Impoliteness in Negative Online Consumer Reviews: A Cross-Language Comparison

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Abstract—**Books are the ladder of human progress. Thanks to the development of the Internet, online book sales have become the mainstream way. However, the uncertainty of online sales always hurts consumers. As a platform for carrying human knowledge, online book sales should not hit the enthusiasm of knowledge consumers but should pay attention to their products and services. This study collects *Educated: A Mirror's book* reviews on Amazon.com and its Chinese version reviews on Douban.com (an online platform in China). By analyzing and comparing the negative reviews of Chinese and English reviewers, we found some of their similarities and differences in the impolite strategies, and last analyzed the possibility factors of producing such pragmatic phenomenon.**

Keywords—**educated, impoliteness, comparison, online consumer reviews**

I. INTRODUCTION

Politeness is the product of social relations. The earliest writings about politeness stretch back to the civilizations of Ancient Egypt, Greece, India, and China more than two and a half thousand years ago [1]. In the 1970s, politeness attracted the attention of pragmatics scholars. Based on this term, a few scholars have proposed many classic pragmatic theories, such as politeness principles, and face-threatening acts [2, 3]. Politeness has become an indispensable part of pragmatics. According to statistics, the articles about politeness began to be published in the 1970s and increased year by year. But impoliteness has attracted the attention of scholars since the 1990s, when only a few articles were published in the past two decades. Since the 1990s, the number of publications has increased year by year, but it is still significantly less than the articles about politeness [4].

However, impoliteness is as common as politeness in social life, not only do people in different languages have their impolite expressions, but even people in the same language have different impolite expressions in different regions. The reasons for different people's impoliteness towards the same object are not all the same. With the development of science and technology, communication online become faster and faster, people share with each other on various platforms. The review function gives people the ability to share their feelings with others.

Some book-sale and recommendation reading platforms support readers with the ability to review the books they bought or have read. In this study, the reviews on Douban.com in China were compared with that on Amazon.com. Although Douban.com is not a website specializing in selling books, it shares hyperlinks to many book sales platforms as a book recommendation website. The two sites are similar in the evaluation mechanism for they both have a 10-point scoring mechanism. Douban's reviews are positive, moderate, and negative reviews; Amazon's reviews are positive and negative reviews.

Therefore, this study takes the negative book reviews on Douban.com and Amazon.com as the object and analyzes its pragmatic phenomenon. Trying to look for the difference in the impoliteness of Chinese and foreign book reviewers, and to analyze the potential factors of the difference.

Research Questions:
1. To what extent do the impoliteness strategies differ in Chinese and English negative online consumer reviews?
2. To what extent do the main topics differ on which Chinese and English reviewers used impolite strategies?

This study is divided into six chapters, the first chapter is the introduction, the second chapter is the literature review, the third chapter is the methodology, the fourth chapter is the result analysis, the fifth chapter is the summary, and the sixth chapter is the discussion part.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Educated: A Mirror

Educated: A Mirror is the debut work of the American historian Tara Westover. Educated is an autobiographical novel that tells the story of a woman who never went to school before the age of 17 breaks through the cage of her family, and finally realizes her life counterattack through education and becomes her own story. In the process of her search for herself, she was constantly suppressed and defined, and finally through the help of others and her own family, love, and friends. Such a book that won nominated for multiple book awards also received some negative reviews, even though they accounted for less than 1% of book reviews.

Since 2019, many scholars in China have analyzed Educated's Chinese version from different perspectives. Liao Mengfan took "scars" and "redemption" as her starting point, she interpreted the artistic expression in the novel and excavated its innovative artistic techniques that are different from traditional literature [5]. Shen Xin and Wang Liming interpreted this novel by Foucault's theory of panorama, power, and survival aesthetics [6]. Huang Shuhai analyzed the different versions of the title from the perspective of reception theory [7]. So far, many scholars have analyzed the content and title of this work, but there has been no analysis of book reviews to analyze the focus of real readers' thoughts.

B. Online Review

Online Consumer Reviews (hereinafter OCRs) are important in the contemporary era of e-commerce. The public

often browse those reviews before purchasing these enchanting goods, especially those negative reviews. In this sense, OCRs play a growing significant role in influencing potential consumers and constructing brand reputation. OCRs, particularly the negative ones, might cause harm and could be catastrophic to short-term sales and long-standing brand reputation [8], and thus are worthy of in-depth exploration from multi-perspectives.

