

Contrast the Differences Between Chinese and Western Polite Language from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract:

Undoubtedly, polite languages help individuals enhance interpersonal communication and build a harmonious social relationship. However, countries with different languages and cultures have different ways of polite expression. It is conducive to enhancing cultural exchanges, improving the ability of cross-cultural communication, and ensuring the smooth progress of cross-cultural communication with a deep understanding of the differences and origin of Chinese and English greetings [1]. This paper reviews and summarizes the achievements of the theoretical research of Chinese and western scholars in cross-cultural communication, on how to use the Chinese and English greetings, farewell, compliment and thanks in cross-cultural communication, and analyzes the root of these differences and how to cultivate students' awareness of the difference between Chinese and Western polite language.

Keywords:

Cross-Culture, Communication, Polite Language, Difference

1. Introduction

Polite language is one of the important languages used in daily communication. As China's opening up to the outside world deepens, cross-cultural economic and social exchanges are also increasing, which provides us with many opportunities to contact and communicate with countries around the world, and help individuals deepen understanding of western society. Influenced by the effect of regional and cultural environment, there are certain differences between Chinese and English greetings, which have a certain impact on cross-cultural communication. Therefore, it is necessary to compare Chinese and English languages and implement correct strategies in cross-cultural communication [2]. In the intercultural communication of both Chinese and British cultures, people communicate with each other by greeting, asking, helping, or compliment each other. Polite language will undoubtedly help to enhance interpersonal communication and build a harmonious social relationship [3].

2. Theoretical basis of the principle of Chinese and English politeness in intercultural communication

2.1. Leech's principle of politeness

In order to avoid communication failure due to language mistakes, and to ensure the smooth progress of communication, people should abide by the principles of courtesy. Leech endorsed Grice's examination to study methods of language use from the perspective of session principles, thus proposing the courtesy principle [4]. The Leech's principles of politeness include six aspects:

(1) Proper guidelines: damages others as little as possible; benefits as much to others as possible.

(2) Magnanimity guidelines: benefits itself as little as possible; damages itself as much as possible.

(3) Praise guidelines: belittle others as little as possible; praise others as much as possible.

(4) Modest guidelines: praise himself as little as possible; belittle himself as much as possible.

(5) Consistent guidelines: minimize inconsistency with others; minimize consistency with others.

(6) Compassion guidelines: minimize discord between himself and others; increase sympathy between himself and others.

2.2. Yueguo Gu's courtesy principle

Professor Yueguo Gu summarized Leech's principles with Chinese characteristics on the principles of politeness, which have Chinese characteristics, which are conducive to helping speakers to express polite information as far as possible, and greatly affect the research of polite language [5]. Yueguo Gu's manners include:

(1) The principle of disparaging yourself and respecting others. It refers to oneself or related to their own things to belittle, to be modest, refers to the listener or things related to the listener to lift, to respect.

(2) The principle of address. It refers to take the initiative to greet each other with the appropriate address.

(3) The principle of elegance. That is to say, to choose elegant language, ban dirty language; use more euphemism, use less blunt language;

(4) Guidelines for seeking consensus. That is the speaker and the listener in many aspects to strive for harmony, try to meet the other side's desire.

(5) Morality, words, practice standards. It means to minimize the cost of others in behavioral motivation, exaggerate the benefits to others, and try to minimize the cost they pay.

These five guidelines permeate and restrict each other. The common trend of the development of Chinese and English politeness is the integration of Chinese and Western civilizations, Chinese and English politeness, and the development trend of polite language is to reflect modern civilization, people-oriented, respect for personality and freedom [6].

3. Comparative Analysis of Chinese and English Polite Language in Cross-Cultural Communication

3.1. Comparative analysis of the Chinese and English greeting in intercultural communication

Greetings is another important symbol to judge a person's politeness. We use greetings or gestures habitually when we want to talk to others, and when we come across acquaintances in the street.

