Enhancing Cross-Border E-Commerce through Speech Act Theory in Live-streaming

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to investigate the linguistic aspects of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming through the application of Speech Act Theory. It hypothesizes that the integration of Speech Act Theory can enhance the effectiveness of short video e-commerce live webcasts in promoting Chinese products to international audiences.

Approach/Methodology/Design: A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative analysis of web data with qualitative discourse analysis of live stream snippets. Data were collected from platforms like Amazon and TikTok, focusing on segments featuring product endorsements. The study analyzed directives, assertives, and expressives as outlined by Speech Act Theory, and assessed their impact on consumer engagement and purchase intentions.

Findings: The findings suggest that short video e-commerce live-streaming can effectively be integrated with Speech Act Theory. Anchors' use of concise, vivid, and persuasive language, coupled with interactive discourse, significantly enhances consumer engagement and drives sales. Furthermore, cultural adaptation and linguistic scrutiny were found to be crucial in cross-border e-commerce live-streaming, allowing streamers to showcase "Made in China" products from foreign perspectives.

Practical Implications: The study offers practical insights for training centers and e-commerce platforms, suggesting that they should prioritize the development of linguistic curricula tailored to enhance streamers' cross-cultural communication skills. By fostering a friendly, interactive live-streaming atmosphere tailored for the target language, the international reach of domestic short video live streams can be increased.

Originality/Value: This study innovates by applying Speech Act Theory to analyze the linguistic dynamics of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming. It provides new evidence on the effectiveness of specific speech acts in promoting products to international audiences and highlights the importance of cultural adaptation in this context. The findings contribute to the understanding of how language can be leveraged to enhance cross-border e-commerce and facilitate cultural exchange.

1.Introduction

1.1 The Significance of the Study

This study applies Speech Act Theory to analyze linguistic and terminological variations in cross-border e-commerce live-streaming. It covers promotional language, product descriptions, and interactive discourse. The proposed model offers new insights, enhancing Speech Act Theory and providing innovative problem-solving methods.

The study's goal is to leverage language proficiency in cross-border live-streaming to increase consumer interest and drive sales. It aims to vividly showcase Chinese culture globally, strengthening cultural identity and confidence. By using language that resonates with international audiences, the study seeks to effectively communicate the uniqueness of Chinese products. Tailored linguistic strategies for training centers, such as persuasive language and cultural references, aim to create engaging content and a more interactive live-streaming environment. For example, using cultural idioms and metaphors can foster familiarity and interest among international viewers, improving their understanding of "Made in China" products.

The study acknowledges the significant impact of live-streaming on international commerce, as seen in the growing consumer engagement and purchases through these platforms. By applying our findings, training centers can develop linguistic curricula to equip streamers with skills to captivate a global audience. Streamers can then use these strategies to build trust, create urgency, and stimulate purchasing intent.

In conclusion, this study provides a theoretical framework for understanding the linguistic aspects of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming and offers practical insights for training centers and streamers to enhance their international reach.

1.2 The Objectives of the Study

The study objectives are to investigate the language used in e-commerce live streams and assess the applicability of Speech Act Theory to this discourse. It analyzes live-stream segments from platforms like Amazon and TikTok, focusing on directives, assertives, and expressives as outlined by Speech Act Theory. The aim is to understand the nature of e-commerce live streaming through discourse analysis.

The study also aims to provide theoretical insights into language norms, such as politeness strategies, language formality, and cultural adaptation. It offers practical evidence for fostering a healthier live stream language environment.

In the context of international live streaming, the study emphasizes the careful use of English by hosts to elucidate product details and facilitate cross-cultural communication. It highlights the importance of linguistic adaptation in cross-border e-commerce by showing how effective product descriptions and intercultural communication strategies can enhance consumer engagement and drive sales. The study also aims to offer concrete advice for hosts on using language to bridge cultural gaps and communicate brand identity effectively.

