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A Research Study on the Differences of Chinese Pragmatics and Pragmatic Failures in Intercultural Communication

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Abstract- "Language" is the main tool of communication between people, and it's an important mechanism to express people's way of thinking and cultural connotation. "Pragmatics" mainly considers in what context, when, and what to say something and to whom to say it. The language expressions used by people from different cultural backgrounds are quite different. Insufficient understanding of pragmatics will cause language misunderstanding and pragmatic failures. Based on theories on language pragmatics, this article mainly discusses the differences of Chinese pragmatics and pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication, the influence of different cultures on Chinese pragmatics, the main factors that cause Chinese pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication, and the ways to avoid such pragmatic failures and misunderstandings.

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ARESEARCHSTUDYONTHEDIFFERENCESOFCHINESEPRAGMATICSANDPRAGMATICFAILURESININTERCULTURALCOMMUNICATION

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Abstract- "Language" is the main tool of communication between people, and it's an important mechanism to express people's way of thinking and cultural connotation. "Pragmatics" mainly considers in what context, when, and what to say something and to whom to say it. The language expressions used by people from different cultural backgrounds are quite different. Insufficient understanding of pragmatics will cause language misunderstanding and pragmatic failures. Based on theories on language pragmatics, this article mainly discusses the differences of Chinese pragmatics and pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication, the influence of different cultures on Chinese pragmatics, the main factors that cause Chinese pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication, and the ways to avoid such pragmatic failures and misunderstandings.

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Introduction

The way people communicate is based on language. We must use correct expressions when speaking, and the listener should have a deep understanding of the language used and its pragmatics, to avoid pragmatic errors. Especially, making pragmatic errors in cross-cultural communication is unavoidable. For foreign students studying in China, Chinese culture is very special. There are obvious differences in the values and customs of Chinese people, and their language expressions are also different. If foreigners do not have a deep knowledge of Chinese pragmatics, it is easy to cause pragmatic failures and misunderstandings. In this article, the author endeavors to explore the pragmatic differences and pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication, the factors that cause pragmatic failures, and the basic methods to avoid them, hoping to benefit researchers who are interested in "Chinese pragmatics".

I. Basic Concept of Pragmatics

Pragmatics refers to a sub-discipline of linguistics, philosophy, and psychology that studies how context affects people's use and understanding of language. Pragmatic analysis studies the standards that influence language behavior (such as greeting, answering, socializing, persuading) and the rules governing alternate speech. Pragmatics also studies the way language is used to accomplish things. For example, "I promise" used in a specific context is a promise.

Pragmatics is a study that specializes in the understanding and use of language. It studies specific words in specific situations and how to understand and use language through context. Pragmatics is different from the study of grammar because of its purpose and value. It is the study of human language itself. Generally speaking, the main research content of pragmatics is how the speaker and the listener use the so-called symbol of language to achieve the purpose of communication.

Pragmatics or Pragmatics in English was developed by the famous American semiotician and philosopher Charles. A concept was first proposed by C. Morris in 1938 in "The Fundamentals of Semiotics". He divided semiotics into three branches;

1. Syntax: study the formal relationship between signs and signs.
2. Semantics: study the relationship between signs and the objects they refer to.
3. Pragmatics: the study of the relationship between signs and sign interpreters.

Later, British philosopher Austin, American philosopher Sayre, American philosopher Grice, and other researchers put forward their definitions of pragmatics.

"Among the many pragmatic definitions, two concepts are very basic, one is meaning and the other is context" (Mr. He Zhaoxiong, 1987). According to Mr. He, the core concepts of pragmatics are meaning and context. From the perspective of development, the rapid rise of pragmatics is caused by the development of semantic research. This shows that pragmatics is the subject of studying semantics. In addition, pragmatics also studies the specific meaning expressed by the language in a specific context. Therefore, the role of context on semantics is particularly important in pragmatics research. According to Mr. Leech (1983), the context "is considered to be the content that the communicators understand each other and the situation

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they understand each other, which has a great effect on understanding the meaning of the speaker's words."

II. The Influence of Different Cultures on Chinese Pragmatics in Communication

Different cultures in the world are one of the main factors that influence communication between people. What people say in one country may not be applicable in another, which will lead to misunderstandings and, in the worst case, even cultural conflicts. Considering the concept of "One Belt One Road", many international students come to China to study. Their cultural background is completely different from that of the Chinese. When a foreigner talks to a Chinese in Chinese, language misunderstandings may occur, and the same situation occurs when a Chinese talks to a foreigner in English. for example. When I was studying in China, I found that "have you eaten?" is a way of greeting rather than a question that you don't have to ask strangers. Chinese people say hello in this way when meeting other people. But when a foreigner hears such a question, he will feel very strange and even offended because they often greet strangers with words such as "你好" (nǐ hǎo) or "Hello".