Until now, however, the focus in linguistic research on complaints and negative reviews was always on these platforms, Twitter, and Amazon [9, 10]. The research presented in this article builds on earlier linguistic studies on complaints and negative reviews like the research [10].

C. Impoliteness

Many foreign scholars have studied impolite pragmatics and subdivided them from different perspectives. Bousfield considered impoliteness as the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflicting verbal Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) that are purposefully delivered and proposed a model of impoliteness consisting of five strategies: bald-on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, and withhold politeness [11]. Culpeper argues that politeness and impoliteness are not at opposite ends of a simple unitary scale [12]. Culpeper defined impoliteness as a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts and emphasized that impoliteness was sustained by expectations, desires, and/or beliefs about social organization [13].

Scholars at home and abroad have conducted extensive research on cross-cultural and cross-linguistic impolite pragmatics. Culpeper examined conventionalized impolite formulae in English: insults, pointed criticisms, unpalatable questions and presuppositions, condescension, message enforcers, dismissals, silencers, threats, negative expressions (e.g., curses, ill-wishes) and their realization forms [13]. Zhu *et al.* compared the textual content of OCRs in business-to-consumer websites between the US and China. They found that Chinese OCRs tended to mention seller trustworthiness, product functionality, price, product quality, and product aesthetics [14]. By contrast, OCRs written by American consumers were more likely to refer to emotional attitudes and recommendation expressions. Ren noted that Chinese consumers tended to employ intensifiers, expletive/taboo words, metaphors, repetition, and punctuation emphasis to strengthen their reviews online [8]. Furthermore, review valence was discovered to have an impact on some mitigation and intensification strategies in Chinese OCRs [8, 15].

Based on the research of domestic and foreign scholars, this study will compare the impolite pragmatic phenomenon in the negative evaluation of the same book by Chinese and American book consumers, explore the concerns of Chinese and American consumers on this globally popular literary work in recent years, and verify the previous conclusions about the tendency of impolite language use.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection

Negative OCRs of the work in English were published from 2019 to 2024, and reviews in Chinese from 2019 to 2023, because the work was published in the United States a year before the Chinese version was released. In this study, 92 one-star popular reviews in English and Chinese are selected from the above period. Due to Amazon's restriction on review, a maximum of 100 relevant reviews can be extracted. Therefore, 100 popular reviews were selected for this study, and 92 relevant reviews were obtained after the reviews unrelated to the research topic were deleted. For the sake of comparison, 92 popular Chinese reviews related to the research are extracted.

B. Data Analysis

The study adopted the discourse-centered approach. The classification and definition of impolite strategies here are guided by the topic of this study, the token advantage of the prototype proposed by Bousfield [11], Culpeper [14], Garcés Conejos Blitvich [16], and Ren [10], then researcher did some appropriate modification to adapt to the content analysis of this study. The working definition of each of these impolite strategies was obtained through a careful bottom-up examination of each piece of data. as Table 1 presents.

Table 1. The strategies of impoliteness

Impoliteness in OCRs	Working Definitions
On-record impoliteness	Reviews that conducted impoliteness directly, threatening the book or author' positive or negative face directly.
Positive impoliteness (ONP)	a.Reviews that questioned the reality of the content;
	b.Reviews that blamed the book or author directly;
	c.Reviews that used taboo words.
Negative impoliteness (ONN)	Reviews that threatened or expressed feelings such as disappointment, anger, annoyance;
Off-record impoliteness	Reviews that conducted impoliteness implicitly.
Implicated impoliteness (OFFI)	Reviews that advised for cautious purchase of potential customers;
Sarcasm (OFFS)	a.Reviews that made unfriendly or unkind joke about the book or author in form of remarks or rhetorical questions;
	b.Reviews that appeared to be appropriate on the surface,but were meant to be taken as face-attack.

