

*Boboraimova Maftuna**The researcher at the National university of Uzbekistan***A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF POLITENESS IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE**

Abstract: This article researchescultural language units in Chinese and English. These characteristics are reflected in courtesy language of English and Chinese. Courtesy language is mainly expressed in the forms of address, greeting, congratulation, appreciation and apology, which reflect the different cultures.

Keywords: English language, Chinese words, communication, pragmatic sides.

Politeness is a social phenomenon, generally existing in every language. But due to the differences of cultural values and conventions, people from different culture may have different understandings about the definition of politeness, and they deal with politeness in different ways. When communicating with people from different cultures, one should pay close attention to the connotation due to different culture values, otherwise it will lead to pragmatic failures in communications.

Chinese culture and English culture are regarded as representatives of the East and the West. Chinese culture, influenced by Confucianism, underlines human sociality and collectivity; while in the English-speaking countries, individualism is the center of social life. People pursue individual rights and freedom, which are holy and inviolable.

Language, as part of culture, is influenced by culture. So is courtesy language. Different cultures lead to different politeness principles. The primary characteristic of Chinese politeness principle is "to denigrate self and to respect others"; English

politeness principle has six pairs of "maximize" and "minimize". The most obvious

difference between the two kinds of politeness principle is that English does not have

the address maxim. Influenced by Christianity, westerners stress equality and egoism, and do not underline the varied status and position so much as the Chinese do. These characteristics are reflected in courtesy language of English and Chinese. Courtesy language is mainly expressed in the forms of address, greeting, congratulation, appreciation and apology, which reflect the different cultures. The

biggest difference between English and Chinese term of address is that the Chinese

system is rich and complicated, while the English one is relatively simple; Chinese term of address often extend beyond family members, as does not seem to happen in English. Age, income, marriage, and religion, etc. are taboos in English, and people in English-speaking countries like to talk about weather when they meet each other; greeting in Chinese almost includes all situations about one's life, the more trifling, the better. The Chinese are used to greeting "吃了吗? (Have you eaten?)/去哪? (Where are you going?)"when they meet each other. Non-verbal greeting is a part of greeting, but the research on it is far from enough. Congratulation in Chinese is much more than that in English, especially the ones used in the Spring Festival. Being a senior-respecting country, congratulations for the old are very rich in Chinese, while in English-speaking countries, "old" is a taboo in the eyes of people, so there are few such congratulations in English. Appreciation in Chinese is not used as

frequently as that in English. The Chinese do not often say "谢谢(thank you)" to their family or close friends. Appreciation in English can be heard among family, friends and colleagues and so on.

Increased communication between China and Western countries leads to mutual influences on not only economy but also language. There is no exception on courtesy language, especially influence of English to Chinese. For example, "你好(Hello)" on meeting and "拜拜(Bye bye)" in departure are from English courtesy language. English is influenced by Chinese too. For example, "Long time no see" derives from "好久不见" in Chinese, and it has been accepted by the English. From the contrastive study of courtesy language, we can find that language is inextricably bound up with culture. To learn a foreign language, one is expected to learn its culture at the same time. Unawareness of culture factor will produce pragmatic failure in communication.

Pragmatic failure in courtesy language can be divided into pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. Both of them are direct or indirect influences of culture to language.

Politeness principle is to restrict speech acts. In this section, a contrast is to be made in the politeness principle between the two languages and the analysis of its influences upon courtesy language.

In China, the most recent developments in politeness study are represented by Gu Yueguo, who explicitly connects politeness with social moral norms. Gu (1992) generalizes the essence of Chinese politeness—a tendency to denigrate the self and respect the other, which has been echoed by most Chinese scholars.

According to Gu's opinion, there are five aspects in the Politeness Principle in Chinese.

1) The Self-denigration Maxim

The primary characteristic of Chinese-style politeness is “夫礼者，自卑而尊人(To be polite, one should denigrate self.)”. The content of the maxim has turned into “self-depreciate” nowadays. The self-denigration maxim asks people to depreciate self as well as anything about self; to praise and show respect to others as well as anything about others. For example, one names himself “鄙人，小弟，不才，在下，老朽”，his wife “内人，老婆，贱内，拙荆”，his children “犬子，小女”，his home “寒舍”，his works “拙作”，others “您，先生，阁下”，other's wife “夫人，太太”. With the development of the society, influenced by new ideas and values, the maxim has changed in some aspects, but a large number of people still keep the original, especially those Chinese in Hong Kong Region, Singapore, and Malaysia.

2) The Address Maxim

Term of address in Chinese represents the social relationship among people. Different addressing means different relationship. For example, a student usually addresses his teacher by “family name + 老师”; “老/小+family name” is not allowed because it is considered impolite.

The maxim means that people should use suitable term of address in communication with others.

The Chinese terms of address are influenced by the following elements: relatives or not, rank, profession, degree of familiarity, sex, age, occasion and so on. These elements are not equally important. They are distinguished in terms of different speech acts and language surroundings.

3) The Tact Maxim

The maxim is to speak with elegant words instead of vulgar words; to speak in a mild way instead of speaking bluntly. Xun Kuang, a famous thinker in ancient China, ever said: “礼者，养也。”(《礼论》，a book of politeness). It means that one who employs polite language looks good and educated. No one thinks a person is polite if he speaks with a mouthful of vulgar words.

4) The Agreement Maxim

“面子(face)” plays a most important role in social interaction. In China, the higher the position, the more eminent the person, and the more important his “面子”. One is expected to consider both the speaker’s 面子 and the hearer’s in Chinese discourse. “面子”and politeness in Chinese go hand in hand.

