

Gender Comparative Analysis of College Students' Consoling Speech Act

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Abstract

In order to analyze the gender comparison of consoling speech acts of college students, this paper uses questionnaire survey to investigate 10 male college students and 10 female college students. A total of 4 situations were set up in the questionnaire, and participants were required to fill in the answers according to their own point of view. According to Sekiyama's classification of consoling speech acts, all the answers are divided into suggestion, positive encouragement, negative encouragement, offer of help, shift of responsibility, and others. The conclusions reached were: male and female usually use not a single way of consoling, they combine general consoling speech act and specific consoling speech act. Females tend to be more emotional when consoling others and prefer to comfort others from the psychological level. Male, on the other hand, are more matter-of-fact and rational when it comes to comforting others, and are more likely to use their suggestions to solve problems.

Keywords

Consoling Speech Act; College Students; Gender Comparison.

1. Introduction

As early as the 1960s, the British philosopher Jane Austen put forward the speech act theory: people's speech is not only to describe the state of things or state a certain fact, but speech itself is a kind of behavior. There are many types of speech acts, such as threats, sarcasm, apologies, thanks and so on. These speech acts follow four rules: propositional content rule, preparation rule, sincerity rule and fundamental rule. Among many speech acts, there are not many researches on consoling speech acts. The study of consoling speech acts is conducive to improving social interpersonal relations, improving social civilization and promoting social harmony and stability.

Consoling speech act refers to a speech act carried out by the speaker to change the negative emotion of the person suffering from misfortune and frustration (Wang Yongna, 2003). Life is not always flat, everyone will encounter difficulties and setbacks, but the appropriate comfort can make people out of the trough and difficulties. Therefore, consoling speech act is one of the most important speech acts in daily life. However, due to different thinking patterns and personality characteristics, people of different genders may use different comforting words and behaviors when performing consoling speech acts, which may lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, it is of positive significance to explore the characteristics and similarities and differences of comfort speech between people of different genders.

This paper focuses on consoling speech acts and investigates what kind of consoling speech acts are used by college students of different genders in different situations by means of questionnaires.

2. Pragmatic Features and Categories of Consoling Speech Act

2.1. Pragmatic Features of Consoling Speech Act

The basic feature of consoling speech acts is that they are based on specific context and specific comfort psychology (Wen Yunshui, 1999). Two people, A is the one offering comfort, B is the one being comforted. A negative psychological emotion (usually disappointment, depression, sadness, distress, remorse, etc.) is caused by a negative event (usually illness, setback, failure, mistake, etc.). Psychological emotion is the precondition of consoling act and the most important contextual factor of consoling speech act. In this context, the consoling speech act will have its effect. For example, if said "losing money sometimes brings luck" to the person who lost the property, it has a comfort effect, otherwise it is just a judgment revealing some objective law.

For comfort purposes, A will generally point out to B that the event is not as serious as B thinks it is, or not serious at all, that is, try to downplay the severity of the event and point out that B's negative emotions are unnecessary. If accepts A's words, B's negative emotions will be reduced or disappear. In this way, comfort is similar to exhortation and encouragement, but not exactly the same. The pragmatic purpose of advice is to persuade someone to stop or give up a certain behavior or intention by reasonable explanation, and to advise someone not to do something. But the speech act of advice is aimed at bad things, but comfort is aimed at negative psychological emotions. The pragmatic purpose of encouragement is to help someone increase his confidence to meet the challenge. Although comfort words also have the function of encouraging someone to return to a normal state of mind, it is obviously not self-confidence but a positive and optimistic mood. Therefore, comfort speech acts have their unique pragmatic features.