Here are some examples of Chinese-English greetings: Hi, Hello! How do you do? How are you? How are you doing? 您/你好! 早! 早上好! 您早! 吃了吗? 去哪里? 干什么去? In China, the above statements are usually used as greetings in their daily lives. Because the Chinese people advocate collectivism, we regard helping others and treating others as a virtue. Both the speaker and the listener simply treat the above statements as an ordinary greeting, not questions that require formal answers. According to traditional Chinese culture and habits, these greetings are important ways to show friendship and care to others. If we mechanically translate these strong Chinese greetings into English, then the original meaning of the statements will disappear, and it is the more serious that westerners may begin to wonder whether the statements have other implied meaning. For example, if you greet a foreigner in a way of the sentence *did you eat it?* We all know that it is the same extremely ordinary greeting as *hello*, but the foreigner will think that you want to invite him to have a dinner. In addition, westerners pay more attention to protecting their personal privacy than the Chinese. They don't ask about someone else age, work, etc. casually. For example, to use *what are you doing* to greet an Englishman, he will answer immediately, *it has nothing to do with you*. In this case, the problem of understanding bias in intercultural communication occurs.

3.2. Comparative analysis of the Chinese and English farewell language in cross-cultural communication

Farewell is the stylized language that people use when saying goodbye. In general, people not only say goodbye, they also express their desire to see goodbye later. There are several common farewell languages in both Chinese and British languages:

再见/再会! 明天见! 回见!

您慢走! 路上小心!

下次有空再来啊! 别送了, 留步!

Good bye! Bye-bye!

See you soon. / See you later. / See you tomorrow.

Good night! / Have a nice day!

From the expression of the above two languages, the farewell language is still very different. Children in English-speaking countries often say goodbye to each other: *See you later*, *Alligator*. and *in a while*, *Crocodile*, which are interesting and lively [7]. Due to the complicated Chinese etiquette, the Chinese people speak more polite words like “留步” and “慢走”, which do not exist in English. If these complicated farewell words are rigidly translated into English, foreigners are be confused.

For another example, in the West, if you visit someone else house, you should say,

thank you very much. I have a wonderful night. the host answers with good night, and in China, we usually say to the host when leaving, “不好意思，打扰了”。The host will answer “慢走，慢走。”

3.3. Comparative analysis of Chinese and English compliments in intercultural communication

Some foreign scholars believe that the role of the compliment is to enhance the feelings and harmony with the listener. Complimentary is an expression of a good will that can strengthen the relationship between the speaker and the listener. For the Chinese, the compliment has more role, such as leaving a good impression on the leaders, which is completely different in foreign countries, and more about the leaders giving some encouragement to their subordinates in exchange for their hard work.

In terms of China's social and cultural background, people are used to follow the principle that individuals should obey the collective and dilute their self-consciousness. The Chinese standard is the mean. When being praised, the Chinese people often give negative answers. Of course, this *no* is not denying others to praise themselves, just because the Chinese people want themselves to show a modest attitude, and those who praise will not really want their compliment to get a positive answer. For an example:

A: 你的衣服真漂亮!

B: 哪里哪里，还是你的衣服更漂亮!

B wanted to express a modest response to his praise of A. Instead, B also complimented A. Sometimes the Chinese tend more to belittle themselves after receiving compliments. For example, “你真行，我要是有你一半能干就好了”。But for those people in English-speaking countries, they directly answer *thank you* when hearing people praising their clothes. However, a man praises a woman's dress or her beauty, and if a boy praises a girl with sexy, the girl will certainly be angry in China.

In short, the difference between Chinese and English compliments is very obvious. Native speakers prefer to accept compliments and praise from others. Instead, Chinese usually do not accept praise from themselves or only accept indirectly.

3.4. Comparative analysis of Chinese and English acknowledgments in intercultural communication

People around the world will use words of thanks to express their courtesy, accept praise, which enhances the harmonious relationship among them. The acknowledgments are not in the same format as the wording across countries. In English-speaking countries, people never thank those who have helped them, even if they are not worth mentioning, such as giving directions, passing on items, or offering their seats to others. This is very different from the Chinese habits. They will not only thank their leaders, colleagues, and strangers, but also to their relatives, friends, and even their parents and children. Here are several situations that the Chinese people think no need to thank:

For one, if two persons have a very close relationship, such as between parents and children, husband and wife, siblings, or between good friends, there is no need to express and even to speak thanks. Usually, we do not thank when we are praised, because it seems very immodest.

For another, the subordinate completes a work for the leader out of responsibility, and the leader does not need to thank the subordinate.

Acknowledgments commonly used in daily communication include: Not at all. Don't mention it. You are welcome. It's my pleasure.

不用谢!/别客气!/没什么!/别这么说!过奖了!/这是我应该做的!

