Understanding Misunderstandings from Socio-cognitive Approach to Pragmatics

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Abstract: Misunderstanding is an old and open question especially in the linguistic domain, but few concerns have put on this important topic recently. To reconsider this problem and offer instructive views, the new theoretical perspective and approaches are needed. A new theory “socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics” (SCA) dubbed by Istvan Kecskes offers a fresh angle for understanding misunderstandings. Other than traditional pragmatics and cognitive pragmatics, SCA standing in the middle point tries to integrate them and explain linguistic phenomenon with both social and cognitive factors. This study tries to examine misunderstandings under SCA, especially its view of Common Ground Co-construction. First, it is assumed that the root cause of misunderstanding lies in egocentrism, which are both an intrinsic property of verbal communication and a mechanism of individual thinking. Then, with a detailed analysis of CG co-construction deficiency and misunderstandings from the perspective of CG co-constructionism of SCA, it is illustrated how egocentrism causes different misunderstandings. In so doing, this study digs out the root cause of misunderstanding by taking speaker and hearer as a whole, and considering both the social factors and cognitive factors, which is a fresh practice on the “speaker-hearer pragmatic model” of SCA.

Keywords: Socio-cognitive Approach to Pragmatics, The Root Cause of Misunderstanding, Egocentrism, CG Co-construct

1. Introduction

Misunderstanding is a common “untidy” verbal communication phenomenon, [1] which often has negative effects and even creates interpersonal conflicts, which requires more time and effort to resolve. Therefore, misunderstandings are often regarded as “errors” in verbal communication, which people should try to avoid in the traditional pragmatic view. However, in our daily life especially in casual talks, misunderstandings seem to be ubiquitous and difficult to avoid. This shows that misunderstandings are not “errors” in the general sense, and their essential roots deserve further study.

The root cause of misunderstanding has always been the focus of misunderstanding research. Previous studies have generally covered four aspects, namely the root of discourse, [2, 3] the root of context, [4, 5] the psychological roots [6-10] and Social roots. [11, 12] Recently, some researchers attempt to mine the root causes of misunderstandings from a comprehensive or an intercultural way. Wu from the angle of the language use system, namely, “the interference of psychological tendencies in the pragmatic inference process with reference to the Ideal Communication Model”, [13] and from a philosophical perspective points out that “the intrinsic properties of the indicative and reflexive language and the subjectivity and psychological orientation of the communicator make the misunderstanding potentially in the process of communication, making the potential of misunderstanding a necessity.” [14, 15] Intercultural impoliteness is a typical misunderstanding issue. Kecskes argues that impoliteness may work differently in intercultural interactions than in L1 communication. Such as for the propositional meanings, interlocutors with different L1 backgrounds may sometimes be unaware of impoliteness. [16-18]

Misunderstanding occurs in the stage of discourse comprehension, but what it reflects is a complete interactive communication process. As a kind of verbal communication phenomenon, it must also originate from and reflect the nature of communication. Therefore, we should explore the root cause of misunderstanding from the perspective of
communicative nature and the overall process of communication, namely, taking speaker-hearer as a whole. From this point of view, Wu's research seems closer to this aim, and especially its research ideas are worthy of noticing and learning. However, the shortcoming is also obvious that it is biased by referring to the Ideal Communication Model (ICM), because this communication model itself is still arguable. [1, 6-8] The main point is that they think ICM puts too much weight on “cooperation”, less even nothing on egocentrism from the perspective of the nature of communication. So referring to ICM will hinder the objective and comprehensive analysis of misunderstandings from the perspective of the nature of communication.

“Socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics” (SCA) is a theoretical framework that advocates the integration of cognition and pragmatics, namely individual and social factors, “Cooperation” and “egocentrism” are the essential characteristics of the two opposites of communication. [1, 16-18] It proposes to construct “speaker-hearer pragmatics”, aiming at constructing a kind of linguistics, which is also an analytical framework that combines pragmatic top-down approach and cognitive bottom-up approach. [19] SCA provides a new perspective for exploring the root causes of misunderstanding from the perspective of speaker-hearer as a whole and the nature of communication. This paper mainly aims to discuss the egocentrism of communication as the root cause of misunderstanding by means of Common Ground (CG) Co-construction in SCA.

