Study of Chinese and Western Cultural Difference in the Cross-Cultural Communication

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Keywords: Cross-Cultural Communication, Cross-Cultural Communication Forms, Comparative Study, Cultural Difference.

Abstract. Recognize the differences between Chinese and western social value systems and grasp the corresponding rule in the process of cross-cultural communication, solve and avoid the cultural conflicts and obstacles, improve the practical skills of cross-cultural communication. There is a very important theory value and practical significance in cross-cultural communication activities. Because the history of Chinese and western English speaking countries is different, there exists difference in their code of conduct, way of thinking, value orientation, language righteousness, the way of expression etc. We should stand on the position where accept for cultural differences and identity, dig the modern value of Chinese traditional culture, and absorb the positive and beneficial ingredients in western culture.

Introduction

Inevitable Trend of Cross-cultural Communication

As the process of economic globalization speeding up and the phenomenon of cross-cultural communication emerging in an endless stream, we have more chances to contact with foreigners. However, due to the obvious differences between various cultures, inevitably there will be a communication conflict when interact with people coming from unfamiliar cultures and countries who have the different way of thinking and living habits and behaviors. As a result, under the background of globalization, seeking the differences between Chinese and western culture, and effective communication way, is of great significance to strengthen cross-cultural communication.

Definition of Cross-cultural Communication

"Cross-cultural communication" refers to communication between native speakers and non-native speakers, and also refers to any communication between people in different languages and culture backgrounds.[1] Byram (1997) argued that, people with the cross-cultural communicative competence can not only communicate with foreigners successfully, also be able to overcome cultural superiority and cultural prejudice, to reach a compromise with people from foreign cultures and achieve win-win results.[2] In other words, if you communicate with foreigners (because of the differences of languages and culture backgrounds), you should pay attention to what problem you will meet and how to communicate appropriately.

Reasons for Cultural Differences

Due to the various geography, history and religious environment in different nations, there appear different social cultures, local customs, language habits and other contextual factors. Because the development history of Chinese and western English speaking countries is different so the cultural background is different. There exists a big difference in their language righteousness, the way of expression, the way of thinking, code of conduct, value orientation, and etc.
Chinese and Western Cultural Differences in Cross-cultural Communication

Different Languages

The Words of Chinese and Western are Different. In terms of words, there is a phenomenon that words may have the same semantic meaning but different cultural meaning in the two languages. For example, "dragon" is the symbol of right and power in Chinese and represents the majesty of imperial power. It is also a cultural symbol of which Chinese people are proud, so there are a lot of words to praise "dragon", such as "the descendants of the dragon" and "dragon horse spirit" and so on. However, in the west, "dragon" is not the equivalent as the vocabulary of Chinese. It is near the viper's unicorn and represents the disaster and evil. As we all know, the "four dragons in Asia" in Chinese became the "four tigers in Asia" in English. Another example is "dog". "Dog" has different concepts in the two different cultures. Chinese put the dog as a humble thing and words with dog as metaphor in Chinese are almost pejorative, such as "A dog will leap over a wall in desperation", "Seeing lower in dogs", "A dog threatening people on the strength of its master's power", etc. On the contrary, the British and American people treat dog as a loyal companion, just like a son. There are a lot of sayings to express their love to dogs, “You are the lucky dog”, “Love the man, love his dog” and so on.[3]

The Sentence Structure of Chinese and Western is Different. The English sentence tend to use verb as core, with the principle of relevance to other components from the primary level to the secondary level, and form the expanded sentence construe which extend outward from the central word. For example: I take heart from the fact that the enemy, which boasts that it can occupy the strategic point in a couple of hours, has not yet been able to take even the outlying regions, because of the stiff resistance that gets in the way. The Chinese sentence usually arranged by time order or logical order, forms linear syntactic normalization. Different with the “English hypotaxis structure”, Chinese language structure directly reflects the order of real time and the human perception of the world. At the same time, Chinese syntax is the embodiment of the linear flow, and thus it pursuit the rhythm, and pace. The differences between Chinese and Western thinking mode is also reflected in word order with column. Chinese "harmony between man and nature" concept advocate oriented consciousness in language, while the Westerners "subject is independent from object" thinking mode tended to emphasize the consciousness of object in language. The specific embodiment of Chinese is that Chinese tend to use the first person as subject. Sentence patterns are more inclined to "active" sentence; English tends to use the "non-person" subject, the sentence tends to be "passive" sentence. For example: (1) It never occurred to me that she was so dishonest./I never thought she was so dishonest. (2) The thick carpet killed the sound of my foot steps./ I walk on the thick carpet, and there is little footsteps. From the above example we can see the difference is consistent with the philosophy of the Chinese and Western ideas and ways of thinking.[4]