Another example of expressing the influence of cross-cultural influence on language in communication is that when Chinese people are praised, they answer the speaker by declining and Westerners accept the praise. For example, when a foreigner says "Wow, you speak English very fluently" to a Chinese, the Chinese will answer "Where, my English is not good at all". Here, the listener does not intend to oppose the other party, but he refuses the other party's praise in a very polite way. This shows the humility of the listener, and also reflects the particularity of Chinese culture and the difference between Western culture. In this situation, Westerners will simply say "thank you" to accept the compliment from the other party.

According to Deborah Tannen "Communication is, by its very nature, culturally relative. Ways of communicating meaning in the talk are learned in the speech community, that is by talking to people with whom one identifies socially.[1]" Communication is culturally relative. The method of communicating meaning in conversation is learned in verbal groups, that is, by talking with socially identified people.

"A speaker from a different cultural background must therefore not only be well versed in the target language but must also possess the relevant sociopragmatic knowledge that will enable him or her to infer the meaning that was likely intended by the speaker (Stadler, S. 2018). Stadler's point is that speakers from different cultural backgrounds must not only be proficient in the target language but also must have relevant social pragmatic knowledge so that they can infer what the speaker may intend to express. It can be seen that, In daily communication, different cultures will have a positive impact on the meaning of language, which will lead to pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication.

III. Pragmatic Differences and Pragmatic Failures in Cross-Cultural Communication

"Conversations involving culturally different speakers are more likely to go wrong than those involving people who share the same cultural background (Gumperz, 1982)" easy to make mistakes. So, what is the opposite of culture in communication? The answer is that almost nothing is culturally related. What you say, how you say it, etc. are all related to culture. Next, the author will talk about some examples of pragmatic differences and pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication.

a) Pragmatic Differences in Cross-cultural Communication

i. *Time Difference*

"For the same person who speaks (for example, a Chinese person), in the same space (for example, in China), and time is different, some words have a question of appropriateness and inadequacy" (Qian Guanlian, 1997). When and what to say is culturally relative. For example, two people who fell in love before marriage call each other's parents "uncle, aunt", and when they get married they call them "father, mother".

Another example is that people in some European and American countries don't like to talk much and don't like to have special conversations with strangers. They remain silent most of the time, speaking only when necessary. However, some Asian countries, such as Sri Lanka, China, and India, find it a very pleasant thing to greet people. When someone visits the other party, they will offer tea or snacks to show their hospitality. From my learning experience in China, I found out that Chinese people are as friendly as Sri Lankans. They always greet each other warmly and respect each other. However, in some European countries, they would rather remain silent than try to talk or say hello to strangers. If a stranger suddenly comes up to talk to him, he will sometimes get angry and try to avoid him.

ii. *Differences in Speaking*

There are some issues to consider when one speaks. He wants to make sure what is appropriate to talk? Can it be a problem? What kind of questions

[1] DEBORAH TANNEN; The Pragmatics of Cross-Cultural Communication 1, Applied Linguistics, Volume 5, Issue 3, Autumn 1984, Pages 189–195

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should be asked? and so on. Some people don't like others to ask questions, especially when they ask private questions such as age, married, or unmarried.

iii. *Differences Inappropriate Places*

According to Mr. Qian Guanlian, "Speaking and space also have a question of whether it is appropriate to be matched." He puts forward a few examples of appropriate places, such as saying hello to people in the toilet, talking about how the black pearl on the wall is improper in the living room, and how the furniture does not match the environment. Usually, Westerners discourage talking to each other during meals. But Chinese people always like to get together with friends and family, eat and chat. Sometimes, when Westerners have the opportunity to have a meal with the Chinese, they will not find it pleasant to talk.

b) Pragmatic Failure in Cross-Cultural Communication

i. *Social Pragmatic Failures*

1. Appellation

Respect for the elderly is a traditional Chinese virtue, and they cannot be called by their names directly. If the person is the same age as their parents, they are usually called uncles and aunts. But in the West, children can call their parents directly by their name. In addition, the appellation system in China is more complicated, "Uncle" can be called in several terms as 叔叔 "shūshu" or 舅舅 "jiùjiu" and "Aunt" can be called as 阿姨 "āyí, "or 姑 姑 "gūgu". In Western countries, only related members of the family are generally called "Uncle" or "Aunt".

