

Article

Contrastive Study of "Humblebrag" Speech Acts in Chinese and English Online Social Media

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Abstract: As functionally corresponding speech acts in Chinese and English online social media, Fanersai (literally "Versailles") and humblebrag both denote the ostentation of personal superiority via seemingly modest utterances. Grounded in the theoretical nexus between self-praise and Fanersai, this paper presents a systematic contrastive analysis of the two speech acts in Chinese and English digital contexts. Based on a self-compiled specialized corpus of 120 Fanersai posts collected from Chinese Sina Weibo and 120 humblebrag posts from English X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, this study identifies substantial parallels in the thematic distribution, pragmatic features, and core pragmatic strategies of the two constructs. These commonalities stem from the shared psychological motivation of Chinese and Western young adults to pursue self-politeness and construct a positive social image in digital spaces. Meanwhile, significant divergences are observed in the deployment frequency of specific strategies, as well as culture-specific pragmatic mechanisms unique to each linguistic context. These discrepancies are closely associated with cross-cultural normative differences, divergent thinking patterns, and systemic variations between the Chinese logographic and English alphabetic writing systems. This study advances scholarly understanding of the Fanersai/humblebrag speech act in cross-cultural online social media contexts, and calls for the restrained and contextually appropriate use of Fanersai by users in Chinese digital spaces.

Keywords: Fanersai; humblebrag; online social media; speech act; contrastive pragmatics; cross-cultural digital communication

1. Introduction

As a pervasive Chinese internet buzzword, Fanersai first stood out as widespread popularity on Chinese online social platforms (including Sina Weibo, WeChat Moments, and Rednote) in the form of "Fanersai Literature". It is regarded as a discursive practice whereby speakers display a sense of superiority through seemingly understated, low-profile utterances, with the connotation of superiority expanding from an initial focus on material wealth to nearly all domains of social life. Predominantly used for humorous banter and satirical commentary, the expression has gained immense traction among young Chinese internet users.

Like self-praise and bragging, Fanersai represents an innovative form of self-presentation in digital spaces [1], and can thus be conceptualized as a specialized speech act within the theoretical framework of speech act theory [2, 3]. In English, the direct functional and semantic counterpart of Fanersai is humblebrag, a blending word of "humble" and "brag" coined by American comedy writer Harris Wittels in 2011. It is formally defined as "the art of wrapping a brag in a faux-humble veneer" [4]. Both constructs are intrinsically linked to self-praise and bragging; in other words, while bragging constitutes an aggressive form of self-praise that frequently threatens the hearer's face, speakers routinely modify overt bragging with mitigating devices to reduce

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the interpersonal risks associated with explicit self-promotion [5]. Humblebrag, and its Chinese equivalent Fanersai, is precisely constructed through such modified bragging, with its seemingly complaining yet essentially ostentatious usage embodying a speech act of apparent deprecation and actual elevation.

Existing scholarship on the Fanersai phenomenon has approached the topic from both non-linguistic perspectives, including social psychology and journalism and communication studies [5], and linguistic perspectives, notably cognitive linguistics, pragmatics [6], pragmatic strategies [1, 7], and pragmatic functions [8]. However, few studies have adopted a systematic contrastive linguistic approach, and even the handful of comparative works have failed to provide a comprehensive, empirically grounded comparison between Chinese Fanersai and English humblebrag in online social media. To address this research gap, this paper conducts a contrastive analysis of corpus data collected from Chinese and English online social platforms, drawing on pragmatics and cross-cultural communication theories to address three core research questions:

1. What are the fundamental similarities between Fanersai and humblebrag as pervasive speech acts in Chinese and English online social media?
2. What are the significant divergences in their deployment patterns and pragmatic strategies?
3. Why has Fanersai gained such immense popularity among young generations in the Chinese context, which is deeply shaped by Confucian cultural norms of modesty?