2.2. Categories of Consoling Speech Act

Consoling speech acts focus on "speech", since "act" mainly includes touching, hugging, etc. (Wen, 1999), "speech" is much more complicated. This paper is also aimed at the investigation and analysis of consoling speech. Consoling speech acts can be divided into two categories: one is general and the other is specific. General consoling speech acts are basically applicable to all comfort contexts and mainly include two categories: the first category is consolation for negative events such as "never mind" "it doesn't matter"; The second category is something like "Don't be sad", "there's no need to be sad" to console negative psychological emotions. These two kinds of general consoling speech acts can be used either alone or together, which can enhance the effect of consolation. Specific consoling speech acts are those that are only used for a specific negative event. For example, in China, people say "sui sui ping an" if they break a bowl or a plate (Plate's breaking brings luck to someone).

In addition to Wen Yunshui's classification method, Sekiyama (1999) classified consoling speech acts as: advice (you' better drink some hot water), negative encouragement (no one can avoid failness), positive encouragement (go ahead), sympathy (poor you), offer to help (I'll help You), shift responsibility (that's not your fault), confirmation (are you ok), unknown information request (did you get hurt), blame (it's your fault), joke. According to the classification method of Sekiyama, the survey results of this questionnaire are divided into six types: suggestion, positive encouragement, negative encouragement, offer of help, shift of responsibility, and others.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

The object of this survey is college students. The participants were 20 college students from different universities in China. Their average age was 24 ranging from 22 to 26. In order to reduce the influence of disciplinary thinking on the experiment, the selected participants majored in different disciplines such as literature, agronomy, science and engineering. As the purpose of this survey is to study the gender differences in comfort speech of college students, 10 male and 10 female participants were selected.

3.2. Instrument

The instrument used in this survey is the "Questionnaire Star" App. "Questionnaire Star" is a professional online questionnaire survey, examination, evaluation and voting platform, focusing on providing users with powerful and user-friendly online questionnaire design, data collection, survey results analysis and other series of services. This research adopts the form of questionnaire survey, and five questions are set in the questionnaire star. The first question is a required question, which asks the gender of the participant. The next four questions are about four different situations, and the participant needs to write their own comforting words in the blank according to the set situation. The four situations are as follows:

Situation 1: Your friend has done a lot of preparation to pass CET 6. But on the day of the test, he/she fails the test because of his/her listening equipment. What would you say to comfort him/her?

Situation 2: Your friend is unwell due to a cold and is distracted in class, and the teacher unknowingly warns him/her. So, he/she is feeling down, what will you do to comfort him/her?

Situation 3: What would you say to a friend who is upset that he/she has broken up with his/her girlfriend/boyfriend of two years because of an affair of the other side?

Situation 4: As graduation approaches, your friend really wants to get into a certain company. He/she has made a lot of preparation for the interview, but he/she fails the interview and feels very upset. How do you console him/her?

3.3. Procedure

Since this study takes the form of questionnaire survey, the first step is to design the questionnaire. A total of four typical negative event situations were set up in the questionnaire (as above 3.2). The next step was to select 20 college participants, 10 male and 10 female. Participants need to fill in the questionnaire according to their own situation. After collecting the questionnaires, I will classify participants' answers according to suggestion, positive encouragement, negative encouragement, offer of help, shift of responsibility, and others and make bar statistical chart to analyze.

3.4. Data Analysis

For data analysis, the Questionnaire Star App has options for data analysis, including statistical results, detailed data, data screen, etc. The statistical results will automatically draw a keyword cloud map according to the participants' answers, which saves a lot of time and energy for subsequent classification. In addition, it will calculate word frequency and draw pie and bar statistics based on the answers.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results and Discussion of Situation 1

