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Multimodal Refusal and Response to Refusal of Chinese-Speaking Children: A Comparative Case Study

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Abstract: As a complex and dynamic phenomenon, multimodal discourse has gained increasing attention in various fields. One common type of multimodal act among children is multimodal refusal, which involves a communicative act of rejecting an offer, request, or invitation using multimodal semiotic resources such as verbal languages, gestures and body movements, etc. Usually, a refusal is followed by a response to it. The analysis of children's refusal and their responses to refusal can shed light on the ways in which they manage social relationships and interpersonal dynamics in their interactions. Choosing Chinese-speaking children's acts of multimodal refusal on one hand and their responses to refusal on the other hand as its research object, this paper aims to examine and systematically reveal the representational and interactional characteristics of such discourse. A naturally occurred corpus of 100 videos with a length of 120.24 minutes is collected and analyzed, on the basis of which the modal representation, modal interaction and multimodal graduation characteristics of Chinese-speaking children's multimodal refusal-response acts in the early school age are thoroughly analyzed and compared guided by Systemic Functional Grammar and Appraisal Theory. It is found that 62% of the refusal acts are caused by acts of request, and 68% of the children would use multiple modes to implement acts of refusal. Children's multimodal refusal-response acts has the highest frequency of modal synergy, and some children would have strong emotional reactions after being refused. It is suggested that, children's multimodal refusal-response acts should be concerned and valued by researchers, educators and children's parents.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Chinese-Speaking Children, Refusal-Response Acts, Appraisal

1. Introduction

Multimodal discourse refers to the communication that involves more than one mode of semiotic representation, including but not limited to, written or spoken language, images, sounds, gestures, and other forms of nonverbal communication. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001: 20) define multimodality as "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a single text or discourse" [14]. As a complex and dynamic phenomenon, multimodal discourse has gained increasing attention in various fields, including linguistics, communication studies, and education, etc. As such, it is important for elementary school educators and parents to pay attention to and value children's multimodal communication competence and their multimodal acts. One common type of multimodal act among children is multimodal refusal, which involves a communicative act of rejecting an offer, request, or invitation using multimodal semiotic resources. In fact, refusal can take different forms, both verbally and non-verbally, and can be expressed explicitly or implicitly, depending on the context and intentions of children as interlocutors. Usually, a refusal is followed by a response to it. Wenar (1982) posits that refusal can aid children in practicing their ability to control their social environment [29]. Therefore, the analysis of children's refusal and their responses to refusal can shed light on the ways in which they manage social relationships and interpersonal dynamics in their interactions.

Choosing Chinese-speaking children's acts of multimodal refusal on one hand and their responses to refusal on the other hand as its research object, this paper aims to examine and systematically reveal the representational and interactional

characteristics of such discourse based on a collection and annotation of 100-video corpus of naturally occurred conversation with Chinese-speaking children aged 3-7 as part of the interlocutors. The similarities and differences between children's acts of multimodal refusal on one hand and their acts of responses to refusal on the other hand with regard to the multimodal representation, multimodal interaction and multimodal graduation are analyzed in the hope of providing elementary school educators and parents with guidance on how to consciously encourage children to refuse and respond to refusal through multimodal semiotic resources that already become available to their ages so as to facilitate smooth interaction with adults and their peers. This study also endeavors to offer useful linguistic support for family education and school education.

2. Literature Review

Refusal is defined as an act of saying or showing that you will not do, give or accept something (Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 2009) [20]. It is often characterized as the "unexpected second part" (Liu & Li, 1999: 24) in an ongoing communication, which implicates the complexity of refusal as a discourse act [16]. According to Systemic Functional Grammar, the meaning of refusal can be represented with the use of different semiotic signs or in other words, the acts of refusal can be conducted via different semiotic resources. While linguistic refusal such as the use of negative words and negative sentential structures is usually common for both adults and children, non-verbal refusal and multimodal refusal are not rare. In this paper, a multimodal act of refusal is defined as a communicative social act of rejecting an offer, a request, or an invitation in the process of which multimodal semiotic resources are used.

Researchers in linguistics have paid their attention on the study of refusal from different perspectives. Originally, studies mainly focused on the acquisition of refusal in different languages. For example, Beebe & Takahashi (1987) proved that pragmatic transfer of refusal is a universal phenomenon that is not limited to a specific stage of second language acquisition [3]. Beebe, L., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990) showed that pragmatic transfer impacts in at least three aspects: the order, frequency, and content of the semantic forms for choosing refusals [2].