The collected data were coded according to the categories in Table 1. Firstly, the researcher translated the Chinese reviews into English. Then, according to the above working definitions, the researcher judged and recorded the impolite strategies used in these reviews one by one. The researcher first recorded the judgment of the impolite strategies used in the Lead in English reviews and subsequently recorded the strategies in those formal reviews. Then, the impolite strategies of Chinese reviews and English reviews are compared. The whole coding process is completed manually by the researcher with the aid of a computer.

IV. RESULTS

In this part, the researcher summarized and analyzed the collected data and presented it in detail.

A. Impoliteness in Chinese vs. English

Table 2 shows detailed data on the impolite strategies used by Chinese reviews. Table 3 shows detailed data on impolite strategies used by Chinese reviews.

Table 2. The strategies of impoliteness used In Chinese Ocrs

Types of Impoliteness in Chinese OCRs	Frequency	Characters	Trans to en-US	Average Characters (en)
ONP	44	3421	2165	49.2
ONN	14	664	423	30.2
OFFS	12	373	236	19.7
ONP,OFFS	11	1744	1120	101.8
ONN, OFFS	4	428	298	74.5
ONP, ONN	4	817	531	132.8
ONP, OFFI	1	171	103	103
ONP, ONN, OFFS	1	63	40	40
OFFI	1	10	6	6
Sum	92	7691	4916	53.43

Table 3. The strategies of impoliteness used in English Ocrs

Types of Impoliteness in English OCRs	Characters	Frequency	Average Characters
ONP	3840	32	120
ONN	38	1	38
OFFS	96	2	48
ONP,OFFS	3142	29	108.3
ONN,OFFS	128	3	42.7
ONP,ONN	619	9	68.8
ONP,OFFI	394	6	65.7
ONP,ONN, OFFS	57	1	57
ONP,ONN, OFFI,OFFS	117	1	117
ONN,OFFI	25	1	25
ONP,ONN, OFFI	134	3	44.7
ONP,OFFS, OFFI	401	3	133.7
/	36	1	36
Sum	9027	92	98.12

After Chinese reviews are translated into English, it is more reasonable to compare with English reviews in terms of characters. In the statistics of the number of characters in reviews, researchers find the following four points: first, the total number of characters in English reviews is more than that in Chinese reviews; Secondly, the average number of Chinese and English characters used by ONP strategy is more than that of Chinese. Thirdly, the number of strategies used is also more than that used in Chinese reviews. In the two most frequently used strategies, the average number of characters in English is more than that in Chinese reviews. Fourthly, the average number of review characters using different strategies in combination is usually more than that using a single strategy. One of the most special English reviews is that the reviewer is not impolite, and clearly expresses love and approval of the work, but gives a one-star review.

Below is a bar chart of the number of review strategies in both English and Chinese, so that we can find the similarities and differences between them more intuitively.
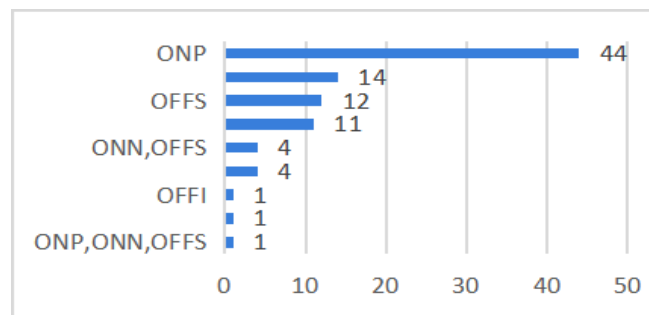

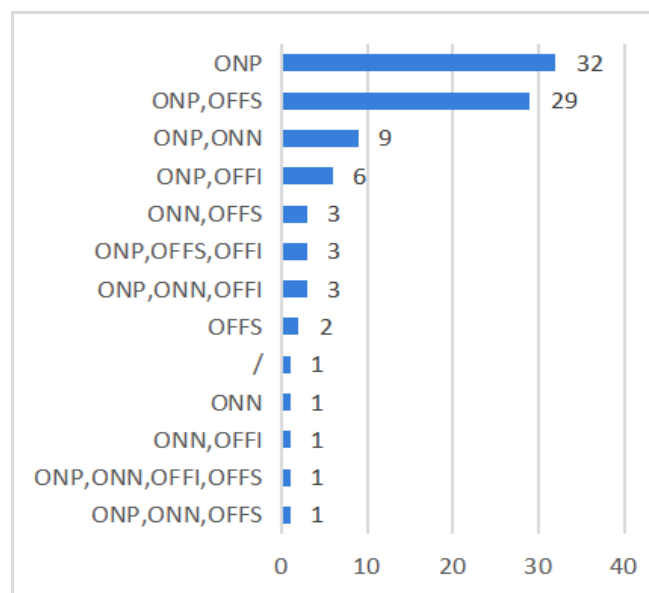Fig. 1. Types used of impoliteness in Chinese OCRs.