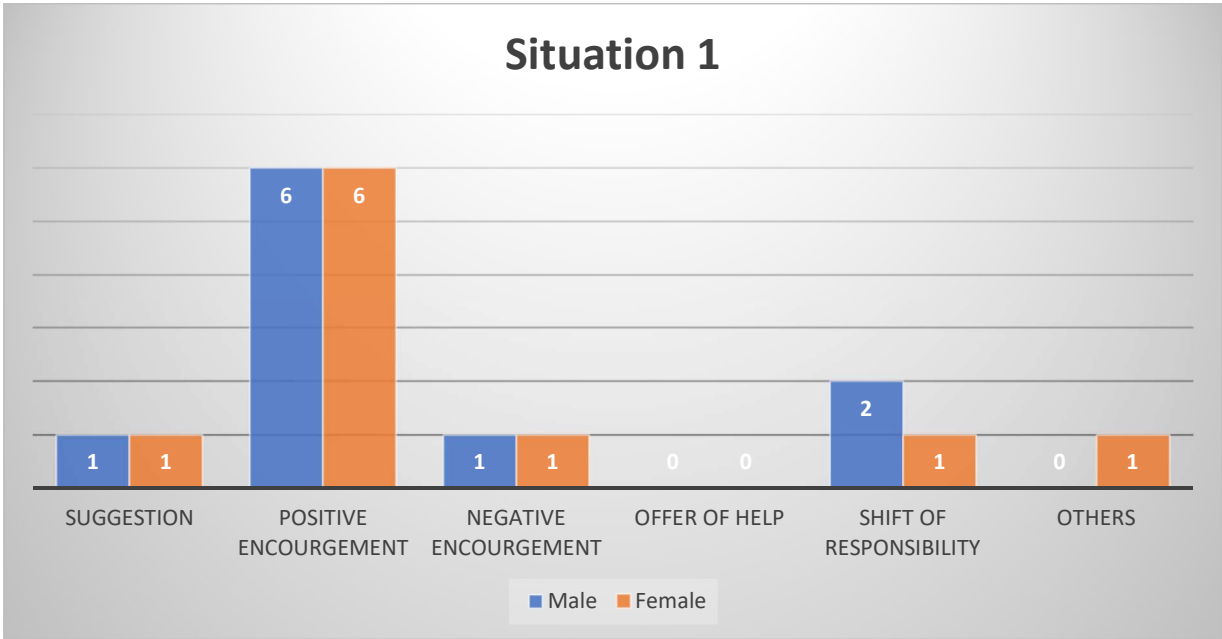


Figure 1. Situation 1

Situation 1 is a negative event about failing an exam, which is one of the common frustrations of college students. In the face of this negative emotion, the consoling speech acts chosen by different genders are surprisingly consistent. Of the 20 participants, one male and one female gave advice to the person being comforted; Six men and six women chose positive words of encouragement; One man and one woman chose to use negative encouragement to comfort a friend who failed an exam. No one offers help to the comforted; There is one female used the compassion principle, whose answer is: my listening device didn’t work, too. It is classified into “others”.

First let's talk about the similarities. From Figure 1, we can see intuitively that there is almost no difference in the consoling speech acts adopted by college students of different genders to comfort others for failing the exam. As can be seen from the bar chart, the most commonly used comforting speech act by the surveyed college students of both sexes is positive encouragement. There are more words: “you will pass next time”, “come on”, “it doesn't matter”. In the face of negative events such as exam failure, giving each other positive encouragement will have a good effect on improving each other's current bad mood. It is true that unexpected events such as the failure of a listening device during a test are not human factors, and the comforter has no way to offer help or specific advice. Therefore, college students generally use fewer of these two types of comfort strategies.

As for the differences between the sexes in consoling speech acts, the answers of the participants need to be analyzed specifically. In addition to answering "you will definitely pass it next time", the female participants also added words such as "Let's go to eat delicious food together" and "I bought you your favorite milk tea" to distract the soothed person. In addition, the female participants were also good at using compassion, telling the person they had experienced the same thing to make the person feel more balanced.

