change, etc.

The discussion forum in UK is “Employment, Jobseeking & Training” section of the MSE Forum, which belongs to UK’s largest money website MoneySavingExpert. Link to the sub-forum:

<https://forums.moneysavingexpert.com/forumdisplay.php?f=141&order=desc&page=2>

The forum in Hong Kong is named “working group – Eng Ver.”, which belongs to one of Hong Kong’s most popular discussion websites: “Discuss.com.hk”. The link to the sub-forum:

<https://forums.moneysavingexpert.com/forumdisplay.php?f=141&order=desc&page=2>

Since the two forums are for peer-to-peer discussion, there was no existence of an expert figure. Therefore, some features of the YR forum in the study of Placencia (2012) also match the forums in the current study. For example, there is no fixed writing format in the posts and no expert figure or editorial involvement.

The Participants

Participants in the online forums are included as the participants in this study. Therefore, both English native speakers and ELLs were included. Participants in the UK forum were English native speakers, while participants in the forum in HK were ELLs.

“Discuss.com.hk” is a Chinese based website, suggests a vast majority of the participants are Chinese speakers. However, this sub-forum is designed for English communication. As a result, people who participant in the discussion are not likely to be native speakers of a language other than Chinese. To further confirm the participants are ELLs, only those who revealed a Chinese native speaker identity in their user account were chosen. For example, those who used Chinese in their user names or personalized signature, or participated in other Chinese posts, and excluded users who cannot be identified as Chinese native speakers.

All users participated in the discussion in these forums used screen names, and no sign up or log in is required before reviewing the posts, which means the information on the two forums are accessible to anyone online, therefore could be considered as open data. This research has been exempted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for further review.

Data collection

The data collection process involved identifying initial posts that are seeking advice, copying and pasting forum threads, including the initial forum as well as all the responses to the initial post, but the conversations between responders were excluded. There are three types of texts, which showed up in the collected texts: the advice seeking message – problem raised in the initial post, advice message – suggestions offered to the problem messages, as well as response messages – initial post owners’ responses to the advice messages and advice givers’ responses to each other. This study focused on the content of the advice messages.

A total of 48 advice messages from 6 threads were collected from the forum in UK. These advice messages were contributed by 35 participants covered in their pseudonyms, with a total word count of 5405. The average length of each advice message is 113 words, the longest message is 351 words, and the shortest one contains 4 words. As for the data in Hong Kong, 63

advice messages from 7 threads were collected. However, 6 of them are exempt from the data analysis because the contributors cannot be identified as non-native speakers of English. The rest of the 57 messages were from 52 different participants that are examined as native speakers of Chinese. With an average length of 32 words, the total word count of the advice messages is 1812 words, among which the longest one contains 150 words and the shortest one only has 1 word. Table 1 shows the general information of the collected advice messages.

	UK	Hong Kong
Number of posts	6	7
Number of advice messages	48	57
Number of participants (advice givers)	35	52
Total word count	5405 words	1812 words
Average length of the advice message	113 words	32 words
Longest advice message	351 words	150 words
Shortest advice message	4 words	1 word

Table 1. General Information of the Collected Advice Messages

Data Analysis

As it is discussed in the literature review, advice messages in the online forums usually contain language that performs various function. For example, in the online expert advising situation, Locher (2006) stated that except for offering directions on what should people do or think, advisors would offer general facts and information as well as assessment or evaluation on the advice-seekers' situation. In peer-to-peer advice forums, which resembles with the situation in the current study, both Morrow (2012) and Placencia (2012) found out that various discursive practices like offering own experience, assessment, and explanation are frequently used in the

advice giving messages. Therefore, this study adopted Locher's (2006) discursive move categories as the tool to analyze the form and the content of the advice giving messages collected from both forums. Table 2 shows the type of discursive moves as well as their definitions. At the same time, this study also looked at the syntactic type of the advice moves in detail.

To increase the validity of the analyzation, the originally collected advice messages were labeled twice independently, and the results from the two separate analyzation were compared to make sure the labeling was accurate and consistent.