Fig. 2. Types used of impoliteness in Chinese OCRs.

By comparing statistics Figs. 1 and 2, it can be found that Chinese reviews use 9 impolite strategies. A total of 12 strategic impolite strategies are used in English reviews, the first 8 of which are the same as those in Chinese reviews, and 4 of which are unique when used in conjunction with multiple strategies. In terms of strategy usage, researchers find that ONP is the most used strategy in Chinese and English. Second, the number of ONN in English reviews is significantly less than that in Chinese reviews; Third, each strategy was used separately in Chinese reviews (OFFI was used once), but no OFFI strategy was used independently in English reviews. Fourthly, both Chinese and English reviews show a tendency to use multiple strategies collocation, and the strategy collocation of English reviews is more than the use of Chinese strategies.

The following is the proportion of impolite strategies used in Chinese and English reviews so that we can find out the use of impolite strategies in Chinese and English reviews.
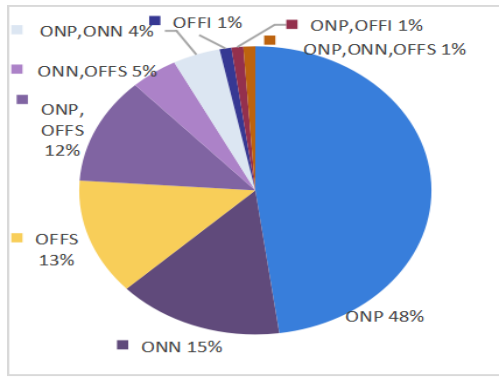
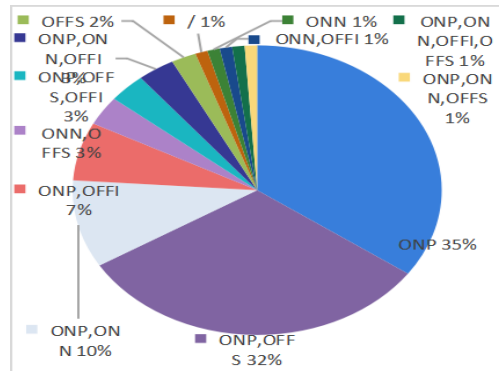Fig. 3. The proportion of different types of impoliteness in Chinese OCRs.

Fig. 4. The proportion of different types of impoliteness in English OCRs.

By comparing the proportion chart, we can see that, first of all, ONP strategy is used in a very high proportion, which accounts for 48% in Chinese reviews, and the proportion of ONN and OFFS strategy is also as high as 15% and 13%, but in English reviews, ONN and OFFS strategy are only used in 1% and 2%. The use of the OFFI strategy alone is only 1% in Chinese reviews and none at all in English reviews. Second, the proportion of strategy collocation in Chinese reviews is small, and the comprehensive proportion is only 23%, while the proportion of strategy collocation in English reviews is as high as 62%, especially ONP and OFFS collocation.

B. Impoliteness of the English Lead

Amazon's review mechanism differs from Douban's in that it places a very short review posted by the reviewer before the official review, acting as a Lead. In this study, since Chinese reviews do not have lead language, researchers conducted a monolingual strategy analysis on the lead part.
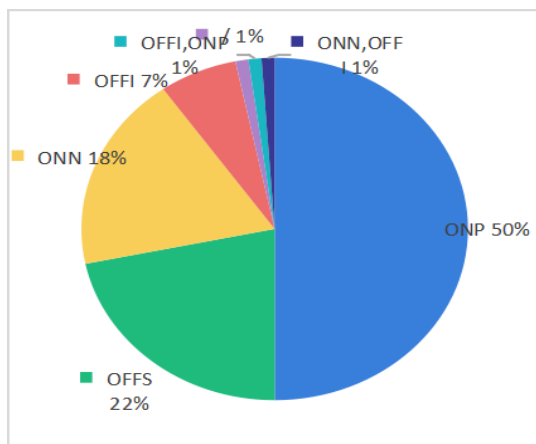

Fig. 5. The proportion of types of impoliteness in lead.