2. CG Co-construction in SCA

For a long time, the concept of CG has been widely concerned by pragmatics research, and together with “cooperation” and “intentions”, it is considered to be one of key factors in achieving successful communication. Therefore, CG has also become a heated topic of the theory of “egocentrism” dubbed by psycholinguistics. [20-22] And it has raised and opposed an important topic of Gricean theory, namely “Cooperation Principle”. Thus, there form two opposite views on CG, Pragmatic views and Cognitive views. Pragmatic views argue that CG is a concrete representation of thinking that exists in the brain before communicative practice; [23, 24] while Cognitive perceptions believe that CG is a common working memory process with the characteristic of “emerging”, and is a post factum of dynamic construction. [21] The essence of the argument lies in the opposition of the dynamic and static views of “common ground”. Based on this, SCA put forward the view of “CG Co-construct”, [25] which is summarized in the following three aspects.

1) SCA differentiates the core CG and the emergent CG. The former refers to the relatively static and stable general knowledge shared by a specific language community, including encyclopedic knowledge, macro-social cultural knowledge and linguistic knowledge; the latter refers to relatively dynamic and variable individual knowledge, including “shared sense” and “current sense” among the specific communicative parties. The difference between individual shared information and core CG is that the sharing category is different. The former is social, and the latter is shared by specific communicators. [19] In other words, the latter depends more on the specific context, that is, emergent physical surrounding. SCA distinguishes the content of CG by the existence state of its constituent elements in specific verbal communication. It not only organically combines the static view and the dynamic view, but also reflects the status and role of different components from the pragmatic function, that is, the basicity and the sameness of the core CG, and the emerging and the temporary of the emergent CG.

2) SCA defines CG as an “assumption”. It pointed out that CG is a thinking representation entity that is constructed (co-constructed) by both parties, but neither party can determine in advance whether the entity exists or not. In other words, it is difficult for people to conclude what the so-called “I know you know what I know” is, and essentially it is an estimate. [26] We also believe that, as the “cognitive context hypothesis” in Relevance Theory requires an ostensive-inferential process for mutual manifestation, and CG construction also requires a process of verifying hypotheses, in which there must be misunderstandings or incomprehension. [6] This requires cooperation between the two parties for eliminating misunderstandings, which embodies the property of dynamism of co-construction.

3) Methodologically, SCA offers some specific operational mechanisms of CG co-construction, namely, activating, seeking, and creating. [25]

(1) Ann: — Please check why the baby is crying.
(2) Ann: — See the woman with blonde hair? She’s our new English teacher. She is pretty, isn’t she?
(3) Teacher: — As you well know, I am leaving soon…
(4) Bud: — Ann, would you like to have dinner with me tonight?

Ann: — I’d love to, but I’ll have to pick up my sister at the airport.

In example (1), “baby” plays a role in activating the thinking representation, and also activates other core CGs associated with the concept, such as the psychological needs of the baby, the social roles of the parents, the responsibilities of the parents, and the language skills of both parties. Cases (2) and (3) exemplify the method of seeking CG, that is, the speaker intentionally highlights certain information by explicit means to achieve the purpose of mutual manifestation, as in example (2) “See the woman with blonde hair” takes the woman's clothing, appearance and temperament into a common vision. In the example (3), the teacher used the slogan “As you well know” to evoke a common memory. Not only that, some CGs can be created temporarily, as Ann in example (4), in the case of convincing that Bud did not know she had a sister, brought in the information “I have a sister” in order to create a new CG for subsequent discourse. It can be seen that in order to convert the CG hypothesis into mutual information, temporary dynamic co-construction is required.
3. The Root Cause of Misunderstanding: Egocentrism