2. *Greetings*

Chinese people like to ask "Have you eaten?" as a way of greeting when meeting another person. Anyway, a foreigner will treat it as a question not polite to ask strangers. Sometimes they are irritated by such a question. However, if the foreigner understands this way of greeting in Chinese culture, he will feel more comfortable and will answer each other's questions politely. The Chinese generally answer this kind of a question by simply saying "I have eaten, What about you?". If a foreigner is not familiar with Chinese culture and does not know how to answer such a question or the answer given by him does not match, then the other party will tolerate his pragmatic errors.

3. *Acknowledgements*

In most Asian countries, such as China, Sri Lanka, and South Korea, people are accustomed to saying "thank you" as a word of gratitude among people who are not familiar with them. But among familiar people, they rarely express gratitude in such a polite way. However, in European countries, people always use the word "thank you" to express their gratitude. Whether they are relatives or friends, they always say "thank you" when expressing their gratitude to others. However, this will make the Chinese think that the family members of Europeans are not closely connected, while Europeans will think that the Chinese lack proper courtesy.

4. *Self-effacing*

The Chinese face the praise in a declining way. For example, when someone praises a Chinese lady saying "You are so beautiful", she will smile and answer "哪里，我一点都不漂 亮/"Nǎlǐ, wǒ yīdiǎnr dōu bù piàoliang" which literally means (Where, I am not beautiful at all). Here she answers the other party's compliments by means of declining, instead of accepting compliments. This shows the cultural characteristics of the Chinese. They avoid compliments and politely refuse. However, this is completely different from Western culture. In Western culture, Westerners are used to accept compliments with the term "thank you". Yet, when a foreigner encounters such a situation and someone refuses to accept his praise, then there is a possibility that he would take this as a rude response, and sometimes he would even feel offended.

5. *Bidding Farewell*

In Chinese culture, when people leave after a visit, they generally say goodbye with farewell words such as "请 慢 走","路 上 小 心" and "下次再来" which mean "Go slowly", "Take care on the road", and "Come again next time" respectively. But in English, they say "See you", "Good-bye" and so on as farewell words. If a foreigner who is not familiar with Chinese culture comes into contact with a farewell word like this, they would probably perceive it is a strange way of saying goodbye, and even question why someone would ask him to go slow when he was young.

ii. *Pragmatic Language Errors*

Students who learn foreign languages often make pragmatic errors, which leads to misunderstanding of the language used in communication. In most cases, this is due to not mastering the language context or blindly applying the expressions of the mother tongue to the expressions of the target language. For example, when a foreigner is visiting a store in China, the salesperson will ask "你 要 什 么？ nǐ yào shénme?" (What do you want?) instead of asking "我 能 帮 你 什 么 忙 吗?/Wǒ néng bāng nǐ shénme máng" (How can I help you?/may I help you?) Thus the foreigners would think that salespersons are too rude to ask such questions, and it is impolite.

Sometimes the language used in cross-cultural communication violates the law of language habits. For example, when a mother asks his son "汤姆，你吃晚饭了吗？/ Tāngmǔ, nǐ chī wǎn fàn le ma?" (Tom, have you taken dinner?) the son answers 是的，我吃晚饭了 Shì de, wǒ chī wǎn fàn le" (Yes, I have eaten dinner). The son's answer has no grammatical errors, but it violates the language habits of English. The

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correct answer to this question should be "是的，我吃了/Shì de, wǒ chī le" (Yes I have) or 没有，我没吃/ méiyǒu, wǒ méi chī" (No, I haven't).

IV. Factors that Cause Pragmatic Failures in Cross-Cultural Communication

The main factors that cause pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication include lack of cultural awareness and lack of understanding of Chinese and its correct usage. Described below are the causes of pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication.

a) *Lack of cultural awareness*

In cross-cultural communication, customs and rituals play a vital role in sharing and understanding each other's ideas. Different countries have different cultures, and people in different countries have different social customs and cultural beliefs. When they come across each other, there will be pragmatic errors. For example, the Chinese believe that asking someone's age, salary, and other personal information is not unethical. But in Western culture, it is unacceptable to ask people personal questions, and they think it is impolite.

Another important aspect of cultural differences is the difference in thinking. For example, Chinese people value their reputation, and they always put their face in front of others. Therefore, they tend to use euphemisms when communicating. Especially when rejecting something, they will not reject it directly, so as not to hurt the feelings of others, and it feels impolite to reject it directly. But in Western culture, people directly reject what they want to reject, and always express their feelings to others in direct straightforward language.