4.2. Results and Discussion of Situation 2

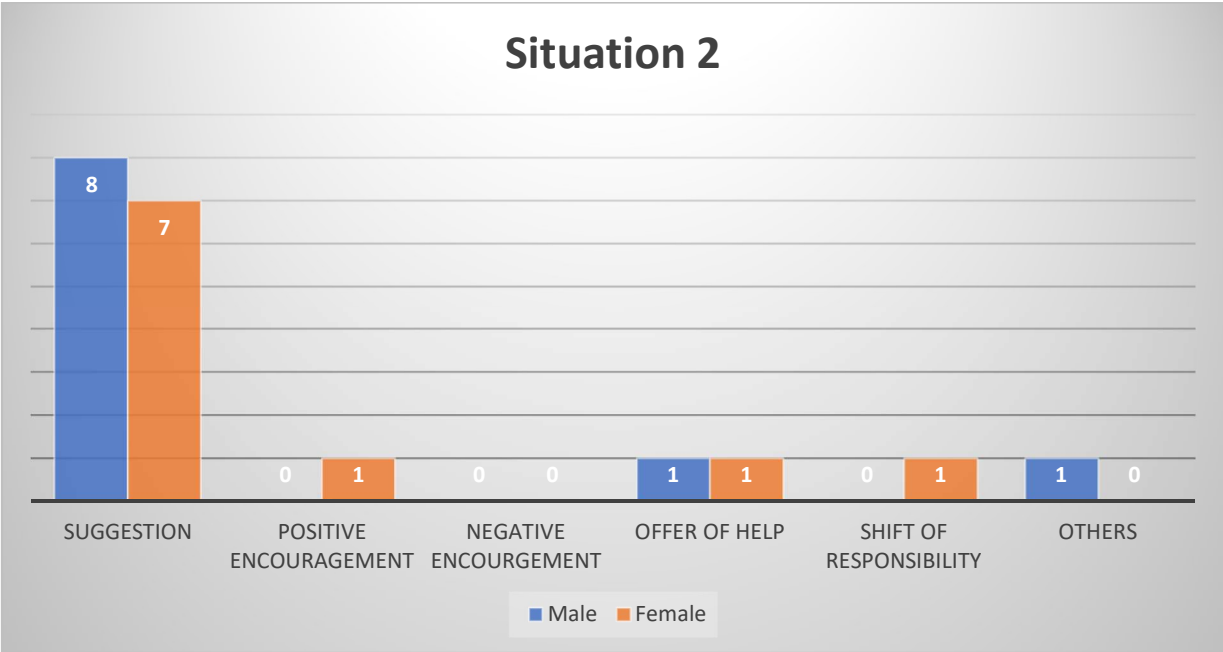


Figure 2. Situation 2

Situation two is about the negative events of being misunderstood and criticized by the teacher. In the face of the teacher's misunderstanding, most participants chose the consoling speech act of giving advice to the person being comforted, with a ratio of 8:7 (male:female). One female participant took the form of positive encouragement. No one uses negative encouragement. One male and one female participant chose to provide assistance to the person being comforted. One female participant took the comfort of shifting responsibility. Surprisingly, one male participant chose the comforting speech act of blaming the person being comforted, which we classified as "others".

From Figure 2, we can clearly see that the participants' choice of comforting speech acts was also surprisingly consistent in the face of their friend's illness and teacher's misunderstanding. Most of the participants gave advice to the person being consoled, and the most common words were: You'd better go explain it to the teacher. Admittedly, when faced with the negative emotions caused by the misunderstanding of others, whether male or female, their first thought is to solve the misunderstanding. The participants either asked the soothed person to explain themselves to the teacher to clear the misunderstanding, or they helped the soothed person to clear the misunderstanding.

As for the differences, in addition to one woman who used positive encouragement, one woman used shifting responsibility and one man used blaming. The female participant, who chose to shift responsibility, answers: "What's wrong with this teacher? She's too much for you!" . Women tend to be more emotional than men when it comes to being misunderstood, so it makes sense to have this response. One man, by contrast, took the approach of blaming the person being comforted, saying: "The teacher blaming you is for your own good. You shouldn't feel bad about it". It is easy to see that the male participant is deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese patriarchal education style.