The concept of “egocentrism” is derived from the description of children's personality in Developmental Psychology. It refers to children's perception of the surrounding world from their own perspectives, focusing on their own perceptions, emotions, and subjective wills. [27] While Psycholinguistics describes “egocentrism” as a communicative feature that contrasts with Grice's “Cooperative Principle,” [7, 8, 22] in which adults are often egocentric in interactive communication. In addition, cognitive linguistics believes that language is also egocentric, referring to the subjectivity of language, that is, “the self-expression of the speaker through words, including opinions, positions, attitudes, beliefs, etc.” [22] In SCA, “egocentrism” of communication is not equivalent to the above concepts, especially the derogatory color and personality sense. It is an objective description of the characteristics of speech act or the mechanism of thinking mechanism, [19] is “a way of thinking that communicators automatically bring explicit information to the level of attention in the process of discourse output and understanding”. [1]

SCA's interpretation of “egocentrism” is based on the integration of Keysar's “communicative egocentrism” and Giora's "salience hypothesis". [22] In Giora's view, “salience” is not only a cognitive model, but also a mechanism of thinking, that is, the more salient the meaning of the code formed in our brain due to habit, familiarity, frequency of use and typicality, the faster you get. Kecskes extended the “salience hypothesis” to distinguish “inherent salience” from “emergent salience”. [1] The former refers to the vocabulary meaning defined by Giora, and the latter refers to situationality or perceptiveness. Perceptiveness highlights differentiation, as different people in the same situation will pay attention to different details. It can be seen that egocentrism in SCA actually refers to the essential attribute of the thinking mechanism of “salience”, which is reflected in the verbal communication as the feature of communicative egocentrism. So far, the operation of the thinking mechanism cannot be observed in detail, but its properties are driven by the communicative characteristics. Salience mechanisms drive the formation of egocentric cognition, which is manifested in self-perspective and self-cognition, inducing egocentric discourse. [26] Similarly, the egocentrism of communication is reflected in the communicative subject bias. And the use of the most familiar and most accessible information in cognitive resources for speech expression and understanding is a direct portrayal of the Principle of Least Effort of thinking in the process of verbal communication, which inevitably induces misunderstanding.

Specifically, verbal communication is a process of integration of individual cognition and social interaction. The egocentrism of communication will undoubtedly have a direct impact on these two processes, leading to egocentric understanding and perspective, referred to as “self-cognition” and “self-perspective”. [29] Self-cognition is mainly reflected in the individual differences of knowledge and experience. Individual cognition is a process of “privatized” knowledge learning, [30] so it will be more or less subjective. Knowledge experience includes both core CG information and local shared information in emergent CG. They all derive from the communicator's prior contextualized experience, that is, information that has been reserved before the specific communication occurs. The self-cognition of core CG is mainly reflected in the deviation of vocabulary concept features, such as the Eskimo's cognition of snow, the Mongolian classification of horses, and etc. The self-cognition of local shared information in CG is mainly reflected in the difference of memory focus and intensity. The above constitutes the knowledge base for misunderstandings, especially inducing propositional misunderstanding. The emergence of “situational information” in CG is often reflected in the “self-perspective.” The self-perspective has priority over the other perspective, [20] because, based on the Principle of Least Effort, it takes less time and effort to observe things and consider problems from self perspective. In addition, unlike the property of unconsciousness of the core CG, the co-construction of emerging CG is often conscious and strategic, embodied in a perspective strategy, tending to express a subjective emotion, attitude and position, and therefore tends to induce referential misunderstanding, intention misunderstanding and implicated meaning misunderstanding. It can be seen that misunderstanding can be analyzed systematically from the egocentrism of communication. The following will further analyze it from the perspective of CG co-construction.

