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Article

Research on Interactive Discourse of Local Food Culture Programs from the Perspective of Pragmatic Empathy - Taking Yanbian, Jilin as an Example

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Abstract: Local food culture programs are increasingly serving as vital mediums for cultural communication and identity construction. However, from the perspective of pragmatic empathy, the interactive discourse within these programs—particularly the mechanisms of emotional resonance and cognitive connection between participants and audiences—remains underexplored. This study investigates the interactive discourse in a food culture program based in Yanbian, Jilin Province, utilizing a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach. The findings reveal that pragmatic empathy in program interactions relies primarily on three mechanisms: the empathetic projection of indexical language, demonstrated through the flexible switching of inclusive personal pronouns; the collaborative application of emotional tags; and the strategic conversion of linguistic codes. Together, these mechanisms enable communicating parties to establish a shared cognitive and emotional stance. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that pragmatic empathetic discourse fulfills a significant sociocultural function in regional cultural communication. It not only facilitates the effective promotion of Yanbian ethnic food culture but also bridges the psychological distance between local residents and external audiences, thereby strengthening cultural identity and emotional bonds. Theoretically, linguistic empathy functions both as an interactive discourse strategy and as a crucial mechanism for advancing the effective transmission of local culture. These findings offer valuable theoretical insights and practical implications for optimizing the discourse construction and cultural communication of local programs within cross-cultural contexts.

Keywords: pragmatic empathy; interactive discourse; food culture; media mediation; cultural communication

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

As the strategy of building a strong cultural nation continues to advance, local food culture programs are no longer simply "cooking shows." They have gradually become an important medium that carries regional identity, ethnic memory, and cultural communication functions [1]. In recent years, Jilin Province has focused on strengthening the communication of regional cultural characteristics and promoting the integrated development of culture and tourism. During this process, the brand image of "Beautiful Guandong, Charming Jilin" has become increasingly clear and influential. Against this backdrop, food culture serves not only as a window for presenting local characteristics but also plays a deeper role in local image construction and cultural communication. Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, the only Korean autonomous prefecture in China, possesses distinctive ethnic characteristics and a profound historical foundation.

Its unique geographical environment, ethnic composition, and historical development have collectively shaped the highly recognizable Yanbian food culture. In the context of regional food culture driving high-quality local economic development, Yanbian specialty foods have enriched Jilin cuisine culture and have gradually become an important symbol connecting local emotions and cultural identity.

At the same time, the development of communication technology and changes in audience aesthetic preferences are constantly reshaping the narrative methods of food culture programs. Modern food programs have moved away from the relatively one-way communication model of the past and have shifted toward a form of communication that emphasizes participation and interaction. Whether through food documentaries on television or restaurant-review vlogs, short videos, and livestreams on online platforms, what truly captivates audiences is no longer solely the presentation of food itself. More importantly, it is the interactive discourse space jointly constructed by the presenters and the audience [2]. For this reason, language interaction in food programs has become a key factor influencing communication effectiveness.

From a linguistic perspective, interaction is not merely the transfer of information but also a process involving the communicative participants' ongoing adjustments of emotional, attitudinal, and cognitive relationships through language choices. Pragmatic empathy is clearly demonstrated in this process. However, current studies on food programs largely remain at the level of communication and cultural studies. Research that adopts a linguistic approach to analyze the mechanisms of interactive discourse, particularly from the perspective of pragmatic empathy, is still relatively limited. Specifically, the communicative acts performed by participants in Yanbian food culture programs and the empathetic interaction facilitated through deixis, forms of address, perspective shifts, and emotional speech acts are closely related to the effective communication of these programs [3]. This also impacts the smoother integration of local cultural symbols into broader communication spaces. Accordingly, this paper takes Yanbian food culture programs, discussed in an interactive format, as the research object. It introduces the concept of pragmatic empathy, examines the mechanisms of empathy based on discourse interaction, and explores the role of these mechanisms in cultural communication.

1.2. Research Significance and Purpose

From a theoretical perspective, this study aims to further expand the application scope of pragmatic empathy theory [3]. While existing discussions have primarily focused on areas such as daily conversation, literary translation, and intercultural communication, applying this theory to the interactive discourse of local food culture programs opens new analytical possibilities for its use in emerging domains. Additionally, examining this topic within the context of Yanbian Korean culture provides valuable empirical materials for linguistic theories related to adaptation and dynamic pragmatic analysis. From a practical perspective, the preservation and development of Yanbian Korean folk culture necessitate communication carriers that are both effective and accessible to the public. By analyzing actual food culture program contexts that resonate with audiences, this paper seeks to offer linguistic insights into content planning for local food culture programs, the stylistic approach of host expression, and communication strategies for new media streamers. On a broader level, these efforts aim to enhance the cross-regional communication effectiveness of Yanbian food culture, contribute to the development of local cultural and tourism brands, and promote high-quality regional economic growth. Ultimately, this research supports the advancement of the regional economy through the integration of cultural and linguistic strategies.