In addition, differences in people's values under different cultural backgrounds also affect pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese people do not use "thank you" to express gratitude to close friends and family members, while Westerners use "thank you" to express politeness and gratitude to close friends and family members. They even call their parents by their names, and the Chinese think this is impolite. It can be seen that these cultural differences have caused pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication.

b) *Lack of understanding of Chinese language and its correct usage*

People who learn foreign languages need to be in the same language environment to master foreign languages. However, due to the lack of real context, learners cannot master the real language. Chinese and English words are completely different. Some words are translated into Chinese and have the same meaning, but there are many differences, including different meanings. Foreign students often ignore these differences and make pragmatic errors regardless of context.

Another factor that affects pragmatic failure is the language level and teaching methods of local teachers. In Sri Lanka, we can find that most Chinese teachers are local teachers. Their Chinese level is different from that of native Chinese speakers. And their pronunciation and intonation are possibly inaccurate. Therefore, when students learn Chinese from local teachers, their Chinese proficiency will not reach the ideal level of proficiency, and they are prone to make pragmatic errors. Considering Chinese textbooks, the number of relevant textbooks that can be found in Sri Lanka, for the time being, is not large, and the old textbooks do not provide new vocabulary and grammar knowledge, causing students to make pragmatic errors in communication.

V. Methods to Avoid Pragmatic Errors in Cross-Cultural Communication

In cross-cultural communication, communicators should be familiar with and understand the characteristics of the communicative language, from language learning to learning and understanding the culture of a region, and then better explore and master strategies to avoid cross-cultural communication errors. Strategies to avoid pragmatic errors in cross-cultural communication include the following:

a) *Comprehensive understanding of Chinese language and cultural background and language habits*

In cross-cultural communication, a comprehensive understanding of the Chinese language and cultural background can help avoid pragmatic errors. In actual cross-cultural communication, Chinese and its cultural background are different from English-speaking countries. To make cross-cultural communication more effective, promote the improvement of Chinese pragmatic ability, and to reduce the differences in communication between Chinese and English environments, we must have a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of China's historical and cultural background and language.

In cross-cultural communication, the frequent occurrence of Chinese pragmatic errors is mainly due to the communicator's inadequate consideration of Chinese language habits. It should be noted that the language habits of each country are different. When using Chinese to communicate with these countries, if the influence of this language habit is not considered, it will weaken the role of Chinese pragmatics in practice and affect the effect of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of Chinese pragmatics and obtain the actual effect of Chinese in cross-cultural communication, it is necessary to fully understand the influence of Chinese habits in China,

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and strength training in the process of practice, to truly improve the effect of Chinese pragmatics.

b) Strengthen the concept of language contrast

According to experts, the application of contrast in Chinese learning is very important. Language comparison can be divided into three levels, including structure, expression, and language psychology. To effectively combine the cognitive context with these three levels, it is necessary to fully understand the difference between the mother tongue and Chinese, carefully analyze and compare the main factors in the cognitive context, and lay a solid pragmatic foundation for cross-cultural communication.

c) Comprehensive understanding of Chinese grammar

Chinese grammar is different from English and the meaning of each word and the corresponding word in English is different. In the learning process, we mainly understand and remember the meaning of English words, but we cannot blindly use the learning methods of English grammar in the learning process of Chinese grammar. If we apply the same method to Chinese, it will lead to pragmatic errors. To ensure the pragmatic effect of Chinese in cross-cultural communication, it is necessary to fully understand the actual situation of Chinese grammar and improve the accuracy of Chinese pragmatics in cross-cultural communication.

d) Pragmatic practice improves Chinese pragmatic competence

Language competence in communication includes language competence and pragmatic competence. To master pragmatic competence, Chinese learners need to transform the grammatical knowledge or language competence learned from books into actual communicative competence. This can be achieved through specific language application practices, such as observing and adapting your Chinese film and television works, integrating them into our conversations, participating in Chinese speaking activities, inspiring participants' enthusiasm, and improving communication skills.

VI. Summary

In cross-cultural communication, unless both the speaker and the listener are aware of the other's culture, customs, speaking style, language characteristics, language structure, and target language grammar, many pragmatic errors will occur. In this article, the author discusses some aspects of pragmatic failures such as social pragmatic failure and pragmatic language failure. In addition, the author also puts forward the reasons for the occurrence of pragmatic errors, such as lack of cultural awareness, lack of understanding of Chinese and its correct use, and other factors. According to the author's opinion, through a comprehensive understanding of Chinese language and cultural background and language habits, strengthening the concept of language contrast, comprehensive understanding of Chinese grammar, and pragmatic practice to improve Chinese pragmatic competence, foreign students can avoid the pragmatic errors and failures that occur when communicating in the target language.

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