Discursive Move	Explanation
Greeting	Greeting, salutation
Advice	Telling someone what they should do or think. Three different syntactic types of advice are distinguished with type-tags: – declaratives ('decl') – interrogatives ('int-a': inviting an action) ('int-i': inviting introspection) – imperatives ('imp-a': inviting an action) ('imp-i': inviting introspection)
List	If there is more than one piece of 'advice' of the same syntactic form, this is indicated by adding the attribute 'list' (e.g., advice=decl list)
Assessment	Assessment and/or evaluation of the questioner's situation; an uptake of the questioner's narrative; support of the reader
Disclaimer	A special kind of assessment, in which it is pointed out that the information given is incomplete or cannot match expectations due to the site's limitations
Explanation	An explanation of a point just made; a type-tag indicates which element is being further explained, namely 'advice', 'assessment', 'disclaimer', 'farewell', 'general information', 'metacomment', 'open category', 'own experience', 'referral'
Own experience	Personal experience of advice-giver
General information	General information (however, if there is a personal link to the questioner's situation, then it should be labeled as 'assessment')
Disclaimer	Special type of assessment used to point out incomplete information or advice-giver's lack of competence
Apology	Expressing regret, saying you're sorry
Question	Request for further information
Referral	'Referral' can be considered a special kind of advice, in that it refers the questioner to professional, personal help as well as phone numbers, addresses, books, etc.; as for 'advice', three different syntactic types are distinguished, and the list option is available (cf. 'advice')
Metacomment	Text-structuring comments (e.g., as to your second question)
Open category	A category for moves that do not fit any other category
Farewell	Farewell, Good-bye

Table 2. Discursive Moves (adapted from Locher 2006, P. 62 and Morrow 2012, P. 263)

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The Form and Content of Advice Messages

Table 3 and Table 4 show the distribution of the discursive moves in UK and HK. The frequency of each discursive move, the number of messages containing the move, as well as the frequency with which the move appeared as the first move and last move (excluding greeting and farewell) are identified.

There are 210 discursive moves in the 48 advice messages in the forum in UK. Advice and assessment are the most frequently used discursive moves in the advice giving messages. Both advice and assessment appeared 70 times in the 210 discursive moves, respectively accounting for 33.18% of all discursive moves. Among the advice moves, 11 of them appeared as the first move in the very beginning of the message, and 16 of them worked as the last move at the end of the message. As for the assessment move, 24 out of the 70 showed up in the beginning of the advice message as the first move, and 8 as the last move of the message. Own experience ranked at the third in terms of the overall frequency, representing 9% (19 instances) of all discursive moves. There are 5 instances in which own experience was offered at the beginning of the message, and 9 offered at the end of the message. The fourth most frequently used move is explanation, which appeared 18 times, and contributed to 8.53% of the advice messages, and 5 of them worked as the final move of the message. Overall, most of the advice messages started with assessment (n=23, 50%), or advice (n=11, 22.9%), and 10.4% (n=5) of the messages started with personal experience.

Similar with UK, the content of Hong Kong advice giving messages also majorly consists of advice, assessment, explanation and own experience. In the 57 advice messages, 127 discursive moves were identified. Advice moves occurred 42 times (33.07% of all situations), making it the most frequently used one. Among the 42 advice moves, 21 of them occurred as the first move in the advice messages, and 7 of them as the final move. Assessment is the second most commonly seen discursive move in the advice messages from Hong Kong – 31 assessment moves were identified in the data, which made up 24.14% of the text. There were 17 assessment moves spotted at the beginning of the advice message, and 8 at the very end of the message. Also, the advice givers used 17 (13.39%) explanations as well as 9 (7.09 %) own experiences in their advice. As for the sequence of the discursive moves, similar with UK, advice (n=21, 37.5%) and assessment (n=17, 30.3%) most frequently appeared in the beginning of the message. However, there are also 12.5% (n=7) of the messages which started with own experience, and 10.7% (n=6) which started with disclaimer.

When comparing the general pattern of the discursive moves between UK and Hong Kong (Figure 1), the general form and content of the advice messages from the two groups does not have profound difference, except for that participants in UK used more assessment in their advice giving messages. Notably, disclaimer, as a “special kind of assessment” that indicates the advice giver did not provide complete information (Locher, 2006), appeared more frequently in the advice messages in Hong Kong. Therefore, if assessment and disclaimer are considered under the same category, then the difference in frequency between UK and Hong Kong would be reduced. This would be explained later in detail.