Subsequent research began to focus on the analysis of refusal discourse strategies. For instance, Liao & Bresnahan (1996: 706) identified 24 refusal strategies in Chinese, such as offering an alternative, avoidance and criticism [15]. Turnbull & Saxton (1997) also emphasized that the selection of refusal strategies is significantly correlated with social psychological factors [22]. In comparative studies of Chinese and American refusal strategies, Ma (1998, 2000) identified and provided several viable refusal strategies for English and Chinese learners [17, 18]. Wang (2001, 2004) demonstrated the influences of social power, social distance and the degree of difficulty on refusal acts in Chinese and English [23, 24]. Hong & Chen (2011) compared specific strategies used by Chinese and American spokespeople to refuse reporters' questions during regular press conferences. Their findings showed that both Chinese and American spokespeople mainly used indirect strategies such as excuse of explanation, offering an alternative and avoid with humor [12]. Similarly, Guo (2012) identified similarities and differences in the use of refusal strategies between English and Chinese speakers, reflecting differences in value orientation and social and cultural factors between the East and the West [9]. The comparative study in Jiang (2015) showed that American English users preferred direct refusal strategies and positive emotions compared to Chinese users [13].

In recent literature, researchers began to investigate children's acts of refusal from the perspective of discourse and multimodal discourse analysis. Guidetti (2000) found that by the age of two, children can recognize two types of speech acts, and use different forms such as gestures or words to express consent and refusal. Later it is proven that children aged 1-4 mainly use oral expression to communicate, but they also employ gestures to convey affirmation or negation (Guidetti, 2005) [7, 8]. Beaupoil (2013) pointed out that children use postures and gestures to express their refusal before acquiring verbal language. Even after they acquire a more complex language competence, they continue to express refusal by combining verbal language together with gesture and posture [1]. As is found, multimodal communication plays an important role in the early stages of children's communication and is often used to express their refusals in various situations. Wang & Wang (2019) made a classification of children's multimodal refusal acts and undertook a detailed analysis of the multimodal representational characteristics of Chinese speaking children's refusal, taking into account parents' behaviors as contextual factors that may have contributed to such refusal [28].

Theoretically speaking, previous studies mainly built theoretical frameworks based on theories like Speech Act Theory, Face and Politeness, Cooperative Principle, and Systemic Functional Grammar etc., few research are undertaken from the perspective of Appraisal Theory. Appraisal Theory is a framework in linguistics that explores how language is used to evaluate and express attitudes, emotions, and opinions. Developed by Martin & White (2005), it provides a means of analyzing language in context and revealing the speaker's stance towards the topic at hand [19]. Appraisal Theory identifies three main categories of evaluation: attitude, which concerns the speaker's personal evaluation; engagement, which concerns the speaker's degree of involvement in the evaluation; and graduation, which concerns the degree of intensity of the evaluation (Martin & White, 2005) [20].

In recent years, there have been numerous studies that have applied Appraisal Theory to multimodal discourse analysis. The combination of these two approaches has been shown to provide a deeper understanding of how different modes of communication work together to create meaning and express attitudes and emotions. Researchers have applied Appraisal Theory to analyze various types of multimodal discourse, such

as political speeches, advertising, social media, and film (Chen, 2008; Feng & Qi, 2014; Shi & Wang, 2015; Wang & Xue, 2016; Wang & Qu, 2020) [4, 6, 21, 25, 27]. These studies have demonstrated the usefulness of the framework in identifying discourse features across different modalities, and in revealing the complex ways in which these features interact to represent meaning and communicate attitudes.

At present, there hasn't been a lot of investigation of children's discourse through the lens of Appraisal Theory. Painter (2003) conducted a case study of children's language development from 9 months to 4 years of age, tracking the evolution of two children's semiotic resources for expressing emotional, moral, and other evaluations, and discovered that appreciation is the most elaborate domain of attitude with respect to the two children's early lexical repertoire [5]. Xiang (2015) found that children's discourse contains a considerable number of attitude resources, with affect resources accounting for the largest proportion, appreciation resources coming in second, and judgment resources being the least frequent. The author posits that the distribution of these resources is likely influenced by variations in children's linguistic and cognitive abilities [30].

Literature review above shows that, (1) existent studies on acts of refusal focus on refusal strategies but lack sufficient attention to the representational and interactional characteristics of children's acts of refusal; (2) Appraisal Theory is appliable to the study of refusal as multimodal discourse. Considering this, this paper aims to examine and systematically reveal the representational and interactional characteristics of Chinese-speaking children's acts of multimodal refusal on one hand and their responses to refusal on the other hand from a combined perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar and Appraisal Theory, especially the latter's graduation system, hoping to promote research on children's multimodal discourse in terms of both analytical framework and corpus analysis.