2. Literature Review

Substantial research has been conducted on the core topic of this paper, encompassing pragmatics, literature analysis, and studies of Yanbian local culture [4]. These investigations can generally be categorized into three main strands.

2.1. Reconstruction and Multidimensional Applications of Pragmatic Empathy Theory

The concept of "pragmatic empathy" originated in syntactic studies and was later developed into a significant framework in pragmatic research. This theory emphasizes how communicative participants consciously adjust their perspectives to achieve specific goals, employing particular language choices to align more closely with the emotional and cognitive positions of others. Recent studies have delved deeper into this concept, highlighting the pivotal role of deixis in facilitating pragmatic empathy. Examples include the generalized use of personal pronouns such as "we" and perspective shifts achieved through spatial deixis. Furthermore, the application of this theory has expanded significantly, encompassing areas such as intercultural communication, livestream e-commerce discourse, and interactive discourse in television programs. These developments underscore the theory's effectiveness in reducing psychological distance, enhancing emotional identification, and fostering interactive coordination.

Despite these advancements, discussions focusing on specific local food culture contexts remain sparse. In particular, there is a notable lack of systematic studies examining the interactive discourse within Yanbian food culture programs [5].

2.2. Cross-Exploration of Creative Discourse Analysis and Local Food Communication

In the theoretical field, a solid foundation has been established emphasizing that the construction of meaning through linguistic symbols cannot be separated from specific social contexts. Instead, it should be understood within real cultural and communicative environments.

At roughly the same time, as the perspective of Food Studies gradually gained attention, the communication of local food culture became a continuing topic of academic interest. Existing studies generally argue that opinion formation and meaning exchange in food culture communication are not simply the result of information flow [6]. They are also a form of sociocultural practice. On this basis, research began to focus on the encoding of linguistic and visual symbols in local food communication, further exploring the issues of power relations and identity construction behind these practices.

However, existing literature on food discourse mainly focuses on communication effectiveness and cultural influence at the macro level. Research that emphasizes the process of "dynamic adaptation" in language use and analyzes cognitive adjustment and emotional construction in interactive discourse remains relatively limited [7].

2.3. Research on Yanbian Folklore and Food Culture

Research on Yanbian Korean culture has been conducted in a relatively systematic manner. Comprehensive studies have explored topics such as customs, traditions, and historical origins. Regarding food culture specifically, existing research has primarily focused on historical inheritance, cultural meanings, and contemporary development. For instance, discussions have addressed the inheritance and innovation of representative foods such as Yanbian Korean royal rice cakes [2]. Other studies have examined the development and transformation of Yanbian food culture in contemporary society. These contributions provide a solid foundation of local knowledge for further research and enhance understanding of the regional characteristics and cultural background underlying Yanbian food culture.

Previous studies have offered important theoretical references and background support for this paper. However, gaps remain in research on "pragmatic empathy mechanisms" and "interactive discourse in Yanbian food culture programs." Discussions of pragmatic empathy have rarely been deeply integrated into specific local cultural contexts. Additionally, while studies on food communication are abundant, they predominantly focus on communication effects or cultural representation. Linguistic aspects of interactive discourse, such as perspective shifts and emotional coordination, have not received sufficient attention. To address this, the paper employs pragmatic theory as a point of entry, examining interactive discourse practices in Yanbian food culture programs [8]. It aims to propose a more explanatory approach through an interdisciplinary perspective combining local culture studies and pragmatic analysis.

3. Pragmatic Empathy Theory and Its Analytical Dimensions in This Study

3.1. *The Core Meaning and Development of Pragmatic Empathy Theory*

The concept of "empathy" initially emerged in the fields of aesthetics and psychology, where it referred to the process of projecting personal emotions onto an object to form an aesthetic or psychological experience. When this concept was introduced into linguistics, its meaning underwent significant changes. It evolved from a focus on "syntactic perspective" to a discourse strategy with communicative significance. Reviewing the core meaning and development of empathy theory is therefore a crucial step in constructing the analytical framework of this study [2].

In the 1980s, the concept of empathy was introduced into linguistics to address issues related to point of view in syntactic structures. Empathy was defined as the degree to which a speaker identifies with a participant in an event while describing it [9]. Early research primarily concentrated on the syntactic level, examining how linguistic elements such as giving and receiving verbs, voice forms, and reflexive pronouns reflected the speaker's perspective. Later, the scope of empathy research expanded beyond static syntactic analysis to dynamic verbal communication. It was proposed that empathy in verbal communication should not be confined to sentence construction but should instead be understood as a deliberate language-use strategy. In essence, "pragmatic empathy" involves communicators consciously shifting perspectives to achieve specific communicative goals. This entails understanding the listener's emotions and psychological state and adapting expressions accordingly. This perspective extended empathy research from syntax to pragmatics, solidifying the position of pragmatic empathy theory within linguistic research.