UK Discursive Move	No.	%	No. of message contains the move	First move	Last move
greeting	2	0.95%	2		
Advice	70	33.18%	35	11	16
assessment	70	33.18%	35	24	8
disclaimer	4	1.90%	5	2	1
explanation	18	8.53%	13	0	5
own experience	19	9.00%	15	5	9
general information	3	1.42%	3	2	0
apology	0	0.00%	0	0	0
question	6	2.84%	4	2	2
referral	7	3.32%	7	1	0
metacomment	7	3.32%	6	1	0
open category	1	0.47%	1	0	1
farewell	4	1.90%	4		
Total	210	100%		48	42

Table 3. Distribution of Discursive Moves in UK Advice Messages

HK Discursive Move	No.	%	No. of message contains the move	First move	Last move
greeting	0	0.00%	0		
Advice	42	33.07%	36	21	7
assessment	31	24.41%	25	17	8
disclaimer	8	6.30%	8	6	1
explanation	17	13.39%	16	0	7
own experience	9	7.09%	8	7	1
general information	5	6.30%	4	0	2
apology	0	3.94%	0	0	0
question	4	3.15%	4	0	3
referral	1	3.15%	1	0	1
metacomment	3	2.36%	3	3	0
open category	4	2.36%	4	2	1
farewell	3	0.79%	3		
total	127	100%		56	31