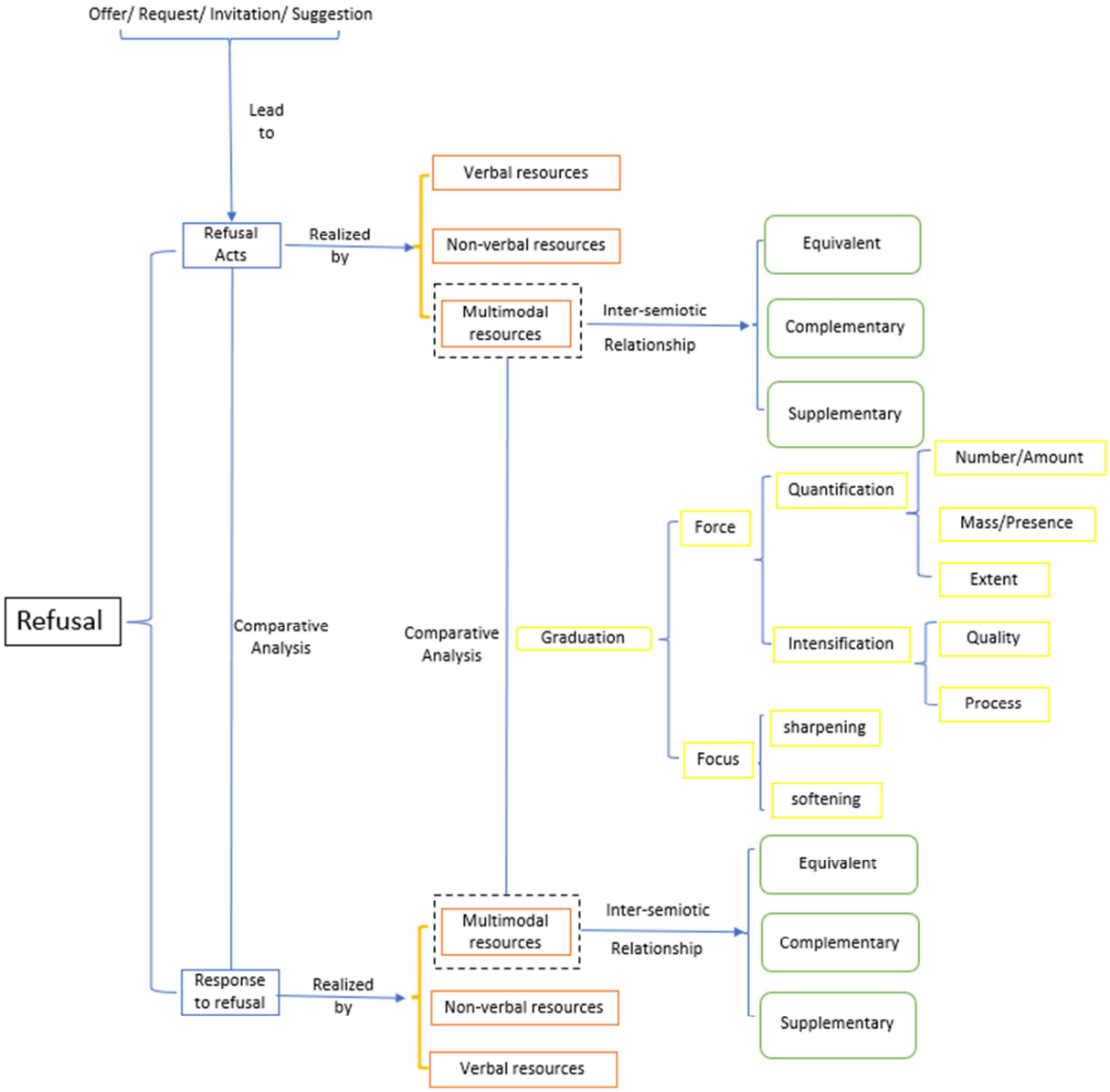

Figure 1. *Analytical framework of Chinese-speaking children's refusal and response to refusal.*

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the idea of representation in Systematic Functional Grammar and the subsystem of graduation in Appraisal Theory to build its theoretical framework. In fact, Halliday extended Malinowski's view that the language system originates from the function of children's language and identified seven functions during children's language development (Halliday, 1978) [11]. Therefore, it can be said that Systemic Functional Grammar and Appraisal Theory has a natural advantage in analyzing children's language. Briefly speaking, representation refers to how language is used to represent aspects of the world. It is one of the three meta-functions of language use, along with the interpersonal and textual meta-functions (Halliday, 2014) [10]. In multimodal discourse analysis, representation is concerned with the way that verbal and nonverbal resources is used to create and communicate meanings about the world. In this paper, it is used to analyze how the acts of refusal and response to the acts of refusal is represented via multimodal discourse.