2. Theoretical Framework: Self-Praise and the Fanersai Speech Act

Previous research has conceptualized Fanersai as an indirect form of self-praise [6], a subcategory of self-praise paired with overt bragging [4], or a covert, modified form of self-promotion [1]. There is a broad scholarly consensus that Fanersai falls under the umbrella of self-praise, a speech act that poses a fundamental challenge to classic pragmatic theories. Specifically, self-praise violates Leech's Modesty Maxim within the Politeness Principle, which requires speakers to minimize self-praise and maximize self-deprecation in social interaction [9]. It also flouts Gu's Self-denigration Maxim, a core component of Chinese politeness norms that prioritizes self-effacement as a marker of social appropriateness [10]. Furthermore, self-praise runs counter to Brown and Levinson's Face Theory, as it threatens the hearer's positive face (the innate desire to be approved of and valued by others) and undermines their need for positive self-image [11]. For this reason, speakers in both Chinese and English online contexts deploy a range of pragmatic strategies to mitigate the aversiveness of self-praise, many of which are also employed in the performance of Fanersai.

For this study, Fanersai is operationalized as an indirect speech act oriented toward fulfilling social needs, whereby speakers enhance their social standing and engage in social comparison through both positive and negative self-disclosure. Distinct from overt self-praise and bragging, Fanersai is a unique indirect speech act that simultaneously enacts positive and negative self-disclosure. It can thus be framed as disguised self-enhancement and serves as an accurate umbrella term for the implicit self-promotion enacted through positive or negative self-disclosure in both Chinese and English online contexts.

Linguistic research on Fanersai has predominantly focused on two core streams, namely, the social and contextual factors shaping Fanersai in online social media and the underlying pragmatic strategies of Fanersai. For instance, studies have examined the interpersonal effectiveness of humblebragging in English online contexts, finding that it is widely perceived as insincere and thus ineffective at creating the intended self-image [12, 13], with contextual information and group knowledge playing a critical role in interpreting the speech act. Some scholarship has centered on the pragmatic strategies of Fanersai/humblebrag, for instance, Wittels identified that English speakers frequently disguise bragging through complaining, displays of humility, questioning, and information sharing [4]; Ren and Guo categorized Chinese Fanersai strategies into indirect strategies (narration, complaint, comparison, third-party reference, and humility) and

self-praise mitigated by hedges [1]. Building on this prior scholarship, this study develops a systematic analytical framework to compare the two speech acts empirically.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus Construction

This study compiles a specialized balanced corpus consisting of 240 posts in total: 120 Chinese Fanersai posts collected from Sina Weibo, and 120 English humblebrag posts collected from X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook. All posts were collected between January 2022 and December 2023, with duplicate posts, reposts, and non-original content excluded from the final corpus. To ensure the representativeness of the data, posts were selected to cover a diverse range of topics and deployment patterns, consistent with the core defining features of Fanersai/humblebrag: ostensible modesty paired with implicit ostentation of superiority.

3.2. Analytical Procedure

The corpus analysis followed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative content analysis and quantitative frequency analysis, in line with established methodologies in contrastive pragmatics research. First, two trained coders with expertise in pragmatics independently coded all posts for thematic categories, pragmatic features, and pragmatic strategies, with an inter-coder reliability score of Cohen's kappa = 0.89, indicating a high level of coding consistency. Discrepancies in coding were resolved through iterative discussion until full consensus was reached. Second, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to calculate the frequency and percentage of each pragmatic strategy deployed in the Chinese and English sub-corpora, to identify statistically meaningful patterns of similarity and divergence. Finally, cross-cultural qualitative analysis was performed to explain the observed patterns, drawing on established pragmatic theories and cross-cultural communication frameworks.

4. Fanersai in Chinese Online Social Media

First gaining widespread traction in Chinese online social circles in 2020, Fanersai uses seemingly plain language to display superiority in all aspects of life through casual, offhand ostentation. Today, the speech act has evolved far beyond mere self-praise and bragging, and is predominantly used as a vehicle for humorous banter and satire, with extensive discussions across major Chinese social platforms.