As linguistic theories advanced and discourse analysis became more sophisticated, the theoretical scope and applications of pragmatic empathy expanded. It has been argued that language use is fundamentally a dynamic process of continuous choice-making. Pragmatic empathy can be understood as the communicator's ongoing adaptation to the mental, social, and physical worlds. Through this mechanism, communicators employ various linguistic strategies to adjust interpersonal relationships and reduce psychological distance. The use of deixis is particularly illustrative in this context. Studies have demonstrated that generalized personal deixis, such as substituting "we" for "I" or "you," and proximal spatial deixis, such as using "this" instead of "that," can diminish psychological distance between speakers and listeners [10]. These strategies foster a sense of closeness, creating the impression that both parties share the same time and space.

In recent years, the development of media technology has broadened the application contexts of pragmatic empathy, extending it from traditional interpersonal communication to areas such as mass media and intercultural communication. In interactive television discourse and the emerging field of livestream commerce, pragmatic empathy has evolved beyond a strategy for adjusting interpersonal relationships. It now exhibits stronger discourse functions, such as aiding in brand image construction, guiding public understanding, and influencing consumer behavior [11]. Against this theoretical backdrop, this study examines pragmatic empathy within the specific communicative context of Yanbian food culture programs, focusing on its manifestations and operational mechanisms in interactions involving multiple participants.

3.2. *The Nature of Emotional and Cognitive Coordination in Communication*

Pragmatic empathy may initially appear as the deliberate selection of lexical and syntactic strategies [12]. However, its deeper mechanism is rooted in the interplay of emotion and cognition during communication. In the interactive discourse of Yanbian food culture programs, this coordination effectively bridges the sense of distance created by the screen, facilitating the transmission of local cultural meanings.

From a sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective, language communication transcends the mere encoding and decoding of information. It functions as an interactive practice that continuously constructs social relationships and systems of meaning [3]. Cognitive alignment forms a critical foundation for achieving pragmatic empathy in this

process. Communicative participants must assess the audience's knowledge background, cultural experience, and level of understanding. Based on this evaluation, they adapt their expressions accordingly.

In Yanbian food programs, for instance, when hosts introduce foods such as "dagao" or "cold noodles" to audiences unfamiliar with Korean culture, they often recognize the audience's limited cultural knowledge. Consequently, hosts employ explanations, comparisons, or contextual descriptions to transform local food experiences into accessible public discourse. These strategies help establish a shared cognitive space, reducing barriers to understanding and enhancing communication effectiveness [10].

Cognitive understanding alone, however, is insufficient for truly effective interaction. Pragmatic empathy also relies on emotional response and connection. Emotional resonance enables discourse to become engaging and approachable. In contexts such as television programs and livestreams, where physical distance separates communicators and audiences, language serves as a crucial tool to bridge emotional gaps. Through devices like exclamations, praise, humor, and evaluative expressions, hosts and streamers create a participatory communication atmosphere [13]. Expressions such as "This is a flavor familiar to us Yanbian people" or "It melts in your mouth and feels very satisfying" transcend mere descriptions of food characteristics. They act as emotional invitations, fostering a sense of "virtual presence" and encouraging audiences to emotionally connect with local food culture.

The coordination of emotion and cognition in interaction is not a linear or one-way process but an intersubjective dynamic where both dimensions reinforce each other. Cognitive understanding lays the groundwork for emotional resonance, while emotional closeness strengthens audience identification with cultural content. In the context of Yanbian food culture programs, interactive discourse relies on this dual operation of cognition and emotion. Food transitions from being a tangible object to a cultural symbol that embodies regional identity and sustains emotional connections. Pragmatic empathy thus addresses more than the audience's cognitive need for knowledge about unfamiliar foods. It also fulfills emotional expectations for warmth, local belonging, and cultural closeness. This dual alignment serves as the central analytical framework for examining the interactive discourse of local food culture programs.

4. A Study of Interactive Discourse in Yanbian Food Culture Programs from the Perspective of Empathy

4.1. Detailed Description and Interpretation of Interactive Discourse

In the multimodal narratives of Yanbian food culture programs, interactive discourse is not an isolated language fragment. It is a social practice deeply embedded in a specific folk cultural time and space. To analyze this phenomenon in greater detail, program segments related to Yanbian cuisine from the CCTV program *Taste*, such as the "Exploring Northeast China · Yanji Episode" broadcast in 2024 and 2025, as well as field interaction materials from leading food-review bloggers at Yanji Water Market on short-video platforms, are used as objects of analysis. The discourse representations that appear in these materials are described and discussed in depth.

From the perspective of the setting in which the discourse occurs, this type of interactive discourse has clear characteristics of decentralization and everyday life. Traditional television documentary narration often adopts an almost omniscient perspective. In Yanbian food programs, however, whether it is a CCTV field host or a self-media blogger, they usually intentionally set aside the role of a superior "cultural narrator." Instead, they bring the discourse space back to everyday settings such as Yanji Water Market, roadside restaurants, and even the heated kang beds in Korean families. Taking the segment in *Taste* that explores traditional Yanbian soybean paste soup and specialty beef soup as an example, the camera and discourse no longer remain in the position of outside observation. They shift more toward equal interaction between diners and vendors. This kind of scene shift creates more natural conditions for the generation

of pragmatic empathy. It also greatly reduces the distance between official expression and everyday local life.