In China, we pursue the doctrine of the mean, and we should strive to be modest and prudent when we are praised. But modesty is contrary to Grice's *the principle of quality*, which often gives rise to semantic misunderstanding in intercultural communication. For example, a Chinese scholar who goes abroad for academic visits habitually uses *I am sorry for wasting your precious time* as the end of his academic speech. But foreigners understand it as another meaning: he doesn't think we can understand his speech, does he? Or why did he still give speeches when he knew our time is precious? In this case, the scholar should end his speech with *thank you*, or *I hope you like my speech*.

4. The Root Cause of the Difference Between Chinese and English Polite Language in Cross-Cultural Communication

4.1. Differences in values

In oriental culture, Chinese society has formed a strict hierarchy and group consciousness due to over 2,000 years of the feudal autocratic system and the centralized state regime in history. Individuals must first obey the overall situation of the country, society and family, while also be influenced by Confucianism. Therefore, Chinese people respect the polite principles of belittle oneself and respecting others and humility in communication. The remarkable symbol of Chinese society is that there are many stable and firm social structures, which vary in different small groups or between small groups, such as feudal big families, working groups, activity organizations, etc. The culture of collectivism emphasizes the collective consciousness, the collective identity and the emotional dependence, pays attention to the stability and unity of the collective, assumes responsibility and obligation in the collective, and the individual actions are subordinate to the decision of the collective. In a culture characterized by collectivism, one wants to depend on each other, and individuals are subject to collective standards and values. The Chinese people are more concerned about their collective needs and goals than about their individual needs. Collective interests are regarded as the social standard and social responsibility, rather than the pursuit of personal enjoyment as the most important thing. Individuals are used to sharing their labors or cooperation with other participants, rather than exclusive to themselves.

Western culture, unlike Chinese culture, especially American culture, pays more attention to personal value. Traditional western culture believes that personal interests, personal rights and privacy are sacred fields, which is related to the 16th century European society Renaissance Movement. At that time, the trend of "humanism" rising at that time advocated people-centered, so the values of individualism are the mainstream culture of western society, which is reflected in the process of interpersonal communication. Such values highlight themselves as much as possible, respect their own rights and freedoms, and advocate the supreme individual values. The individualistic culture emphasizes self-consciousness, autonomy and emotional independence, which means personal initiative, protecting personal privacy and

private property and pursuit of personal material satisfaction. In any individual-dominated culture, individual goals dominate collective goals. Everyone is his own master. They will let their own characteristics develop, attach great importance to self-dependence and self-protection, and attach great importance to the external and personal interests. Westerners believe that society is necessary to meet the needs of individuals, whose power is higher than the social needs.

4.2. Differences in modes of thinking

Thinking modes and language have a deep internal connection, and different cultures also have a very direct impact on communication. These effects include the way of speech communicates, the organization structure of the conversation, morphology, and syntactic differences. Therefore, differences in thinking modes often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in intercultural communication [8].

Occidental are used to analytical thinking, pay attention to quantitative analysis and logical reasoning, and are good at grasping the essence of things through abstraction. In terms of language expression, they put more emphasis on the authenticity of content, reflecting the frankness of the language. When talking, Europeans and Americans will give priority to consider whether their language conveys enough information, and sometimes even give up politeness for the sake of the authenticity of speech. Their mindset is approximately linear. When talking to others or writing articles, they all express their central ideas directly.

On the contrary, the Chinese followed the doctrine of the mean because of the influence of Confucianism. We always try to avoid direct conflicts and use a moderate and gentle way of thinking. In China, speakers or thesis authors tend to organize and express their ideas in quite implicit and obscure ways. And audience or readers also need to infer or dig into the deep meaning of the language to understand the meaning of the speaker and the author. Due to the differences in history, culture and values, the Chinese modes of thinking are also very different from Western societies. Chinese are good at holistic thinking, thinking is always from big to small, from the whole to local, reflected to the language form, which is reflected in the euphemism, concise and implicit language. As for the true meaning implied in the language, which need to rely on the speculation and understanding of the obedient themselves. Modes of thinking play an important role in people's communication. Therefore, the Chinese polite language is different from English polite language . For example, Chinese likes to send some invitation to others in euphemistic and indirect ways, while people in English-speaking countries prefer direct ways. Some English proverbs, such as *don't beat around the bush* and *get to the point*, embody this direct mode of thinking. In short, each culture has its own unique principles of manners and polite expression. In the process of cross-cultural communication, the study of different cultural differences is more meaningful, and multi-cultural communication is also more beneficial than multilingual communication. When people communicate in different cultures, cultural misunderstandings and even cultural conflicts will occur [9]. As an indispensable part of interpersonal communication, polite language has a great impact on the success of communication. Therefore, when communicating with foreigners, speakers should understand the cultural background of the communicative country, learn to choose appropriate language, and understand and use polite language, so as to avoid making mistakes, and also promote the communication of different cultures to make interpersonal relations more harmonious.