4.1. Thematic Distribution

The popularity of Fanersai among young Chinese internet users stems from its accessibility, ease of production, and all-encompassing nature, with self-praise able to be derived from any trivial incident in daily life. Inductive analysis of the Chinese sub-corpus reveals that Fanersai content falls into three core thematic categories: family and wealth display, physical attractiveness display, and academic and educational achievement display.

The first category, family and wealth display, constitutes the traditional and dominant domain of Fanersai, centered predominantly on the ostentation of material wealth. This formed the bulk of early Fanersai content, with wealth---whether owned by the speaker or their family---featured prominently in posts, as in the following example: My mom called me in tears, saying: "We lost some money, but it's not a big deal. We just sold the family Bentley, and we still have a few cars left to drive around anyway. We're so sorry we didn't buy you an apartment earlier; we were too busy buying ones for ourselves."

The second category, physical attractiveness display, is another pervasive theme, where speakers showcase their appearance through offhand language, often accompanied by selfies in the post. A representative example is: Two guys tapped me on the shoulder from behind. I turned around, and one of them looked a bit shy and said, "Sorry, we

mistook you for someone else." After I turned back, I heard the other one say: "She really looks just like Liu Yifei (a prominent Chinese actress known for her beauty)."

The third category, academic and educational achievement display, features posts from highly educated young adults, with high-frequency lexical items including gaokao (China's national college entrance examination), postgraduate education, and elite universities. These markers of academic excellence are integrated into the text in a seemingly unobtrusive manner, as illustrated here: I only got 50 points, what's the point of going to this lousy university? I'm already constantly outshone by all the geniuses around me at school, and I finally got online to relax for a bit, only to get upset from a stupid quiz. How on earth did I even get into Tsinghua University (China's top higher education institution)???

4.2. Pragmatic Features

The core of Fanersai lies in the speaker's desire to display superiority without causing displeasure from the audience. Speakers thus use modesty as a means of seeking attention, with feigned humility reducing the perceived aggressiveness of the utterance while eliciting praise and admiration rather than envy or ridicule from the hearer. Accordingly, Fanersai discourse is characterized by three core pragmatic features: the deployment of implicature, prior depreciation and subsequent elevation (explicit criticism with implicit praise), and casual understatement with inherent ostentation.

First, the pervasive use of implicature allows speakers to convey ostentatious meaning without explicit boasting. For example, in the utterance If we're talking about being well-matched in family background, I'd probably have to close down a couple of my companies in Dubai first before I can get a wife, the speaker does not directly boast about his or her wealth, but implicitly conveys extensive business assets and financial status through a seemingly casual remark about marriage.

Second, prior depreciation and subsequent elevation create a stark contrast between the speaker's ostensible self-deprecation and the implicit superiority conveyed in the utterance. For instance, I'm really good at nothing. Even with a top degree and a whole bunch of qualifications---an accounting certificate, a teaching certificate, a bar admission certificate---I still have to listen to my dad and go home to take over the family company opens with self-deprecating remarks, only to list exceptional academic and professional qualifications and a privileged family background, with the contrast amplifying the ostentatious effect.

Third, casual understatement with inherent ostentation frames exceptional achievements as mundane and unremarkable, a defining feature of Fanersai discourse. In the example People online are so nitpicky these days Academic qualifications don't mean anything, right? I just got my PhD at 21, and everyone around me is the same It's really not a big deal, the speaker uses nonchalant language to complain about online users' nitpicking, while framing his or her achievement of earning a PhD at 21 as a common, unremarkable occurrence among their peers.

4.3. Pragmatic Strategies

To avoid causing unhappiness among the audience, Fanersai posters deploy specific pragmatic strategies to disguise their ostentatious intent. Based on the frameworks developed by Ren and Guo and Ou, and inductive analysis of the corpus, this study categorizes the pragmatic strategies of Chinese Fanersai into six core types: narration, complaint, comparison, feigned humility, third-party perspective endorsement, and help-seeking [1].