4. Co-construction Failure and Misunderstanding

For a long time, misunderstanding research is mostly focused on the listener. The reason is that normally people think that misunderstanding belongs to the listener and seems to have nothing to do with the speaker. The root cause of such view lies in the traditional verbal communication theory. Kecskes pointed out that traditional pragmatics theory usually regards communication as a cooperative, context-dependent process, in which the speaker is often conceived as the one who makes the discourse after considering all the contextual factors, hearer is conceived as the one who tries to understand the speaker's intentions as much as possible. [1] In fact, what the speaker intends to express is not always recovered by the hearer, but depends on the pre-context of both parties, especially the pre-individual context, the interaction of intention and attention, and the emergent CG. In other words, verbal communication is essentially a process of integration of individual factors and social factors, and symbiosis of cooperation and egocentrism. This is also the reason why SCA advocates speaker-hearer pragmatics.

As mentioned above, the idea “co-construction CG” provides an analytical mechanism for exploring the root cause
of misunderstanding from the perspective of communicative nature and speaker-hearer as a whole. Under normal circumstances, verbal communicators, based on information dynamic co-construction, form common knowledge, achieve successful communication, and also thus construct new common information for subsequent conversations. It can be said that verbal communication is actually a continuum of mutual understanding and CG co-construction. Among them, the egocentrism of communication will inevitably lead to some co-construction failure phenomena, that is, the information imbalance occurs in the process of activating, seeking and creating, which leads to misunderstanding. With the advancement of the verbal flow, the participation of more construction factors, the self-monitoring and adjustment of the communicative subjects, and the CG co-construction will eventually be achieved, which is reflected in the dispelling of misunderstandings. Below we further distinguish the core CG co-construction failure and the emergent CG co-construction failure, combined with three construction methods to analyze misunderstanding.

4.1. Core CG co-construction Failures and Misunderstandings

The core CG is relatively static, stable, and built in a default way, so it is often seen as a presupposed knowledge. The core CG, with the property of social sharing, is the basis of normal communication, and is the basis for ensuring the identity of the language community. [19] But its sharing is not absolute, something of scope and degree. The “Dynamic Model of Meaning” points out that vocabulary concept include 3 parts: core conceptual features, specific semantic features, and specific cultural characteristics. [8] For example, “kick off” in “The president kicked off the new academic year with an excellent speech” includes core concept feature “announcement”, semantic feature “metaphoric expression, more rhetorical effects than ‘open’, ‘start’”, and cultural identity “American culture”. The deviation of core CG is often reflected in the difference of vocabulary concept features, which will lead to co-construction failure and misunderstanding, including two situations: one is that the listener lacks the corresponding core concept information; the other is the difference between semantic features and specific cultural characteristics.

4.1.1. Core Concepts Defect and Misunderstanding

Normally linguistic representation (sound/shape) will activate the same conceptual features, but if the listener lacks the corresponding core concepts, which will lead to incomprehension or misunderstanding. For the former case, the listener often asks “What does XX mean?” which often occurs in second-language acquisitions; the latter occurs more in the native language conversation because the listener does not have the corresponding core concept. Under such circumstances, the interlocutors tend to make guesses according to the linguistic representations. Two examples from Chinese TV series *China Land* are illustrated as below.

(5) (A conversation between an old couple, Laoga and Gashen, and his son Yongzhi about the daughter-in-law issue)

永志：爹，俺娶外面的媳妇行不行？
永名：不，没结婚呢，是女，女朋友。
永志2：Bushi, méi jiēhūn ne, shí nǚ, nǚ péngyǒu
永志3：No, not married yet, just a... a girlfriend.

嘎婶1：啥朋友？
嘎婶2：这，这多不要脸的词，你这，啥叫女朋友，你说，好好说。

嘎婶2：这，这多不要脸的词，你这，啥叫女朋友，你说，好好说。

嘎婶2：Zhe, zhe duō bāoliàn de cí, nǐ zhě, shā jiào nǐ péngyǒu, nǐ shuō, hōhō shuō.
Gashen2: what a shameless word! What does “nǚ péngyǒu” mean, you, you explain it.

(6) (Japanese invaders were coming, villagers were moving back to the mountains)

永志：爹，我们这大牲口比啥都重要。

嘎婶：Shuānzi, tāi wǒmen zhě dà shēngkǒu bì shà dōu zhòngyào.