4.3. Differences in ethics

Ethics is also an indispensable part of social culture. Under the long-term influence of traditional family patriarchal, Chinese people respect benevolence and value righteousness. In daily life, people will use kinship titles to call people who are not related to them according to their degree of familiarity, such as Grandpa Zhao and Aunt Wang. Sometimes you will ask some personal questions to show your kindness and concern. At the point of Chinese people, these are manifestations of intimacy, while in the position of foreigners, these inquiries feel uncomfortable, violate their privacy, and are impolite.

5. The Importance of the Courtesy Principle in Intercultural Communication

Since the reform and opening up, more and more new things have flooded into China, and the society has been changing with each passing day. The rapid development of economy and culture, and the frequency of communication with foreigners is much higher than before. Politeness is cultural. People affected by different cultures need to follow the principle of politeness in order to ensure the smooth progress of communication. Learning and mastering the principles of politeness helps to understand the differences in cross-cultural communication, and then better guide cross-cultural communication [10].

6. How to Cultivate Students' Consciousness of Pragmatic Difference Between Chinese and Western Polite Language in University English Teaching

6.1. Application of a positive courtesy strategy in the English course

6.1.1. Sense of identity

Sense of identity, it refers to teachers' recognition of students' views, standpoints and interests. Teachers should use this polite strategy appropriately to timely praise the students who answer the questions correctly and complete the learning task excellently. For instance, well done! Good! Very good! Good job! Perfect! Excellent! These words improve students confidence and motivation. At the same time, we should try to avoid blaming students, especially in front of the whole class. For example, this is a silly mistake. Haven't I pointed it out to you time and again? How many times have you made this mistake? I don't understand why you have so poor memory! It is impolite to accuse students in such an impatient tone and it is unfair to put the blame entirely on them. In this case, teachers can try to say it another way, "well, perhaps I did not emphasize that in the previous class" and "it's really an very important point, let's try together to remember it", which not only show the tolerance of teachers, but also preserve the positive face of students, avoiding the blow to students' enthusiasm.

6.1.2. Showing the cooperative attitude between teachers and students

When teachers have trouble answering students' questions in class, teachers should show a cooperative attitude. For example, when a student offers their own opinions, the teacher can answer as following: "Maybe you are right. I'll check it out and tell you later", but not to say: "No matter what you say I am right here, just remember

this.” It is easy to cause direct conflict. Moreover, if the student gets the correct and satisfactory answer from other ways, the teacher will lose his prestige and trust, and even cause the students’ weariness of learning and a negative impact on the teaching.

6.1.3. Try to meet the legitimate needs of the students

P. Hagbolt believed that a good teacher should be able to understand the students’ wishes and be confident in meeting their wishes [11]. After giving a certain language point, the teacher should allow the students to ask questions, so that they are satisfied for spiritual level.

6.1.4. Creating a harmonious classroom atmosphere and the teacher-student relationship

In class, a harmonious relationship between teachers and students is an important factor in teaching success. Therefore, teachers should try to optimize the relationship with students. Properly using some words like: we, us, let’s, together, you and me, and should, perhaps, maybe, possibly and so on for replacing the mandatory or individual words like: I, myself, you, yourself and must, have to, need, exactly, and so on. When explaining grammar, the teacher could say: we can say...we don’t say it that way. And organize class activities to avoid using command sentences.

6.1.5. Influencing students with an optimistic, positive and encouraging attitude

The special role of teacher has an profound influence on students’ learning attitude. In English learning, it is very important to keep an optimistic attitude all the time, and the students’ mentality, especially like enthusiasm or weariness in class, is affected by the teachers to a large extent. Therefore, teachers should know how to control their emotions and affect their students, for example, after the student has committed a mistake, say: Never mind. Next time you will make it. Don’t worry, I believe you can surely remember it next time. We all know the question is important but difficult. Let’s study it together. Failure breeds success, and so on.