In Appraisal Theory, Attitude system refers to the speaker's personal feelings, whether they are positive, negative or neutral. Engagement system is used to evaluate how the speaker is positioning themselves in relation to their audience or the topic they are discussing. Finally, Graduation system is used to grade or intensify the speaker's feelings, making them stronger or weaker. In this paper, refusal is regarded as a negative attitude toward an offer, a request, or an invitation, making Appraisal Theory appliable in analyzing refusal.

In short, this paper aims to investigate how the representation, the multimodal interaction and the graduation of Chinese-speaking children's act of refusal differ from their response to refusal using the following framework. As is shown, three types of modalities are categorized, that is, verbal, nonverbal, and multimodal resources, and the multimodal interactional relationship are classified into three types, which are equivalent, complementary, and supplementary relationships (Wang & Xue, 2020: 25) [26]. As for the graduation of refusal and its response, both the aspects of force and focus are considered in the framework.

4. Corpus Collection and Annotation

The present study investigates the phenomenon of Chinese-speaking children's refusal in response to speech acts such as invitations, requests, suggestions, and orders, as well as their response to refusal. The corpus is drawn from three Chinese children's naturally occurred communication, which include the interactions with their classmates, teachers, and parents during academic and personal activities. They are 4 years old, 5 years old and 7 years old respectively. A total of 120.24 minutes of video corpus was thoroughly and repeatedly examined, and 50 instances of children's multimodal refusal acts and 50 instances of response acts were randomly sampled. The multimodal analysis software *Elan* 6.4 was employed for annotation and transcription of the corpus. Statistical analysis was conducted to find answers to the three research questions above and tables are drawn.

5. Results and Discussion

Through the annotation and statistics of the collected video corpus, it is proven that the acts of refusal and the response to refusal by the three Chinese-speaking children are realized through verbal resources, nonverbal resources or multimodal resources, among which there are three kinds of modal interaction relations in multimodal resources, namely equivalent, complementary and supplementary, and they tend to make both direct refusal and indirect refusal. Next, the modal representation and modal interaction characteristics as well the analysis of graduation will be explained respectively.

5.1. A comparative Analysis of Representational Characteristics

Table 1. *Representational characteristics of children's acts of refusal.*

	Verbal	Nonverbal	Multimodal	Total	Percentages
Direct refusal	9	4	22	35	70%
Indirect refusal	3	0	12	15	30%
Total	12	4	34	50	
Percentages	24%	8%	68%		1

As is revealed by Table 1, out of 50 instances of refusals, 12 were communicated using language (24%), 4 through non-language means (8%), and 34 via a combination of multimodal resources (68%). Notably, 70% of the children employed a direct refusal strategy, whereas the remaining 30% opted for an indirect strategy. The findings indicate that Chinese-speaking children's acts of refusal aligns with their developmental stage. Unlike adults, who frequently employ indirect strategies while refusing, children tend to use direct strategies since they have not fully internalized the norms governing social communication.

Example 1:
Child 1: Let's be good friends.
(*Zan lia zuo hao peng you ba.*)
Child 2: No.
(*Bu.*)

Example 1 illustrates a case where a request instigated an act of refusal from the child, who employed the negative word 不"*bu*" to directly communicate her refusal. In addition to this linguistic strategy, children also utilize verbs beginning with "*bu*", such as 不用"*bu yong*", 不要"*bu yao*", 不可以"*bu ke yi*", 不用了"*bu yong le*" and 不行"*bu xing*" to verbalize

their refusals. Beyond explicitly expressing their refusal through language, children also convey refusals through nonverbal means, such as gestures and body postures. For instance, in Example 2, the acts of request and refusal were exclusively represented through nonverbal resources. While Child 2 did not verbally express her refusal, her actions of retracting her hand and turning around clearly indicated her non-acceptance of Child 1's request.

Example 2:

Child 1: Posture: approach Child 2 and hold her hand with the right hand.

Child 2: Posture: retract her hand and turn around away from Child 1.

In addition to using verbal or non-verbal resources alone to express refusal, 68% of the children in the corpus use verbal and non-verbal resources together, that is, multimodal resources to conduct refusal.