4.3.1. Narration

Narration involves the speaker recounting a seemingly mundane daily event in a descriptive tone, with ostentatious content embedded seamlessly into the narrative. For example, I forgot my belt today, so I just popped into Gucci and bought one casually. When the shop assistant was punching the holes, she said my waist was so slim that she'd

never punched one that close to the edge before. I think girls look better with a bit of curves. I really envy that! But there's nothing I can do about it; my husband keeps feeding me bird's nest and stuff, and I just have no appetite for it. This post reads as a casual update about daily life, but implicitly boasts of the speaker's access to luxury goods, slim figure, and privileged lifestyle.

4.3.2. Complaint

Complaint involves the speaker expressing seemingly negative sentiment or dissatisfaction, with the complaint serving as a vehicle to convey implicit superiority. For instance, I used to hunch over and practically stick my head through the counter every time I went to the bank to do business. Then one day, my dad gave me a bank card, and now the branch president always greets me in person every time. The tea in the VIP luxury business room is just terrible. Here, the speaker complains about the quality of tea in the bank's VIP room, while highlighting access to exclusive banking privileges unavailable to most people.

4.3.3. Comparison

Comparison involves the speaker drawing an ostensible contrast between themselves and others, framing themselves as envious of the other party while implicitly highlighting their own superiority. A representative example is: I really envy you guys who ride bikes. No traffic jams, no need to find a parking spot---way more convenient than me driving my Porsche. The speaker claims to envy people who ride bicycles for their convenience, while drawing attention to his or her ownership of a luxury Porsche car.

4.3.4. Feigned Humility

Feigned humility involves the speaker using self-deprecating, modest language to downplay exceptional achievements, while simultaneously drawing attention to those achievements. For example, So swamped this week... I have 3 presentations due, and I was just going to take it easy, but my team members pushed me to be the speaker. I got a 7.5 in IELTS Speaking just by luck, but public speaking is literally impossible for someone with social anxiety like me!! Unified reply: Thank you, everyone, for your kind words~ I really thought I messed up, I didn't expect the Professor to give me an A! Even a failure like me feels like this is a win, hooray. The speaker attributes his or her high IELTS score to luck, claims to suffer from social anxiety about public speaking, and downplays his or her academic performance, all while highlighting exceptional language proficiency and top grades.

4.3.5. Third-Party Perspective Endorsement

Third-party perspective endorsement involves the speaker attributing praise and positive evaluation to an external third party, rather than directly praising themselves. This strategy avoids the appearance of overt self-promotion, while still conveying the speaker's desired sense of superiority through seemingly objective external validation. For instance, I got this evaluation from my high school classmates today: my face looks like Liu Lingzi, my figure Chen Jue, my way of speaking Sun Rui, my work style Yu Shuxin, my singing Cai Zhuoyi + Su Shanshan, and my dancing Zhao Xiaotang (all prominent Chinese actresses and performers). Should I laugh or cry? The speaker uses the evaluation of high school classmates to highlight her appearance, talent, and all-around abilities.

4.3.6. Help-Seeking

Help-seeking involves the speaker framing their post as a request for advice or assistance, while the content of the request implicitly boasts of their superiority. A representative example is: My kid always gets either first place in Chinese or first place in math in exams. Is there any way to get them to get first place in both at the same time?

The parent ostensibly asks for advice to help his or her child excel in both subjects, while highlighting that the child already consistently ranks first in one of the two.

5. Humblebrag in English Online Social Media

As the direct English counterpart of *Fanersai*, humblebrag centers on the ostentation of superiority through ostensibly modest or complaining utterances. Etymologically, humblebrag emerged earlier than its Chinese equivalent, and its rapid dissemination in English-speaking countries with highly developed online social media has given rise to distinct usage characteristics and deployment patterns.

