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贾雪睿 著

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE AND AMERICAN COMMUNICATION STYLES

中美交际风格比较研究



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前 言

本书作者以对交际风格的实证和个案研究为基础,参考了社会语言学和语用学对言语行为研究及对语篇组织结构风格的跨文化分析的成果,提出了语用相对论和语用多样化的概念来代替社会语言学相对论和多样化的概念;并用语用相对论和语用多样化的概念作为指导原则,对中美文化的交际和语篇风格进行比较分析。语用相对论指的是由于每一个文化都有自己的独特的文化价值观念系统,每一个文化自然会有自己的独特的制约语言使用的语用规范的现象。规范因文化而异的现象会导致语言使用方面的众多差异,这些差异往往会导致交际失误,因为当来自不同的文化背景的人们交往时,他们倾向于按照他们自己的规范来判断和评价彼此的行为。这种现象就是语用多样化概念所包含的内容。

以语用相对论和语用多样化的原则为指导,本书认为中美文化的交际和语篇规范存在差异。为了证明书中的假设,本书从口语交际和语篇组织结构两个视角来比较中美文化的交际风格,这两个视角不仅与信息交流有关,而且与交际中的社会关系的处理有关。本书指出,间接式与直接式风格在中美文化中分别占有主导地位,这种差异不仅体现在口语的交往方面,而且也体现在笔语的语篇组织结构方面。这种相同或一致性表明,中美之间在交际风格方面的差异绝不是偶然现象。这是中国人和美国人在日常交际,甚至在学术写作中系统的和一贯的做法。本书的分析和探讨证实了中国文化中的交际与语篇组织结构对间接式风格更为侧重,而美国文化中的交际与语篇组织结构对直接式风格更为侧重。尽管几乎所有的文化在日常的交往与交际中都采用这两种风格,然而,侧重程度因文化而异。

为了分析和解释两国文化的交际与语篇组织结构风格的差

异,书中提供了一个框架。把文化作为一个解释变数,尤其选择了在文化层面交际中的个人主义取向与群体取向的因素,以及在个人层面交际中的独立型与相互依赖型自我建构类型的因素。在像中国这样的群体取向的强交际环境文化中,意义是蕴涵的,强调的是间接、含蓄、保守的陈述及较多的非语言交际语码。在像美国这样的个人主义取向的弱交际环境文化中,信息是明白清楚地被用语言表达出来,而人们则在这些信息中寻找别人行为的意义。

从哲学的角度来讲,中国人的间接式与美国人的直接式交际和语篇组织结构风格与两国文化中的人际关系中的自我的概念是一致的。在跨文化交际的过程中,交际和语篇组织结构风格与表现的差异要归结于东方与西方的自我的概念与东西方文化中自我表现的差异。

在口语表达与写作方面没有全世界通用的规范。由 Grice、Leech 等一些西方的学者提出的原则大体上是以西方的言辞表达的交往或言辞表达的意义为基础的。中国文化情境中的交际,规范是独特的,也正是这些因文化不同而特有的规范指导着中国人的说话和写作的方式。

限于作者水平有限,书中疏漏之处在所难免,敬请学界同仁不吝赐教。

贾雪睿
2008 年 10 月于哈工大

A List of Tables and Figures

Table 3.1	The Indirect Interaction Style in the Chinese Culture vs. the Direct Interaction Style in the American Culture ...	(60)
Table 4.1	Men's Responses to Women's Direct and Indirect Requests	(76)
Table 4.2	Differences in Negotiation and Resolving of Conflict in Chinese and American Cultures	(114)
Table 5.1	English Essays Adopting the Inductive Approach, Quasi-Inductive Approach and Deductive Approach ...	(125)
Table 5.2	Abstracts Adopting the Deductive Style, Inductive Style, and Quasi - Inductive Style	(128)
Table 5.3	English Abstracts Adopting the Deductive Style and Inductive Style	(133)
Table 6.1	Major Differences between Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures	(159)
Table 6.2	Differences between High-context Cultures and Low-Context Cultures	(163)
Table 6.3	Face Saving Strategies in Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures	(164)
Table 6.4	East Asian Orientation and North American Orientation	(165)
Table 6.5	Characteristics of Interdependent and Independent Selves	

in Communication	(173)
Fig. 5.1 Configural Logic Structure/ Climax Ordered Structure	(137)
Fig. 5.2 Configural Logic	(139)
Fig. 5.3 Linear logic/ Anti-climax Ordered Structure	(142)
Fig. 5.4 Toulmin Model / Linear Logic	(144)
Fig. 5.5 Linear Logic	(147)
Fig. 6.1 Different Layers of Culture	(155)