Example 3:

Child 1: Monitor, you can't just sit back and watch us being bullied by Wang Congcong like this.

(*Ban zhang, ni kan zan men bei Wang congcong qi fu cheng zhe yang, ni ye bu neng zuo shi bu li a*.)

Child 2: Since that Wang Congcong is here, he is a member of our class. Everyone should unite and be friendly. If you want to split up, don't blame me for telling Miss Wei.

(*Wang Congcong ji ran lai le, jiu shi ban li de yi fen zi, da jia yao tuan jie you ai, ni men yao shi xiang gao fen lie, jiu bie guai wo gao su wei lao shi*.)

Gesture: Point to Child 1 with the index finger of left hand; and stare at him.

In Example 3, Child 1 sought the aid of the class monitor, Child 2, due to a conflict with Wang Congcong. Child 2 refused the request indirectly by providing objective justifications: emphasizing the importance of maintaining a unified and amicable classroom atmosphere, and ultimately issuing a warning with the assistance of external authority. Although Child 2 refrained from explicitly uttering negative words to refuse Child 1's request, her non-acceptance was clearly conveyed. Moreover, Child 2's refusal was grounded in a negative social permission assessment of Child 1's speech act. As one of the class regulations formulated by Miss Wei stipulated that students ought to cultivate unity and friendliness, Child 2 deemed Child 1's actions and ideas as discordant with these values. Consequently, to uphold the general harmony of the class, Child 1's request was refused.

Table 2. *Representational characteristics of children's response to refusal.*

Response	Verbal	Nonverbal	Multimodal	Total
Cases	3	21	26	50
Percentages	6%	42%	52%	1

Table 2 indicates that in contrast to the refusal acts, children exhibit a greater propensity to utilize nonverbal resources than verbal resources when responding to refusal, with the former accounting for 42% of the total. Moreover, the employment of multimodal resources in acts of response is comparatively lower than that in acts of refusal.

Example 4:

Child: Dad, don't destroy it.

(*Ba ba ni bie chai ya.*)

Posture: hug his dad.

Father: Go, go, go away.

(*Qu qu qu qu.*)

Child: Posture: continue to hold his dad.

In Example 4, the interactive participants are a parent and his child. The child crafted an alarm clock using gloves. However, the following morning, he sustained an injury due to the gloves. In response, his father grew furious and proceeded to disassemble the alarm clock. The child leaned forward onto his father's back in an attempt to impede his actions. Despite the child's efforts, his father remained resolute in his decision. Subsequently, the child proceeded to embrace his father and reiterated his request through bodily movements, constituting a positive response following an initial refusal.

Example 5:

Child 1: Can you hold this for me?

(*Neng bang wo na yi xia zhe ge ma?*)

Child 2: No

(*Bu xing.*)

Child 1: Huh! I won't play with you anymore.

(*Heng! Wo zai ye bu gen ni wan le*.)

In Example 5, Child 1 sought assistance from Child 2 in using the shovel. However, after being refused, Child 1 expressed his discontent which is a verbal response.

Example 6:

Child 1: Why are you all sitting here? Why don't we play together?

(*Ni men zen me dou zai zhe gan zuo zhe, yao bu yi qi wan?*)

Child 2& Child 3: No, no.

(*Bu xing le, bu xing le.*)

Child 1: Why don't we have a brain teaser?

(*Yao bu, yao bu wo men wan nao jin ji zhuan wan ba?*)

Example 6 involves Child 1 extending an invitation to Children 2 and 3 to play together. However, following the direct use of negative words 不行了"*bu xing le*" by Children 2 and 3 to refuse the invitation, their subsequent actions of reclining on the table and exhibiting refusal behaviors expressed their negative emotional response towards Child 1's proposal and their unwillingness to comply. In response, Child 1 altered the content of the invitation and extended it to them once more, constituting a positive response subsequent to the initial refusal.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that following a refusal, Chinese-speaking children tend to employ a range of nonverbal resources including deep breathing, frowning, lowering their heads, walking away, pouting, becoming angry, or crying in order to express negative emotions or accept the refusal calmly by standing quietly or walking away to do their own activities.

Through a comprehensive analysis and comparison of the representational features of children's multimodal acts of refusal and response to refusal, a notable finding emerges in regard to the Chinese-speaking children's patterns of communication. Specifically, the corpus reveals a shared

tendency amongst the children to utilize a high frequency of multimodal resources in both acts, constituting 68% and 52% of the cases respectively. Notably, a distinction is also observed: while verbal resources alone constitute the preferred modality for conveying refusals, representing 24% of cases, nonverbal resources are more commonly utilized in response to refusals, comprising 42% of cases.

