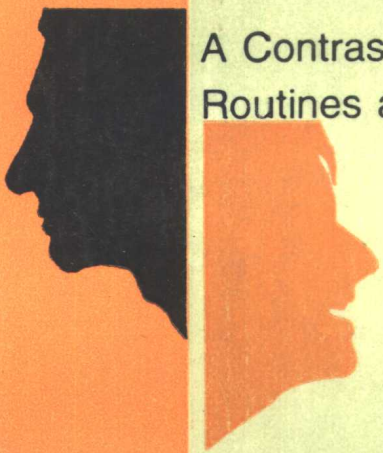
GREETINGS AND PARTINGS IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

A Contrastive Study of Linguistic Routines and Politeness



英汉问候语告别语对比研究

钱厚生 著

商务印书馆

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内 容 提 要

本书使用微观语言分析法对英汉问候语和告别语进行了系统对比研究，内容包括其结构特征、社交功能、具体使用等，并且通过语言调查统计，对英汉问候语和告别语在表达方式和使用对象等方面的差异进行了量化分析，在充分肯定英美礼貌语言研究权威理论模式的同时，以实际语言事实指出其不足之处，说明必须加强礼貌语言对比研究，促进跨文化语言交际。本书可供语言研究者、英语教师及其他有兴趣的英语读者研读。

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DUIBǏ-YÁN JIU
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Preface

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H. S. Qian

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Introduction

This book provides a contrastive study of greetings and partings in English and Chinese discourse in terms of linguistic routines and politeness.

As Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) claim, greetings and partings occur in all languages. They provide the means for opening and closing conversations appropriately (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, Schiffrin 1977), and for establishing, maintaining and negotiating social relationships (Goffman 1971). They are also linguistic routines that form part of the repertoire of politeness (Laver 1981). Whilst such routines have been studied in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, there has been no systematic investigation of their structure and use in and across different languages. Consequently, the present study aims to undertake such an investigation in two distant languages, namely English and Chinese.

Although greetings and partings appear to be unexceptional in their structure and function, they are in fact highly complex interactional phenomena. As Laver (1981: 304) points out:

> Linguistic routines of greeting and parting, far from being relatively meaningless and mechanical social behaviour, can thus be understood as extremely important strategies for the negotiation and

control of social identity and social relationships between participants in conversation.

This observation is highlighted in situations of cross-cultural communication where the potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding has proved to be considerable (cf. Gumperz 1972, 1982). For example, misunderstanding and misinterpretation can lead to feelings of offence, insult and suspicion on the part of the individuals involved.

In order to alert foreign language learners and users to this potential threat, much research needs to be undertaken in situations of language contact, where appropriate language use is crucial.

The present study, therefore, explores some common properties of greetings and partings in English and Chinese and investigates the differences in their linguistic routines and use. By undertaking a contrastive study of greetings and partings in the two languages, the research aims to:

(1) devise a descriptive framework for accounting for the linguistic routines involved in both languages;

(2) compare the nature of such routines in English and Chinese; and

(3) examine the kinds of factors that affect their use and particularly their functions in maintaining "face", i.e., the positive social value people claim for themselves (Goffman 1971, Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987).

In terms of this latter aim, Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model of politeness is applied to the analysis of a corpus of greetings and partings in English and Chinese collected by participant observation and in the form of

a language diary. This work is undertaken in order to extend and develop the descriptive framework for greetings and partings put forward by Laver (1981), which he suggests "needs further empirical work" (1981: 300). A series of judgemental tests involving the indication of frequency of use and the evaluation of degrees of politeness of specified routine expressions by speakers of English and Chinese to different addressees are implemented. The results of such work are used to prove that whilst the principles governing politeness are universal as Brown and Levinson demonstrate, their realization is language specific. These findings are then considered in the light of their practical implications for foreign language learning/teaching and for the theory of politeness.

The first chapter of this book reviews studies of greetings and partings which have involved the analysis of conversational components, internal structure, and adjacency pairs. Chapter Two reviews studies of greetings and partings as illocutionary acts, access rituals, and linguistic routines of politeness.

In Chapter Three, Brown and Levinson's model of politeness and Laver's descriptive framework for the use of greetings and partings in social contexts are presented. The framework is used to identify the kinds of factors that govern the use of greeting and parting strategies in English and Chinese.

Chapter Four explores the repertoire of greetings and partings in English and Chinese on the basis of a collected corpus. It demonstrates that whilst the nature and function of greetings and partings are the same, the linguistic possi-

bilities to express them are quite distinct.

This distinction is further explored in Chapter Five, where experimental work is taken to investigate the frequency of use of English and Chinese greetings and partings, to evaluate the perceived degree of politeness in specified routine expressions and to investigate the influence of social factors constraining the use of such expressions. Practical problems in the use of linguistic routines in cross-cultural communication as discussed in Chapter Six suggest the need for further studies in this important area of research.

Chapter 1

The Structure of Greetings and Partings

This chapter considers the kinds of linguistic routines that greetings and partings involve and reviews their study in various disciplines. In particular, it focuses on studies that have helped to identify the structural characteristics of greetings and partings as part of the wider phenomena of conversational interaction.

1.1 Greetings and Partings as Conversational Components

Greetings and partings are two components of the overall structural organization of conversations. According to Clark (1985: 219 – 221), a conversation between two (or more) people usually has three major parts:

(1) opening section,
(2) body of conversation, and
(3) closing section.

The opening section, as Clark explains, usually begins with the identification of each speaker by the other, either

as a member of a category (e.g. a waiter) or as a known individual (e.g. one's father), followed by the establishment or reestablishment of acquaintance (if necessary) and the preparation of each other for opening the first topic of conversation. This section thus consists of three subsections as follows:

(a) contact initiation,
(b) greetings, and
(c) topic initiation.

The body of conversation may consist of discussions of several topics (n topics):

(a) topic 1,
.....
(n) topic n.

The closing section usually begins with the termination of the last topic, followed by a leave-taking (parting) process and finally the termination of contact. This section thus consists of the following three subsections:

(a) topic termination,
(b) leave-taking, and
(c) contact termination.

To summarize Clark's ananlysis, the overall structure of a conversation can be easily seen from the following diagram:

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