4.3. Results and Discussion of Situation 3

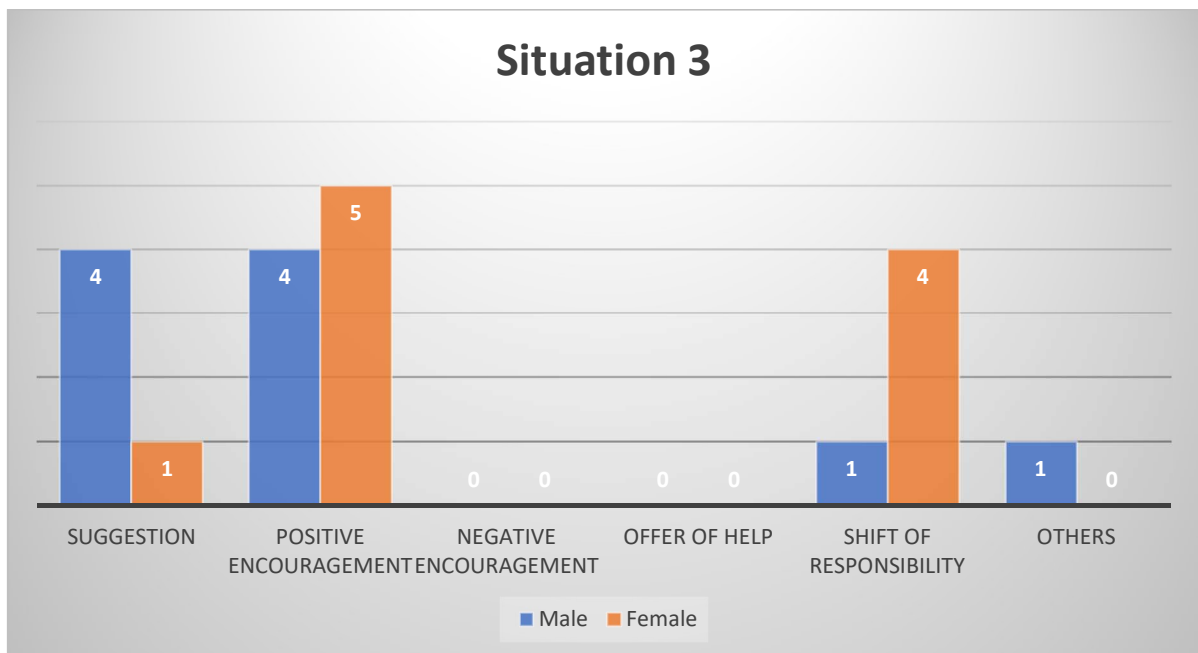


Figure 3. Situation 3

Situation three is about comforting a friend who has fallen out of love. As can be seen from figure 3, in this case, the consoling speech acts adopted by males and females are significantly different. Especially when it comes to the comfort strategies of giving advice and shifting responsibility. Of the 20 participants, four men and one woman used the comforting strategy of giving advice; Four of the men and five of the women used positive encouragement; In terms of responsibility shifting strategies, there was one man and four women; The last man used the "joking" comforting speech act.

First let's look at the most consistent of the comforting speech acts adopted by males and females: positive encouragement. The majority of both men and women in the study said they were relieved of their suffering and thought their lives would be better later on. The words that came up the most were: the next one will be better. This response seems to be the standard line of comfort for the lovelorn. In terms of advice, both male and female participants suggested that the lovelorn should do something else to distract themselves, with the most frequently used words being "get drunk."

The biggest differences in the responses of the participants in situation 3 are reflected in the two aspects of making suggestions and shifting responsibilities. In ten male participants, the equivalent of positive encouragement was giving advice. Their advice was the same: "Come on, let's go for a drink". It's a funny answer, but it's true. Whether in movies or in real life, when men are betrayed by love, they usually choose to comfort themselves or others by getting drunk. In the face of lovelorn, women's way of vent is often more words and tears. As a result, four out of ten female participants had strong responsibility shifting strategies in their comforting words: "the dog man wasn't worth your tears", "It was the man who was not blessed". Women tend to be more emotional than men about negative events such as a friend's breakup. According to the word count of female participants and male participants, women are more impulsive in the face of love betrayal, and this impulse is often expressed through language. In addition, one male participant chose the comforting speech act of joking in order to make his friend feel better. It also shows that men are more open-minded in love.

