An Empirical Study on Zero Address Terms Among Chinese College Students

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Abstract

Chinese address terms are the basis of interpersonal communication. On the one hand, a conversation usually begins with address terms which play a important role. On the other hand, choosing different address terms represents the different tone the speaker wants to express. Therefore, accurate and appropriate use of address terms is one of the important symbols of successful communication. However, using zero address terms is still very common because we don't know how to address appropriately in some occasions. This paper aims to study the common types of zero address terms usage among university students, and try to summarize the main reasons. This study is based on daily conversations of college students in four common campus scenes which are office building, study building, store and playground. The following findings are obtained in this study. There are five common types of zero address terms phenomenon. They are polite expression, personal pronoun, no expression, onomatopoeia and body language. There are three main reasons for using zero address terms. They are occasion, interpersonal purpose and social development.

Key words: Zero address terms; Causes; College students

1. INTRODUCTION

The address terms are the names that refers to others based on their identity, occupation, gender and so on, they also reflect their social relations (Ma & Chang, 1998). In the process of verbal communication, there will be a phenomenon that speakers or listeners do not know how to correctly address the other. This phenomenon is called the absence of address terms. The absence of address terms is a linguistic phenomenon that affects the systematization and communication effect due to social changes and people's concept changes, which is incompatible with people's identity, status and communication context (Zhu, 2004). In the absence of Chinese address terms, zero address terms is one of the most important compensation strategy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1990s, the situation of not using address terms has gradually increased, and domestic scholars began to study the phenomenon of zero address terms. Chen Jianming (1990) discussed the lack and generalization of address terms in modern Chinese. Taking seven common social relations as examples, this paper summarizes the current situation of the absence of address terms, and also gives the corresponding solutions. Zhu Keyi (2004) discussed from two perspectives: the absence of kinship terms and the absence of social terms. Xu Yueyan (2004) analyzed and summarized four reasons for the phenomenon of zero address terms by investigating the phenomena in companies, service industries and public places. Hao Yuanyuan (2005) mainly focused on the zero

address terms phenomena in female groups, and analyzed the current situations and reasons. Meng Wanchun (2010) explained the phenomenon of zero address terms from three aspects: the dilemma of Chinese address terms, the deep reasons for the absence of address terms, and the pragmatic analysis of zero address terms. Huang Wenwen (2012) studied the compensation strategies and reasons for the absence of address terms among college students through a questionnaire survey.

To sum up, previous studies focused on theoretical research. Scholars analyzed the current situations of zero address terms, explored the deep causes of zero address terms and gave strategies of dealing with zero address terms phenomena. However, there is a lack of empirical research, especially for the phenomenon in college students. Therefore, this study aims to analyze and summarize the main types of zero address terms phenomena and the main reasons behind the phenomena. Based on the natural observation corpus of college students in the university campus, this study takes zero address terms as the research object, takes empirical research as the research method.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is an empirical research. It adopts the methods of natural observation, site record and random interview to collect corpus. Natural observation ensures the authenticity and effectiveness of corpus. Site recording means accurately and timely record the phenomenon of zero address terms in each conversation. The zero address terms phenomenon is generally at the beginning of the dialogue, and address terms content is short, so the method of site recording is suitable. Random interview is conducted to ask the speakers about the reasons and purposes of using the zero address terms.

As for the occasion of corpus collection, this study selects four scenes on the campus. They are teaching building, study building, store and playground. On the one hand, it is clear that the scene needs to cover as many college students' daily communication as possible. On the other hand, these four scenes are convenient to carry out the observation, record and interview.

As for the participant of corpus collection, it needs the dialogue between college students which means both the speaker and the listener are college students. As for the step of corpus collection, it is divided into four steps, and there are observing conversation, recording corpus, recording basic personal information of speaker and listener, and random interview.

The process of corpus collection is as follows. In this empirical study, corpus is collected from four places: office building, teaching building, store and playground. In each occasion, 40 zero address terms phenomena are collected. And 20 are collected among strangers and 20