Gashen：啥朋友？要娶外面的媳妇？你在外面有媳妇啦？

永志：王先森：Nàbāo, tāi wǒmen zhě dà shēngkǒu bì shà dōu zhòngyào.

Laoga：Suanzi, take Mr. Wang to the mountain and put him with the big cattle.

永志：爹，我们在山上看见，农民保护大牲口。

嘎婶：Shuānzi, tāi wǒmen zhě dà shēngkǒu bì shà dōu zhòngyào.

Gashen：啥朋友？要娶外面的媳妇？你在外面有媳妇啦？

永志：王先生，你这啥呢？我和他媳妇在一起。

嘎婶：Shuānzi, tāi wǒmen zhě dà shēngkǒu bì shà dōu zhòngyào.

Gashen：啥朋友？要娶外面的媳妇？你在外面有媳妇啦？

永志：爹，我们在山上看见，农民保护大牲口。

嘎婶：Shuānzi, tāi wǒmen zhě dà shēngkǒu bì shà dōu zhòngyào.

Gashen：啥朋友？要娶外面的媳妇？你在外面有媳妇啦？
4.1.2. Conceptual Deviation and Misunderstanding

The concept deviation leads to the failure of CG co-construction and induces misunderstanding mainly in the different understanding of semantic features and cultural characteristics. The co-construction mechanism here is also based on “activating”. Such misunderstandings are particularly prevalent in cross-regional and intercultural communication. Such as:

(7) (Groom Xiaozhou from Hunan and bride Xiaoyuan from Sichuan are having a wedding ceremony in Xiaozhou's home. The following is a dialogue between mother Zhou and Xiaoyuan)

Mother Zhou 1: Xiaoyuan, it’s not easy for your parents to come over so far. How do you think we should send them away?

Xiaoyuan: Send away? You treat them like beggars!

Mother Zhou 2: Not like that, according to the tradition here, we have to send something back to the bride’s parents. It’s just a return gift.

4.2. Emergent CG co-construction Failures and Misunderstandings

The emergent CG refers to relatively dynamic and changeable individual knowledge, including “individual shared information” and “contextual information”. The former is mainly based on “activating” and the latter is mainly “seeking” and “creating”. The main problem of the emergent CG co-construction lies in the effective coordination of locally shared information and instant information, that is, the key factor is whether or not the other party can successfully recall the sharing information, and notice the specific situation focus or the new information created. Generally speaking, the richer the shared information, the more effective and smooth the communication is. For example, for the husband and wife, an eye contact is enough to know each other's intention. But because of the differences in memory, attention and interest, interlocutors cannot always achieve perfect accordance every time. This will lead to the emergent CG co-construction failures and misunderstandings.

4.2.1. Local Shared Information Co-construction Failures and Misunderstandings

(9) (Zheng & Zhou are good friends, encountering on the road)

Zheng 1: Did you get it done?

Zhou 2: Oh, yes, last time you asked about this, you see a lot.

Zheng 1: Did you get it done?

Zhou 2: Units are friendly, but the original unit leader is not released.

Zhou 1: The unit is well connected, but I am stuck by the former unit leader.

Zheng 2: Is it? You didn’t tell me this. But I am not asking this. I am asking you the visa issue to Taiwan.

Zhou 2: Okay, for the next one, the last few questions, we have not yet.

Zheng 2: What is it? You didn’t tell me this. But I am not asking this. I am asking you the visa issue to Taiwan.

Zhou 2: Okay, for the next one, the last few questions, we have not yet.

Loo gä 1: Wô zhê xínlî kôngluóluô de...
Laoga 1: I feel very upset.
Gà sīnà 2: Nǐ zhè qǐ niào méi zǐ yě shì zhè hēme chăng shì jīliănle, liăn gěi xīnhě bu lǐ.
Gatsao 2: Well, Sister Qiqiao has been away for so long without even a letter.
Lōo gà 2: Ni xīng nè'er qùē nǐ.
Laoga 2: Nonsense! You think too much!
Gà sīnà 3: Nǐ yǒu luò luó de wèi shà yā?
Gatsao 3: Then why are you so upset?
老嘎 3: 我想起曹军长来了。
Lōo gà 3: Wǒ xiǎng qǐ zhāng junzhǎng lai le.
Laoga 3: I missed Commander Cao just then.