5.1. Thematic Distribution and Usage Characteristics

In a foundational study, Sezer et al. examined social media content and identified four core thematic domains of humblebrag: wealth, physical attractiveness, ability, and life experiences [12]. The following examples illustrate typical humblebrag posts in the English sub-corpus, aligned with these thematic categories:

1. I can't really decide between a Ferrari and a Lamborghini. (Wealth)
2. I'm wearing a ponytail, rolled out of bed from a nap, at the bar w/my guy and guys r still hitting on me. Like really? (Physical attractiveness)
3. I never thought I was very good at exams, so it's a bit confusing that I got top of the class in all subjects again this year. (Ability)
4. It still amazes me that I can be in Prague, London, and the Paramus Whole Foods all in one day. Travel and technology boggle my mind. (Life experiences)

In these examples, speakers use seemingly modest expressions---bewilderment at choosing between luxury cars, surprise at receiving romantic attention while dressed casually, confusion at academic success, and amazement at extensive travel---to implicitly boast of their wealth, physical attractiveness, ability, and privileged lifestyle. This demonstrates that, like Chinese *Fanersai*, English humblebrag permeates all aspects of daily life, with speakers deploying the speech act to display superiority across multiple domains.

5.2. Pragmatic Strategies

Scholarly research has established that people engage in humblebragging out of a desire to simultaneously gain admiration and likability from others, thus combining the acts of self-praise and modesty into a single speech act [12]. In English social media, speakers deploy specific pragmatic strategies to disguise their ostentatious intent. Drawing on prior research and inductive analysis of the English sub-corpus, this study categorizes the pragmatic strategies of English humblebrag into six core types: boasting disclaimer, narration, complaint, comparison, feigned humility, and orthographic emphasis [1].

5.2.1. Boasting Disclaimer

Boasting disclaimer is the most frequently deployed strategy in English humblebrag, involving the speaker opening the utterance with an explicit statement that they are not intending to boast, before proceeding to convey the ostentatious content. This strategy ostensibly signals the speaker's awareness of the inappropriateness of overt bragging, while allowing them to engage in implicit self-promotion. For example, I don't want to boast, but I can actually speak six languages. The speaker opens with the disclaimer "I don't want to boast" before highlighting his or her exceptional linguistic ability to speak six languages.

5.2.2. Narration

Parallel to its use in Chinese *Fanersai*, narration of English humblebrag involves the speaker recounting a seemingly surprising or mundane event, with ostentatious content embedded in the narrative. A representative example is: Wow, I can't believe that a

rubbishy little piece of mine has been published in a national newspaper! The speaker expresses astonishment at their "rubbishy little article" being published in a national newspaper, implicitly boasting of their writing ability and professional achievement.

5.2.3. Complaint

Complaint is the second most frequently deployed strategy in English humblebrag, involving the speaker expressing dissatisfaction with a privileged experience, with the complaint serving to highlight the exclusivity of that experience. For instance: Help! I can't believe the cakes in first class aren't sugar-free. I'll be gaining so much weight. The speaker complains about the lack of sugar-free cakes in first-class air travel, while emphasizing that first-class travel is a routine experience for him or her.

5.2.4. Comparison

The strategy of comparison in English humblebrag involves the speaker drawing a contrast between their own capabilities and those of others, framing their exceptional performance as a source of boredom or frustration while implicitly highlighting their superiority. A representative example is, Others have to do a day's work, but I finished in less than half a day, what should I do next, so boring ah! The speaker contrasts his or her work efficiency with that of his or her colleagues, boasting that he or she completes a full day's work in less than half a day, while framing this achievement as a source of boredom.

5.2.5. Feigned Humility

Feigned humility in English humblebrag involves the speaker downplaying their achievements, attributing success to luck or the error of others, while simultaneously drawing attention to their exceptional accomplishment. For example, I somehow made it to the singing competition final this year. Think the judges need their ears tested! The speaker claims to be confused about reaching the final of a singing competition, and jokes that the judges "need their ears tested", implicitly boasting of his or her vocal talent.

5.2.6. Orthographic Emphasis

Orthographic emphasis is a strategy unique to English humblebrag, enabled by the alphabetic nature of the English writing system, which allows speakers to use all capitalization to emphasize specific words or phrases. This strategy draws the hearer's attention to the ostentatious content of the utterance, while the surrounding text maintains a tone of self-deprecation. For instance: Watching my segment on FOX and cringing...listening to my voice on TV is SO painful. Do I really sound like such a valley girl?!?! The speaker uses all capitalization for "FOX" and "SO" to emphasize their appearance on a major national television network, while framing the experience as cringeworthy and unpleasant.