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	(1)
1.1 Rationale of the Study	(2)
1.2 Research Objectives	(13)
1.3 Methodology and Data for the Research	(14)
1.4 The Organization of the Book	(15)
Chapter 2 Towards an Understanding of Indirect and Discourse Organization Styles	(18)
2.1 Introduction	(19)
2.2 The Theory of Pragmatic Relativity and Diversity	(20)
2.3 The Study of Interaction and Discourse Organization styles	(23)
2.4 Theories of Culture: A Theoretical Variable	(28)
Chapter 3 Variations of Pragmatic Conventions between/among Cultures	(33)
3.1 Introduction	(34)
3.2 Pragmatic Relativity and Pragmatic Diversity	(35)
3.3 Pragmatic Transfer, Pragmatic Conventions, and Pragmatic Failure	(40)
3.4 Consequences of Diversity of Pragmatic Conventions between Cultures	(50)
3.5 Indirect and Direct Interaction and Discourse Styles as Pragmatic Conventions	(56)
Chapter 4 Indirect vs. Direct Interaction Styles	(61)
4.1 Introduction	(62)

4.2 Indirect vs. Direct Interaction Styles	(64)
4.3 Indirect vs. Direct Facework Strategies	(93)
Chapter 5 Indirect vs. Direct Style in Discourse Organization	(116)
5.1 Introduction	(117)
5.2 Indirect vs. Direct Discourse Organizations	(120)
5.3 Argument Styles	(135)
Chapter 6 Treating Culture as a Theoretical Variable	(149)
6.1 Introduction	(150)
6.2 A Framework for Explaining the Differences in Interaction and Discourse Organization	(152)
6.3 Differences in Concept of Self and Self-Expressions in Chinese and American Cultures	(174)
6.4 Culture-Specific Pragmatic and Discourse Conventions	(180)
Chapter 7 Conclusion and Suggestion	(184)
7.1 Summary of Major Findings and Contributions	(185)
7.2 Implications and Applications	(188)
7.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research	(191)
Appendices	(195)
Bibliography	(225)
后记	(236)

『本章导读』

本章介绍了中美交际风格比较研究的基本前提、研究目标、研究方法与数据以及本书的总体结构。本书将对比分析跨中美文化的人际关系处理与语篇组织的交际规范——间接式与直接式交际风格。本书认为中美文化的交际和语篇规范存在差异,为了证明我们的假设,我们将从口语交际和语篇组织结构两个视角来比较中美文化的交际风格,这两个视角不仅与信息交流有关,而且与交际中的社会关系的处理有关。

1.1 Rationale of the Study

1.1.1 Background

Managing interpersonal relationship is an important aspect of communication and managing interpersonal relationship between people from different cultural backgrounds seems to be more difficult as people lack knowledge of other cultures' conventions or norms for managing relationship.

In general, communication consists of two components; a content component and a relationship component (Watzlwick, Beavin and Jackson 1967). The former is also called the transactional, or information-transferring) aspect of communication while the latter is called interactional or relational aspect of communication, or maintenance, or management of social relationship aspect of communication (Brown and Yule 1983). According to Brown and Yule, communication is either primarily transactional in focus, or primarily interactional in focus, and that the goals of these two main types of communication are different. The goal of transactional communication is to convey information coherently and accurately, whereas the goal of interactional communication is to communicate friendliness and good will or to maintain and establish harmonious relationship, and to make the interlocutors feel comfortable and unthreatened. Weather forecasts, academic lectures, and news report are typical cases of transactional communication, while greetings, small talk, and compliment of interactional communication.

However, in general, communication is both transactional and

interactional. If one person requests another person to do something, for example, there will be a transactional aspect to the request, which concerns what one of them is requested to do, such as showing someone around the city, fetching someone a cup of tea, or giving someone a ride to somewhere. However, there will also be a relational aspect to the performance of the request, for example, whether the request is performed directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, or whether the request is performed with or without due respect may bring people feelings of comfort in one cultural context but offense and resentment in another cultural context.