In example (9), Zhou and Zheng are good friends and undoubtedly have a lot of personal information to share. However, frequent information exchanges make the specific memory confused. In addition, Zheng did not specify what "things" refer to, which leads to the local shared information co-construction failure and misunderstanding. In example (10), Sister Qiqiao is Laoga's lover, and Commander Cao is Laoga's confidant. This is the local shared information between Laoga and his wife. So the wife's point of view on Laoga's melancholy mood is egocentric and Laoga's intention is misunderstood (Ga 2). This also shows that in the process of CG co-construction, listeners are not always passively activated, but their subjectivity and initiative will also cause misunderstandings.

4.2.2. Situational Information Co-construction Failures and Misunderstandings

As the Chinese poem says “Héng kàn chéng lǐng cè chéng fèng, yuǎnjìn gāodī gè bùtóng” (looking at the mountain from different angles and distances, one will get different views), interlocutors in a same place will have the difference between the focus of attention and the perspective in the communicative situation. The inclusion of contextual factors in the concept of “CG co-construction” not only fully reflects the dynamics of co-construction, but also reveals the subjective differences between the two sides’ observational perspectives. On the one hand, as Keckes said, only the situational factors that enter the attention of both parties are well-known; [1] on the other hand, as the local shared information is co-constructed, the necessary prompting means are also indispensable. However, in the specific communication, the attention of both parties is still difficult to achieve perfect coordination, which is related to the attention of the communicator and the interference of cognitive tasks.

(11) (Wang Peng and his friends climbed to the top of the mountain near Leifeng Pagoda to overlook the West Lake)
朋友 1: 真漂亮！
Péngyǒu 1: Zhēn piàoliāng!
Friend 1: How beautiful!
Wáng pēng 1: 是呀，人间天堂嘛。
Wang Peng 1: Shi ya, rěnjiān tiāntáng ma.

Wang Peng 1: Yes, paradise on earth!

Friend 2: 还有比人家天堂更美的，你看……应该是杭州美吧。
Péngyǒu 2: Hái yǒu bǐ rén jiā tiāntáng gèng méi de, nǐ kàn……yīnggāi shì hángzhōu měi ma ba.
Friend 2: There’s a thing more beautiful than paradise, look at it... look at that pretty Hangzhou girl.

Wáng péng 1: 嗯，是不错，人家名花有主啦，看到旁边那个帅哥说，西湖才是大家的，好好欣赏吧。
Wang Peng 1: 嗯，是不错，人家名花有主啦，看到旁边那个帅哥说，西湖才是大家的，好好欣赏吧。

Wáng pēng 2: 嗯，她花儿甲，rěn jiā miǎo miǎo méi de, wǒ kàn dào pāngbiān nà gè shuāigē méi，xiūshí cái shì dàjiā de，hôohôôô xǐnshǎng ba.
Wang Peng 2: 嗯，她花儿甲，看到旁边那个美美的，休憩才说是大家的，好好欣赏吧。

Wang Peng 2: Well, she is really beautiful. But the flower has its owner. Look at the handsome man next to her. The West Lake is for everyone. Enjoy yourself!

(12) (The father wants to go home by bus, and his son-in-law is showing him the station from a tall building)
女婿 1: 爸爸，你看那个高高的烟囱了吗？
Niǔxù 1: Bāba, nǐ kàn dào nà gāo gāo de yāncōng ma?
Son-in-law 1: Dad, do you see that tall chimney?

岳父 1: 看到了。
Yuèfù 1: Kàn dàole.
Father-in-law 1: Yes.