2.Literature Review

The Speech Act Theory (SAT), introduced by Austin (1962) and refined by Searle (1969, 1979), has been pivotal in pragmatics, focusing on how language performs actions and classifying speech acts into assertive, commissive, directive, declaratory, and expressive (Vanderkeven & Kubo, 2002). This theory has been further explored in the context of live-streaming commerce, a rapidly growing platform for consumer engagement and sales. Grice's (1975, 1978) work on conversational implicature complements SAT by explaining inferred meanings beyond literal interpretations, which is particularly relevant in the dynamic environment of live-streaming where interactions are spontaneous and context-dependent.

Internationally, SAT is applied to cross-border e-commerce live-streaming, examining the sales mode selections for brands from the perspective of value co-creation (Xue et al., 2020; Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). The cultural nuances in live-streaming require hosts to adapt their language for global audiences, a point further explored by Capece et al. (2013) and Cayla and Arnould (2008) on the role of national culture in e-commerce acceptance and global branding.

Studies like those by Hazarika & Mousavi (2022) focus on how live-commerce strategies influence consumer behavior and brand loyalty, stressing the importance of cultural adaptation. Research by Cao and Chen (2022) on business English in cross-border e-commerce highlights the need for vocabulary richness and emotional expression, which is crucial for engaging global audiences in live-streaming.

Live-streaming's role in decision-making, as examined by Gao et al. (2021) and Huang and Suo (2021), shows that elements like real-time interaction and entertainment significantly influence consumer engagement and purchases. The impact of network social presence on live streaming viewers' social support willingness has been explored, indicating that the interaction between the live host and viewer is a critical element of the live platform (Wohn, Freeman, 2020; Hsu et al., 2020).

Research on live-streaming e-commerce's global expansion, such as that by Li and Peng (2021) and Zhang (2021), indicates its rapid growth and the involvement of major technology companies like Google, Amazon, and Facebook. The success of live-streaming, as discussed by Chen et al. (2023), is influenced by various factors, including the live streamers' characteristics and behaviors, which are shaped by their understanding and application of SAT.

In the B2B context, the power of talk and the effects of streamers' linguistic styles on sales performance in livestreaming commerce have been examined, highlighting the importance of assertive and directive speech acts (Bharadwaj, Ballings, Naik, Moore, & Arat, 2022). This research underscores the need for live streamers to employ strategic communication skills based on SAT to enhance sales performance.

In conclusion, the literature on Speech Act Theory and its application in e-commerce live-streaming is extensive, with a focus on international research providing insights into cross-border communication strategies and consumer engagement. The integration of SAT in live-streaming commerce is essential for enhancing communicative competence and sales outcomes in this interactive and culturally diverse medium.

3.Methodology and Procedures

3.1Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The application of Speech Act Theory in cross-border e-commerce live-streaming will significantly influence consumer engagement and purchase intentions.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The linguistic strategies employed by live streamers, particularly those that adapt to the target language and culture, will positively impact consumer satisfaction and trust.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The effectiveness of different types of speech acts will vary across different product categories in cross-border e-commerce live-streaming.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Cultural differences will affect the perception and effectiveness of speech acts in cross-border e-commerce live-streaming, with distinct cultural groups responding differently to the same speech acts.

3.2 Methodology and Procedures

The methodology employed in this study was designed to investigate the linguistic aspects of cross-border e-commerce Live-streaming through the application of Speech Act Theory. The primary objective was to analyze the use of language in Live-streaming and assess its effectiveness in promoting products to international audiences.

3.2.1 Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study, combining quantitative analysis of web data with qualitative discourse analysis of live stream snippets. This dual approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of both the frequency and impact of specific speech acts in Live-streaming.

3.2.2.Data Collection

Data was collected from a variety of sources to ensure a broad and representative sample of cross-border e-commerce Live-streaming. The data set comprised:

A corpus of live stream recordings from popular platforms such as Amazon and TikTok, focusing on segments that featured product endorsements.