Table 4. Distribution of Discursive Moves in Hong Kong Advice Messages

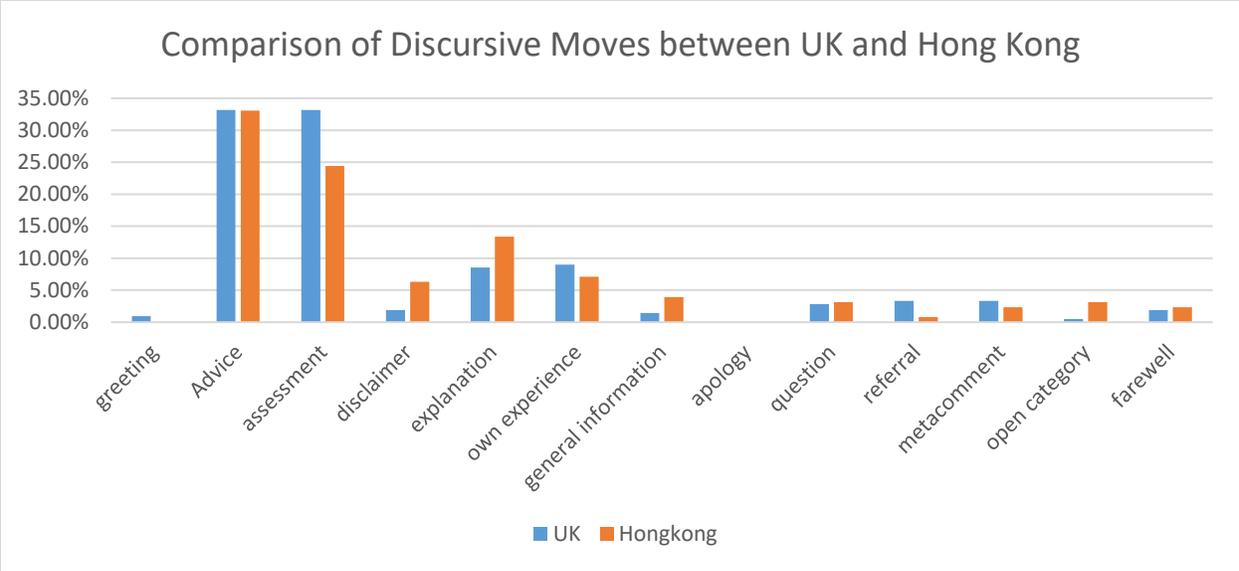


Figure 1. Comparison of Discursive Moves between UK and Hong Kong

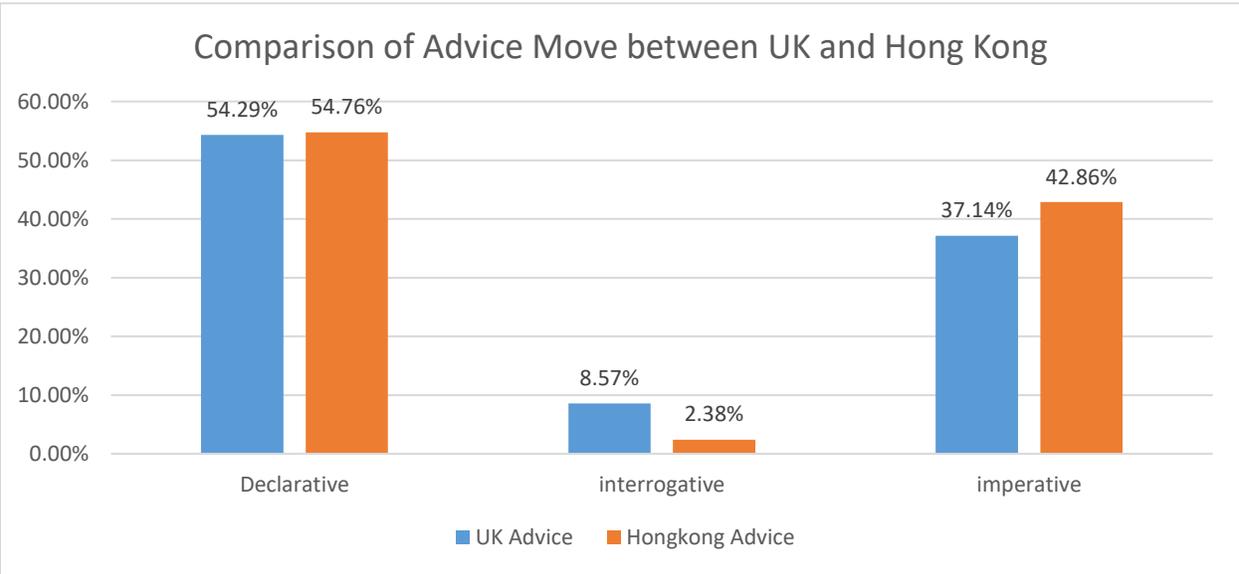


Figure 2. Comparison of Advice Move between UK and Hong Kong

Advice. Content that tells people what they should do or think is labeled as an advice move, which was used as the most frequent discursive move in the advice giving messages in both forums, and the proportions were similar. In the forum in UK, advice moves accounted for 33.18% of all discursive moves, while in Hong Kong they accounted for 32.86%. The linguistic realization of the advice moves was achieved in three different forms: declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives. Declaratives are descriptive sentences that contain directive meaning for actions; interrogatives are questions that invite an introspections or actions; and imperatives are sentences in which verbs serve directly as command. This is the most direct way of offering advice, and can often be face threatening. The sentence type of advice moves in both forums are shown in Figure 2. Even though the percentage of advice moves in UK and Hong Kong are approximately the same, the syntactic realization of the advice moves shows some differences. The advice moves in UK are mostly (54.29%) achieved by declarative sentence, along with 8.57% of interrogatives and 37.14% of imperatives. In Hong Kong, there is a similar number in declaratives (54.76%), but interrogatives and imperatives are different from UK. Advice givers in Hong Kong used only 1 interrogative sentence (2.38%), and the percentage of imperatives is higher (42.86%) than UK.

Advice givers in UK offered more than half of their advice through declarative sentences. In the 70 discursive moves that are identified as advice moves, 38 (54.29%) were achieved in a descriptive way. They could appear with modal verbs like *may*, *might*, *can*, *could*, *shall*, and *should*, be structured in “*it*-construction”, or appear with the verb *suggest* or *advice*.

For example, in the response to a post seeking advice on employment tribunal, one advice is structured in “*it*-construction”:

(1) [**advice=decl**] But, it's important you prepare properly, make sure everything is in order, completely honest and that your claim is reasonable.

In response to a post about a dual location working problem, declarative advice with model verb *could* is used:

(2) [**advice=decl**] you could look at Mo-Fri shares maybe with some flexibility to have the OH stay and some weekends.

The following advice (3) used the verb *suggest* in the sentence to offer suggestion to the same issue in (2):

(3) [**advice=decl**] but I'd tend to suggest that wherever you live during the week should be in a town/ city and not anywhere isolated.