女婿 2: 车站在烟囱的前面。
Niǔxù 2: Chèzhàn jiù zài yāncōng de qiánmiàn.
Son-in-law 2: The station is in front of the chimney.

岳父 3: 前面？烟囱前面不是海湾吗？(烟囱靠近海湾)
Yuèfù 3: Qiánmiàn？Yāncōng qiánmiàn bùshì hǎi yān ma？(Yāncōng kàoqìng hǎi yān)
Father-in-law 3: 前面？烟囱前面不是海湾吗？(烟囱靠近海湾)

Father-in-law 2: 前面？Isn’t the Bay in front of the chimney?
(The chimney is near the bay)

女婿 3: 我的意思是靠我们这边的前面。
Niǔxù 3: Wǒ de yìsi shì kào wǒmen zhè biān de qiánmiàn.
Son-in-law 3: I mean the front of our side.

岳父 3: 这样呀，那应该说是烟囱的后面呀，不对，应该是前面，也不对，反正你应该说得具体一点。
Yuèfù 3: Zhè yàng yā，nà yǐgāi shì yāncōng de hòumiàn ya，bùduì，yǐgāi shì qiánmiàn，yě bùduì，fēnzhēng nǐ yǐgāi shuō de jùyì yǐndōn.
Father-in-law 3: 这样呀，那应该说是烟囱的后面呀，不对，应该是前面，也不对，反正你应该说得具体一点。

Father-in-law 3: Well, that should be the back of the chimney. No, it should be the front or...... Anyway, you should be more specific.

In the case of (11), what the friend said “truly beautiful” refers to the beautiful girl climbing together, and Wang Peng is enjoying the beauty of the West Lake, not paying attention to the new information created by friends through the seeking mechanism (by his blinks and gestures). There have been co-construction failures so as to lead misunderstandings (see Wang Peng 1). In the case of (12), the “front” of the son-in-law refers to the front of the chimney facing them, while the father-in-law means that the chimney is facing away from them, forming a failure and misunderstanding of co-construction. Although the son-in-law has created a new focus of attention (see Son-in-law 1 and Father-in-law 1), egocentric orientation indicators such as “this”, “that”, “before” and “post” often differ depending on the perspective adopted by the subject, and thus become blurred and
ambiguous.

In addition, the psychological space also has a difference in perspective. The transformation of psychological perspective often has a pragmatic function of expressing subjective emotions, positions and attitudes. For example, using “I come to the hospital” instead of “I go to the hospital” reflects the sympathy and concern of the speaker. On the contrary, if the listener fails to perceive the perspective change of the speaker, he cannot truly understand his emotional intentions, and it is likely to cause co-construction failure and misunderstanding.

(13) (In the TV series Snow Leopard: Japanese special forces are coming to attack Zhao village)

周卫国 1: 赵老伯, 这里不安全, 赵庄您也回不去了, 您赶紧带着乡亲转移吧。

Zhōu Wèiguó 1: Zhào lǎobó, zhèlǐ bù ānquán, zhào zhuāng nǐ yè huí bù qùé, nǐ gōnjīn dàizhě xiāngqín zhùòyǐ ba.

Zhao Weiguo 1: Uncle Zhao, it's not safe here. You can't go back to Zhao village either. You should take the villagers to transfer as soon as possible.

赵老伯 1: 周团长, 我们马上转移, 绝不会给八路军添麻烦。

Zhāo lǎobó 1: Zhǒu tuánzòng, wǒmen mǎiháng jiù zhǔo nú yì, juè bù huí gěi bālùjūn tiān máfan.

Uncle Zhao 1: Regimental commander Zhou, we will transfer immediately and will never cause trouble to the Eighth Route Army.

周卫国 2: 赵老伯, 我不是这个意思。您别误会。我们八路军不会撇下老百姓不管的。

Zhōu Wèiguó 2: Zhào lǎobó, wǒ bù shǐzhè yǐsī. Nǐ bié huìwǔ. Wǒmen bālùjūn bù huí piē xià lōobǒixíng būguǐn de.