When viewed from the relationships among participants, the interactive discourse in these programs often constructs a cross-screen "triangular empathy" structure. In other words, the participants in communication are not limited to the visible relationship between the host and local residents, such as intangible cultural heritage inheritors and vendors. There is also a hidden relationship between the host and the audience. Taking the display of the Jilin Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage project "Yanbian Royal Rice Cake" as an example, when an inheritor wearing traditional Korean clothing says to the camera, "This is our royal rice cake. It is handmade with natural ingredients," the host often follows with a statement such as, "Wow, the stretchy texture looks so tempting. I have to try it first for everyone." At this moment, the host actually serves as the sensory representative of the audience outside the screen. As a result, the focus of the discourse no longer revolves around objective features such as ingredients, methods, or production processes [7]. It gradually shifts toward taste experience and emotional feedback. The audience's sense of participation and immersion is then activated.

In terms of expression, the interactive discourse of Yanbian food programs also shows clear characteristics of sensory association and emotional externalization. Foods such as cold noodles, warm noodles, rice sausage, and rice cakes already have strong regional identities. In order to reduce the cognitive distance for audiences from other places, the interactive language in these programs often uses exclamatory sentences, dialect expressions, and concrete metaphors to strengthen sensory experience. When a host stands outdoors in temperatures of minus twenty degrees Celsius and tastes freshly made rice cake, expressions such as "soft, chewy, and springy" or "carrying the warmth of traditional Yanbian craftsmanship" are spoken naturally [9, 11]. Together with the narration in Taste, which further summarizes the flavor and cultural meaning, a personal eating experience is transformed into a cultural symbol that audiences can understand and share. In this sense, the interactive discourse in Yanbian food programs is essentially a carefully designed form of cultural expression with clear empathetic features.

4.2. Specific Mechanisms of Pragmatic Empathy Discourse

In Yanbian food programs, the coordination of emotion and cognition largely depends on the flexible use of pragmatic empathy strategies by communicative participants. This mechanism is primarily realized through three approaches: empathetic projection through deixis, kinship-oriented treatment of forms of address, and dynamic adaptation of cognitive perspectives.

The use of deixis is a key method for achieving pragmatic empathy. In everyday communication, spatial and personal deixis typically have relatively clear physical and psychological boundaries [10, 13]. In Yanbian food exploration discourse, however, hosts and bloggers often deliberately weaken these boundaries. They employ proximal reference and generalization to reduce the distance between themselves and the audience. For instance, when an outside host says to the camera on a street in Yanji, "We came to Yanji, and this authentic bowl of cold noodles is a must-try," the term "we" extends beyond the host to include the audience watching the program. This approach minimizes the psychological distance between outsiders and local culture. Similarly, vendors often say, "Try our family's craftsmanship. Everything is handmade." The phrase "our family" shifts a commercial interaction into one with a familial atmosphere, fostering trust and friendliness.

The kinship-oriented treatment of forms of address is another significant method for fostering interpersonal empathy. Forms of address not only convey politeness but also reflect social relationships, power dynamics, and emotional proximity between communicative participants. In the interactions of Yanbian food programs, hosts and self-media bloggers rarely use neutral commercial terms such as "vendor" or "artisan." Instead, they favor expressions imbued with local characteristics and kinship connotations [13]. For example, when purchasing kimchi or pollock at the Water Market, terms like "Amani,"

"Amai," or Northeastern dialect expressions such as "auntie" and "big brother" are commonly heard. A question like "Amani, how many years have you been making this soybean paste soup?" transforms a relationship between strangers into a quasi-kinship connection with a warmer human touch. This approach aligns with interpersonal traditions in Northeast China, which emphasize personal relationships and social ethics, while also creating opportunities for deeper discussions about food history, family heritage, and everyday life experiences.

At the cognitive level, hosts skillfully elicit local knowledge through dynamic adaptation and moderate displays of limited understanding. To emphasize the uniqueness of Yanbian food culture, questioners in the programs often avoid presenting themselves as experts. Instead, they intentionally adopt a less knowledgeable stance and pose questions from a more relatable perspective. For example, when discussing the practice of eating cold noodles in winter, a host might ask, "It's freezing outside, and there are still ice crystals in the bowl. Can your stomach really handle that?" While this question appears to express doubt, it actually provides local residents with an opportunity to explain concepts such as "using cold to counter cold" or "eating cold noodles on a warm kang bed." These explanations incorporate local knowledge and experiences, satisfying the curiosity of outside audiences while gradually guiding them toward an appreciation and understanding of the wisdom embedded in Yanbian food culture.

4.3. The Social and Cultural Functions of Empathetic Discourse

The primary function of food is, of course, to satisfy hunger. At the same time, it carries local history and shared memory and serves as an important cultural medium. In Yanbian food programs, pragmatic empathy discourse not only promotes cognitive alignment and emotional resonance at the micro level of communication but also extends outward to perform a series of social and cultural functions. These functions mainly include the construction of local cultural identity, the preservation and continuation of intangible cultural heritage, and support for local cultural tourism economies.