The Chapter Structure of Chinese and Western is Different. When deliver message, the Chinese are used to abstract thinking and association. In order to make the article vivid and image, they often use rhetoric, metaphor and a lot of adjectives. Before going into the theme of the article, they often use words which are exquisite and carefully crafted to make a lot of foreshadows. While for the westerners, this practice will only be considered to weakened the effect of information dissemination, and often it is considered to be empty and boast words. Because the writing style of the west, especially the writing of English, generally pay more attention to the logic and factual statements. Even some famous speeches, also do not use a lot of beautiful words as Chinese. For example, former British Prime Minister David Churchill's famous speech "Blood, toil, sweat, tears," the word is very simple. Here is part of the speech:

I say to the House as I said to the Ministers who have joined this government,
I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, Sweat.
We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous Kind.
We have before us many, many months of Struggle and suffering.[2]

On the writing style, there are also different expressions in English and Chinese. As for narrative writing, English readers accustomed to a kind of linear thought processes, and the implicit
euphemism, winding writing style will be appreciated by Chinese people.

As for the argument article, Chinese developed image thinking style produced significant influence to the style of it. In the process of reasoning, the Chinese tend to use concrete object to express deep, abstract sense, leading people to realize a certain sense and obtain rich imagination. However, this is confused for westerners, because the westerners are accustomed to using logical argumentation, guileless languages, clear and precise structure. What's more, they like to use long sentences, for example, when Germany's classical philosophy scientists are writing, a title can be accounted for a sheet of paper sometimes. So we must be aware of the expression difference in the communication.

Different Thinking Mode

Different thinking way is the product of a particular culture and in turn constantly influence and form a specific cultural connotation. The thinking mode of western culture pays attention to logic and analysis, while the thinking mode of the Eastern culture lays emphasis on intuition integrity, which is also the feature of Chinese traditional thinking way. By the influence of the traditional culture, Chinese people often pay much attention to intuition, feeling and experience in the process of learning. In addition, they also tend to use their experience and feeling to judge other people's behavior in the process of communication. Compared with the western mode of thinking, the Chinese thought mode is obvious more general and ambiguous. English and Chinese sentence structure also reflect the different thinking pattern. Chinese traditional culture pays attention to "the integrity of nature and humanity", and form this thinking mode. As a result, the students used to use personal pronouns as the subject, such as "I, we" and etc. Western thinking mode emphasizes "the division of thing and I ", and try to make the language objective, fair and logical. In English, there are many objective expressions, such as: "It is believed that", "It is said that" and other structures. As time passed, different thinking way will form a kind of mind set, and it can be interpreted as a kind of process which recognize and simplify the external world. In essence, the Chinese mind-set tends to ignore individual difference and exaggerate the cognitive attitude to other related social group with a sense of color, and accompanied by fixed creed. Western culture pays more attention to rational thinking, emphasizes the objectivity of things. This difference of thinking mode will directly affect the cross-cultural communication, and even sometimes cause communication error.

Different Conduct Codes

Code of conduct refers to the moral standards and behavior commonly accepted by society. In short, it is telling people what to do and what not to do. When you communicate with people who come from different cultural backgrounds, a phenomenon often appears where people use their own standards to measure the behavior of others. Owing to differences between both sides of the code of conduct, the "impose standards on others" way is often considered to be in contradiction with the principle that handling method should change according to different time, locations, and conditions. Because of different cultural environment, the differences of many behaviors in Chinese and western culture often lead to misunderstanding and even more bad results. For example, the Chinese pat children's head to express amity. However, in the western countries, it is a kind of disrespect behavior and the parents will be very angry. At the same time, nonverbal communication is also an important way of communication. It refers to use nonverbal behavior to understand the information according to specific context of situation. Actually they are not real language unit, but sometimes it can express more strongly than words and some certain non-verbal behavior often represents a certain meaning. In cross-cultural communication, much attention must be paid to it. The meaning expressed by nonverbal behavior is various under the different backgrounds between Chinese and western culture. For example, the Chinese believe in "silence is golden", considering silence contains rich information, even sometimes "silent wins audio". While in western countries, people feel very uncomfortable about this kind of behavior. When westerners talk, the listener is generally watching speaker's eyes for a long time to show the listener's recognition and respect for the speaker. But in Chinese point of view, this is a kind of rude behavior.[5] Because the Chinese
are not used to staring at others over a long period of time. Thus in cross-cultural communication whether you can be able to identify and use behavior correctly is an important factor to guarantee cross-cultural communication smoothly.