are collected among acquaintances. Firstly, it needs to observe conversations among college students. If the zero address terms occur, it needs to record specific dialogue content of zero address terms phenomenon. Then，it needs to randomly interview speaker and the listener. About 4 groups need to be interviewed in each kind of place. The questions of the interview are about the ideas of speakers and listeners when they use or receive zero address terms. For example, it will ask the reasons why the speaker uses the zero address terms, the feelings of listeners when hearing the zero address terms, whether the same zero address terms strategy will adopt if this conversation happen again, and what strategy will be adopted if the listener starts this conversation.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this study, 160 zero address terms phenomena were collected. There are 40 phenomena in the context of teaching building, study building, store and playground respectively. In each scene, it is divided into dialogue between strangers and between acquaintances. In the following corpus analysis, the main types of zero address terms and the main reasons for zero address terms will be analyzed. This study analyzes the main types of zero predicate phenomenon from two perspectives. On the one hand, it summarizes the main types among strangers. On the other hand, it summarizes the main types among acquaintances. This study analyzes the main reasons for the phenomenon of zero address terms from three angles. Firstly, it will analyze the causes under different occasions. Secondly, from the micro perspective, it refers to the view of interpersonal purpose. Finally, from the macro perspective, it refers to social and cultural background.

4.1 Analysis of Types of Zero Address Terms

When the phenomenon of lack of address terms appears, there will be different types of zero address terms. In this study, there are five types. They are polite expression, personal pronoun, non-expression, onomatopoeia and body language. When the conversation begins with a sentence like excuse me, sorry, please and etc., it refers to the type of polite expression. The type of personal pronoun refers to the beginning of hello. The type of non-expression means to start a conversation without any greeting word. The type of onomatopoeia refers to the use of sound to attract listener's attention and then start to talk. The type of body language refers to the use of body movements instead of address terms. These five types appear in daily communication in relation to different contexts and social relationships. According to the basic information of the speaker and the listener, the types of zero address terms will be analyzed between strangers and between acquaintances who already know.

4.1.1 The Types of Zero Address Terms Among Strangers

For the dialogue between strangers, 20 cases were collected for each scene, a total of 80 corpuses. Table one shows the types of zero address terms phenomenon in strangers' communicative dialogue and the quantitative distribution of different types can be clearly seen.

Table 1
Zero Address Terms among Strangers

	Office building	Study building	Store	Playground
Polite expression	7	8	10	9
Personal pronoun	8	7	9	8
Non-expression	3	1	1	0
Onomatopoeia	0	0	0	1
Body language	2	4	0	2

On the whole, the types of zero address terms among strangers are mainly polite expression and personal pronoun. No matter in the quiet office and study building, or in the noisy store and playground, college students who don't know each other will choose polite words and personal pronouns to start conversation. For example, Excuse me, how can I get to the teaching building? Sorry, can I help you? Sorry, is this seat taken? For the type of non expression, it will appear in quiet places such as office. For example, there will be such a conversation in a crowded elevator. Click on the seventh floor. In a multi-person office, there will be such a dialogue. Remember to close the door when you go out. The type of onomatopoeia will appear in noisy playground. As for body language, there are more in study building. When in the study room, college students will pat another classmate with their hands and ask if this seat is occupied. Strangers don't know each other, so the speaker cannot choose an appropriate address terms for the listener in a short time. When it is necessary to start a dialogue, most college students will choose a civilized and polite way. This common phenomenon of zero address terms is not difficult to find in our life. When we start a conversation with strangers, it is naturally choose this way. In addition to the most common cases, other types of zero address terms will also occur in different occasions. Perhaps it is because of the quiet place, it is wise to use body language instead of spoken words, so as not to destroy the quiet atmosphere. Maybe it's because of the rush of time, so oral expression is omitted.

4.1.2 The Types of Zero Address Terms among Acquaintances

For the dialogue between acquaintances, 20 cases are collected for each scene, a total of 80 corpus. Table two shows the five types of zero address terms phenomenon among acquaintances, and the quantitative distribution of different types can be clearly seen.

Table 2
Zero Address Terms among Acquaintances

	Office building	Study building	Store	Playground
Polite expression	3	3	1	2
Personal pronoun	2	0	0	1
Non-expression	2	9	9	3
Onomatopoeia	5	3	4	6
Body language	8	5	6	8

On the whole, the types of zero address terms among acquaintances are mainly non expression and body language. In office buildings, acquaintances pat each other directly, or call other in a low voice with onomatopoeia. In study buildings and stores, students directly start to talk. For example, what do you eat after class? Get me a drink, too. What did English teacher say today? In those occasions, it is very common to enter the topic directly without any foreshadowing. In the playground, acquaintances will slap each other. The playground is a place to relax and exercise, where body language is very suitable. People also naturally greet each other during sports.