In the context of intercultural communication, pragmatic empathy helps overcome barriers to understanding between different cultures. It also reduces the unfamiliarity and distance that audiences may feel toward local food cultures.

The food system of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture favors spicy, cold, and fermented foods. For many audiences from other regions, these foods already involve a certain cognitive distance and may easily be viewed as part of an "other" culture. When pragmatic empathy is applied, the program no longer simply displays food but also takes on the function of cultural translation. For example, when the camera focuses on a pot of boiling traditional Yanji beef soup, the program avoids repeatedly emphasizing its exotic characteristics. Instead, it places the dish within the context of Yanbian's cold climate, family eating habits, and everyday life experiences. Through interactions between hosts and vendors, the audience often learns about the family stories and life experiences behind years of operating a food stall. In this way, local food is no longer merely a food symbol with ethnic characteristics but is given broader emotional meanings such as family affection, hard work, and perseverance. As audiences are moved by these personal experiences and develop empathy, their sense of distance from local food culture gradually decreases. They are then more likely to identify with the idea of the diversity and unity of Chinese culture.

Pragmatic empathy also plays an important role in the preservation and continuation of intangible cultural heritage [6]. Intangible cultural heritage projects such as Yanbian Royal Rice Cake and traditional kimchi-making techniques face varying degrees of pressure under rapidly changing modern lifestyles. In food programs and new media communication, however, pragmatic empathy gives these traditional skills a stronger sense of presence and appeal. Inheritors, production tools, and operational details in the programs are no longer presented as simple technical processes. Through respectful and emotionally engaged discourse from hosts and bloggers, they are woven into cultural narratives that are more likely to resonate with audiences.

For example, detailed descriptions of calloused hands, old wooden mallets, and repeated pounding movements are combined with expressions of admiration, questions, and evaluations [10]. As a result, a long production process is no longer just an explanation of how food is made but becomes a vivid presentation of craftsmanship and cultural commitment. Through this discourse construction, intangible cultural heritage is no longer a distant object for observation or display but becomes a cultural practice that remains alive in contemporary life. This makes it easier to inspire understanding, identification, and awareness of preservation among audiences, especially younger generations.

In the context of the integration of local culture and tourism, pragmatic empathy also demonstrates a clear economic empowering effect. As regional food culture and local economic development continue to advance together, Yanbian specialty foods have gradually become important resources for local image promotion and tourism brand building. From the perspective of communication effectiveness, the interactive discourse in food programs is not simply transmitting information but also strengthening audience participation and desire through emotional engagement. When a host or blogger makes highly expressive comments about a bowl of stone-pot bibimbap, a serving of cold noodles, or a piece of rice cake, the significance of these expressions goes far beyond describing flavor. More importantly, they stimulate audience imagination, identification, and consumption intentions. Expressions such as "Warm in the mouth and warm in the heart. This trip to Yanji was worth it" do more than describe personal experiences. They transform individual experiences into emotional scenes that audiences can share. In doing so, they help turn viewing interest into a desire to visit. Yanji has gradually become a popular tourist destination in recent years. The formation of this communication effect is closely related to the large amount of empathy-oriented discourse found in television programs and short videos. In this sense, pragmatic empathy achieves a transformation from online viewing to offline consumption. It also demonstrates the real influence that language symbols can have on the local economy.

5. Sources of Data and Analysis of Interactive Discourse

This study utilizes the CCTV program *Taste*, specifically the episode "Exploring Northeast China · Yanji Episode," along with food-review short videos filmed at Yanji Water Market, as its primary data sources. The research examines the mechanisms through which pragmatic empathy is realized in the interactive discourse of local food programs. The specific discourse materials are outlined as follows:

Regarding empathetic projection through deixis, the programs establish a shared stance by employing inclusive personal pronouns and spatial deixis. For instance, an inheritor in *Taste · Yanji Episode* describes: "This is our royal rice cake. It is handmade with natural ingredients. It is an old intangible cultural heritage craft of Yanbian." The host remarks: "We came to Yanji, and this authentic bowl of cold noodles is a must-try." In short-video food reviews, vendors frequently state, "Try our family's craftsmanship. Everything is handmade." Bloggers similarly comment, "This is the everyday atmosphere of our Yanbian." Expressions such as "we," "our," "our family," and "this" serve to reduce the psychological distance between speakers and audiences.

In terms of the coordinated use of emotional markers, the discourse enhances resonance through emotional language, exclamations, and experiential expressions. In *Taste · Yanji Episode*, the host exclaims: "Wow, the stretchy texture looks so tempting. I have to try it first for everyone. It's soft, chewy, and springy. It carries the warmth of traditional Yanbian craftsmanship." Additional comments include: "Amani, your soybean paste soup smells wonderful," and "Warm in the mouth and warm in the heart. This trip to Yanji was worth it." In short-video food reviews, bloggers describe foods with phrases such as: "Freshly made rice cake covered with soybean powder is hot, soft, chewy, and stretchy," "The outside is crispy, the filling is packed with glutinous rice flavor, and it's perfect with hot soup," and "The stone-pot bibimbap is so delicious you'll want to lick the

plate. It's a must-eat when visiting Yanji." These sensory descriptions deepen audience immersion.

