

English-Chinese 英汉对比语用学与英语教学

Contrastive English-Chinese Pragmatics And TEFL

陈治安 刘家荣 文旭 主编

Contrastive English-Chinese Pragmatics

And TEFL



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*C*ontrastive *E*nglish - *C*hinese *P*ragmatics *A*ND *T*EFL

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FOREWORD

As the new millennium draws near, it seems as though people are compelled to reflect on the successes and failures of the 20th century, and to predict what life will be like on the planet earth in the 21st century. Dean Barnlund describes a the earth world shrinking via technology, a “global village” where we have instant access to nearly any culture in the world at any time. Satellite technology, fax machines, the Internet, and e-mail have virtually erased geographic boundaries. However these windows on the world guarantee only the access to, but not the understanding of, another culture. To fill the knowledge gap between cultures, scholarship in intercultural communication is vital. How do we understand our own culture? How does that understanding influence our perceptions of other cultures? What theories aid our ability to become better intercultural communicators? Surely if we hope to realize a true global village in the 21st century, these questions must be thoroughly addressed in our research.

Contrastive English-Chinese Pragmatics and TEFL is an important scholarly collection that uses various linguistic and communication theories to shed light on questions on intracultural and intercultural communications. Zhou Rong and Hu Yonghong’s works on politeness strategies identify significant similarities and differences between Chinese and English speaking cultures on a wide spectrum of politeness issues. This type of work is essential for cross-cultural understanding.

Liu Jiarong and Zhang Hong’s examination of politeness strategies in the famous Chinese novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* is an interesting approach for drawing past politeness strategies into the present for comparison. From an intracultural perspective, this analysis has merit both as a case study on politeness in a particular

text, and as a cultural comparison of politeness practices in 18th century China and modern China.

Liu Jiarong and Jiao Hui's work on textual connective devices clarifies the differences in communication strategies between English and Chinese speakers and the consequences of those differences for learning and teaching a foreign language. The pedagogical implications from this work are profound.

Chen Zhi'an and Kuang Lan's work comparing thematic structures in English and Chinese reinforces the important idea that comparing one's native language with a target language results in better cultural understanding as well as higher quality translations. Given the growing interest in scholarship on intercultural communication and translation, this piece is timely indeed.

Chen Zhi'an and Li Wenfeng's exploration of cultural differences in negation looks at the power of language to miscommunicate when the goal is the same (i.e., negation), but the communicators' cultures are different, thus creating different ways of expressing and interpreting negation. Again, focused comparisons such as this are central for cross-cultural understanding.

Chen Zhi'an and Huang Ming's work on cross-cultural pragmatic failure and teaching culture in ELT makes a number of insightful suggestions for improving English Language Teaching pedagogy. As in other articles in this collection, Chen and Huang point out the importance of linking culture, language, and communication for more thorough language learning and higher quality teaching. More specifically, their suggestions for improving students' cross-cultural awareness, designing a culture-oriented syllabus, dealing with culture in classroom materials, making the classroom a "culture island", teaching culture in class, and using various aids for teaching culture are not only appropriate for foreign language teachers, but also for any class where understanding culture is central to understanding the subject matter.

Finally, Chen Zhi'an and Liu Liying's article on speech act theory and college English teaching nicely uses speech act theory to

examine the dynamic aspect of language. They argue that when teaching college level English, both static and dynamic aspects of language should be studied, meaning that grammar study alone is insufficient for satisfactory language learning. Language must also be understood and used; pragmatic knowledge of speech acts should further the student's communication competence.

This volume is important for teachers of English in China, but it is equally valuable for teachers of Chinese in English speaking countries. Language cannot be learned without an understanding of the target language's culture. Pragmatics attempts to place a language in particular context. Addressing language and culture as hand-in-hand concepts, the foreign language teacher opens up not only the possibility of deep language learning, but also of intercultural communication competence. The work of each of the scholars in this volume to further this understanding is most valuable.