Through the proportion Fig. 5, we can observe that the use of a single impolite strategy dominates the lead, especially

the ONP strategy is as high as 50%. In the lead of the review, OFFS and ONN are used at 22% and 18%. Compared to the case that OFFI does not appear alone in the formal review, OFFI is used in the Lead at 6%.

The following statistics are used in each of the main leads with different impolite strategies.
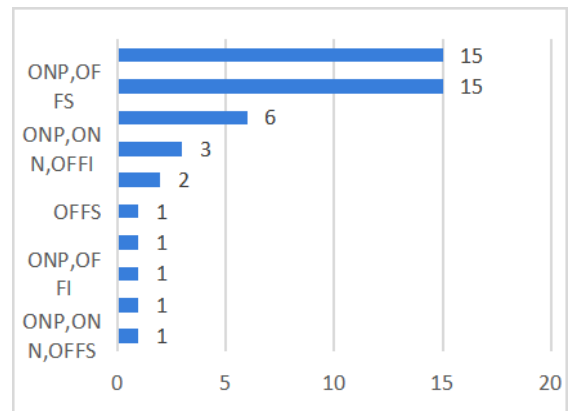

Fig. 6. The types in ONP lead.

In the reviews using the ONP Lead, reviewers used 10 strategies, and the ONP and ONPOFFS strategies were used the most. Some reviews use a completely different strategy from the Lead, such as ONNOFFS, OFFS, and ONNOFFI.
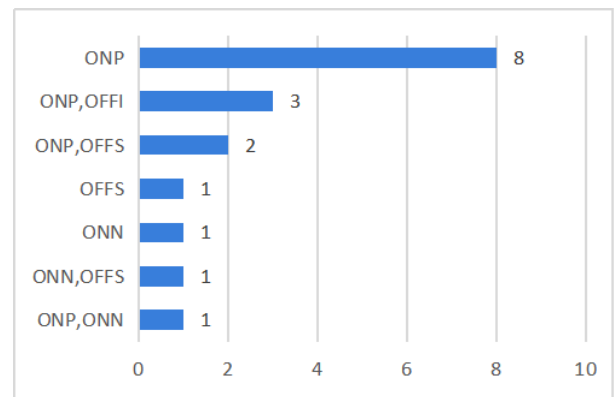

Fig. 7. The types in ONN lead.

In the reviews using the ONN Lead, reviewers used 7 strategies, the single ONP strategy was the most used, and 3 multiple strategies were using ONP, answering 6 times more. However, ONP appears in all five strategy species.
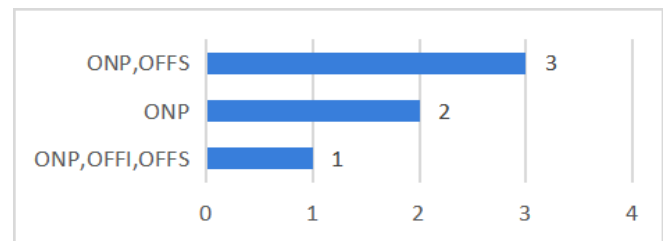

Fig. 8. The types in OFFI lead.

In the reviews using the OFFI Lead, the reviewer used a total of 3 strategies, where ONP, OFFS were 3 times, and each strategy included the ONP strategy. Separately analyzing the proportion of the above four leads, it is found that English formal reviews use the most ONP single strategy in ONP and ONN leads, and the most ONPOFFS in OFFS and OFFI leads. ONP is commonly used by reviewers to pair with other strategies.

C. Impoliteness of the Relevant Topics in Chinese vs. English

In Chinese and English reviews, researchers found that the topics discussed by Chinese and English reviewers are different. Therefore, researchers conducted a summary analysis of the topics that adopt impolite strategies. The main topics discussed around the book and the author include the overall evaluation of the reader, the authenticity of the content of the story, the discussion of the content other than reality, the relevance of the book to education, the evaluation of the author, the marketing of the book, religion, cultural differences, literariness, writing and translation.

