

A socio-pragmatic critique of pragmatic failures in other-prefaces: Take the Chinese academic monograph as an example

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Keywords: preface, Chinese academic monograph, pragmatic failures, relevance degree

Preface, a special form of written style which we most Chinese understand as *Xu*, enjoys a history of more than two thousand years in China. Preface/*Xu* has found its way in *Wen Xuan* as an important independent style in the Southern Dynasty (AD 420-589). Preface is normally divided into 'self-preface' (SP, written by the author him/herself) and 'other-preface' (OP, written by someone else) in accordance with the preface writer. As a significant part of the book, the quality of the OP will directly affect readers' attitude towards the book. In recent years, the study of OP has been conducted from a certain linguistic perspective, and it is usually confined within discussion of generic structures and politeness phenomena in OP. However, its writing styles and contents, especially those in a Chinese academic monograph, are often ignored in previous studies, and some OPs help readers understand the book well while others seem to fail to do so. Based on Generic Structure Potential and Relevance Theory framework, this study examined the OPs in Chinese academic monographs, which identified thirteen generic elements. These were then divided into very relevant (e.g. the generic elements that are quite relevant to the content of the monograph: *book description* and *book features*), weakly relevant (e.g. the generic elements that are weakly relevant to the content of the monograph: *book author introduction* and *evaluation*), and irrelevant elements (e.g. the generic elements that are irrelevant to the content of the monograph: *self-abasement* and *research anticipation*) depending on the relevance degrees for reader understanding. Some pragmatic failures were found that could weaken OP functions and prevent readers from gaining an optimal understanding of the book. The causes of these pragmatic failures are also discussed.