This collection of scholarship opens many new areas of research. There are some interesting issues that should be examined and researched in the future. One of those areas might include the differences between instruction methods of different cultures. That is, the ways in which children are formally taught their own language may result in cultural assumptions that frame their worldview. For example, English speaking cultures tend to have more rhetorically based instruction; that is, students are taught to speak in class frequently. More specifically, they are encouraged to ask questions, share ideas and insights, voice their concerns, and even respectfully challenge the teacher. These values and behaviors may be a reflection of the individuality of English speaking cultures. The point is that students are taught from an early age to speak in class, not simply to recite answers. Even young school children are given speaking assignments in class where they each must make a presentation to the class. Every child makes at least one presentation each week. These exercises in public communication continue throughout the education system.

Additionally, a current method of education in the United States

for young elementary age students is teaching students to read and write without focusing too heavily on grammar rules. This method encourages young children to express themselves freely without the hindrance of too much focus on grammar rules. The students are taught grammar, but the initial attention is on each student's ideas.

Our time in China revealed a different system that seems to focus more on recitation and memorization. Students do not have practice or formal instruction in public speaking. In fact, the structure of the Chinese language seems to require a great deal of memorization—especially tones, the incredible number of characters in the language, and the precise method of writing each character. While emerging quite logically out of the Chinese language, this method of instruction might not be as effective for teaching English as a second language. It is clear that by focusing on the pragmatics of a language we can begin to discover new and exciting ways to teach. Perhaps future research can examine the pragmatics of language instruction and acquisition as well.

One common problem is that many researchers refer to English speaking practices and culture as if they are homogeneous. Researchers in this area should examine the complex differences between the various forms of English. For instance, most scholars would agree that there are differences between American culture, British culture, Australian culture, and Canadian culture. Yet, many refer to English as if it were one language. A central assumption of the articles in this text is that culture and language are intertwined. If that is so, then the pragmatics of these various forms of English are different. Granted, these differences are likely subtle, but to English speakers they may be significant. Just as there are different forms of Chinese, so too there are different forms of English. Future research on the pragmatics of English should begin to examine these differences.

Finally, one of the problems with using pragmatics and communication theories is that these theories are largely based on Western languages. Thus, they have assumptions that might not be as

applicable to Chinese and other non-Western languages. We encourage scholars in China to begin working to develop some new theories of pragmatics based on assumptions that are inherent in their own culture. This development could enrich our cultural understandings even more dramatically.

We welcome this new addition to the scholarship on pragmatics and look forward to future developments in Chinese scholarship in this area.

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August 8, 1999

PREFACE

The term *contrastive linguistics*, first adduced by American anthropologist B. L. Whorf in 1941, is also called *contrastive analysis* or *contrastive study*, although there are some subtle distinctions among them. Contrastive linguistics is a new field in linguistics, which studies the similarities and dissimilarities of various aspects between different languages mainly from a synchronic perspective. It is generally considered that R. Lado's *Linguistics across Cultures* marks its establishment. In the last two decades, with the policy of reforming and opening up more deeply carried out and especially with the development of foreign language teaching and translation, contrastive linguistics has aroused great interest among many scholars in China, and witnessed an unprecedented mighty advance.

Contrastive pragmatics, one branch of contrastive linguistics, is based on the Pragmatic Universal Hypothesis: the pragmatic systems of the world's natural languages at least share some common properties. It is the contrastive study of the aspects of language use ranging from the societal pragmatics, cultural pragmatics and discourse pragmatics to applied pragmatics. In recent years, an energetic research community has been focusing increasing attention on contrastive pragmatics, and its work falls into three categories: (1) contrastive speech act research, e.g. Blum-Kulka, et al's *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (1989); (2) contrastive politeness research, e.g. Brown and Levinson's *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (1987); and (3) contrastive conversation analysis, e.g. Moerman's *Talking Culture: Ethnography and Conversation Analysis* (1988).

