Research on Similarities and Differences in Polite Expressions at Home and Abroad

YUFANG RAO

ABSTRACT

In this paper, theoretical analysis and comparative analysis are used to make a systematic analysis of polite expressions at home and abroad and then find their similarities and differences by comparing and analyzing, aiming at clarifying the cultural differences in polite expressions at home and abroad. The research result shows that the similarities of polite expressions at home and abroad are reflected in respect for each other and the differences are reflected in the context of the application of polite expressions, which is directly related to the cultural background of China and the west. With the acceleration of globalization, polite expressions certainly will be used more and more frequent in various countries, and thus it is important for the establishment of harmonious communication relationship to define the cultural differences of polite expressions at home and abroad.

KEYWORDS

At home and abroad; language culture; cultural differences polite expressions; similarities and differences.

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of the global integration, the relation among countries all over the world is becoming increasingly close. As an important part of human language, the development of polite expressions is essentially equivalent to the symbol of human cultural progress. Languages of different countries generally bear different ethnic cultures so that they have corresponding differences, so do polite expressions. To appropriately express the thought or emotion in cross-cultural communication, communicating sides must be able to correctly understand the language cultural background of the other country, and then exclude cross-cultural communication barriers between each other according to the pragmatic principles of the other side. Language is an important carrier of a country's culture at the theoretical level. As an important branch of the language, the national cultural background that polite expressions bear is more representative, and thus to clearly understand the similarities and differences between polite expressions has become an important channel to grasp the essence of culture of the corresponding country. In general, the comparison and definitude of similarities and differences in polite expressions between different countries is conducive to better carrying out cross-cultural communication and dispelling language cultural differences between countries, thereby to ensure the rationality of polite expressions application, which has a significant meaning for the harmonious communication between countries.

Yufang, Rao, Wuhan University of Technology; Wuhan 430070 China.
OVERVIEW OF POLITENESS PRINCIPLES AT HOME AND ABROAD

Concept of politeness

Politeness is an important culture of human society since ancient times. No matter in which country or nation, politeness is regarded as the important foundation of culture. However, influenced by the national culture and actual historical situations, there are inevitably more or less differences in awareness and standards of polite culture in different countries. Accordingly, as a core carrier of polite culture, the relevant language application based on the cultural background also shows some differences. Based on the definition of “politeness” in the existing research results at home and abroad, it is argued in this paper that the concept of politeness can simply come down to the most basic moral and behavioral norms that must be possessed in individual life in the social environment, Individuals use many elements such as language to show a special emotion to the other side in communication, including friendliness, respect, understanding and sympathy, and they carry out interpersonal communication on this basis and form specific behavior characteristics.

Comparison of politeness principles at home and abroad

The “politeness” in sociological perspective, according to the viewpoint of most western scholars, is a part of the Face Act Theory. With the continuous changes, this theoretical system has become mature today. As a universal phenomenon in western culture, “face” culture is highly valued, which regards politeness as an important way to maintain image and dignity in the process of social communication. And polite language is an intuitive emotional presentation. Specifically, the principles of western polite language mainly include six aspects, as shown in Table 1.

As a whole, the difference between cultural backgrounds of China and western countries should be attributed to the profound historical origin. Influenced by this, China and western countries inevitably have different interpretations of politeness principles. Compared with western countries, Chinese sinologist professor Gu Yueguo put forward specific contents of politeness principles by tracing to the source of Chinese culture, including self-denigration maxim, address-term maxim, refinement maxim and conformity maxim as well as the criterion of morality, words and deeds. The main features of these criterions are reflected in four aspects: respect, modesty, warm attitude and refinement. Therefore, due to the different politeness principles in different countries, polite expressions which are based on corresponding politeness principles are also different.

| Principle       | Explanation                                           |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Tact maxim      | Make others suffer less losses and get more benefits  |
| Generosity maxim| Leave oneself less benefits and more losses           |
| Approbation maxi| Give less deprecation and more praise to others       |
| Modesty maxim   | Praise oneself less and degrade oneself more          |
| Agreement maxim | Reduce the differences between the two sides and deepen the consistency of ideas |
| Sympathy maxim  | Weaken the resentment of both sides and increase sympathy |
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN POLITE EXPRESSIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD

Through the comparison of politeness principles of China and western countries, it can be seen that although there are obvious differences in politeness principles between different countries, there are also some similarities. On this basis, polite language also presents specific similarities and differences.