4.2 Analysis of the Causes of Zero Address Terms

This study analyzes the causes for using zero address terms from three angles. Firstly, the reasons are analyzed from the perspective of the scene of corpus collection. The occasion consists of four places: office building, study building, store and playground. Then, from the micro perspective, it refers to interpersonal purpose. For different communicative purposes, speakers use different types of zero address terms. Finally, from the macro perspective, it refer to culture and social background. Cultural context and situation context determine language meaning in a certain extent.

4.2.1 The Causes of Zero Address terms in Relation to Occasion

This study selected four main places on campus, they are office building, study building, store and playground. To a certain extent, office building and study building belong to one type, representing a quiet and serious atmosphere. Shop and playground belong to the other type, representing a noisy and entertaining atmosphere. Table 1 shows the distribution number of each type among strangers, and table 2 shows the number of each type among acquaintances. The number of zero address terms in Table 3 is obtained by adding Table 1 and table 2. Table 3 clearly shows the distribution number of different types in these four occasions.

On the whole, the types of zero address terms among strangers are mainly polite expression and personal pronoun. This distribution is presented in all four occasions. Because the speaker and the listener don't know each other, they will give priority to polite

expression on any occasion. Polite expression is also the most polite way in interpersonal communication. It can be found that there are a small number of non expression types and body language types in the scenes of office buildings and teaching buildings. Because in quiet places, people tend to integrate into the context. In the context of quiet office buildings and teaching buildings, people prefer to choose other ways to replace oral expression.

On the whole, the types of zero address terms among acquaintances are mainly non expression, onomatopoeia and body language. In the office building scene, body language and onomatopoeia are the main ways. Office buildings are serious for college students. When acquaintances meet in office buildings, college students tend to start conversations without using language. They touch each other directly or use other onomatopoeia to attract attention. Both types are ways to reduce language expressions. Study buildings and shops are the main places for college students' daily activities. In these scenes, the relationship between students is relaxing and casual. So the conversation will start directly without any address terms. Those are means of greeting between young people. Also, Friends who haven't seen each other for a long time will send out onomatopoeia to express their exciting emotions. Close friends will directly touch each other's head or body to start the conversation. The playground is a place for sports and entertainment. In such an environment, friends get along most naturally and comfortably. The expression of onomatopoeia matches the noisy playground environment very well. For the phenomena that acquaintances use zero address terms, there are also a small number of polite expressions. On the one hand, it is determined by the degree of intimacy between the speaker and the listener. On the other hand, it was determined by the specific context at that time. For example, there are teachers, seniors and other people present. Speakers and listeners need to be decent and serious in front of them.

Table 3
Zero Address Terms in Four Occasions

	Office building	Study building	Store	Play-ground
Polite expression	10	11	11	11
Personal pronoun	10	7	9	9
Non-expression	5	10	8	3
Onomatopoeia	5	3	4	7
Body language	10	9	6	10

It can be seen from the data in Table 3 that the most commonly used zero address terms types are polite expression and body language. From the data in Tables 1 and 2, we can know that polite expression is between strangers, while body language is between acquaintances. When they don't know each other, college students tend to choose a polite and appropriate way to start a conversation. According to the interview, there are two main reasons. On the one hand, polite expression reflects their own civilization and politeness. On the other hand, polite expression can promote the smooth development of this dialogue. When acquaintances talk, college students tend to be nonverbal. They use the popular body movements of young people or simple onomatopoeia to attract each other's attention, and then have a smooth dialogue. This way paves a relaxed and lively tone of discourse. When college students meet on campus, they will involuntarily choose the tacit way of communication between young people. At the same time, in different scenarios, college students will make corresponding adjustments.

4.2.2 The Causes of Zero Address terms in Relation to Interpersonal Purpose
This study has analyzed and summarized five types of zero address terms. They are polite expression, personal pronoun, non expression, onomatopoeia and body language. Each way represents different communicative purposes. In order to achieve the interpersonal purposes or to show the intentions, the speaker will choose the appropriate way.

The type of polite expression refers to the substitution of polite expressions for address terms. Polite expressions can directly show the speaker's friendly attitude. This approach is in line with the two principles that speech acts must abide by. They are the cooperative principle and the politeness principle. According to the analysis of the random interview, using this type of zero address terms can ease social embarrassment of the speaker. Polite expression sets the basic tone for communication. It can facilitate the smooth development of the conversation. It can promote the speaker's communicative purpose. For example, the speaker maybe want to ask for help or ask about unfamiliar things. The type of personal pronoun refers to using nihao or ninhao instead of address terms. This way highlights the importance of the listener. According to the analysis of the random interview, this approach can make the listener feel be valued. The listener is more willing to answer the speaker's questions and to provide helps. The type of non expression refers to entering the topic directly without any modifications. According to the analysis of the interview, the speaker chooses this way because of the special situation. For example, when talking in a crowded elevator, the speaker chooses this way for expressing fast and clearly. It is very common to directly enter talking between acquaintances. The lack of greetings between acquaintances will not make both parties feel uncomfortable. Sometimes this direct way reflects the high degree of intimacy among them. Psychologist believes that the choice of address terms is not only affected by physical strength, age, wealth, origin, gender or occupation, but also closely related to the degree of intimacy (Brown&Ford, 1961). The type of onomatopoeia refers to the use of sound