Zhao Weiguo 2: Uncle Zhao, I don't mean that. Don't get me wrong. Our Eighth Route Army will not leave the people behind.

(14) (Dialogue in the modern drama Thunderstorm)

(13) (In the TV series Snow Leopard: Japanese special forces are coming to attack Zhao village)

周卫国 2: 赵老伯, 这里不安全, 赵庄您也回不去了, 您赶紧带着乡亲转移吧。

Zhōu Wèiguó 2: Zhào lǎobó, zhèlǐ bù ānquán, zhào zhuāng nǐ yè huí bù qùé, nǐ gōnjīn dàizhě xiāngqín zhùòyǐ ba.

Zhao Weiguo 1: Uncle Zhao, it's not safe here. You can't go back to Zhao village either. You should take the villagers to transfer as soon as possible.

赵老伯 1: 周团长, 我们马上转移, 绝不会给八路军添麻烦。

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Zhōu Wèiguó 2: Zhào lǎobó, wǒ bù shǐzhè yǐsī. Nǐ bié huìwǔ. Wǒmen bālùjūn bù huí piē xià lōobǒixíng būguǐn de.

Zhao Weiguo 2: Uncle Zhao, I don't mean that. Don't get me wrong. Our Eighth Route Army will not leave the people behind.

(14) (Dialogue in the modern drama Thunderstorm)

贵 1: 大少爷, 您是明天起身吗?

Guì 1: Dà shàoyé, nín shì míntiān qǐshēn ma?

贵 1: 是的, 您是明天起身吗?

Guì 1: Shì de, nín shì míntiān qǐshēn ma?

我这丫头都得惦记着您了。

Wǒ zhè niúyāo dōu děi dìngjì zhe nín le.

你又没钱了吧?

Nǐ yòu méi qián ba?

周卫国 1: 赵老伯, 这里不安全, 赵庄您也回不去了, 您赶紧带着乡亲转移吧。

Zhōu Wèiguó 1: Zhào lǎobó, zhèlǐ bù ānquán, zhào zhuāng nǐ yè huí bù qùé, nǐ gōnjīn dàizhě xiāngqín zhùòyǐ ba.

Zhao Weiguo 1: Uncle Zhao, it's not safe here. You can't go back to Zhao village either. You should take the villagers to transfer as soon as possible.

赵老伯 1: 周团长, 我们马上转移, 绝不会给八路军添麻烦。

Zhāo lǎobó 1: Zhǒu tuánzòng, wǒmen mǎiháng jiù zhǔo nú yì, juè bù huí gěi bālùjūn tiān máfan.

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你又没钱了吧?

Nǐ yòu méi qián ba?

5. Conclusion

This paper has explored the root cause of misunderstanding by using a new perspective of social-cognitive pragmatics. Firstly, it briefly reviews the CG con-construction of SCA, pointing out its definition, nature, content and construction method, which provide an analytical mechanism for the root cause of misunderstanding. Then, combined with the concept “ego-centricism” of philosophy and cognitive science, we further discussed this concept under the theoretical frame of SCA, which points out that the root cause of misunderstanding lies in the egocentrism of communication. It also analyzed the formation of misunderstanding from perspective of CG co-construction, including core CG co-construction failure and the emergent CG co-construction failure. The study found that egocentrism can offer an overall explanation on different misunderstandings: on the one hand, the speaker can only, from the self-cognition and self-perspective, estimate the information that the hearer knows; on the other hand, listener, based on the prior knowledge and situational focus and attention, can only draw some related association and reasoning according to the linguistic representation. The result is that although both parties have the willingness to cooperate to accomplish a conversation, there is no guarantee that all explicit-inferential processes can achieve a state of mutual understanding, and certain CG co-construction failures and misunderstandings are inevitably come into being. This research is based on the pragmatic view of taking speaker-hearer as a whole, and makes a new interpretation of the root cause of misunderstanding. It has carried out preliminary practice on SCA’s “speaker-hearer pragmatic model”, which is conducive to further study of misunderstandings and other verbal communication issues.

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