Similarities of polite expressions at home and abroad

In politeness principles, the address-term maxim and conformity maxim in China and western countries is similar to a certain extent. Taking the English word “please” for example, it is a word routinely use in the daily life in western countries, while Chinese people are also accustomed to use “Please” as a manifestation of respect for the other side. Another example is “You”, a Chinese respectful word widely and generally used to call others in communication. Although there is no such kind of proper vocabulary in foreign polite language system, some sentence patterns are used in English to express the similar meaning. For example, “Could you tell me your age” shows the same meaning as the Chinese expression “How old are you”. Appellation polite expressions of such kind reflect the similarities at home and abroad. Although the polite expressions in different countries do not have absolutely identical meaning, all of them can fully reflect the respect for each other, which is conducive to deepening the emotion of both sides.

Differences in polite expressions at home and abroad

Polite language is an important symbol of the development of human culture. Different nations have different cultures, while these different cultures influence the polite language in communication. Understanding of differences of politeness principle in different cultures can effectively promote cross-cultural communication, and thereby achieves harmonious communication. In cross-cultural communication, people keep many different views on the cognition and application of politeness due to cultural differences. Based on this, the author summarizes the similarities and differences of polite expressions at home and abroad according to relevant information:

1. Congratulation and praise
Due to the influence of the differences in traditional concepts, Chinese and Americans generally respond very differently when they receive congratulations and praise from other people. Americans advocate expressing love praise in a free and direct way. They hope to directly make others feel their compliment and admiration, and are also willing to directly accept praise. Therefore, they will say “thank you” in the face of direct praise from others. But Chinese people always stress “modesty” and “belittle oneself and respect others”. In the face of praise from others, Chinese people generally answer “(I am not worthy of such compliments)”, “(I really don't deserve this)”, etc. Great cultural differences can be seen clearly through the modesty principle and praise principle in Chinese and western politeness principle.

2. Expressions showing “thanks”
There are also great differences in expressing appreciation between Chinese people and westerners. Westerners say “thank you” and “please” very frequently, even
between the parent and kids or acquaintances with intimate relationship. But in the viewpoint of Chinese, it is not necessary for parents, couples and family members to thank each other and it is very strange to express appreciation clearly to the ones with intimate relationship. Chinese often say “There is nothing worthy of appreciation. You regarded me as an outsider.” This indicates that close friends seldom say “thanks” to each other. Only strangers and unfamiliar people naturally say “thank you” to each in order to express courtesy and respect, and the behavior of expressing gratitude also implies a certain sense of distance.

3. Expressions for dinner invitation

In the process of communication, the forms of polite expressions between westerners and Chinese also express different connotations which generate the differences in polite expressions at home and abroad. In the actual communication process, it is very common for Chinese people to say “I will invite you to dinner another day” or “Let's go eating together”. In China, both the two polite dinner invitations indicate that the speaker is willing to entertain guests. But westerners often plan to entertain guests only when they clearly express that they will stand treat. The expressions similar to “Let's eat together” does not mean that the speaker will entertain guests. Most Chinese are not accustomed to AA (Dutch treatment) especially in a date. But in western countries, AA is very common and normal way even for two people who are dating.

4. Daily greeting

People in China and western countries also have different manners and polite expressions of greeting. In China, some expressions like “Where are you going?” and “Have you eaten your meal?” are commonly and widely used by people to greet each other and they are also a part of being gracious. But in the west, asking someone where he is going or whether he has had meals is a kind of behavior inquiring about other's privacy. These kinds of expressions only bear their literal meaning in western countries. At the same time, Chinese people are accustomed to share personal privacy with others to express friendliness and intimacy in the communication. But westerners are not used to talking about personal privacy because they think it's impolite.

5. Appellation

In addressing, Chinese people think that the appellation presenting blood relationship and family relation is more intimate, friendly and also more polite. The parents and their kids do not address each other by name, so do couples. But in the west, parents, couples or other family members are accustomed to addressing each other directly by name to show courtesy and friendliness.