Web data on pragmatics, which included viewer comments, likes, shares, and purchase data, to assess the impact of linguistic strategies on consumer behavior.

3.2.3 Sample Selection

A systematic sampling method was employed to select live stream segments for analysis. The selection criteria included:

The host's use of both Chinese and English languages to cater to an international audience.

The diversity of products endorsed to capture a wide range of speech acts and linguistic strategies.

The popularity of the host, ensuring that the sample included segments from both new and established live streamers.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis: The qualitative analysis involved a detailed discourse analysis of the selected live stream snippets. This process included:

Identifying and categorizing speech acts according to Speech Act Theory, focusing on inlocutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

Analyzing the use of idioms and metaphors in both Chinese and English to understand cultural nuances and their impact on comprehension and appeal.

Assessing the interactive elements of the Live-streaming, such as Q&A sessions and viewer responses, to evaluate the level of engagement and interactivity.

Quantitative Analysis: Quantitative analysis was conducted on the web data to determine the correlation between the use of specific speech acts and viewer engagement metrics, such as the number of likes, shares, and purchases.

3.2.5Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, a pilot test was conducted on a small subset of data. This allowed for the refinement of the analytical framework and the establishment of inter-coder reliability through a high level of agreement between two independent coders.

3.2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards, ensuring the privacy and consent of the live stream hosts by anonymizing the data and focusing on the linguistic aspects rather than individual identities.

4.Results and Discussion

4.1 The Linguistic Nature of E-commerce Live-streaming

E-commerce live language possesses a strong interaction between the host and the audience, characterized by real-time and two-way communication. When selling through live streaming, the way products are perceived and presented has a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions. The level of professionalism of the hosts and the interactive atmosphere of the live streams also positively influence consumers' willingness to buy. This type of language allows the host to deliver information in a more personal and engaging manner, encouraging audience participation and feedback. E-commerce live language is also authentic, as hosts can directly showcase products, enabling viewers to see and evaluate the actual effects without any exaggeration. Additionally, it is rich in emotional color, as hosts can express their likes, dislikes, concerns, and other emotions, which can effectively enhance audience engagement and increase conversion rates. Furthermore, the language used in e-commerce live streams is typically professional and concise, as hosts need to have a solid understanding of products to introduce their features and advantages in a way that resonates with the audience.

4.2 Language Classification of Live E-commerce

Firstly, the most common type of language used in e-commerce Live-streaming is the introduction of goods, which involves the anchor introducing the characteristics, uses, prices and other important information of the products being sold. This helps the audience to understand the products in more detail and makes it easier for them to make informed decisions about whether or not to purchase them.

Secondly, there is the interactive communication category, where the host and audience engage in discussions and communication using language. This helps the audience to clarify any doubts or questions they may have regarding the products being sold. The host can also provide useful advice and tips to help the audience make the best choices possible when shopping online.

The third type of language used in e-commerce Live-streaming is promotion promotion, where the anchor uses language to promote the products being sold in a more effective and engaging way. They can use phrases like "buy now" or "limited time offer" to encourage the audience to act quickly and make a purchase.

There is also the emotional expression category, where the anchor uses language to express their love for the products being sold and how much they believe in them. They can use language to express their excitement and enthusiasm for the products, which can help the audience to feel more connected to the products and more likely to purchase them.

Lastly, there is the story-telling category, where the anchor shares interesting stories and background information about the products being sold. This helps the audience to connect with the products on a more personal level and can make them more likely to make a purchase.

4.3 Speech Act Analysis of Anchors

In the process of Live-streaming, the host will be divided into three parts: product information statement, persuading the audience to buy, and interaction with the audience. Therefore, this paper from the three parts of the live webcast with goods on the language features.