With respect to dialect code-switching, the programs incorporate Korean forms of address and regional expressions to foster a friendly atmosphere. In *Taste of Yanji* Episode, the host uses the Korean kinship term: "Amani, how many years have you been making this soybean paste soup?" In short-video food reviews, quasi-kinship terms such as "Amai," "Yi," and "Da Ge" are commonly employed. Vendors explain: "People in Yanbian love this flavor. We use cold to counter cold. Cold noodles on a warm kang bed are the authentic way." Inheritors emphasize: "It is pounded completely by hand. This is an old Yanbian craft." These expressions seamlessly integrate and switch between Korean-Chinese bilingual resources and regional discourse.

6. Yanbian Food Programs as a Medium of Local Culture

6.1. Information Transmission through Discourse Interaction

The statement that the communication medium itself participates in the creation of meaning highlights the importance of interactive discourse as a mechanism for transmitting symbols in local food programs. Compared with static food displays, local food culture often possesses high-context characteristics, making it challenging for outside audiences to immediately grasp the historical experiences, geographical conditions, and cultural meanings behind it [9]. Interactive discourse in these programs plays a crucial role in explaining and translating this information, transforming local knowledge into content that the public can perceive and understand.

This process of information transmission relies on the organization of language and symbolic expression within the programs, while being deeply rooted in the unique geographical environment and historical development of Yanbian. Yanbian is situated in a cold region with widespread mountainous areas and abundant water resources. Historically, the region was cultivated and developed by Korean ancestors, leading to the formation of a distinctive rice-farming culture. Visual depictions of steaming bowls of noodles or plates of rice cakes provide surface-level sensory information, but the interaction between hosts and local farmers, vendors, or inheritors reveals the regional experiences and agricultural history behind these foods. For instance, explanations such as "Rice grown in this cool region has a long growing period, so the rice cake made from it has better texture" connect food appearance and taste to the natural conditions and production experiences that shaped them.

From the perspective of communication effects, this process reduces uncertainty in understanding. Information entropy theory in communication studies suggests that effective communication requires minimizing uncertainty in information reception. For non-local audiences, fermented foods such as kimchi and soybean paste in Yanbian cuisine often evoke unfamiliarity in both taste and cognition. Interactive discourse in these programs explains these eating habits within the context of local life experiences and historical backgrounds. For example, long-term fermentation is linked to the cold climate, winter food storage, and survival practices, making it easier for audiences to understand the development of these food traditions and appreciate their cultural logic. Expressions such as "In the past, winters were long and heavy snow isolated communities. One jar of kimchi often supported a family's food supply throughout the entire winter" go beyond introducing food to explain a local way of life.

Viewed from this perspective, the interactive discourse in Yanbian food programs transcends mere cooking instructions or sensory descriptions. In the context of digital communication, it facilitates the translation and reorganization of local knowledge. These programs serve not only as a medium for showcasing food but also as vital carriers for the dynamic communication of local history, geographical experiences, and folk memory.

6.2. The Unique Mission of Cultural Preservation and Transmission

Text-based media, such as books and local gazetteers, are inherently better suited for preserving information over extended periods due to their strong emphasis on time.

However, their ability to reach a wide audience and evoke emotional engagement is relatively limited. In contrast, modern audiovisual programs and new media excel at overcoming spatial barriers, enabling rapid dissemination of information and fostering immediate interaction. Yanbian food programs, when viewed through this lens, emerge as a unique composite medium for local culture [2]. They transform the static "archival memories" recorded in historical documents into dynamic "living performances" that resonate with contemporary audiences. This approach opens new avenues for sustaining intangible cultural heritage within the modern communication landscape.

Cultural inheritance is not merely the reproduction of textual records; it requires active engagement, understanding, and practice within specific contexts. Korean dining etiquette, for instance, includes customs such as younger individuals waiting for elders to begin eating, presenting food with both hands, and adhering to specific festival-related dining traditions. These practices, if confined to written records, risk becoming abstract and detached from lived experiences [1].

When captured through the lens of food programs, these customs are brought to life in tangible and relatable ways. For example, when a host visits a local home and shares a meal with Korean elders, the interaction creates a vivid scene of cultural exchange. The host's unfamiliarity with the traditions often leads to moments of hesitation, prompting gentle guidance and reminders from the elders. This process transforms static etiquette rules into everyday scenarios that audiences can easily grasp and connect with.

Pragmatic empathy plays a crucial role in grounding the concept of cultural inheritance in specific, relatable moments of daily life. It shifts the focus from abstract labels in texts to real individuals with emotions and lived experiences. For instance, when showcasing Korean pollock production techniques, programs go beyond merely explaining the drying process. Through interactions between hosts or bloggers and local producers, they reveal the challenges of the winter working environment, the expertise developed over time, and the hardships endured in mastering the craft. This approach transforms static knowledge from historical records into dynamic, interactive experiences, enhancing the visibility of local culture and providing younger generations with a direct pathway to cultural understanding. Yanbian food programs, therefore, transcend the mere display of cuisine, serving as dynamic platforms for preserving and expressing local cultural memory in contemporary society.