The present book, *Contrastive English-Chinese Pragmatics and*

TEFL, is the result of arduous work and joint efforts on the part of the authors and editors. It contains a collection of seven papers covering the contrastive analysis of politeness, textual connective devices, thematic structures, negation, speech acts in English and Chinese with special attention to intercultural communication and foreign language learning and teaching, which offers an up-to-date synthesis of some research in contrastive English-Chinese pragmatics that involves one or another aspect of contrastive analysis. Of course, it is impossible for such a book to exhaust all the topics in contrastive pragmatics. However, as will be seen, with the deep-going considerations it offers, it is surely a singularly welcome publication to pragmatics and contrastive linguistics. We are pleased to deliver it to a wide audience, and hope that it will show a deep insight into and provide ample scope for future cross-linguistic and cross-cultural researches.

We are profoundly grateful to Dr. Jeanmarie Cook and Dr. Richard, J. Ice, associate professors of St. John's University, USA, who have kindly offered their opinions and written the foreword to the book. This book is one of achievements of the scientific research project *Contrastive English-Chinese Pragmatics*, which is financed by The National Fund of Social Sciences. On the occasion of its publication, we are also indebted to Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and all those who have provided us with assistance without which this book could not have been brought to its present appearance.

The Editors
January 8, 2000

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Politeness Strategies in English and Chinese

Zhou Rong Hu Yonghong

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1.1 INTRODUCTION: A THEORETICAL PREAMBLE

1.1.1 What Is Politeness?

The socio-cultural phenomenon in human communication—politeness, has been defined in diverse ways.

For Kochman (1984), politeness has a protective mission exercised in putting things in such a way as to take account of the feelings of others:

Polite conversation is...a way of showing consideration for other people's feelings, that is, not saying or doing anything that might unduly excite or arouse. The 'gentleman's agreement' (though, hardly just confined to adult males) is and was 'you don't do or say anything that might arouse my feelings, and I won't do or say anything that might arouse yours'... (1984: 204).

Watts (1992) defines polite behaviour as "socio-culturally determined behaviour directed towards the goal of establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group, whether open or closed, during the ongoing process of interaction" (1992: 50).

Therefore, the term "politeness" may be generally defined as adequate social conduct and tactful consideration of others aiming to avoid interactional conflicts.

Politeness can be realized in a number of ways, among which the use of language concerns us most in the present discussion. Politeness is then taken to be the various forms of language structure and usage which allow the members of a socio-cultural group to achieve their conflict-avoiding goals.

If politeness is seen as the adequacy of linguistic behavior, then all speakers of different languages are equally polite, since they all have linguistic means at their disposal, which according to their rules of application are adequate in different situations. The concept of politeness, therefore, is universally valid.

1.1.2 Motives of Being Polite

Why do people apologize when they have done something wrong? Why do they compliment on their friends' new hairstyle? Why do they change unpleasant topics of conversation? In one word, why do people behave appropriately, hence politely? The explanation of such diverse communicative behaviours lies in the consideration of "face".

"Face" is a social phenomenon; it comes into being when one person comes into the presence of another. According to Goffman (1972):

The term "face" may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes—albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself (1972: 5).

Face is thus viewed as a positive public self-image that is maintained in society. That is, in newly formed contacts the individual engages in establishing a public image for himself. In continued contacts he engages in sustaining and improving the face he has encouraged the others to develop for him.

A fundamental preoccupation of people around the world is maintaining or protecting face. Threats to face, whether intended, accidental, or only imagined, are the basis of most interpersonal conflicts. They arise when people feel that their right to a positive self-image is being ignored. One conventional way of avoiding threats to face in all cultures is to be linguistically polite.