5.2. A comparative Analysis of Interactional Characteristics

The inter-semiotic relationship of children's multimodal acts of refusal is listed as follows:

Table 3. *Interactional characteristics of children's acts of refusal.*

Relationships	Equivalent	Complementary	Supplementary	Total
Cases	19	6	9	34
Percentages	56%	18%	26%	1

Table 3 illustrates the patterns of modal interactions observed in Chinese-speaking children aged 3-7, which include equivalent, complementary, and supplementary relationships. The most frequently observed pattern is equivalent relationship, in which children use both verbal and nonverbal resources simultaneously to express their refusal, accounting for 56% of the total cases. Supplementary relationship is the second most common pattern, accounting for 26% of cases, while complementarity is the least common, accounting for 18%.

Example 7:

Child 1: Smell it. I'll give you one but not anymore, okay?

(*Ni wen yi wen, hao wen bu? Wo gei ni yi ge jiu bu gei ni le, hao bu?*)

Child 2: No, no.

(Bu xing, bu xing.)

Gesture: swing his right hand from one side to the other.

I promised my father that I would not do that.

(*Wo da ying le ba ba de shi qing de zuo dao*.)

Example 7 depicts a scenario wherein Child 1 proffered a candy to Child 2, which was met with refusal by the latter using the expression 不行，不行 "*bu xing, bu xing*." Additionally, Child 2 accompanied the verbal response with a lateral swing gesture of the right hand, which was used at the same time and further reinforced the rejection of Child 1's offer. It is noteworthy that the verbal and gestural modalities in this context exhibit an equivalent association.

Example 8:

Child 1: You look exactly like Detective Gao Ming in this suit. Let me try it on.

(*Ni chuan shang zhe tao xi zhuang, he gaoming zhen tan yi mu yi yang, gei wo chuan chuan.*)

Child 2: Posture: draw back.

Gesture: point to Child 1.

I warn you, no matter how naughty you are, this suit can't be moved. If you delay the wedding, your mother will punish you.

(*Wo jing gao ni a, ni zai zen me tiao pi, zhe tao yi fu ke dou shi dong bu de de, yao shi yin wei ni dan wu le hun li, ni ma fei de ba ni pi gu da kai hua.*)

Example 8 shows the act of Child 2 trying on the attire intended for his aunt's nuptials. Upon witnessing this, Child 1, who happens to be the younger brother, requested to try on the said garments. Child 2 took a step back and directed his finger towards his younger sibling, and then utilized the verbs 警告 "*jing gao*" and 动不得 "*dong bu de*" to convey refusal. In this instance, Child 2 employed multimodal resources to decline the entreaty, and the interface between the different modalities exhibited a complementary relationship as the combination of the gesture of pointing and verbal verbs together completed an act of refusal in this case.

Example 9:

Child 1: How about lending me some money? Are we still good brothers?

(*Jie wo dian qian bei, wo men shi bu shi hao xiong di*?)

Child 2: No.

(*Bu shi.*)

Posture: get up and walk away.

Example 9 entails a case in which Child 1 sought to obtain a loan from Child 2 and consequently posed a query aimed at cementing their relationship. Child 2 seemingly repudiated their friendship, but in actuality declined Child 1's solicitation by saying 不是"*bu shi*" and subsequently vacating his seat. In this instance, the modal interaction between the verbal and non-verbal resources displayed a supplementary correlation because the posture of getting up and walking away happens after the completion of the verbal refusal 不是"*bu shi*" and supplementarily enhances the force of refusal.

The inter-semiotic relationship of response to refusal is listed as follows:

Table 4. *Interactional characteristics of children's multimodal response to refusal.*

Relationships	Equivalent	Complementary	Supplementary	Total
Cases	12	10	4	26
Percentages	46%	39%	15%	1

As is shown in Table 4, it is evident that the modal interaction exhibiting an equivalent relationship in children's multimodal response acts registers the highest frequency, accounting for 46%. In contrast to the multimodal acts of refusal, the modal interaction of complementary relationship in response acts is observed to be the least frequent, constituting a mere 15%.

Example 10:

Child 1: Let's sit here together.

(*Wo men yi qi zuo zhe li ba, yi qi zuo.*)

Gesture: point to the chair where he is sitting.

Child 2: This is too small.

(*Zhe ge tai xiao le.*)

Child 1: Posture: move back.

Let me give you bigger space.

