

Interpersonal Functional Mood Analysis of the Dialogue in the Film Dead Poets Society

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How to cite this paper: Lin, Y. (2025). Interpersonal functional mood analysis of the dialogue in the film Dead Poets Society. *Education and Social Work*, 1(1), 45-51. ISSN Print: 3079-515X. ISSN Online: 3079-5168.

<https://doi.org/10.63313/ESW.69001>

Published: 2025-03-12

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Abstract

The Dead Poets Society is an excellent educational film with thought-provoking cultural connotation and a story ending that looks like a tragedy but actually a comedy. The film adopts a multi-thread narrative structure to show the theme, and criticizes the phenomenon that the rigid educational system imprisons the idea. The systemic functional theory of functional linguistics holds that the potential meaning of a text can be analyzed through the mood system. Based on the inter-personal function theory of systemic functional grammar, through the inter-personal function mood analysis of the dialogue of the characters in the film Dead Poets Society, this paper reveals the role of the mood function in helping to analyze the relationship between the characters in the work and the meaning level that the film is intended to convey.

Keywords

Interpersonal Functional Mood, Dead Poets Society, education, systemic functional grammar

1. Introduction

The film Dead Poets Society is set in the United States in the 1950s. It tells the story of the new English teacher, Mr. Keating, who uses fresh ideas and lively teaching methods to arouse students' enthusiasm for thinking, their desire for freedom and dreams in the aristocratic schools with dull and traditional teaching atmosphere and outdated and pedantic teaching style. This paper combines several dialogues between Neil, one of the important characters in the film, and his father and Mr. Keating, and uses the interpersonal function theory of systemic functional grammar to analyze the interpersonal function mood, revealing that the mood function can provide an important role in the in-depth analysis of the relationship between the characters in the film, personality characteristics and the meaning conveyed in the film.

2. Theory

Language is the carrier and medium of interpersonal communication, and bears various functions in interpersonal communication. As an important symbol of human communication activities, language carries all kinds of meaning functions and reveals interpersonal relationships. It can express the literal meaning that the speaker wants to convey and complete the semantic function of communication. At the same time, it can also express more dimensions and levels of meaning. Because of the complex meaning function of language, applying different theories to multi-dimensional analysis of language can help people to extract the rich and complete meaning of language. The study of human's subjective meaning is far higher than that of the external material world. The transmission of human subjective meaning mainly takes language as the medium, and the best research carrier to study interpersonal subjective meaning is to study interpersonal language.

Mood system is one of the important system theories in systemic functional grammar. Mood can not only be used to communicate and transmit information, but also has clear semantic functions. Mood types can be roughly divided into declarative sentences, imperative sentences, interrogative sentences, exclamatory sentences. The analysis of mood type is one of the important means for us to understand literary works, especially the analysis of literary works that emphasize dialogue to highlight the author's profound meaning will enable readers to have a more thorough understanding of the relationship between various roles in literary works in verbal communication and the implied meaning of the whole work. In the final analysis, the study of language is the study of meaning, and the communicative understanding of the sender and participants of meaning is the core of our interpersonal study from the perspective of discourse.

3. The Interpersonal Functional Mood Analysis of the Dialogue between the Characters in the Dead Poets Society

In the film, Welton Academy is famous for its calm and strict teaching style and high enrollment rate. The ideal of its graduating students is to go to a famous school and prepare for finding ideal jobs in the future. The arrival of Mr. Keating, the literature teacher in the new semester, is like a spring breeze. He is kind and humorous, and his teaching method is unconventional, which deeply affects the students and makes them gradually learn to think and pursue in their own way. Neil, an important character in the film, is a handsome, outstanding, and friendly sunshine boy. His family is not rich enough. At the same time, he has a strict father who hopes for success. His father puts all his expectations on Neil and often suppresses him in words and thoughts. Under the influence of Mr. Keating, Neil and his classmates organized the Dead Poets Society. With the opening of their minds, each member had a different

mood from the past. Neil found his goal: to become an actor. Despite his father's opposition, he participated in the drama performance and was greatly praised, but this still did not stop his father's anger. Finally, Neil did not escape the tragic fate, and chose to kill himself with a gun after his father's verbal violence. The dialogue of the whole film *Dead Poets Society* is about 12000 words and 1575 sentences. This paper analyzes Neil's representative conversations with several other characters from the perspective of interpersonal power tone types, and explores the character behind and the intrinsic meaning of the film.

3.1. The interpersonal functional mood of Neil's conversation with his father

Example1

Father: Neil I've just spoken to Mr Nolan.

You're taking too many extracurricular activities this semester and I've decided that you should drop the school annual.

Neil: But I'm the assistant editor this year.

Father: Well I'm sorry Neil.

Neil: But Father I can't. It wouldn't be fair.

Father: Don't you ever dispute me in public. Do you understand?

Neil: Father I wasn't disputing.

Father: After you've finished medical school and you're on your own then you can do as you damn well please.

But until then you do as I tell you.

Is that clear?

Neil: Yes sir. I'm sorry.

Father: You know how much this means to your mother, don't you?

Neil: Yes sir.