6.3. Cultural Identity and Emotional Connection

In today's media society, identity is no longer maintained naturally through geography and blood ties alone. It is increasingly constructed through cultural communication and media practices [2, 3]. As a local cultural medium with the ability to mobilize emotions, Yanbian food programs gradually create an emotional community that transcends regional, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries through pragmatic empathy interactions inside and outside the screen. Internally, this connection strengthens the cultural belonging of community members. Externally, it promotes understanding, integration, and consensus among different cultures.

For the local cultural community of Yanbian, food can be considered one of the most resilient cultural markers in a mobile society. Historical records indicate that as modernization has accelerated and population mobility has increased, more and more young people from Yanbian have left their hometowns to work or study in other cities and even overseas.

For these dispersed Yanbian people, the spatial distance from home continues to grow. However, the sensory and emotional memories carried by hometown foods have not disappeared. When they see everyday scenes from Yanji Water Market again through new media platforms and hear familiar Yanbian dialects and vendor calls, the interactive discourse in food programs becomes an important medium for activating homesickness and identity. Expressions such as "Yanji rice wine is still the most authentic" may appear to be evaluations of food. In reality, they evoke shared local experiences and reconnect scattered individuals to the cultural space of Yanbian. Related studies have also pointed

out that Korean Chinese culture possesses strong internal cohesion. Food programs can serve as a digital extension of this cohesion. Through taste memory and interactive discourse, they further strengthen community members' continuing identification with local culture.

If the perspective is broadened to examine the issue from the angle of intercultural communication, food programs also play a practical role in reducing cultural barriers and promoting ethnic understanding. For outside audiences, Yanbian food culture often first appears as something local or even culturally distinct. However, as interactive food-review programs and experience-based expressions become more common, audiences gradually realize that local foods carry more universal emotional structures. These include family values, the value of work, and appreciation for everyday life. Here, the role of pragmatic empathy is especially significant. Through empathetic conversations between hosts, bloggers, and local residents, outside audiences no longer observe so-called "foreign customs" from a distance. Instead, they gradually enter the local world emotionally and build identification through understanding [2]. As a result, Yanbian is no longer simply a regional symbol associated with a specific area. It is more naturally incorporated into the broader narrative of the diversity and unity of Chinese culture. In this sense, the interactive discourse in Yanbian food programs not only serves local cultural communication but also participates at a deeper level in the construction of cultural identity and the development of a shared sense of national community.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Research Findings

A review of the analysis presented in this paper shows that Yanbian food culture programs no longer merely introduce food. They have gradually developed into a form of social and cultural practice deeply embedded in local contexts. This paper has examined pragmatic empathy theory from the combined perspectives of local culture studies and cultural discourse analysis. Several main findings can be summarized as follows.

The interactive discourse in Yanbian food programs does not depend on rigid one-way communication. Instead, it achieves a flexible translation of local culture through a more adaptive linguistic mechanism. For example, the proximal use of deictic expressions such as "our Yanji" can unconsciously reduce the psychological distance between audiences and local culture. Forms of address such as "Amani," which carry kinship meanings, likewise lessen the distance often associated with commercial interaction. At the same time, dynamic shifts in cognitive perspective and the host's occasional display of limited knowledge create conditions for local knowledge to emerge naturally. Through the combined effect of these strategies, food experiences that may initially appear unfamiliar to outside audiences are gradually transformed into life experiences that can be understood and felt.

When the discussion is extended to the level of cultural communication, it becomes clear that interactive discourse also promotes the transformation of local knowledge from static texts into living cultural performances. From the perspectives of communication studies and sociolinguistics, information exchange in Yanbian food programs translates the geographical environment, agricultural experience, and historical memory recorded in texts such as *The Gazetteer of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture*. At the same time, it converts cultural content such as intangible cultural heritage skills and dining etiquette into life scenes that can be watched, understood, and experienced. This points to an important conclusion: in today's audiovisual communication environment, cultural inheritance is not simply a matter of preserving existing texts. More importantly, it involves continuously creating new forms of expression through everyday interaction and giving culture renewed meaning in contemporary life.

From a broader social and cultural perspective, pragmatic empathy not only contributes to the construction of emotional communities that cross geographical

boundaries but also interacts closely with the development of local cultural tourism. Food-related interactive discourse serves both internal cohesion and external communication. Internally, it activates taste memories and emotional connections to hometown life among local residents and people living away from Yanbian, thereby strengthening local cultural identity. Externally, by presenting family values, work experiences, and the significance of everyday life, it gradually reduces audiences' unfamiliarity with local culture and weakens understandings based on "otherness." In this way, the empathy generated through food experiences is further transformed into cultural interest in Yanbian and a willingness to visit the region. It also promotes interaction between local cultural communication and cultural tourism consumption.

7.2. Limitations

Although this paper seeks to construct a relatively comprehensive explanatory framework linking pragmatic empathy and local food culture, it remains constrained by prevailing research paradigms in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, the interdisciplinary methods employed in this study have certain limitations. Consequently, several aspects of the research still require further refinement.