6.2. Application of negative courtesy strategies

6.2.1. Giving the students freedom to choose

Teachers should give students great freedom when requiring students to complete learning tasks. Teachers’ language in class is polite and decent, so that students are willing to accept it. However, in case of rejection, the teacher must maintain the demeanor, take care of the students’ thoughts so as not to cause the students’ rebellious mood.

6.2.2. Apologies to the students, expressing no intention of hurting the students in feelings or action

In the teaching process, teachers’ teaching will inevitably make some mistakes. In the special environment of class, what the teachers need to do is to put down their pride and apologize to the students. Although this will lose the teacher’s face, it will avoid hurting the students’ self-esteem and self-confidence. The apology sentences often used in English classes are: I am terribly sorry. I did not mean to hurt you. I am sorry. I should have told you that. Sorry, I’ve forgot you have done it. I hope I can take back what I said just now.

6.2.3. Giving thanks to the students

In class, giving thanks in class is also a polite strategy that follows the approbation maxim in the principle of politeness. Try to minimize belittling others and increase praise to others. It will not make the teachers' face damaged, but make the classroom atmosphere more harmonious, the relationship between teachers and students is closer. It is necessary for teachers to use more words such as: thank you, thanks a lot and other words to express gratitude.

6.2.4. Try to reduce the negative face imposed on the students

In class, many students are very afraid of making mistakes, and believe that they are very face-saving, so they are reluctant to face some more difficult problems and activities. Teachers can use this strategy to reduce the psychological burden of students. For example, could you have a try? It doesn't matter even you make a mistake. Don't worry. It's somewhat difficult. Not bad, just two words missing. It's quite natural to make mistakes in this case.

6.3. Combination of culture and language

Language is the carrier of culture, and culture and language are inextricably linked. Therefore, teachers should also add the corresponding cultural teaching in English teaching. Teachers could explain the culture of English-speaking countries through English newspapers, radio, novels, songs, movies and other ways that students are interested in, and compare with local culture, firstly know about the culture, and then explain the differences, which is easier for students to understand.

6.4. Comparative study of Chinese and Western politeness principles

Teachers conduct comparative analysis of Chinese and Western politeness principles, and combine their own cultural background, so that students can discover the similarities and differences of the principles, and the communication misunderstandings and obstacles caused by their differences, understand the importance of cultivating the awareness of differences between Chinese and Western polite language, and then conduct scene drills to deepen their impression.

6.5. Improvement of cross-cultural communication ability and the practical application of polite language

Teachers should be students-centered, organize various oral English communication activities, and encourage students to actively participate in various English activities and competitions held by schools, provinces and countries, so as to broaden their horizons and perceive the necessity and urgency of English learning. In teaching procedure, teachers could create a real communication environment, such as: character interview, role playing, debate competition, movie dubbing and scene dialogue, to cultivate students' English communication skills, and encourage students to communicate with foreign teachers in their spare time, to improve their cross-cultural communication ability [12].

7. Conclusions

Politeness is an universal social norm and a moral norm that people must maintain and follow in the process of communication. Because of the different cultural traditions and modes of thinking, different nationalities have different understandings

of the principles of politeness, and different strategies and guidelines will also be adopted for the use of polite language. In cross-cultural communication, both sides should make joint efforts, respect cultural differences, actively adjust their words and deeds to adapt to the changes in the communication environment, and ensure the well progress of cross-cultural communication in a friendly and harmonious atmosphere. Politeness is also an important way to build and maintain relationships, and plays a key role in communication. Each ethnic group has different norms of polite behavior, reflecting their different ethnic ideologies, cultures and values, and their cultural differences give rise to different manners of polite expressions. The correct use of polite language, will promote the further development of communication relations, and even achieve unexpected results. In cross-cultural exchanges, verbal errors should be minimized. Cultural stereotypes are often thought to hinder the success of intercultural communication, which lead to important guiding significance for people to master the cultural values of a nation. By knowing about western culture, social and pragmatic errors in polite language can be avoided. The characteristics of modesty, compassion and courtesy emphasized by the Chinese collective orientation enable the Chinese people to achieve successful communication in a better and more patient way.

Conflicts of Interest

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