Obviously, how we use language to communicate can affect our relationship with others, both positively and negatively. The interactional or relational aspect of communication has a lot to do with communication or interaction and discourse styles such as indirect and direct styles. In fact, the study of interaction and discourse styles, especially that of indirect and direct styles, is one of the most relevant areas in interactional or relational communication.

When an English speaker communicates with a foreigner whose English is odd, he often attributes it to grammatical or phonological inadequacies. When he interacts with someone with an unusual interaction style he may misjudge that person's intention or ability, leading to severe unexpected consequences, including the hurting of feelings and even offense and resentment. Likewise, some Chinese speakers of English tend to think that an improvement in the communication process with English speakers lies in the modification of accent and an increase in vocabulary. Both the Chinese and Americans are not aware that it is the substantial differences in the use of language or in interaction or discourse styles rather than basic sentence structure

*A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE AND AMERICAN
COMMUNICATION STYLES*

and vocabulary that lead to misunderstandings of the speaker's intention.

This book is a contrastive study of the indirect and direct interaction styles in spoken interaction and written discourse which are immediately relevant to the management of social relations in communication between Chinese and American cultures. Interaction and discourse styles are in fact the basic characteristics of the management of social relations and manifestations of conventions or conventionalized strategies for managing social relationships. This book treats indirect and direct interaction and discourse styles as pragmatic conventions, which, like situational factors, affect communication. They are in fact mediating factors through which culture influences communication. The convention of indirect style, for example, can be traced to culture specific notions of the harmonious social relationship, which is the preference of the Chinese.

To study the differences of styles in spoken interactions, the book mainly compares the semantic organizations or organizational sequences of, for example, request in Chinese and American cultures. That is, where is the request component placed in the form of request? At the beginning or at the end or somewhere else? And what information precedes or follows it?

What is important to notice is the fact that the Chinese indirect and Americans' direct styles in spoken interactions parallel the Chinese indirect and Americans' direct styles in written discourses. In each case, the topic appears at the end or in the middle in the indirect or inductive interaction and discourse, while the topic appears at the beginning in the direct or deductive interaction and discourse. That is, what is called in this book the frame-main semantic sequence which

Chapter 1 Introduction

operates in the spoken interactions also operates in the written discourse in the Chinese cultural context. And the main-frame sequence which operates in spoken interactions also operates in the written discourse in the American cultural context.

To illustrate this parallel phenomenon between spoken and written discourses, this book makes a contrastive study of the indirect and direct styles in both spoken interactions and written discourses. One of the ways to analyze indirectness and directness of written discourses is to examine the conventions of these styles, particularly in terms of semantic structure or whether the discourse is organized inductively or deductively. Whether a written discourse is deductive or inductive or direct or indirect depends on whether the main ideas or the topic is placed either at the beginning or delayed until the end. In the indirect or inductive discourse, a topic is sometimes placed in the middle or it is not mentioned at all—it is “buried in the passage” (Hinds 1990:90). The additional supportive components in the act of request are called frame including reasons, justifications, facework (which is the actions taken to deal with the face-wants of one and the other) (Lim 1994: 207-247), or other minor or supporting parts, which are presented at the beginning in the inductive or indirect discourses. In contrast with the indirect or inductive organization of written discourses, in the direct or deductive discourses, the main idea or the topic is introduced at the beginning, with the additional or supportive components or the frame appearing afterwards. According to Hinds, the Chinese discourse is reader-responsible while the Americans’ discourse is speaker and writer-responsible in nature. Looked at in this light, the use of indirect or direct, or inductive or deductive conventions in written discourses, like those used in spoken discourses is also related to the maintenance and

*A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE AND AMERICAN
COMMUNICATION STYLES*

management of social relationship.

Actually both of these indirect or inductive style and direct or deductive style are found in both spoken and written discourses in Chinese and American cultures. That is to say, there is nothing inherently Chinese or American about these styles. Nevertheless, the book argues that there is great probability that the Chinese tend to prefer indirect or inductive style in more situations than the Americans. In fact, it is a matter of preference. According to Y. R. Chao, a famous Chinese linguist, 50% of the utterances in Chinese are topic-comment types (Chao 1968: 83). For example, Chinese has subordinate clauses that set the evaluative framework for the main clause. In other words, they must precede the main clause (Chao 1968).