(*Na wo gei ni da yi dian de wei zi ba.*)

In Example 10, Child 1 extended an invitation to Child 2 to occupy the chair. Child 2 declined the invitation indirectly, citing the inadequacy of the seat's size, without resorting to explicit refusal verbiage. Following the refusal, Child 1 retraced his steps and issued a renewed invitation to Child 2.

In this instance, Child 1's response was manifested through a fusion of verbal and non-verbal resources, with the interface between the different modes evincing a complementary relationship.

Example 11:

Child 1: I want this, and you buy this for me.

(*Wo yao zhe ge, ni men gei wo mai zhe ge*.)

Gesture: point to the toy.

Child 2 & Child 3: No.

(*Bu xing*.)

Child 1: Somebody, someone is abusing child! Come and see, someone is abusing child.

(*Lai ren a, you ren nue dai er tong la, kuai lai ren kuai lai kan a, nue dai er tong la*.)

Posture: rolling on the ground.

Example 11 features Child 1 issuing directives to other two children to purchase toys on his behalf, only to be met with refusal from Child 2 and Child 3, who employed the expression 不行"*bu xing*" to convey their refusal. Subsequent to the rebuff, Child 1 resorted to an outburst of frustration, exhibiting behavior such as lying on the ground, rolling, and vociferating in the meantime. In this example, Child 1's response to refusal was characterized by an interaction between different modalities that are equivalent in nature.

Example 12:

Child 1: How about giving this dinosaur (toy) to others?

(*Yao bu yao ba zhe ge kong long gei bie ren?*)

Child 2: No.

(*Bu yao*.)

Child 1: No? I'll re-elect.

(*Bu yao a, wo chong xin xuan*.)

Posture: stand up to pick out other toys.

In Example 12, a sister-brother duo is engaged in selecting toys to be donated to children from underprivileged backgrounds. The elder sister intended to include a toy dinosaur in the donations, but her younger brother refused. The elder sister accedes to her brother's wishes and responds positively by promising to choose a different toy. Additionally, she reinforces her verbal commitment by promptly standing up to select a new toy, using her posture and body movements as supplementary modes of communication.

To conclude, in the context of Chinese-speaking children's multimodal acts of refusal and response to refusal, it is apparent that the frequency of equivalent relationships between different modes is the highest. In other words, the majority of children utilize both verbal and non-verbal modes simultaneously to convey their refusals and responses. Furthermore, in multimodal acts of refusal, the frequency of supplemental relationships is the second highest, with children expressing their refusal verbally first and then reinforcing it with gestures or body postures. Conversely, the frequency of complementary relationships is the lowest. What is different is that in multimodal responses to refusals, the frequency of complementary relationships is the second highest, with children opting to make alternative requests or protests through their actions.

5.3. A Qualitative Analysis of Graduation

Similarly, the graduation of Chinese-speaking children's multimodal refusal and response to refusal are also realized through the combination of verbal and nonverbal modes.

Example 13:

Father: Do me a favor and go home, OK?

(*Gei ba ba ge mian zi, hui jia, hao bu hao*.)

Child 1: No.

(*Bu xing.)*

Posture: turn around.

I won't go back if my mom let "Mouse" in.

(Wo ma bu rang hao zi jin men, wo jue dui bu hui qu.)

In Example 13, Child 1 and his friends found a stray dog and brought it home, naming it "Mouse". However, upon discovering the dog, the child's mother drove it out of the house, leading the child to run away with the puppy. The child's father later found him and advised him to return home. In response to his father's advice, the child employed the direct negative word 不行 "*bu xing*" to explicitly express his refusal, while simultaneously gesturing by turning his head. Through the use of multimodal acts, the child implemented the refusal act, and the interaction between the modes was equivalent. The differential resources used in this act of refusal were strengthened through the combination of verbal and nonverbal resources. When refusing, the child utilized the words 不行 "*bu xing*" and the adverb 绝对 "*jue dui*" in language, which function as a reinforcement of quality with a sharp focus. Additionally, the act of turning his head also strengthened the intensity of the child's desire to refuse.

Example 14:

Child 1: I beg you, XX, run for the position of class monitor.

(*Wo qiu ni le, XX, ni qu jing xuan ban zhang ba*.)

Gesture: shake Child 2's hand.

Child 2: I really have a lot of books to read and a lot of knowledge to learn and have no time to be a monitor.

(*Wo zhen de hai you hao duo shu mei kan, hao duo zhi shi yao xue ne, mei shi jian dang ban zhang*.)

Posture: withdraw his hand and keep his head down and read.