To secure this public self-image, people engage in what Goffman calls "face work", performing action "to make whatever they are doing consistent with face" (1967: 12), while trying to save their own face as well as the other's. Goffman (1967) specifies two kinds of face-work: the avoidance process (avoiding potentially face-threatening acts) and the corrective process (performing a variety of redressive acts). However, he says little about how face can be maintained linguistically while damage is occurring. This gap is closed by Brown & Levinson's politeness strategies discussed in 1.2.4 (1987).

As implied above, face wants are reciprocal, i.e. if one wants his face cared for, he should care for other people's face. The reason is that,

while the individual is absorbed in developing and maintaining his face, the others also have similar considerations for themselves. It is clear that one way of ensuring the maintenance of their own face is to keep everybody's face undamaged. Normally, the participants during interaction work on the understanding that one will respect the other's face as long as the other respects his. This point is best expressed by the concise rule in Scripture: Do unto all men as you would they should do unto you.

Since face wants are reciprocal, politeness naturally concerns a relationship between two rational participants or interlocutors, whom we may call *self* and *other*. In a conversation, *self* may be identified with *speaker* or *addresser*, and *other* with *hearer* or *addressee*. Also it is possible that speakers show politeness to a third party that is related to interlocutors' face.

1.1.3 Sociolinguistic Study of Politeness

Sociolinguistics, the study of interplay of linguistic, social and cultural factors in human communication, is of fundamental importance to the study of politeness. The significance of the study of politeness in sociolinguistics derives from the fact that it lies at the junction between the study of certain forms of language usage such as address terms, honorifics, indirect speech acts, and the study of a general socio-cultural system reflecting the values and the structure of the society that the language serves.

Pragmatics refers to "the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding" (Levinson, 1983: 21). In the literature on cross-cultural differences, the term "pragmatics" is often used instead of the term "sociolinguistics" for descriptions of patterns having to do with interpersonal interaction, or what we have called micro-sociolinguistics.

The ethnography of speaking designates a particular approach to the study of sociolinguistics in which the use of language in general is related to social and cultural values. As Hymes points out, "the ethnography of speaking is concerned with the situations and uses, the patterns and functions, of speaking as an activity in its own right" (Hymes, 1962/1968: 101). It is applied by sociolinguists to the investigations of the ways in

which language is actually used in different cultures, it therefore tends to be cross-cultural in emphasis.

Drawing a great many insights from pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and the ethnography of speaking, we are now provided with a theoretical base on which to make a comparative study of politeness in a cross-cultural perspective.

1.1.4 Speech Act: A Functional Approach to Politeness

The key issue in this article is to illustrate how linguistic forms and cultural values are correlated to yield culturally defined polite behaviours in English and Chinese. The approach intended to the above issue is functional in the sense that politeness is studied through the way it manifests itself in interaction, that is, through the performance of a speech act—the minimal unit of speaking which can be said to have a function.

Politeness theory begins its analysis with speech acts (Searle, 1969), which refer to the functions or actions performed by particular utterances. So, for instance, in uttering the words “Close the door”, a speaker performs a command and, in saying “I’m sorry to have kept you waiting”, an apology. From this derives the notion that utterances may have “illocutionary force” such that they are interpreted as specific kinds of act.

The notion of “speech act”, however, has a slightly different meaning in the study of the ethnography of speaking from that in pragmatics and in philosophy (e.g. Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), where speech act theory is understood as applying to the single utterance, not to longer stretches of talk. According to Hymes (1972), speech acts are part of speech events which are, in turn, part of speech situations. For example, a compliment might be a speech act that is part of a conversation (a speech event) which takes place at a party (a speech situation). A speech situation may be non-verbal like a football game, but speech events and acts are governed by the rules or norms for the use of speech. For Hymes (1972), a speech act is to be distinguished from a single utterance and is not to be identified with any unit at any level of grammar, since a speech act gets its status from the social context as well as grammatical form. As he puts it, “the level of speech acts mediates immediately between the usual levels of grammar and the rest of a speech event or situation in that it implicates both linguistic form and social norms” (Hymes, 1972: 57).