The maxim requires the speaker to manage to correspond with the hearer, trying to meet the hearer’s needs in actual interaction. When given, invited, and praised, the hearer enjoys due respect (that is, 有面子), but now the speaker’s 面子 is laid before the hearer. It is impolite for the hearer not to satisfy the speaker, that is, the speaker loses face if the hearer does not meet his need. So according to the agreement maxim, the hearer should “恭敬不如从命(that is, agree with the speaker)”; when one has to criticize or give a different opinion, he usually “先礼后兵(that is, praise before depreciation)”, saving other’s face before giving a different opinion, thus, although the speech act itself is not polite, the conversation can go on in a polite way.

5) The Generosity Maxim

The generosity maxim requires one, in motive, to minimize the price of others and maximize the benefit for others; in speech, to maximize the benefit given by others and minimize the price of self. For example:

(1) A : 明天来我家吃晚饭吧。(Would you like to have dinner with us tomorrow night?)

(2) B : 不了，太麻烦了。(No, thank you. I don’t want to trouble you.)

(3) A : 麻烦什么呀，菜都是现成的。(It is not trouble at all. The dishes are ready.)

(4) B : 那也要烧啊。(No, thank you. You have to cook anyway.)

(5) A : 你不来我们也要做饭的，不差你一个，来吧。(We still have to cook, even without you. Come on!)

(6) B : 好吧，先谢谢了。(OK. Thank you.)

A (1) invites B to dinner, which follows “maximize the benefit for others” in the generosity maxim; B (2)’s refusal is in accord with “minimize the price of others”; A (3) tries to “minimize the price of self”; B (4) refuses again, which is in accord with “minimize the price of others” too; insisting on B’s coming, A tries to “minimize the price of self” again; B (6) accepts the invitation, which falls foul of the generosity maxim, but follows the agreement maxim. What’s more, B can give a return banquet later on, so his acceptance does not fall into impolite behavior.

Linguistic research into politeness in English is closely associated with the names of Lakoff, Leech, and Brown & Levinson. Although they perceive politeness based on different research methods,

they share the common goal of establishing universal principles of politeness, which is a “fuzzy and difficult area”(Held, 1992). Brown and Levinson’s theory has been treated as the classic study on politeness since its first publication in 1978. Brown and Levinson (1978) attempted to explain why people often choose to convey themselves indirectly by proposing politeness principles, which was later specified as six maxims by G. Leech. “Unless you are polite to your neighbor, the channel of communication between you will break down and you will no longer be able to borrow his mower”(Leech, 1983).

In Leech’s view (1983), the maxims of the Politeness Principle are as follows:

- 1) Tact Maxim
 - (a) Minimize cost to other;
 - (b) Maximize benefit to other.
- 2) Generosity Maxim
 - (a) Minimize benefit to self;
 - (b) Maximize cost to self.
- 3) Approbation Maxim
 - (a) Minimize dispraise of other;
 - (b) Maximize praise of other.
- 4) Modesty Maxim
 - (a) Minimize praise of self;
 - (b) Maximize dispraise of self.
- 5) Agreement Maxim
 - (a) Minimize disagreement between self and other;
 - (b) Maximize agreement between self and other.
- 6) Sympathy Maxim
 - (a) Minimize antipathy between self and other;
 - (b) Maximize sympathy between self and other.

From the above description, we can see that the English politeness principle and the Chinese politeness principle have some similarities, such as depreciating self to show respect to others; trying to find the common grounds between self and others; giving others more benefit and minimize the price of other and so on, though, some differences can be found. Although both Chinese and English politeness principle have the tact maxim, the meaning of the tact maxim is different. Chinese tact maxim refers to decency of language, while English tact maxim focuses on relationship between self and other. The biggest difference between the two languages is that Chinese politeness principle has the address maxim but English does not. The address maxim is given rise to by the hierarchical

relationship in the minds of the Chinese, while the westerners pursue the equality in interaction, so they do not stress the terms of address as much as the Chinese.

Since Chinese culture is collectivism-oriented and English culture is individualism-centered, Chinese people are more careful in trying not to offend others and sometimes may echo others' opinions more frequently. Apart from expressing agreement, they, may also praise others and show their appreciation of others' views. When one is praised by others, the English usually accept it by saying "thank you", which follows the agreement maxim in English politeness principle. However, the Chinese often deny or have self-humbling/self-abasement responses to praise by saying "不行, 不行/哪里, 哪里/过奖了", etc. because they are following the self-denigration maxim in Chinese politeness principle. The Chinese people are inclined to play down themselves as a way to show respect to others (Gu, 1990). In Chinese society there is a long tradition of self-denigration, so even if the complimentee does something really good, he will not admit that in public, instead he usually denies the complimenter's judgment. And the complimenter does not expect an agreement from the complimentee either, but this does not mean that Chinese people do not think positively of themselves. By not accepting the compliment, they show modesty, which is important for the Chinese people, because modesty is one of the most critical constituents of their self-image. Chinese modesty is a virtue of self-cultivation while the English modesty is a strategy of minimizing or avoiding self-praise.

That is why it tends to be not easy for people from English-speaking countries to understand many negative comments in Chinese, which are expressed out of modesty.

For example: Foreign guest: What a job!

Foreign waiter: Thank you very much.

Chinese waiter: No. I still have much to do.

After awareness of the similarities and differences between Chinese and English politeness principle, we may avoid misunderstandings in actual communication with foreigners.

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