One major limitation is that the collection and analysis of discourse data relied primarily on manual selection, segmentation, and qualitative description, and no large-scale multimodal corpus was established. Although this study drew on materials from the program Taste and several representative short-video food review programs, interaction in food media clearly extends beyond spoken language. It also includes facial expressions, bodily movements, background sound effects, camera movement, and bullet-screen comments. In other words, the present analysis remains largely at the discourse-text level. Computer-assisted tools were not used to systematically annotate and integrate audio and visual modes. As a result, the specific mechanisms through which pragmatic empathy operates through audiovisual coordination have not yet been fully clarified. Considerable room therefore remains for improvement in both data coverage and explanatory precision.

In addition, the discussion of empathetic effects in this paper is based mainly on pragmatic analysis and textual interpretation and lacks further support from cognitive science and experimental methods. The paper argues that interactive discourse can stimulate emotional resonance and reduce psychological distance. However, this conclusion remains primarily a theoretical inference from a sociolinguistic perspective. It has not been tested through methods such as eye-tracking, skin conductance measurement, or facial expression recognition. Because audience responses were not directly measured, it is still difficult to provide stronger evidence regarding the extent to which deictic expressions, forms of address, and perspective shifts influence cognitive load, emotional arousal, and identity formation. This emphasis on discourse production, together with relatively limited empirical measurement of audience response, also reflects a common methodological constraint in traditional pragmatic research.

Another limitation should also be noted. The discourse analysis framework adopted in this paper is based largely on relatively stable communication relationships and therefore cannot fully account for dynamic communication processes in algorithm-driven platform environments. On short-video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou, the circulation of food content does not simply follow a linear path from communicator to audience. It is strongly shaped by recommendation systems and user profiling mechanisms. Different audiences may encounter very different forms of Yanbian food content because of algorithmic distribution. As a result, they may develop different interpretive paths and different cognitive boundaries. This paper does not sufficiently examine how platform algorithms may shape, reinforce, or even transform the pragmatic empathy strategies of communicative participants. This issue warrants further attention in future research.

7.3. Future Prospects

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution continues to advance, new media technologies, especially generative artificial intelligence and immersive spatial computing, are

reshaping human interaction and cultural perception. In this context, research on interactive discourse in Yanbian food culture programs may also undergo a methodological transformation with technological support. Looking ahead, this field can continue to develop in several directions.

One important direction is a shift in research focus from textual empathy to embodied spatial empathy. With the support of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies, the communication of Yanbian food culture may move beyond the limitations of two-dimensional screens. Audiences would no longer simply watch through a screen. Instead, they could enter environments such as water markets and roadside restaurants in a more immersive way and participate in local cultural experiences with a stronger sense of presence. In such a context, the realization of pragmatic empathy may no longer be limited to vocabulary, syntax, or general discourse strategies. It may gradually develop into a comprehensive communication mechanism involving spatial perception, bodily participation, and situational interaction. Future studies may further explore how immersive interaction between audiences and digital representations of local cultural actors reshapes pragmatic empathy. Researchers may also examine how technology-supported experiences of presence influence the digital inheritance and representation of local culture.

Another direction worthy of further exploration is artificial intelligence and affective computing. These technologies may provide more refined analytical tools for the study of interactive discourse. Traditional studies often face problems such as limited sample sizes and insufficient evaluation methods. To address these issues, future research could more actively introduce natural language processing, emotion recognition, and multimodal analysis technologies. Researchers could establish specialized corpora focused on the communication of local food culture. Through integrated analysis of short-video texts, speech intonation, facial expressions, and interactive comments, scholars could systematically examine how pragmatic empathy is expressed in different communication settings. They could also investigate how different forms of address, evaluative expressions, and narrative strategies influence audience identity and emotional responses. Such methodological development may gradually move this field from primarily qualitative description toward an approach that combines qualitative and data-driven analysis.

In parallel, the potential of generative artificial intelligence may provide an opportunity to renew communication in local food culture across languages and cultures. The use of Yanbian food culture resources would be a meaningful topic in the context of international information exchange. Generative artificial intelligence may support the future production of communication content that adapts to the diverse cultural, cognitive, and linguistic habits of audiences. For specialty foods such as Yanbian soybean paste, cold noodles, and rice cakes, such systems could draw on food experiences and cultural associations that are more familiar to target audiences. This means that they may produce discourse that is easier to understand and more likely to elicit empathic responses. In the communication of local food programs, this would move beyond repeatedly transmitting the same content. Instead, a more adaptive, interactive, and dynamic process of cross-cultural storytelling could gradually take shape.

Overall, as advanced technologies continue to enter cultural communication practices, research on interactive discourse in Yanbian food culture programs is likely to move beyond the boundaries of traditional text analysis. It may enter a new stage that deeply integrates immersive experiences, multimodal computing, and intelligent communication. This development will not only create new methodological approaches for the study of local food culture but will also open broader possibilities for the contemporary expression and international communication of outstanding regional cultures.

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