In the forum in Hong Kong, declaratives with model verbs and verb *suggest/advice* could also be found, for example, (4) to (6). But there is no *it*-construction found in the sampled posts.

(4) [**advice=decl**] Perhaps you should ask the leader of Team C to clarify your job duties, coz s/he will be the one who knows the most about the work assignments.

(5) [**advice=decl**] I would suggest you do your job hunts in both Canada and in HK, see what offers can you get and then decide.

(6) [**advice=decl**] i am advise you that, sometime hard job can give us training for the future. if such thing u cann handlle it well.

Interrogative advices are usually achieved through questions. The forum in UK and the forum in Hong Kong showed a significant difference in giving advice through questions. In UK, 13 out of the 70 advice moves are achieved by interrogatives.

(7) [**advice=int-i**] Rather than focussing on wages, why not think about what you want to do with your life? Maybe put your engineering skills to use in a different way?

(8) [**advice=int-a**] Why doesn't he set up his own business and expand into the space they are leaving?

However, in the forum in Hong Kong, only one interrogative advice is used:

(9) [**advice=int-a**] Have you considered starting a business and be your own boss?

Imperative sentences are considered as the most direct way of offering advice, in which the verb functions as illocutionary force. Twenty six imperatives appeared in the forum in UK, here are the examples:

(10) [**advice=imp-a**] Also find a gym, a cinema, and a book group.

(11) [**advice=imp-i**] Think carefully about what this really means.

Among the 42 advice moves in Hong Kong advice giving messages, 18 of them used imperative sentences. The examples below are advice offered for a career change issue from the forum in Hong Kong:

(12) [**advice=imp-a**] Keep looking before you quit

(13) [**advice=imp-i**] Don't let this reason to bother you. [**advice=imp-a**] Move on to another job if you hate your current job.

Assessment and Disclaimer. Assessment and disclaimer are the discursive moves in which the advice giver mentioned, evaluated, or explained the advice seeker's situation in their advice giving messages. Especially, disclaimer is listed as a special kind of assessment that pointed out the assessment or evaluation of the advice seeker's situation is not going to be complete due to the advice giver's incapability or the incompleteness of the information provided.

In the advice messages in UK, 33.18% (n=70) of assessment and 1.90% of disclaimer (n=4) were used, and accounted for 35.08% in total. In 24 out of the 48 messages, assessment served 24 times as the very first move, and 8 times as the last move of the message.

Below (14) is an example of assessment and disclaimer used in the UK forum. The questioner is seeking advice on her employment tribunal, and the following assessment was offered in one of the responses. The advice giver first used a disclaimer to indicate that more information would be needed in order to give accurate evaluation and suggestion. But an assessment based on the provided information was also offered after the disclaimer.

(14) **[disclaimer]** As others have said they can potentially claim for costs, it depends entirely on how much merit there is to your claim. You haven't said much about the claim here but I'd try and be as impartial as possible and think very carefully about how valid your claim is. **[assessment]** The fact your union isn't willing to represent you and you can't get a 'no win no fee' solicitor either is a serious warning sign. If a solicitor isn't confident they can win your case then you'll probably struggle representing yourself. The company actions is another warning sign, most would offer a settlement. The fact they haven't suggests they feel they have a strong case.

In the forum in Hong Kong, out of 127 discursive moves, assessment appeared 31 times, accounting for 24.41%, and disclaimer appeared 8 times, accounting for 6.30%. Assessment and disclaimer constitute 30.71% of the discursive moves. And 23 out of the 56 advice messages (41.00%) are started with either assessment or disclaimer. The following are examples of disclaimer (15) and assessment (16).

(15) **[disclaimer]** it all depends on what u have to do and what u getting paid for?

(16) **[assessment]** do not get surprised that your boss would projectise the tasks and making all operational tasks to become projects...

Own experience. Own experiences are also used in both forums. They usually serve as a support for the advice or assessment moves they made. In the forum in UK, 19 (9.00%) own experience moves were used in the advice messages, and 5 of them served as the first move, 9 served as the last move. Below, (17), is an example of the own experience in an advice to the questioner's career change problem. The forum in Hong Kong had 9 (7.09%), and 7 of them appeared in the beginning, 1 served as the last move in the message. An example is offered in (18).