REASONS FOR THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN POLITE EXPRESSIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD

There is a variety of differences in polite expressions at home and abroad As far as the root is concerned, the polite language is part of the language system of its respective country and also based on the whole language system of the nation or country. And meanwhile, this integrated language system also has the corresponding differences, which determines the differences in polite expressions at home and abroad. The main reasons can be divided into two major aspects.
Cultural model

Comparatively speaking, the multicultural interaction pattern is relatively more distinct in western countries. Although some countries do not have a long history of development as China, the cultural root of individualism tends to be particularly solid. Generally speaking, the cultural psychological characteristics of western countries are freedom, self-reliance, autonomy, equality and respect. In the viewpoint of westerners, personal interests, power, privacy, freedom and liberation are inviolable. The Chinese traditional culture takes Confucianism as the core and thus it is relatively moderate, which determines that Chinese people focus more on dignity and “modesty and self-control”. Chinese people greatly highlight collectivism, believing “a great tree inspires the wind” and “beating their heads and birds”. They also hold that their personal interests are always less important than the collective interests. This background determines that Chinese polite expressions more emphasize the standardization.

Thinking model

Language is the medium of expression of human thinking. Affected by different thinking models of people in different countries, the application of polite language gradually highlights the differences. In western countries, people's thinking is generally linear, stressing the reason and function. As the origin of western theories, philosophy has a profound influence on all doctrines. The thinking model of westerners is also accustomed to starting from the part to the whole and highlighting logical analysis, and they also generally have strong ability of solving problems. Thus, the application of polite language in western countries is also more open and direct. But the thinking model of Chinese is generally dominated by circular thought pattern which emphasizes “flexibility”, trying the best to find unity among contradictions. In view of the ambiguity of this thinking model, the Chinese are more willing to regard “failures” as “the mother of success”, reflecting the prudence and tradition of thinking. Accordingly, “speaking and acting cautiously” is regarded as a virtue. Chinese people advocate “harmony is most precious”, and thus the polite language in China is relatively reserved and implied, and also more emphasizes the feelings of others.

CONCLUSION

There are some similarities and also more differences in polite expressions at home and abroad.

The origin of these differences lies in the different interpretations of politeness principles in different cultural fields, and the deeper reason is subject to the differences in the cultural pattern and thinking model of respective country. In the future, as the process of globalization continues accelerating, the exchanges among countries will become increasingly close and the application of polite expressions will also be more and more frequent. The harmonious communication relationship between countries can be established and deepened more effectively only by clearly understanding the cultural differences in polite expressions at home and abroad and ensuring the appropriate use of polite expressions.
REFERENCES

1. Zhang Huanxin, Zhang Yiting. Research on Chinese College Students' Pragmatic Competence of Polite Language in intercultural communication—A Case Study of colleges and Universities in Dalian [J]. Modern Communication, 2017, (16): 108-110.
2. Li Pei, Wang Nina. A study of the Basic Methods of Cross-cultural Communication from the Perspective of Chinese and Western Polite Expressions [J]. Management & Technology of SME, 2016 (12): 88-89.
3. Mikolaj Ira, Shen ting. A Comparative Study of the Han and Uigur Polite Language [J]. Culture Journal, 2016, (09): 189-191.
4. Yan Wenjing. Pragmatic Differences between Chinese and English greetings from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication [J]. Language Planning, 2016, (27): 87-88.
5. Fan Yi. Research on the Courtesy Expression Teaching in Class Interaction of College English [J]. Journal of Hunan University of Science and Engineering, 2016, 37 (08): 153-155.
6. Tang ting. A Contrastive Study of English and Chinese Polite Expressions in Intercultural Communication [J]. Overseas English, 2016, (05): 204-205.
7. Meng ran. Pragmatic Comparison of English and Chinese Politeness [J]. Journal of Juamusi Occupational College, 2016, (04): 352.
8. Ke Xiaorong. Study on the Differences in Politeness Principles and Polite Expressions between English and Chinese [J]. Journal of Minxi Vocational and Technical College, 2016, 18 (01): 86-89+113.