

DOCTORAL THESIS

Revealing Holism within the Communicative Patterns in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Consultations: An Interactional Linguistic Approach

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Abstract

In recent years, doctor-patient interaction in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) consultations has attracted increasing attention, with specific reference to the nature of such communication and the relationship between the doctor and the patient in the TCM context. Highly influenced by ancient Chinese philosophy, TCM is unique in its exemplification of Chinese wisdom, in particular the approach of “holism”. This and related concepts are highly valued in the TCM theory and have been proposed in previous studies as possible reasons for the satisfying doctor-patient relationship in TCM consultations. However, the theoretical fundamentals that underline the features and patterns of communication in the context of TCM and how TCM concepts might influence doctor-patient interactions as well as doctor-patient relationships remains under investigated.

Accordingly, the present study focuses on doctor-patient interactions in TCM consultations, exploring the significant concepts within doctor-patient communication driving the patient-oriented and power-balanced doctor-patient relationship. Adopting a broadly interactional linguistics approach, this study investigates the communicative patterns and the doctor-patient relationships involved in TCM consultations; audio recordings are analysed by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. It is observed in the results of the present study that TCM doctors and patients communicate in a particular shared *voice*, labelled as the *voice of TCM* (VOTCM), in which the concept “holism” is realized through, with explanation and socializing talk

occurring frequently to achieve a successful doctor-patient communication in the TCM context. The statistical analysis of numeral data has validated the finding that the doctor-patient relationship in TCM consultations is patient-oriented and more power-balanced. The research results of this study indicate that the TCM doctors have in mind the concept “holism” when communicating with their patients, and that patients begin understanding this concept through the doctor-patient communication in TCM consultations. This study reveals important features of doctor-patient communication that the communicative style is relaxing and the relationship is more patient-oriented. This study may also help TCM students, both local and international, gain the communicative skills of TCM doctors and understand the cultural knowledge within TCM consultations to enable successful communication in the TCM context, leading to better cooperation of the patient for treatment.