4.3.1 Live-streaming Linguistic Features

The anchor needs to use concise and clear language to introduce the features, functions and advantages of the product, so that consumers can quickly understand the product. Anchors need to use vivid language to describe the appearance of goods, color, texture, etc. , so that consumers can better imagine the appearance of goods. Anchors need to use emotional language to express the love and recommendation of goods, so that consumers can feel the sincerity and enthusiasm of anchors. Anchors need to interact with viewers, answer their questions and address their concerns so that consumers can trust anchors and products more.

The research has concentrated on the linguistic characteristics of product information enunciation exhibited by live shopping hosts during their official promotion phase. It was found that within this period, a majority of hosts routinely employ the sequence "brand + commodity category + materials + usage method + specifications + price" to concisely articulate the product data. (Zhang Hao,2023).

Example 1:

(1) Kellymedinaenos,an reputable blogger in the beauty and skincare realm, during a Live-streaming on the TikTok platform, she said:"Gucci's lipstick collection offers various shades: terracotta red, bluish red, peach rose beige, caramel maple leaf red, etc. The texture is hydrating and contains a variety of natural substances such as natural sunflower seed wax. The original price on the official website is 38 dollars, and today I am offering it at 32 dollars."

(2)During a product presentation on the USMILE toothbrush brand the anchor Glowbyshloe said "This electric toothbrush boasts an appealing design, featuring a marble pattern, accentuated with a sophisticated metal texture. Additionally, it ensures thorough cleaning of the teeth through the operation of ultrasonic oscillations, thus efficiently eradicating dental bacteria and pigment deposits.Today, however, this toothbrush is your for a bargain $9.9 in my Live-streaming."

(3)During a live stream displaying cashmere jackets the anchor Jodie1303 said:"I highly recommend for any lady boss,we put on this,its gonna be lift up your appearances.And what's the highlight for this jacket?Definitely is about the fabric,it's a really amazing super thick and add 80% cotton inside the jacket.That mean definitely go through the whole winter.By the way, this one in my offline shop its gonna be 89 pounds,but today I only do 29 pounds,29 pounds that means 70% discount off,only for you only for my followers.So guys follow me first,I'm gonna send another extra bonus for my followers."

From the three examples above, it's crucial for anchors to thoroughly understand products they endorse. When showcasing a product, they must mention its brand, category, raw materials and use to stimulate consumer purchasing intent.

4.3.2 Persuasion Skills of Live Webcast

Hosts and anchors of promotional events must have a comprehensive understanding of the products they are representing and conveying to their audiences. They should familiarize themselves with each product's features, functions, advantages, and benefits, as well as any additional information they need to share with their viewers. In this way, they can effectively communicate the product's key messages to the audience, generating interest and enthusiasm among consumers. Hosts and anchors must also cultivate a positive and engaging rapport with their audience, addressing their questions, concerns, and feedback to enhance consumer confidence in both the hosts and the products. By building trust and credibility, hosts and anchors can effectively influence consumer purchasing decisions.

Moreover, hosts and anchors should use vivid and descriptive language to convey the appearance and characteristics of the products they are promoting. This helps to generate an emotional connection between the product and the audience, making it more tangible and real for consumers. Product appearance and aesthetics play a crucial role in consumer purchasing decisions, and hosts and anchors should not underestimate the importance of conveying these characteristics effectively.

To further enhance consumer confidence in the products they are promoting, hosts and anchors should highlight the advantages of the products compared to similar products on the market. By offering comparisons, they can demonstrate the unique value and advantages of their products, helping consumers to make more informed and confident purchasing decisions.