4.4. Results and Discussion of Situation 4

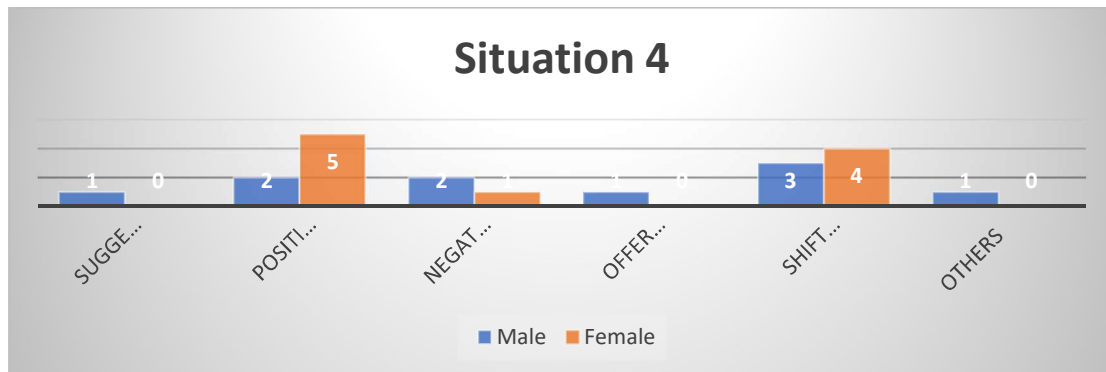


Figure 4. Situation 4

Among the frustrations of college students, failure to find a job occupies a place. Situation four is the negative event associated with failing the job interview. As can be seen from Figure 4, the types of comforting speech acts adopted by the participants in situation 4 are the most among the four situations. Of the 20 participants, one man chose to give advice; Two men and five women chose positive encouragement; Two men and one woman chose negative encouragement. One man chose a helping strategy; Three men and four women chose to shift responsibilities; Finally, one man chose to comfort by blaming.

As for the common ground of consoling speech acts adopted by both genders in situation 4, it is necessary to analyze the four strategies adopted by both genders: positive encouragement, negative encouragement and responsibility shifting. Among participants who adopted positive encouragement, the most frequent sentence was: "There is a better company waiting for you". Interview failure is similar to exam failure. When comforting such friend, both men and women will tend to say some encouraging words to the person being comforted to increase the confidence of the person being comforted. At the same time, three participants chose the negative encouragement strategy, which made the interviewees think it was normal to fail in the interview. Their main answer: "finding a job is hard enough", and "life isn't always smooth". Equal to the number of people choosing positive incentives is the responsibility shift. The phrases most frequently used in the selection of such comforting speech acts are: "This company has no vision"; "It's the company's loss not to admit you". By shifting the blame onto the company, the speaker belittles the company while boosting the competence and confidence of the person being comforted.

It can be clearly seen from Figure 4 that men adopt more types of comforting speech acts when they need to comfort a friend who failed in the job interview. In addition to several of the same strategies mentioned above, male participants also used comfort strategies of giving advice, offering help, and blaming the person being comforted. "You should improve yourself to be more competitive," said the male participant who gave the advice. The male participant offered to help: "Take you out to eat good food and give you some job hunting experience". In addition, one male participant used a reproach: "You're not trying hard enough". Thus, male participants tended to be more matter-of-fact and solution-oriented when comforting others. Female participants were more likely to comfort others emotionally.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigates and analyzes the consoling speech acts of 20 college students (10 males and 10 females) in the face of four kinds of negative events by means of a questionnaire survey, and summarizes the similarities and differences between male and female consoling speech acts. From the above analysis and discussion, it can be seen that when men and women comfort

others, they will not use a single way of comfort, usually a combination of general comfort words and specific comfort. The difference is that women tend to be more emotional when using comfort speech acts and prefer to comfort others from the psychological level. Men, on the other hand, are more matter-of-fact and rational when it comes to comforting others, and are more likely to use their suggestions to solve problems.

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