words. Onomatopoeic words are usually used to attract attention among acquaintances. According to the analysis of the interview content, speakers are very confident that this way can attract the attention of the listener. The listens also express great acceptance of onomatopoeia. Usually, onomatopoeia are accompanied by the speaker's relaxed and pleasant emotion. The type of body language refers to the use of body movements. Under certain conditions, body posture and other accompanying actions can also complete some communication tasks independently of language. Linguists call these nonverbal actions body language. The use of body language and onomatopoeia both are nonverbal ways. Sometimes, because of the special context, the use of nonverbal expressions can avoid social embarrassments. Sometimes, for the purpose of the speaker, the use of nonverbal expressions can show special social relations. It is undeniable that body language has become an increasingly popular way of expression among young people.

4.2.3 The Causes of Zero Address terms in Relation to Social Development

Address terms contain certain social and cultural connotations, so it can be said that the development of address terms is essentially determined by social development. Chinese traditional interpersonal relationship takes morality and ethics as the core and family affections as the link (Cao Hong, 2007). In this interpersonal relationship, people have a strong concept of hierarchical ethics and strong emotions. The address terms used in communication must also be influenced and dominated by this cultural concept. Therefore, two principles of Chinese address terms have been formed: the principle of equal difference and the principle of emotion (Li, 2004). The closeness of Chinese traditional culture make Chinese address terms have strict hierarchical characteristics. Under the impact of hierarchical culture and emotional culture, the development of Chinese address terms has become complex and uncertain. Therefore, the phenomena of not using address terms gradually appear which means people tend to use the zero address terms strategy when they can't appropriately choose. Then, another reason is the lack of general address terms in the Chinese appellation system. Chen Jianming (1990) pointed out that due to the progress of society and the renewal of people's ideas, some social occasions lack some accurate and appropriate address terms. This was not a problem in the world of acquaintances in the past. Both sides of communication can use address forms according to each other's name, position and generation. However, with the increasing social communication, the speaker does not know each other's name, occupation and position, so the lack of address terms is becoming more and more prominent. Furthermore, this study is based on the daily dialogue of college students which means both the speaker and the listener are college students.

Wang Xianglin (2002) conducted a social survey of social groups according to their educational level and age. The results show that people over the age of 40 have exclusion and resistance to the phenomenon of zero address terms, while people under the age of 40 express different degrees of recognition for others to call themselves without address terms. The interview of this empirical study also shows that college students have a high acceptance of the phenomenon of zero address terms. In addition, when acquaintances communicated without address terms, some students thought that it represented high degree of intimacy.

As one of the most important means of compensation in the absence of Chinese address terms, the zero address terms strategy is a change that conforms to the times. However, because it has a certain space for its existence, it will exist for a long time in the development of society. The absence of Chinese address terms is not a simple problem of language structure(Fang Huidan & Ji Heng, 1983). For example, if you lack any address terms, you just fill in any address terms. Instead, we should change people's ethical concepts and establish an open new type of values.

5. CONCLUSION

This empirical study focuses on the phenomenon of zero address terms. Based on the corpus of College Students' daily communication, this study summarizes the main types of zero address terms, and tries to explore the main causes of zero address terms. In terms of main types concerned, this study summarizes five kinds. They are polite expression, personal pronoun, non-expression, onomatopoeia and body language. In addition, the main five types are analyzed among different relations. The types of polite expression and personal pronoun are the main zero address terms in stranger conversations. In the conversations between acquaintances, no expression and body language are the main phenomena. In terms of the main reasons for zero address terms, they are analyzed from three perspectives. Firstly, from the perspective of occasions this study selects corpus from four campus scenes. They are office building, study building, store and playground. Secondly, it refers to the perspective of interpersonal purpose. According to situational contexts, speakers choose different types of zero address terms for different communicative purposes. Thirdly, from the macro perspective, the development of zero address terms is determined by social development.

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