Firstly, observing the comparison table, as shown in the following Table 4:

Table 4. Topics in Chinese vs. English

	Frequency in English	Proportion	Frequency in Chinese	Proportion
Reality	45	36.6%	24	17.1%
Content	30	24.4%	13	9.3%
Writing	15	12.2%	23	16.4%
Author's Quality	15	12.2%	12	8.6%
About Education	5	4.1%	17	12.1%
Marketing	5	4.1%	3	2.1%
Overall	4	3.3%	34	24.3%
Religion	3	2.4%	2	1.4%
Translation	/	/	1	0.7%
Affection	1	0.8%	/	/
Literary	/	/	3	2.1%

The most discussed by English reviewers was the reality of the story; Second is the content; Next is the author's writing level and narrative ability; This is followed by a discussion of the author; The second is to question the relevance of the work with the educational theme; Then there is the question of excessive marketing of books; And then the overall evaluation of the work; Finally, there is a discussion about the religious theme embodied in the work.

The most common reviews made by Chinese reviewers are overall works. The second is the reality of the story; Then is the writing level of the author; Next is the relevance between works and educational themes; And then the evaluation of the content; This is followed by a review of the author's quality; This is followed by a discussion of cultural differences; And then the question of whether the work is literary; This is followed by a discussion of over-marketing and literary of books; A discussion of religion follows; Finally, the evaluation of the translation of the work.

Next, researchers compared the reviews of Chinese and English reviewers using the same six strategies. The first is about the contrast between ONP reviews.

In the reviews using a single ONP strategy, English reviewers discussed the authenticity of the story most, while Chinese reviewers also paid more attention to the overall evaluation of writing level and educational relevance.

Table 5. Topics in OCRs with ONP in Chinese vs. English

ONP	Count in English	Proportion	Count in Chinese	Proportion
Writing	4	10.3%	17	24.3%
Overall	2	5.1%	12	17.1%
About Education	2	5.1%	11	15.7%
Reality	20	51.3%	10	14.3%
Content	6	15.4%	6	8.6%
Author's Quality	2	5.1%	5	7.1%
Cultural Difference	/	/	4	5.7%
Marketing	2	5.1%	2	2.9%
Religion	1	2.6%	2	2.9%
Literary	/	/	1	1.4%

Table 6. Topics in OCRs with ONN in Chinese vs. English

ONN	Count in English	Proportion	Count in Chinese	Proportion
Overall	/	/	9	64.3%
Content	1	50.0%	2	14.3%
Author's Quality	1	50.0%	2	14.3%
Cultural Difference	/	/	1	7.1%

In the reviews using a single ONN strategy, English reviewers evaluated the story content and the author, while Chinese reviewers more generally evaluated the work, the story content, and the author at the same time, and also involved the cultural differences between China and the United States.

Table 7. Topics in OCRs with OFFS in Chinese vs. English

OFFS	Count in English	Proportion	Count in Chinese	Proportion
Reality	1	25.0%	7	29.2%
About Education	/	/	4	16.7%
Writing	2	50.0%	4	16.7%
Author's Quality	/	/	4	16.7%
Overall	/	/	2	8.3%
Content	/	/	1	4.2%
Literary	/	/	1	4.2%
Marketing	1	25.0%	1	4.2%

In the reviews using the OFFS strategy alone, English readers focused on the truth of the story, the writing level of the author, and the marketing issues of the book. Chinese reviewers discussed more diverse topics, mainly the authenticity of the story, the relevance of the work to

education, the writing level of the author, and the evaluation of the author.

Table 8. Topics in OCRs with ONP, OFFS in Chinese vs. English

ONP, OFFS	Count in English	Proportion	Count in Chinese	Proportion
Overall	/	/	8	57.1%
Cultural Difference	/	/	2	14.3%
Reality	16	39.0%	2	14.3%
Content	8	19.5%	1	7.1%
Author's Quality	8	19.5%	1	7.1%
Writing	6	14.6%	/	/
About Education	1	2.4%	/	/
Marketing	1	2.4%	/	/

In the reviews using ONP and OFFS strategies, English reviewers mainly evaluated the authenticity of the story, the writing level of the author, and the evaluation of the author. Chinese reviewers mainly made a general evaluation of the work and related to cultural differences, story authenticity, story content, writing level, and evaluation of the author.