If we link language use including communication styles with cultural and social factors, we may be justified in saying that it is the cultural orientation and values as well as interpersonal relationship orientation in Chinese and American cultures that lead to the choice of one or the other of these interaction styles. And the choice of communication, the indirectness for the Chinese, for example, is the signal of interpersonal relations in Chinese society.

Up to now, a very large amount of work from different perspectives and different disciplines has been done on the Eastern indirectness vs. Western directness difference of both spoken and written discourses as well as the factors that bring about the difference. Each perspective and discipline has provided insight into this area. This book will use these insightful ideas as resources and at the same time link the use of language in terms of (both spoken and written) communication styles with culture to construct a more comprehensive

Chapter 1 Introduction

and coherent framework to explain and interpret the differences of interaction styles of Chinese and American cultures.

1.1.2 Rationale of the Research

Nowadays there is a widely shared—almost taken for granted—view that globalization is taking place throughout many aspects of the world. As a result, intercultural contact is increasing rapidly and dramatically. Cultures, economies, and politics appear to merge across the globe through the rapid exchange of information, ideas, knowledge and investment. However, in spite of this, recent experience has shown that physical closeness and economic interconnectedness between and among people from different cultures cannot automatically guarantee effective communication and friendly interpersonal relationship. Greater intercultural contact may actually reinforce cultural and social distinctions and create separation. The experience of increasing global contact has made us realize that intercultural contact, though inevitable, is not always successful. It is the diversity of communicative behavior of different cultures that always creates miscommunication and misunderstanding. The different behavior can be strange and, at times, even bizarre as it often fails to meet our usual expectations. Even when the natural barrier of a foreign language is dissolved, we may still fail to understand and make ourselves understood due to the differences in communication mechanism: the subconscious processes of inference that result from situational factors, social presuppositions and pragmatic or discourse conventions or norms.

Among the communicative phenomena, this study examines, from a sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective, the conventions of

*A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE AND AMERICAN
COMMUNICATION STYLES*

interaction and discourse styles, particularly the Chinese indirect and Americans' direct styles. We take the position that pragmatic conventions are important variables that influence communication and they influence communication just as much as other factors such as situational and social factors. The study of this pair of interaction and discourse styles is very important but hitherto has been inadequately considered and under-discussed.

As mentioned earlier, considerable work has been done on the Chinese indirect and Americans' direct communication styles as well as the factors that attribute to the differences. The work that has been done by scholars of different disciplines, including philosophers, historians, anthropologists, and scholars in the areas of sociolinguistics and pragmatics as well as scholars in the area of intercultural communication. The emphasis of scholars from these perspectives on this issue, however, may vary with their research interest. Some may have been studying the differences relying on historically based explanations. Some may have been searching for the nexus between language and culture in explaining the differences. Some may have been focusing their discussion on the differences in vocabulary and isolated grammatical paradigms. Some may have been researching on the differences in terms of language use. Still, some may have been exploring cultural differences in terms of interaction and discourse styles and attributing the differences to variations in values and conventions or norms. Each, of course, has contributed to the study of communication style in its own way.

Enlightened by the insights provided by these scholars and guided by the principle of pragmatic and discourse relativity, the book will go beyond the boundary of each of the disciplines involved and present a

more comprehensive picture about the interaction and discourse styles in Chinese and American cultures. It will bring spoken (different language behavior) interactions and written discourse (discourse of different genres) together to demonstrate more coherently and systematically that the Chinese and Americans may prefer different communication styles in social interaction and discourse organization.

There are six reasons for our research.

(1) All language use has a transactional or content component and an interactional or relational component. The transactional or content aspect refers to the transmission of information or “what” is being transmitted. The interactional or relational aspect refers to the maintenance or management of social and interpersonal relationship. Both of these two aspects of communication are important and therefore deserve equal attention. However, the interactional or relational aspect of communication, in the area of cross-cultural communication has hitherto been overlooked and underdiscussed. As a matter of fact, the study of the relational aspect of communication has special meaning to communication, especially to cross-cultural communication as people from different cultures often find it extremely hard to manage and maintain relationship due to the lack of the knowledge of cultural conventions in language use relevant to rapport building. Numerous facts and examples have shown that one of the sources of failure to manage interpersonal relationship properly in cross-cultural communication is derived from the inappropriate use and misinterpretation of interaction and discourse styles, such as the Chinese indirect style and Americans’ direct style. Therefore, there is a pressing need for the study and information regarding this issue. This book discusses the Chinese indirect and Americans’ direct interaction