(17) **[advice=decl]** The answer to the OP question is yes you can

[explanation=advice] [own experience] I did, started life as a marine engineer and decided I didn't like it so got out without a clear idea what to do next.. After a few years of bumbling around discovered computers and found my niche. I actually did a TOPS course in 1981 at age 31 and never looked back. I discovered I enjoyed making things work and delivering solutions to a requirement, some companies were crap so not too much fun. I updated my skills as times changed but I stuck at it until last year when I retired. Still enjoy tinkering around making things work....

(18) **[own experience]** I was clinical researcher for 10 years and changed my career in 2009. ... **[advice=imp-a]** So, be open and try something new.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study discussed the linguistic realization of advice giving in two peer-to-peer online forums (one consisting of UK native speakers of English, the other one mainly participated by nonnative speakers in Hong Kong) through analyzing the discursive moves that contributed to the form and content of the advice giving messages. The types, frequency and order of the discursive moves were identified.

Results of the types and frequencies of the discursive moves showed that the general patterns on the distribution of discursive moves were similar between UK and Hong Kong. Advice, assessment, explanation, and own experience were the most frequently used moves in both forums. This finding was align with what was found in the previous studies by Locher (2006), Morrow (2012), and Placencia (2012), that despite the fact that the form and topic of the forum would influence people's way of giving advice, "assessment", "advice", "general information" and "own experiences" are the most commonly used moves.

As for the advice moves, even though advice givers in UK and Hong Kong shared similar frequency of this move in general (respectively accounting for 33.18% and 33.07%), the sentence types they used to achieve advice moves showed some differences: advice givers in Hong Kong used more imperative sentences and less interrogative sentences. Imperatives are considered as the most direct way of giving advice (Locher 2013), which indicates that nonnative speakers in the Hong Kong forum tend to be more direct when giving advice to their peers. This difference was also observed in previous studies. For example, researchers focused on cross-cultural pragmatics on advice giving have proved that pragmatics differences exist between

English native speakers and nonnative speakers from various cultural backgrounds, and nonnative speakers tend to offer advice more directly than native speakers (Al-Shboul, Maros & Yasin, 2014; Babaie & Shahrokhi, 2015; DeCapua & Dunham, 2007; Hinkel, 1997; Matsumura, 2001). Cultural differences and varied English proficiency might be the two main factors that led to the current results. On one hand, as Hinkel (1994) noted, giving advice is often recognized as a friendly, caring, and engaging activity in East Asian cultures like Japan, Korea, and China. Therefore, it is not unusual that native speakers of Chinese transfer the pragmatics in their native language into their second language. However, in UK, under the influence of Anglo-western culture, advice giving is considered as a face threatening speech act that may invade into the advice receivers' independent social identity. On the other hand, the proficiency level of the language speaker may also affect the sentence structure they use. Babaie and Shahrokhi (2015) found that speakers with lower English proficiency level would use easier and more familiar sentence types to offer advice. DeCapua and Dunham (2007) also found that native speakers produced more introspective questions than ESL learners in the advice letters they composed.

Comparing the assessment moves alone between UK and Hong Kong, UK had a much higher rate of using assessment. However, if we put disclaimer together into the comparison, the gap becomes smaller. One of the reasons might be the degree of details offered in the initial post. As it is shown in the basic information of the collected data, participants in UK posted longer messages than in Hong Kong, and the situations are explained in more detail, while the advice seeking messages in HK tend to present a broader idea or situation. Therefore, advice givers in HK may have the tendency to provide their evaluations in the form of disclaimer.

The order of discursive moves in Hong Kong and UK shares some similarities but is also different in some ways. In both UK and Hong Kong, assessment and disclaimer often appeared

as the very first move of the advice messages, which means that people in both groups often evaluate advice givers' situations before other moves such as offering suggestions. This is a similar result with Locher's (2006) study on "*Lucy Answers*", in which the advisors in "*Lucy Answers*" preferred to start their response through assessment so that a personal relationship with the advice seeker could be built in the beginning of the message. This could also be a strategy that advice givers used to build up the validity of their advice messages. According to Morrow (2012), who investigated in the peer-to-peer situation, the advice givers felt the need of displaying their understanding of the situation before giving advice.