Table 9. Topics in OCRs with ONN, OFFS in Chinese vs. English

ONN, OFFS	Count in English	Proportion	Count in Chinese	Proportion
Writing	1	33.3%	2	33.3%
Reality	/	/	2	33.3%
Overall	1	33.3%	1	16.7%
Content	/	/	1	16.7%
Author's Quality	1	33.3%	/	/

In reviews using the ONN and OFFS strategies, English reviewers rate the author's writing ability, the author, and the work as a whole. Chinese readers only did not rate the author.

Table 10. Topics in OCRs with ONP, ONN in Chinese vs. English

ONP, ONN	Count in English	Proportion	Count in Chinese	Proportion
Content	5	50.0%	2	28.6%
Reality	2	20.0%	2	28.6%
Translation	/	/	1	14.3%
Overall	/	/	1	14.3%
About Education	1	10.0%	1	14.3%
Writing	1	10.0%	/	/
Marketing	1	10.0%	/	/

In the reviews using ONP and ONN strategies, English reviewers mainly evaluated the content and made reviews on the authenticity of the story, the relevance to education, the writing level, and the marketing of the book. Chinese reviewers gave a general evaluation of the work, story authenticity, translation level, educational relevance, and the whole work.

V. DISCUSSION

The discussion section of this study is mainly divided into two parts, the first is about the similarities and differences in the use of strategies by Chinese and English reviewers. Secondly, Chinese and English reviewers differ in which topics they use impolite strategies. After inductive analysis, the author first finds that the number of characters of English reviewers is generally more than that of Chinese reviewers. Secondly, most of the Chinese and English reviewers will use the ONP strategy to review, but the strategy collocation of English reviews is more abundant than that of Chinese reviewers. Secondly, the strategy of the English reviewers' lead is also dominated by the use of the ONP single strategy, but under the use of other strategies, the reviews of the single ONP strategy and ONP collocation with other strategies still account for the majority.

Regarding the different habits of the subjects related to the use of impolite strategies, the author found through the above analysis that foreign reviewers mainly questioned the authenticity of the story, then focused on the content of the story, and again focused on the writing level and the quality of the author. Chinese reviewers mainly made general reviews, followed by the authenticity of the story, the writing level of the author, and the educational relevance and evaluation of the author. In the reviews of Chinese and English reviewers using the same strategy, they also have different degrees of concern for the topic. Chinese reviewers are more inclined to summarize the evaluation, while English readers are more inclined to evaluate the authenticity and content of the story. Chinese and English readers tend to use ONP and ONP with other strategies when evaluating the work negatively, but English reviewers have more direct expressions of self-emotion than Chinese reviewers in formal reviews.

As books are a kind of commodity, the results of this study are slightly different from the strategic conclusions of previous scholars who studied the negative evaluation of commodities. Previous studies have shown that impolite behavior in product evaluation may have a great correlation with social and cultural environment, that is, the difference between Chinese and foreign cultures will affect the evaluation of products. the different preferences between Chinese and English speakers/writers found in Culpeper *Keywords* [17] and the present study reflects the Western Utilitarian versus the Chinese Confucianist discourse divide [18], while in this study we do not see the discrepancy. Researchers recognize the influence of this macro social and cultural background, but in this study, the researcher believes that there are other potential influencing factors. For example, the product is a product under a specific cultural background. As a cultural awareness product, the buyer will be more affected in spirit and consciousness after reading the book, which is likely to affect their evaluation of them.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the use of impolite strategies in the

negative evaluation of a nonfiction literary work. There are some problems in the research process. First of all, the research is not detailed enough, and not deepened to the smallest category. Secondly, the subjectivity in this study is strong, objectively not rigorous enough, we need to take more tools to testify the credit. Researchers believe that there is still a huge space for us to study the negative evaluation of Internet products, and further detailed research will be carried out in the future.

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