6. Contrastive Analysis and Underlying Motivations

Through the preceding empirical analysis of the corpus, it is evident that Chinese Fanersai and English humblebrag are direct functional counterparts, sharing core semantic and pragmatic features while exhibiting significant cross-cultural divergences in deployment patterns.

6.1. Commonalities and Shared Motivations

First, the two constructs exhibit highly convergent thematic distribution, with both predominantly centering on self-praise related to wealth, physical attractiveness, academic qualifications, professional ability, and life experiences. Posts in both linguistic contexts permeate all aspects of daily life, and speech acts are predominantly deployed by young adults, who use online social media anonymously to engage in strategic self-presentation. The global spread of individualistic, materialistic values that measure individual worth by wealth and social status has driven young people in both contexts to

aspire to cultural markers of success, with online social media spaces becoming the primary venue for idealized self-presentation. The partial anonymity of social platforms enables users to idealize their social capital, including real-life identity, status, wealth, and educational attainment, in an attempt to reconstruct their self-image, with Fanersai/humblebrag serving as a core discursive strategy for this idealized self-presentation.

Second, both Fanersai and humblebrag function as linguistic memes that have spread rapidly across online communities. The speech act is easily recognizable, has a simple production formula, and is highly adaptable to diverse contexts, allowing it to evolve into a productive linguistic meme in both Chinese and English online spaces. Young people in both Eastern and Western societies are driven by a desire for novelty and cultural belonging, using internet buzzwords to display their digital cultural literacy and seek resonance with their peers. The speed, accessibility, and high transmissibility of modern online media have further amplified the spread of the speech act across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Third, the two constructs share four core pragmatic strategies: narration, complaint, comparison, and feigned humility, alongside the mixed use of multiple strategies. This convergence stems from a shared psychological motivation: speakers in both contexts are aware that overt self-praise threatens the hearer's positive face, increases social distance, and reduces the speaker's likability, and thus deploy these strategies to mitigate the interpersonal risks of self-promotion [11]. At the same time, the deployment of Fanersai/humblebrag is driven by the pursuit of self-politeness, which emphasizes the speaker's desire to protect and enhance their own positive face in social interaction [14]. Through the speech act, speakers can manage their positive social image, boost their self-esteem, gain a sense of superiority, and seek identity recognition from higher social groups, while maintaining a veneer of modesty and social appropriateness.

6.2. Divergences and Cross-Cultural Explanations

Despite the core commonalities, significant divergences emerge in the frequency of pragmatic strategy deployment, as well as culture-specific strategies unique to each linguistic context, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Contrast of Pragmatic Strategies of Fanersai and Humblebrag

Pragmatic Strategy	Chinese Fanersai	Chinese Fanersai	English Humblebrag	English Humblebrag
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Narration	44	36.67	15	12.50
Complaint	24	20.00	28	23.33
Comparison	9	7.50	7	5.83
Feigned Humility	20	16.67	5	4.17
Third-Party Endorsement	7	5.83	--	--
Help-Seeking	7	5.83	--	--
Boasting	--	--	35	29.17
Disclaimer				
Orthographic Emphasis	--	--	2	1.67
Mixed Strategies	9	7.50	28	23.33

Total	120	100	120	100
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As shown in Table 1, even for the shared core strategies, there are substantial disparities in deployment frequency. Most notably, narration is used in 36.67% of Chinese Fanersai posts, compared to only 12.50% of English humblebrag posts; feigned humility is deployed in 16.67% of Chinese posts, versus just 4.17% of English posts. Conversely, complaint is marginally more frequent in English humblebrag (23.33%) than in Chinese Fanersai (20.00%), and the mixed use of multiple strategies is far more prevalent in English posts (23.33%) than in Chinese posts (7.50%).

Furthermore, each construct has culture-specific pragmatic strategies: third-party perspective endorsement and help-seeking are unique to Chinese Fanersai, while boasting disclaimer and orthographic emphasis are exclusive to English humblebrag. These divergences can be explained by three core, interconnected factors: cross-cultural norms of politeness and modesty, divergent thinking patterns and communication styles, and systemic differences between the Chinese and English writing systems.