**Different Value Orientation**

People's communicative competence is produced in the process of socialization, and it linked with values inevitably. Every culture has its own unique value system, and this system can help people distinguish between beauty and ugliness, good and evil, and this is a kind of philosophy, moral standard and code of conduct. But the social value system can not exist without specific cultural and the judging standards for every culture is different. This culture thinks that is good, another culture may do not think so. However, they have their existence reason in their own cultural system. We can never think that a kind of value standard is advanced, and the other is backward. For example, people advocate modesty and politeness in Chinese culture. They don't like competitive, and social morals often kill too outstanding person. The old saying "it's the taller trees in the woods that get their tops blown off". Collectivism play a leading role in Chinese culture and the pursuit of personal development is often condemned as individualism. On the contrary, western culture advocates individualism. The people-oriented thought rooted in their hearts so that they advocate independent thinking, independent judges, and rely on their own ability to achieve personal interests, and they think personal interests are the most important.

**The Development Trend of Different Cultures**

Cross-cultural communication prompted the mutual penetration between Chinese and western culture. There are many expressions come into each other’s language. Through the comparative study, we found that Chinese and English tend to learn from each other. On the one hand, this is because English is bearing the advanced science and technology and education, developed economy and a strong culture in western developed countries. This makes English a strong language in international communication. On the other hand, China has absorbed a large number of science and technology and culture of the west for many years due to the needs of the development. It has brought the strong penetration form Chinese to English and enriched the Chinese form of expression. About language contact, we agree with this point of view that languages should learn from each other in the process of contact, enrich their vocabulary, improve the structure of their own, and perfect their expression. When our local languages contact with other ethnic languages frequently, we should not only to maintain the status of the equal dialogue with other languages, but also greatly strengthen the expression of our own.

The communication of Chinese and western culture based on China and western countries during language contact, can not be understood as replace between languages or cultures, and even can not be seen as hybrid mixed in different languages or cultures, but should be reflected in the expansion of people's cultural vision. However, there is a phenomenon should not be ignored, which is Chinese English. Chinese English uses standard English as nuclear heart, to express the unique things and phenomenon in China. It is the combination of English and Chinese society characters. It is the international variants of English. We can predict that with the development of Chinese science and technology, economy and culture as well as the deepening exchanges between China and western countries, on the one hand, there will be more Chinese language accepted and absorbed by English native speakers, on the other hand, China English will also enlarge the influence of Chinese, and part of China English expressions will be borrowed by native English speakers.

**Summary**

Understanding the differences and similarities between Chinese and western culture is the base of improving the efficiency of cross-cultural communication. Language learners must have the ability of two aspects: Linguistic competence and communicative competence. Linguistic
competence refers to the ability to master the languages' pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and etc. And communicative competence refers to using these language knowledge to communication effectively. Grasping the western culture, understanding and being familiar with Chinese and western cultural differences are very important for foreign language learners.

In a successful cross-cultural communication, language reflect culture, and cultural influence the language use and development. The communicator should obey the pragmatic rules of the language culture. Only to learn a foreign language pronunciation, vocabulary and language rules just can communicate smoothly, but it does not mean that the mastery of this language. Language changes provide further clarification that language and culture is a dynamic state filled with constant development and changes. The two things are not absolute one-to-one relationship. In some cases, several cultures may work on the same language, promote the language changes, and form different variants, or there may be some similar parts of the culture in the different language environment. In cross-cultural communication, if the both sides of communication can't go into the same cultural background, misunderstanding may lead to international failure. The choice of language can't ignore the dynamic context adaptation problems. Only when the language selection adapt to language context and cultural context and language users’ mental world, social world and physical world and so on, communication can proceed smoothly.

Human communication is not only a language phenomenon, but also a cross-cultural phenomenon and communication of thinking pattern. Learning a language must learn the culture it represents. Culture lies in phonetics, grammar, vocabulary, conversation, chapter, and the dimensions of the cognitive model. Chinese and western culture have great difference in the thinking mode, values, religious practices, code of conduct and life style. In cross-cultural communication, the contact of two kinds of cultures is inevitable. Only master the differences of mainstream culture which is locked closely with language communication, can we further understand the subtle differences between various cultures and achieve intercultural communication better.

Acknowledgement

The research was financially supported by No.2015MS58 of the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities of Ministry of Education of China.

The research was also financially supported by No.261 of the Undergraduate Training Program for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Foundation of the North China Electric Power University.

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