Hosts and anchors can also offer a range of incentives and promotional offers to entice consumers to make purchases. These incentives can include time-limited discounts, free giveaways, and other promotional events, helping to stimulate consumer demand and drive sales.Overall, the role of hosts and anchors in product promotion is crucial. They must have a thorough understanding of the products they are representing, cultivate an engaging rapport with their audience, communicate the product's key messages effectively, use vivid language to describe the product's appearance and characteristics, highlight the product's advantages compared to similar products on the market, and offer incentives and promotional offers to entice consumers to make purchases. By doing so, hosts and anchors can help drive consumer demand and sales, and ultimately help brands achieve their business goals. During the Live-streaming, the host would also take the gift of the product as a point of emphasis and mention to the audience in the Live-streaming room the gift and happiness. For some viewers in the Live-streaming room, compared with the significance of this product, it may be cheaper and more acceptable to potential consumers, prompting viewers to place orders.

Example 2:

(1)During the Live-streaming showcasing the CHANEL LIPSTICK COLLECTION, Kellymedinaenos said: "Anyone who buys this Gucci lipstick in my live stream today will also receive a hand cream."

(2)During a live stream centered on the "I do" diamond brand the anchor Lopwert said:"Guys, this exquisite 10.27-carat diamond ring is priced at a relatively tempting 1.99 million dollar. On top of that, we're thrilled to throw in a precious diamond necklace worth 6000 dollar in 18K gold if you manage to bag the ring tonight."

(3)During a live stream about the Hibiscus Goddess Water brand,the anchor Graces.faces_ said:"Retail price is $99 per bottle, I'm selling it in my live stream for only $49. Includes intensive repair moisturizing facial mask about 5 pcs, an authentic eye and lip makeup remover, and 20 milliliters of goddess water. Isn't that a sweet deal, babies?"

Reflecting the three examples, it is clear that offering discounts is a common yet effective way to stimulate buying behavior in live sales. Mentioning time-sensitive deals instills urgency for immediate purchases. Emphasizing limited quantities boosts products' uniqueness and scarcity, thus intensifying buying desires. Announcing complimentary gifts with select items enhances their appeal.

4.3.3 The Interactive Speech of Live-streaming with Cargo Anchor

During the Live-streaming of the anchor, it is essential to respond to the audience's questions in a timely manner so that consumers can have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the product, and to determine if it is suitable for their needs and preferences. The anchor needs to carefully listen to and observe the reactions of the viewers in the Live-streaming room, paying attention to the content and context of the comments, and actively respond to them in a positive and understanding manner. This will help to create a sense of connection and trust between the anchor and the audience, as well as building a sense of closeness and involvement in the product or service being discussed. Furthermore, the host may guide the audience to actively participate in the interaction through various methods, such as interactive games, lucky draws, and other engaging activities, which can increase the Live-streaming room's dynamic atmosphere, and make the audience feel more engaged in the Live-streaming. Anchors should also take the opportunity to show the actual effects of goods to attract consumers desire to buy, such as by offering try-on and demo activities, which can help consumers better understand the product and its benefits. Finally, an anchor should also be prepared to provide some practical advice and guidance to the audience based on their own personal experience and professional knowledge, which can help consumers better choose the right product or service for their specific needs, and ultimately improve their overall experience.

Live in the process of carrying goods, anchors will not always be around the product to explain, but also interact with the audience. And the purpose of these interactive discourse is only one, is to enliven the atmosphere of the Live-streaming room. Live with goods anchor will also show their talent or say some humorous jokes to keep the live studio audience.

Example 3:

(1)Amazon Exclusive Champion Sherpa Hoodie faced one of her guests Cindy who the anchor to show the green color,and the anchor said:"All right.You don't have to yell,Cindy.I'm goona to show you the green.But my favorite color is gray,because it bring light to your face."

(2)Calebdoesmakeup said:"Then I'm gonna to show you guys the rest of that one but let's go into the next mirror for your require."

(3)Dawnlove replied to one of her guests:"Anything you want to cook,you can throw in there.Have I cook wings in there?No,but I have cook two corn tortilla."

(4)Lin a Chinese girl who sells clothes on Tiktok platform said:"Every girl listen to me,this setting is your must have for your new year,no matter how old are you,no matter what type of you are,trust me try this one gonna make you so attractive in any occasion."