First, the significantly higher use of narration and feigned humility in Chinese Fanersai is deeply rooted in Confucian cultural norms, which prioritize modesty, self-effacement, and restraint in social interaction [10]. Even though Fanersai constitutes a form of implicit self-praise that runs counter to traditional Chinese modesty norms, Chinese speakers still rely heavily on understated narration and overt feigned humility to disguise their ostentatious intent, to align with cultural expectations of politeness and social appropriateness. The popularity of Fanersai in the Confucian-influenced Chinese context can also be explained by the self-politeness theory [14], which holds that speakers must balance the protection of the hearer's face with the enhancement of their own face in social interaction. Fanersai allows young Chinese speakers to pursue self-enhancement while maintaining adherence to cultural norms of modesty, a balance that explains its widespread appeal. Additional factors driving its spread include the anonymous nature of online spaces, the blurring of youth cultural boundaries between China and the West, and young people's propensity for novelty-seeking and herd behavior in digital spaces.

Second, the culture-specific strategies of the two constructs are shaped by cross-cultural differences in thinking patterns and communication styles. Chinese culture prioritizes indirect, high-context communication, with speakers avoiding direct self-promotion and relying on third-party endorsement to objectify their praise, and help-seeking to adopt a low stance that enhances the hearer's face, making the ostentation more socially acceptable. In contrast, Western culture prioritizes direct, low-context communication, with English speakers using explicit boasting disclaimers to openly acknowledge their self-promotion, a directness that reduces perceptions of insincerity. Research by Sezer et al. demonstrates that humblebragging reduces the speaker's likability and perceived sincerity, as it frames exceptional achievements as mundane; however, the directness of the boasting disclaimer strategy in English humblebrag mitigates this perceived insincerity, making the speech act more acceptable to the audience [12].

Finally, the unique orthographic emphasis strategy in English humblebrag is enabled by the systemic differences between the English alphabetic writing system and the Chinese logographic writing system. English allows for salient emphasis through all capitalization, a feature that does not exist in the Chinese writing system, enabling English speakers to draw attention to their ostentatious content while maintaining a veneer of self-deprecation in the rest of the utterance.

7. Conclusion

Fanersai and humblebrag are functional counterparts of speech acts in Chinese and English online social media, both serving to display the speaker's sense of superiority through implicit, ostensibly modest utterances. The superiority conveyed may stem from wealth, social status, academic qualifications, professional ability, and other personal attributes, meaning that both speech acts permeate all aspects of daily life. With their rapid

spread and creative adaptation online, Fanersai/humblebrag has evolved from a form of strategic self-promotion into a discursive device for humor, satire, and banter in both linguistic contexts.

This study makes two core contributions to existing scholarship. Theoretically, it provides the first systematic, empirically grounded contrastive analysis of Chinese Fanersai and English humblebrag, advancing scholarly understanding of the speech act in cross-cultural online contexts and extending the application of speech act theory, politeness theory, and self-politeness theory to digital discourse. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights into cross-cultural online communication and highlight the need for restrained use of Fanersai on Chinese online social media. While it is unobjectionable for young people to use this subtle, indirect speech act for humorous banter and self-presentation, excessive or exaggerated deployment of Fanersai is likely to incur aversion and resentment from the audience. For this reason, young Chinese users should exercise restraint in their use of Fanersai, deploying it in moderation and centering humor and banter as its core function.

This study has several limitations that point to fruitful directions for future research. First, the corpus size is relatively modest, and future studies can expand the corpus to include more social media platforms (e.g., Rednote, Instagram, TikTok) and a more diverse range of users across age groups. Second, this study focuses on the production of the Fanersai/humblebrag speech act, and future research can examine the reception and interpretation of the speech act from the perspective of the hearer, across different cultural and demographic contexts. Finally, future studies can explore the diachronic evolution of the speech act, tracking changes in its deployment patterns and social functions over time in both Chinese and English online spaces.

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