In Example 14, Child 1 requested Child 2 to run for the monitor to prevent the re-election of an annoying monitor. Child 2 indirectly refused Child 1's request by citing the importance of "reading and learning knowledge", while simultaneously keeping his head down and continuing to read. The multimodal nature of Child 2's refusal was complementary in nature, with verbal and nonverbal modes interacting to convey the refusal. The linguistic resources employed by Child 2 during the refusal, such as 好多书 "*hao duo shu*" and 好多知识 "*hao duo zhi shi*", strengthen the process of graduation resources. Additionally, Child 2 utilized repetition to further emphasize his point. Notably, Child 2 distinguished between countable and uncountable nouns by quantifying them separately, with "book" being a countable noun and "knowledge" being an uncountable noun. Furthermore, Child 2's nonverbal behavior was gentle, with

softening focus, while utilizing an indirect refusal strategy.

Example 15:

Child 1: Mom, give me the garbage truck.

(*Ma ma gei wo la ji che*.)

Child 2: No, I can only give it to you if you behave well.

(*bu xing, yin wei zhe bu shi xiang gei jiu gei de, shi biao xian hao cai neng gei de*.)

Child 1: Then how to behave well?

(*Zen me cai neng biao xian hao ne?*)

Posture: step forward and put his arms together.

In Example 15, two children engage in a role-playing game, with Child 1 assuming the role of a child and Child 2 playing the child's mother. Child 1 expresses a desire to obtain the garbage truck toy in Child 2's possession and requests it from her. However, Child 2 refuses the request with the word 不行 "*bu xing*" and provides the reason that the toy can only be obtained through good behavior. In response to this refusal, Child 1 employs an active fighting strategy, inquiring about the criteria for good behavior, and taking a step forward to ask again. Child 1's response is realized through the use of 才能 "*cai neng*" in language, which reinforces modality in graduation resources. By actively seeking reasons and adjusting his approach after being refused, Child 1 endeavors to achieve his objective.

Example 16:

Child 1: Can you help me with it?

(*Neng bang wo ti yi xia ma?*)

Child 2: What do you want to do?

(*Ni xiang gan ma?*)

Child 1: I want to put it there.

(*Wo xiang fang dao na li.*)

Child 2: No.

(*Bu neng.*)

Child 1: I hate you; I won't play with you.

(*Ni tao ye, wo bu gen ni men wan le.*)

Posture: kick the bucket, turn around and run away.

In Example 16, the children were engaged in preparations for their picnic at noon. Assigned tasks included mixing mud and washing rice. Child 1 required assistance with moving a heavy bucket to another location and requested help from Child 2 but was refused. Child 1 expressed her dissatisfaction through a combination of verbal and non-verbal resources, stating "I hate you; I won't play with you" verbally and then kicking the bucket and running away. The child utilized multimodal resources to convey her emotions effectively, with the combination of verbal and nonverbal modes strengthening and focusing the graduation resources on her response. Specifically, the use of the word "hate" in the verbal mode is an enhancement of quality with a sharp focus, and the physical actions of kicking the bucket and running away powerfully also conveyed the child's dissatisfaction after being refused.

6. Conclusion

The paper provides valuable insights into the characteristics of representation, interaction and graduation of multimodal acts of refusal and response to refusal of Chinese-speaking children aged 4-7. It shows that children at this age can use both verbal and non-verbal resources to carry out multimodal refusal. The majority of children produce multimodal acts of refusal, using the verb structure starting with 不 "*bu*" to carry out verbal refusal, and most of them adopt the direct refusal strategy.

In response to refusal, children use non-verbal resources more frequently than verbal resources, and the frequency of children using verbal resources and non-verbal resources equivalently to express refusal is the highest. The equivalent relationship of modes in children's multimodal acts of response is also the highest.

In acts of refusal and response to refusal, children usually combine and make use of different verbal and non-verbal resources such as different adverbs, verbs or body postures to adjust the strength of their refusal or response to refusal. In other words, the graduation of Chinese-speaking children's acts of refusal and response to refusal are also realized in a multimodal way.

Based on the main research findings above, this paper highlights the importance of understanding children's multimodal realization of refusal, hoping to rise parents' awareness of encouraging children to refuse and respond to refuse using all kinds of semiotic resources when they encounter things they do not want to accept, so as to cultivate children's multiliteracy, especially the multimodal competence of refusal.

However, the paper has some limitations. For example, gender differences are not taken into account, and the corpus may not large enough. Future research should aim to improve these limitations and provide more comprehensive insights into the multimodal representational and interactional characteristics of children's multimodal acts of refusal and response to refusal, as well as the graduation studies.

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