As illustrated, effective live interaction with viewers boosts engagement, enhances user experience and promotes sales. Focusing on these aspects during a Live-streaming can help broadcasters employ language effectively: directly addressing the audience creates a sense of intimacy; posing questions and responding to answers demonstrates attentiveness; narratives about products or services make information more memorable; humor maintains an enjoyable atmosphere, enhancing viewer rapport; and timely responses show respect for user comments.

5.Conclusion and Suggestion

The present study delves into the application of Speech Act Theory in the context of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming, offering valuable insights into the linguistic dynamics of this rapidly evolving business model. By analyzing live stream snippets from platforms like Amazon and TikTok, the study has successfully demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of integrating Speech Act Theory into short video e-commerce live webcasts. The findings reveal that anchors' use of concise, vivid, and persuasive language, coupled with interactive discourse, significantly enhances consumer engagement and drives sales.

More importantly, the study highlights the crucial role of cultural adaptation and linguistic scrutiny in cross-border e-commerce live-streaming. By tailoring linguistic strategies to resonate with international audiences, streamers can not only showcase "Made in China" products from foreign perspectives but also promote Chinese culture, boost national pride, and strengthen cultural self-confidence. These findings have important implications for training centers and e-commerce platforms, suggesting that they should prioritize the development of linguistic curricula tailored to enhance streamers' cross-cultural communication skills.

5.1 Optimizing the Language of Cross-border E-commerce Live-streaming

The study offers practical guidance for streamers aiming to optimize their language use in cross-border e-commerce live-streaming. Based on our findings, several recommendations emerge for optimizing language use in cross-border e-commerce Live-streaming:

5.1.1 Product Presentation

Anchors should articulate the unique features, functions, and benefits of products using clear and concise language. Vivid descriptions of the product's appearance, color, texture, and other attributes can significantly enhance consumer comprehension and interest.

5.1.2 Persuasion Techniques

Hosts should highlight promotional activities and associated benefits, such as discounts and rebates, to create a sense of urgency among potential customers. Time-limited offers and complimentary gifts can further entice viewers to make immediate purchases.

5.1.3 Interactive Dialogue

Effective interaction with viewers, through timely responses to questions and the use of engaging strategies like interactive games and lucky draws, can significantly boost audience engagement and participation.

5.1.4 Cultural Adaptation

Given the diverse cultural backgrounds of international audiences, anchors should adapt their language to cater to specific cultural nuances. This includes using cultural idioms and metaphors that resonate with different viewer groups.

5.2 Promoting the Development of Cross-border E-commerce Live-streaming

The study underscores the need for policy support and international collaboration to foster the growth of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming. Governments can play a pivotal role by implementing policies that encourage investment in cross-border e-commerce platforms and provide technical support to streamers. Additionally, active pursuit of overseas markets and collaboration with international e-commerce platforms can broaden sales channels and increase the global reach of Chinese products.

5.3 Innovations, Limitations, and Future Directions

While the study has made significant contributions to the understanding of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming, it is not without limitations. The sample size and geographical scope of the data collected may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the dataset to include more platforms, regions, and languages to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic dynamics at play.

Moreover, as technology and consumer behavior continue to evolve, future studies should explore emerging trends and innovations in cross-border e-commerce live-streaming. This includes the impact of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality on the live-streaming experience, as well as the evolving preferences of international consumers. By staying abreast of these developments, researchers can continue to provide valuable insights and guidance for the ongoing growth and optimization of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming.

In conclusion, the study presents a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic aspects of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming through the lens of Speech Act Theory. The findings offer practical insights for streamers, training centers, and policymakers aiming to enhance the international reach and effectiveness of this dynamic business model. With continued research and innovation, cross-border e-commerce live-streaming holds promise as a powerful tool for cultural exchange and economic growth in the globalized world.

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