In addition to assessment moves, advice is another move that was often used in the very beginning of the advice messages in Hong Kong. Half of the advice moves (21 out of 42) appeared as the first moves. Compared with Hong Kong, only 11 out of 70 advice moves were put at the beginning of the message in UK, which is to say, most people in UK chose to give their advice after other discursive moves, for example, offering their own experience or evaluation of the situation. In comparison, people in Hong Kong tend to be more straightforward when giving advice. The result in UK agrees with the findings in Locher's (2006) study, in which assessment and general information are the common moves to start a message, and advice is rarely used as the first move. This reflects the perception of advice giving in the English language: Anglo-western cultures perceive advice giving as a face threatening speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). Therefore, instead of giving their advice in a straight forward way, people would prefer to indicate to the reader and the advice receiver that the advice they provided is based on a thorough understanding of the situation. The different result in Hong Kong might be caused by the positive perception of advice giving in East Asian cultures (Hinkel, 1994).

The findings above showed that in online advice forums supported by peers, the general pattern of the discursive moves that contributed to the form and content of the advice messages were similar, especially in terms of type and frequencies. Even across different languages, people seem to have similar understanding on the elements included in advice giving events in their native languages (Locher, 2012). This study expanded Locher's conclusion into an interlanguage perspective: under equal circumstances, the understanding on the component of advice giving are similar between native and nonnative speakers. However, the sequencing and the syntactic realization of the discursive moves may vary under the influence of culture and language proficiency.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the linguistic realization of advice giving messages between English native speakers in UK and nonnative speakers of English in Hong Kong under online settings. Both of the two forums were designed in similar structure and are on the same topic. A total of 5405 words from 48 advice messages were collected from the forum in UK, and 57 messages were collected from the forum in Hong Kong, counted up to 1812 words. The concept of discursive moves is applied in the data analysis process to investigate in the form and content of the advice messages. The types, frequency, as well as the sequence of discursive moves were identified. Furthermore, the syntactic type of the actual advice giving was examined in detail.

The result of the analysis of the types and frequency on discursive moves showed that English native speakers in UK and nonnative speakers in Hong Kong had similar perceptions on what elements should be included in an advice giving message. In both forums, advice, assessment, explanation, and own experience are used as the most frequent advice moves, which agreed with the previous findings of studies on the form and content of online advice messages (Locher, 2006; Kouper, 2009; Morrow, 2012; Placencia, 2012).

On the syntactic types of the actual piece of language that functions as offering direction or suggestion, native speakers in UK and nonnative speakers in Hong Kong showed some differences. It was found that more interrogative sentences were used in UK and more imperative sentences were used in Hong Kong, which suggests the nonnative speakers tend to give advice in a more direct way. Research on cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics has found similar

result that ELLs have the tendency to choose or produce more direct advice than native speakers (DeCapua & Dunham, 2007; Al-Shboul, Maros & Yasin, 2014; Babaie & Shahrokhi, 2015; Matsumura, 2001; Hinkel, 1997). This could be caused by the influence of the speaker's native culture or the proficiency level of the English speaker.

Participants from both forums used numerous assessments moves to provide evaluation to the advice seeker's situation. Affected by the fact that the participants in Hong Kong tend to offer less detailed information in the initial post, more assessment appeared in the form of disclaimer in the data in Hong Kong.

In addition to the types and frequency of the discursive moves, the sequence of the moves was also discussed in the study. The findings showed that in both forums, assessment moves were often put in the beginning of the message to serve the purpose of showing understanding and building a personal relationship with the advice seeker. Compared with participants in UK, people in Hong Kong tended to organize their advice message in a more straightforward way. This could be related to the positive perception on advice giving in East Asian cultures (Hinkel, 1994).

One of the limitations of the study is that the result of this study is shown through descriptive statistics, but no in dept statistical analysis was used in the data analysis process because of the limited sample size. Additionally, this study mainly focused on the linguistic realization of advice giving in terms of the form and content of the advice messages produced by English native speakers and nonnative speakers. Results indicated that the general structure and elements applied in the advice messages were similar, but organization and syntactic type of advice giving can be influenced by nonnative speakers' language proficiency and cultural background. But the degree of influence caused by these two factors is not identified. Therefore,

this could be explored in further studies through using different research methods like DCT, MCQ, and interview to see to what extent the two factors are influencing English Language Learners' linguistic realization in advice giving.

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