The background of the dialogue took place after Neil's father went to school to have a conversation with the headmaster. He learned that his son had more after-school activities than before. Neil explained the fact with a simple statement in a calm and even humble tone, and his father responded to him with a blunt "Don't you ever put me in public". The imperative sentences that express orders are mandatory, requiring the other party to obey, with affirmative words and serious attitude. Users often think that they are in a strong position and try to build an unequal position between the two sides of communication. This reflects the father's strict requirements for his son. He has absolute authority, which is beyond doubt. Then the father also used two general questions. The content of the question itself is not a statement, so it is uncertain. Neil's father used question sentences, but they were unquestionable. This kind of sentence belongs to grammatical metaphor, that is, mood is inconsistent with speech function. Although it is the form of interrogative sentence, it does not serve as the function of interrogative sentence. The use of

grammatical metaphor emphasizes Neil's father's strength and oppression. At the end of the dialogue, Neil's father used a disjunctive question, which refers to the question raised when the questioner is not sure about the facts described above and needs to prove it to the other party. Its structure is: the first part is a statement, and the second part is a simple question. After feeling Neil's obedience, the father's tone had softened a little. He asked his son in a less powerful tone whether he understood the meaning of hard study for his parents. It can be seen that he actually loved his children very much, but the wrong way of education and communication gave Neil too much pressure. Through this dialogue, we can find that in terms of the number of conversations, the father said more than Neil, which also shows the absolute inequality of the conversation relationship between the two people. In the father-son relationship, Neil has no choice and voice. He is afraid of his father and can only obey his father. In the development of the plot, this also foreshadowed his subsequent participation in the drama performance without his father's knowledge, and he dared not confess to his father.

3.2. The interpersonal functional mood of Neil's conversation with Mr.Keating

Example2:

Neil: I just talked to my father.

He's making me quit the play at Henley Hall.

But acting is everything to me.

I mean- -

But he doesn't know. He- -

I can see his point. We're not a rich family like Charlie's. I mean- -

But he's planning the rest of my life for me.

And he- he's never asked me what I want.

Mr.Keating: Have you ever told your father what you just told me?

Mr. Keating: About your passion for acting?

Mr. Keating: Have you showed him that?

Neil: I can't.

Mr. Keating: Why not?

Neil: I can't talk to him this way.

Mr.Keating: Then you're acting for him too.

You're playing the part of the dutiful son.

I know this sounds impossible but you have to talk to him.

You have to show him who you are what your heart is.

This dialogue comes from Neil and Mr.Keating, because Neil's father did not agree with him to participate in the drama performance. First of all, in terms of the number and type of conversations used by the two people, there is no big difference. This shows that the two people are basically equal in the position of conversation, which

is in contrast with the way Neil communicates with his father. Neil uses all declarative sentences in order to clearly explain his problems and seek the help and advice of Mr. Keating, which shows his sincere trust and recognition of Mr. Keating, because this kind of equal communication and exchange has never existed in his relationship with his father. Neil's inner entanglement can be seen from his intermittent sentences. On the one hand, his subject consciousness has been awakened. He wants to be his master and do what he wants to do. On the other hand, he had to continue to live in the expectations of his parents. To a certain extent, he put himself in a dilemma, and his internal self-calling and the external regulations on him became a strong conflict.

Mr. Keating used three question sentences to ask Neil if he had expressed his intention to his father. The speech function of the questions here is to ask information. Mr. Keating learned from Neil's answer that he did not have the courage to communicate with his father, because Neil was convinced that his father would not give him this opportunity. So Mr. Keating suggested Neil to make such an attempt to show his father what he wanted. From raising questions to giving solutions, Mr. Keating's language is smooth and his tone is peaceful, without any oppression.

3.3. Interpersonal functional mood of teacher's teaching language

The next two groups of examples are from the words used by the Latin teacher and Mr. Keating in the film during the class. Through the comparison of interpersonal functional tone, we can analyze the different personality characteristics and education methods of the two teachers.

Example 3:

Slow down boys!

Slow down you horrible phalanx of pubescence!

Pick three laboratory experiments from the project list and report on them every five weeks.

These words are the language used by the Latin teacher of the school when teaching. He uses three imperative sentences in succession to command and demand students. It is a typical strict and standard teaching method. It is dogmatic, rigorous and meticulous, which conforms to the teaching tradition of the whole school, pays attention to discipline and is rigid.

Example 4:

Mr. Keating:

"O Captain my Captain."

Who knows where that comes from?

Anybody?

Not a clue?

It's from a poem by Walt Whitman about Mr Abraham Lincoln.
 Now in this class you can either call me Mr Keating or if you're slightly more daring
 "O Captain my Captain."
 Mr. Keating:
 Mr Pitts would you open your hymnal to page 542.
 Read the first stanza of the poem you find there.

These two paragraphs are from the scene in which Mr.Keating gave the students the first class in the film. Instead of making a rigid statement like the conventional teacher' s self-introduction, he started with a poem and then threw out a question. The general questions used here do not have any oppressive and questioning tone, just to elicit the students' enthusiasm for learning, adjust the classroom atmosphere and open the topic. When he first asked the students a question alone, he used a polite and euphemistic tone. He communicated with the students on an equal footing, which was completely different from the education that the students had received for a long time, forming a sharp contrast. As an innovator of education and an enlightener of students, Mr.Keating' s education in his eyes is not limited to the transmission of knowledge and skills, but to awaken students' minds and enlighten their minds.

In the whole film, Mr.Keating rarely uses imperative sentences, which are only used when students are encouraged to do something unconventional, such as when students are killed by the pages full of cliches in textbooks, or when students are standing on desks to observe. Even though imperative sentences are used, the purpose is not to oppress, but to encourage students to have their own ideas and learn to think from different perspectives. Mr.Keating' s unique educational method and language expression have changed the students' thoughts that have been oppressed by autocracy and oppression for a long time.

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis of Neil' s father and Kitting' s education and communication methods in the film, we can know that using different tone communication will produce different communication effects. The study of interpersonal functional mood provides a new perspective for the study of the film, and is closer to the meaning conveyed by the film. Plato said that learning is not memory, but revelation. It is useless to instill ideas and knowledge into students through spiritual oppression and verbal violence. Mr.Keating' s classroom teaching is not based on teaching knowledge. He uses gentle and humorous words to guide students in ideas and methods. This is the real education that touches the heart, wakes the heart and guides life.

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